

Understanding 'Solo':

A biography of Solomon Mameloni



Christopher Chevalier

Solomon Sunaone Mamaloni was an outstanding and controversial politician in Solomon Islands from 1970 until his death in January 2000. Becoming the country's first chief minister in 1974 at the age of 31, he led Solomon Islands to self-government in January 1976 and subsequently served as prime minister three times— from 1981 to 1983, 1989 to 1993, and 1994 to 1997. Solomon Islands has suffered many problems and crises during and since Mamaloni's time, including the Tension from 1998–2003. It would be easy to attribute most of the responsibility for these to the style of politics that 'Solo' practised and inspired in others, but both need to be understood in context. 'Solo' was a product of complex traditional societies, changing rapidly as the islands moved from colonial rule to independence, situated in an even more complex and rapidly changing post-war global environment. By taking into account these historical and structural forces, this biography seeks to arrive at a fuller understanding of Solomon Mamaloni—his life, career, legacy, and country.

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Cover photograph: Aliko Nono`ohimae, Solomon Mamaloni and David Kausimae, at Kiu, Malaita September 1974 after his election as Solomon Islands' first chief minister. Source: Hugo Zemp.

Dedication

This biography is dedicated to the memory of six men who represented the best of public service to Solomon Islands before and after Independence. Each of them also provided very helpful insights about Solomon Mamaloni and encouraged the writing of this biography.

Joseph Hasiaua (1954–2009), from the Longgu (Marau) area of Guadalcanal, was one of the many brave public servants who worked throughout the Tension, particularly after the coup in 2000, despite violent threats by the Malaita Eagle Force. Like Mamaloni, he died prematurely from end-stage kidney disease.

A.V. (Tony) Hughes (1936~), from Darlestone in England, came to the Solomons in 1962 to work for the colonial government as a district officer, planning officer, and permanent secretary in the ministry of finance. He became a Solomon Islands citizen in 1979, served as the first governor of the Central Bank from 1982 to 1993, and then worked as a development consultant. He worked with Mamaloni before Independence and was a critic of his policies thereafter.¹

Dr John Roughan (1930–2013), a New York-born Catholic missionary, arrived in the Solomons in 1959, left the priesthood in 1975 and became a citizen after Independence. Based on his PhD thesis, he founded the Solomon Islands Development Trust in 1982 to champion sustainable village development. He was a prolific social commentator and government critic through his *Ting ting blong mi* newspaper articles and publications.²

Tom Russell (1920–2016), from Melrose in Scotland, served in the Solomons from 1947 to 1974 as a district officer, district commissioner and chief secretary, before becoming governor of Cayman Islands. His memoir and a delightful interview with him in London in 2011 gave me a fresh appreciation of how positively some colonial officers had worked for Solomon Islands.³

John Saunana (1945–2014), from Arosi in Makira, was one of Solomon Islands' first university graduates and published writers.⁴ He took over the parliamentary seat of West Makira in 1977 after Mamaloni suddenly resigned, and became education minister in Peter Kenilorea's government. He also co-authored the People's Alliance Party manifesto for the 1980 elections. A most helpful respondent, he was committed to honest politics up until his death in 2014.

James (Jim) Tedder (1926–2015), from Wamberal in Australia, worked from 1952 to 1974 as a district officer in Malaita, district commissioner in Eastern District and Central District, and director of information and broadcasting. He was Mamaloni's first boss in the public service. His memoir is one of the best written by former colonial officers. A collection of his papers and photographs has been digitised and can be found online at the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau.⁵

¹ See 'A.V. (Tony) Hughes' in Chevalier 2021, 81–84.

² 'Obituary, John Roughan', Chevalier 2015a, 533–542.

³ Tom Russell 2003, *I have the honour to be*.

⁴ John Saunana 1980, *The Alternative*.

⁵ James Tedder 2008, *Solomon Island years, A District Administrator in the Islands 1952–1974*; Pacific Manuscripts Bureau PMB DOC 1365.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AAO	Assistant Administrative Officer
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AO	Administrative Officer
AUD	Australian Dollar
BSIP	British Solomon Islands Protectorate
CBSI	Central Bank Solomon Islands
CDC	Commonwealth Development Corporation; the area on the north Guadalcanal plains where CDC (later SIPL) oil palm plantations were situated
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COM	Church of Melanesia
DC	District Commissioner
DO	District Officer
EU	European Union, formerly the European Economic Community (EEC)
GCMG	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (knighthood awarded to governors-general from Sir Baddeley Devesi onwards)
GG	Governor-general
GRA	Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army
IFM	Isatabu Freedom Movement
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KBE	Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (awarded to former PMs Sir Peter Kenilorea, Sir Billy Hilly, and Sir Allan Kemakeza)
KCMG	Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and Saint George
KGVI	King George Sixth School
MBE	Member of the Order of the British Empire
MEF	Malaita Eagle Force
MUP	Makira-Ulawa Province
NADEPA	National Democratic Party
NCD	Non-communicable disease
NGO	Non-government organisation
OBE	Officer of the Order of the British Empire
PAP	People's Alliance Party
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PM	Prime Minister
PNG	Papua New Guinea

PPP	People's Progress Party
PRC	People's Republic of China (Mainland China)
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RCDF	Rural Constituency Development Fund
ROC	Republic of China (Taiwan)
RSIPF	Royal Solomon Islands Police force
RAP	Rural Alliance Party
SBD	Solomon Islands Dollar
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
SDF	Special Discretionary Fund (precursor of the RCDF)
SI	Solomon Islands ⁶
SIBC	Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation
SIDT	Solomon Islands Development Trust
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SIGWU	Solomon Islands General Workers' Union
SINA	Solomon Islands National Archives
SINM	Solomon Islands National Museum
SIPL	Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd
SIPV	Solomon Islands Police Vessel
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SSEC	South Sea Evangelical Church, formerly South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM)
UC	United Church, formerly Methodist Church
UK	The United Kingdom (Britain)
USA	The United States of America
USD	US Dollar
UP	United Party
UPNG	University of Papua New Guinea
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

⁶ Note that the name of the country has no definite article but for variety I also use the term 'the Solomons'.

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Preface

Solomon Mamaloni was a dominant figure in the political landscape of Solomon Islands from Independence in 1978 to the end of the century. The country had been created by colonial decree from a scattered archipelago with a complex range of social, cultural, political, and economic differences. Mamaloni was one of an elite educated in mission and colonial government schools during the 1950s and 1960s, who had the task of governing and administering the country in the lead up to and after Independence. A populist and always controversial politician, Mamaloni became the country's first chief minister at the age of 31 in 1974 and led his country to self-government in 1976, the final step before independence from Britain in 1978. He served as prime minister three times between 1981 and 1997, and three times as parliamentary opposition leader between his administrations.

In life and death, Solomon Mamaloni was extraordinary—an outstanding individual of his time and place—but he was also characteristic of his people and the country he represented. This biography seeks to understand and explain Mamaloni and his life in the context of the larger structural and social forces that shaped him. Part One provides a background history of Makira, the island where Mamaloni was born. Parts Two and Three cover the life and times of his parents, his upbringing in Makira, his schooling in Solomon Islands and New Zealand, and his brief career as a junior public servant before he entered politics in 1970 at the age of 27. Parts Four to Seven examine his rise to power, his domination of politics over 25 years, and his legacy.

Opinions about Solomon Mamaloni remain divided. By the time of his death in 2000, the country with which he made himself synonymous was racked by disunity, insolvency, and disappointment. Many people who were interviewed for this biography, or who have written about Solomon Islands' post-colonial politics, blame him for the corruption, style of politics, and economic problems that led to the 'Tension' during 1998-2003. Others hail him as a staunch nationalist who resisted colonial and neo-colonial dominance by outsiders. He knew how to deal with island differences using cultural mechanisms and many believe that had he lived he could have prevented the armed coup that brought down the government in June 2000.

The idea of writing the life of Solomon Mamaloni came to me after Sir Peter Kenilorea published his autobiography in 2008.¹ Had Mamaloni lived as long as his former schoolmate and political rival, he too would have written a fascinating and no doubt controversial autobiography. He wrote fluently, with a better command of English than most of his contemporaries. I made enquiries with his family and personal contacts to see if anyone was writing Mamaloni's biography. When it appeared that nobody was, I decided to take on the task.² I considered completing this task as a PhD but concluded that a published biography would be of more interest and more widely read.

Members of the Mamaloni family were very encouraging and gave me their blessing to proceed, as well as granting 30 interviews in Honiara and Makira. My research eventually included just over 200 interviews and conversations between 2010 and 2014 with Mamaloni's family members, schoolmates, former colonial officers, political colleagues (supporters and opponents—including

¹ Kenilorea 2008.

² Chevalier, in Corbett and Lal 2015, 33-46.

former prime ministers and governors-general), members of the public, and academics specialising in Pacific politics and history.³ I researched stories and events in newspapers and magazines, and accessed a range of colonial materials via the Solomon Islands Parliament and National Archives in Honiara, the Australian National Library, and Pacific Islands Manuscripts Bureau in Canberra. Part of my purpose was to draw attention to some of the fascinating literature, stories and forgotten documents that are available to students of Solomon Islands. I have also drawn on my own experience and materials collected while living in Solomon Islands from 1989 to 1998, while helping to manage development projects there from 1999 to 2009, and from further interviews and research undertaken in 2013 to 2016 for a thesis on oral history and social history in Solomon Islands.⁴

This biography aims to understand and explain Solomon Mamaloni's strengths, fallibilities, and roots in his beloved Solomon Islands. I hope that I have been able to do justice to the life of a man who was the most interesting and significant leader that Solomon Islands produced in the 20th century. *Understanding 'Solo'* reflects the views of informants, analysis, and commentary at the time of events and his death. In the words of one biographer, the 'best one can do is to be sincere, to gather all the information that is humanly possible and, while enthusiasm lasts, set it down'.⁵

As a foreigner and outsider writing about and for Solomon Islanders, I am very conscious that insiders have much greater familiarity with their country's peoples, politics, and cultures. I expect readers to disagree with some aspects or interpretations of what is presented here. I welcome feedback, comments, stories, and corrections in response to this draft of the biography, which will be made freely available on several digital platforms and sites. This will allow adjustments and corrections to be made before a final version is printed for posterity.

³ A list of interviewees and informants can be found in the Acknowledgments at the end of the biography and individuals are cited in footnotes throughout the chapters.

⁴ Christopher Chevalier, 2021, *Content and Context: Connecting Oral History and Social History in Solomon Islands*. PhD thesis. The Australian National University. Available at: <http://handle.net/1885/238277>

⁵ Pocock 2011, 207

Prologue—the Funeral of Solomon Mamaloni

Solomon Sunaone Mamaloni was the most significant Solomon Islands politician of the modern era, and certainly the most controversial. To appreciate his status and significance, it is useful to begin this biography with his funeral. He died on 11 January 2000, just 10 days after the start of the new millennium and 10 days before his 57th birthday. The nation was deeply shocked and saddened by news of the death of ‘Solo’, as he was widely known. Word quickly spread around the capital Honiara, and via radio to the whole country. A state funeral was arranged and a national day of mourning declared for Thursday 13 January 2000.

Mamaloni’s body was taken from the public ward at Central Hospital and embalmed by Dr Eritara Tekierue so it could be displayed lying in state, and then taken back to Makira. On Wednesday 12 January, his family took his body to the family home in Honiara for private viewing and grieving. Mamaloni’s great friend, Japanese businessman Yukio Sato, arranged for an ornate coffin to be flown in from Australia, at great expense. He believed that the coffin sent by the government was not good enough and that the cost was not important—‘what is important is the loss of a great man who is a friend of everyone’.⁶



Figure P.1: The crowds and funeral procession to St Barnabas Cathedral, Honiara, 13 January 2000. Source: *Solomon Star*.

Mamaloni’s body was taken to lie in state in an open coffin at Parliament House. Thousands of members of the public waited to enter Parliament. Dignitaries and officials viewed the body first, including Joseph Kabui, a secessionist leader and later the first president of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, then the doors were opened to the public. The *Solomon Star* reported, ‘There were all kinds of races bowing to his coffin—white, brown, and black’.⁷

His state funeral took place at the St Barnabas Anglican Cathedral. Honiara was brought to a standstill as huge crowds gathered along Mendana Avenue, which was packed on both sides from

⁶ Always a generous friend, Sato later paid for a marble headstone and housing for Mamaloni’s grave in Makira, as well as chartering a ship for the whole family to attend the headstone ceremony two years later.

⁷ *Solomon Star*, 14 January 2000. Not everyone was so subservient. One informant said, ‘I haven’t come to pay my respects, I want to make sure the b***** is dead’.

Honiara City Council to the Cathedral. Leading the procession on foot were women carrying wreaths, followed by the hearse and a procession with three of Mamaloni's wives—Mary, Qila and Caroline—and his relatives. The funeral procession stopped opposite Central Hospital and the coffin was carried by the police from there to the cathedral. It was symbolic that Mamaloni—who had been instrumental in militarising the police force—was carried on the shoulders and saluted by Police Field Force officers.



Figure P.2: Solomon Mamaloni's coffin carried by the Police Field Force. Source: *Solomon Star*.

Mamaloni hated the red carpet treatment and probably would not have chosen for himself the full pomp and ritual of the Anglican Church, whose authority he had tangled with because of his multiple marriages. The funeral service was conducted by Archbishop Ellison Pogo, and opened with the national anthem, followed by classic hymns, such as 'The Lord is My Shepherd' (Mamaloni's favourite hymn), 'O God Our Help in Ages Past', 'Amazing Grace' and 'Abide with Me'.⁸ There were bible readings by the speaker of parliament, Paul Tovua, and chief justice Sir John Muria, as well as eulogies by Sir Baddeley Devesi and Sir Peter Kenilorea, before wreaths were laid by family and dignitaries.

In his eulogy, former governor-general and soccer teammate Devesi spoke about Mamaloni's education at Alangaula, Pawa, and Te Aute College in New Zealand, as well as mentioning his love of cricket and music, and talents as a poet, actor, and playwright. Former prime minister Kenilorea spoke humorously about their time together at King George VI School from 1960 to 1963. Even then, Mamaloni was a character who related easily to all ethnic groups and epitomised the Makiran characteristic of 'friend to all and enemy to none'. He had been appointed as an assistant school prefect on the recommendation of Kenilorea, who was head boy; however, he was too friendly and casual to uphold discipline—as became true of his careers in the public service and politics.

Kenilorea told a now-famous story of their journey to schools in New Zealand, where Mamaloni purchased trousers that were too big and shoes that were too small, causing him to hobble off the plane in Auckland, and needing Kenilorea to carry his bag. Kenilorea also carried Mamaloni's bag

⁸ Order of Service for the sending out the body of the late Honourable Solomon Sunaone Mamaloni, MP Leader of the Official Opposition, 13 January 2000.

when he served as secretary to chief minister and deputy secretary to cabinet from 1974 to 1975. He recalled how Mamaloni had avoided a red-carpet reception at a hotel in Hong Kong in 1974 and discussed Mamaloni's casual and down-to-earth manner, blending informality with officialdom. Mamaloni did not attach personal enmity to political differences. Kenilorea described receiving the call in London in 1990 when Mamaloni asked him to switch from the opposition to serve in his administration in order to save his political leadership. As Kenilorea wrote in his memoir, *Tell It As It Is*:

When my old friend Solo requested that I join him to form a government, I willingly obliged ... I felt compelled to cross the floor ... our reasoning often comes out of our traditional cultures, our long knowledge of each other—and for Solo and me, that meant as far back as when we were schoolboys—combined with our love for our nation. Political parties come second.⁹

He finished by acknowledging Mamaloni as, 'a man worthy to be acknowledged as a great political leader of our nation. The history he has made will no doubt be written by our historians in the future ... So long Solo'.

There was great sadness at Mamaloni's passing and much praise for him, as is normal at funerals, particularly for important men. In the days following his death, condolence notices and tributes appeared in the newspapers on a scale to rival Independence Day and Christmas celebrations. Tributes came from a range of groups, including Malaysian logging companies and the Chinese community, who described him as 'a long time associate and friend'. He was hailed as 'one of Solomon Islands' greatest politicians', a statesman, a founding father and a 'father of the nation'. Political science scholar, Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, wrote a touching tribute, calling him 'a political icon, a great leader whose talents are unparalleled'.¹⁰

There was so much praise for the controversial Mamaloni that he would have no doubt wanted to recount a story told to him by Dr Charles Fox, the great missionary and 'friend of the Arosi people'.¹¹ A notorious wife abuser had died and was being buried by a priest who had never met him when he was alive. The priest believed he could say what a fine man he had been—a wonderful father to his children and wonderful husband to his wife. He spoke on and on until it became too much for the poor mother, who said to the oldest child: 'Hey Masi, you go and look in the coffin and see if it is really your father the priest is burying'.

Following the state funeral, Mamaloni's body was taken aboard the patrol boat RSIP *Lata* and placed on the quarter deck for the journey back to his island of Makira. There were differences about where he should be buried; however, Mamaloni had gone to his mother's village in the month before he died and was buried on his mother's land in Arosi, West Makira. His complicated family life followed him to the grave. Mary Mamaloni, his official wife, objected to his other 'wives', Qila and Caroline, accompanying the body back to Arosi for the burial.¹² Qila and children from

⁹ Kenilorea 2008, 266.

¹⁰ *Solomon Star*, 14 January 2000.

¹¹ Mamaloni, Legislative Assembly, 27 August 1974.

¹² The Pijin terms '02', '03' and so forth are used to describe girlfriends, mistresses, and ex-wives. The terms come from the numbering of successive patrol boats—the *Lata* was 04.

his various marriages went on board the MV *Isabella* with Sir Baddeley Devesi, who knew them well enough to tell them to forget their differences. Caroline was a friend of the engineer and was able to hide in the engine room of the *Lata* and came out to stay with the body when Mary was not there.¹³ The patrol boat arrived at Rumahui at 6 a.m., Mamaloni's birthplace. The coffin was ferried to the shore at Rumahui, carried up the steep path to Bwahuraha and along to his mother's house on the Arosi plateau at Tarai`anoa. His second wife, Ellen, came from the nearby Herenigau village for the burial service. Mamaloni was laid to rest in a plot in front of his mother's house, and 21-gun salutes were fired over the grave and from on board the *Lata*, from the kind of high-powered rifles that in the following week would soon be stolen from police armouries in Auki and Honiara and used to depose the government.

Mamaloni did not rest in peace, nor did his beloved country. Rumours and stories soon emerged and persisted that the real Mamaloni was not in the coffin and was still alive underground, ready to lead an army and Makira to safety. The country that he had led for ten years was torn apart by fighting between the people of Guadalcanal and Malaita—the so-called ethnic tensions or 'the Tension'. Six months later, a Malaita Eagle Force and police force joint operation drove out the government of Bart Ulufa`alu at gun point—an event that Mamaloni had predicted and urgently sought to prevent.



Figures P.3 and P.4: Solomon Mamaloni's gravestone and final resting place at Tarai`anoa, Arosi. Source: Solomon Mamaloni Jnr.

Solomon Mamaloni lived and breathed politics from 1970 to 2000, becoming the country's leading politician. By the 1990s, this diminutive and combative *man Makira* had seen his country move from the heady promise of independence to deep pessimism at the beginning of a new millennium. He was in many ways the country's Winston Churchill, whose oratory he emulated and which was widely admired. But unlike Churchill, he died much younger and before he could become a wartime leader. His legacy, like his life, was divisive and controversial. At the time of his death, many ordinary Solomon Islanders judged him heroically or at least benignly as their longest serving leader and a servant of the nation. But many others, especially outsiders and more western

¹³ Mamaloni died without a will (intestate) with the result that family rivalries continued after his death at considerable cost (see Chapter 19).

educated Solomon Islanders, judged him harshly and blamed him for ruining the country's politics and economy. Journalist and critic, Michael Field, wrote in the month after his death:

He flaunted his power and his abuse of it. He was very bad for the country...Mamaloni was an astute politician who knew how to exploit the weaknesses of local politicians who were mostly far less cunning than him. He used that talent to the full and the Solomon Islands suffered because of it. His legacy will hold back the country for years.¹⁴



Figure P.5: Two sides of the Solomon Islands 10 cent coin.

The Solomon Islands' ten cent coin bears the image of Queen Elizabeth II on one side and the Makira sea spirit *Tararamanu* on the reverse.¹⁵ Judged by the Queen's standards and official government, Mamaloni's behaviour tarnished the office and reputation of his country. But judged by the standards of the Solomons, and Makira in particular, he was an admirable leader who stood up for the sovereignty of Solomon Islanders. Many people referred to his humble manner, his ability to relate to ordinary people, and his strong defence of Solomon Islands sovereignty. As the eminent historian Clive Moore has written:

"Solo" remained the most approachable of all the prime ministers and a true man of the people. When he died suddenly in January 2000, there was national lamentation, even from his political enemies. Everyone recognised that he had been an articulate nationalist.¹⁶

This biography seeks to understand Solomon Mamaloni the man and Solomon Islands the country. It is an outsider's attempt to comprehend a complex and fascinating man who became its most dominant politician, for better and worse.¹⁷ As the *Pacific Islands Monthly* had accurately observed as far back as 1973, he was 'both humble and vain, penetrating and yet blind... and an engaging personality.' He was a great character with many of the endearing aspects of a true Solomon Islander but also with an infuriating streak. However controversial he is regarded, Solomon Mamaloni is most certainly worthy of a biography. It is up to the reader to judge whether this biography is worthy of him.

¹⁴ *Pacific Islands Monthly* 2000 70 (2), 51.

¹⁵ The metaphor of the two-sided coin also references one of the scandals involving Mamaloni—the Letcher Mint Affair in 1975 (see Chapter 10). Prior to Independence, he signed a contract as chief minister with an American company to mint coins to commemorate self-government with his profile on one side and a Makira emblem on the reverse. The contract was declared void and Mamaloni resigned in late 1975 but was almost immediately re-appointed as chief minister.

¹⁶ Moore 2004, 61.

¹⁷ I explain my position as an outsider, living and working in Solomon Islands in Acknowledgments following Chapter 20.

Part One. Taem Bifoa

Part One (comprising Chapters 1 and 2) provides brief histories of Makira, the island where Solomon Mamaloni was raised and which he represented for nearly 30 years, and the Solomon Islands before it became an independent nation in 1978. The Solomons was the first major island group in the South Pacific to be encountered by Europeans, nearly 50 years after Ferdinand Magellan had crossed and given the Pacific Ocean its name. In 1568, Álvaro de Mendaña's small fleet arrived, and then left after six months of bloody encounters. His second expedition in 1595 attempted to create a colony at Graciosa Bay in the Santa Cruz Islands, which ended with the deaths of Mendaña and more than 40 of his crew. In the 18th century, European ships re-discovered but made little or no contact with Islanders.

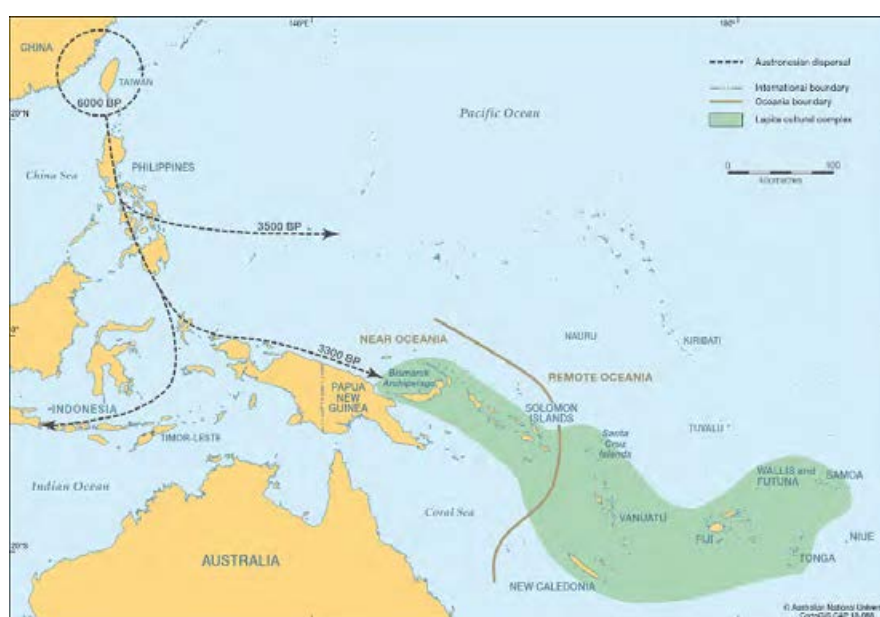
From the 19th century, Christianity, commerce, and colonialism began to gradually change the lives of Islanders. From 1870 to the early 1880s, the British Royal Navy Australia Station patrolled the islands to control the use of violent and unscrupulous means to recruit labour—'blackbirding'—for copra and sugar plantations in Queensland, Fiji, New Caledonia, and Samoa. Britain declared Solomon Islands a protectorate in 1893 in response to growing lawlessness in the islands and pressure from its colonies in Australia to resist imperial competition from Germany in New Guinea to the north and France in the New Hebrides to the south. A plantation economy was developed on alienated land acquired by government to minimise the cost of the colonial administration to the British Exchequer.¹⁸ By the 20th century, introduced infectious diseases had depopulated Makira and destroyed many of the traditional ways. In August 1942, almost six months before Mamaloni was born, the Pacific War exploded onto the shores of neighbouring Guadalcanal and Ngella islands, forever transforming what had been a sleepy backwater plantation colony.

* * *

¹⁸ The British Solomon Islands Protectorate established in 1893 did not cover the easternmost islands of what is now Temotu, or the western islands of Choiseul, Isabel, Shortlands and Treasury Islands, which Germany had claimed in 1885. The eastern islands were added in 1899 and western islands in 1900. Germany transferred all its claims in the Solomons, other than Bougainville, Buka, and neighbouring islands to Britain in return for Britain withdrawing its claims to Western Samoa.

Chapter 1. A Brief History of Makira and Solomon Islands

The settlement of the Pacific is one of the great migrations in human history.¹⁹ The Admiralty Group of islands to the east of mainland Papua, including Bougainville and the Bismarck Archipelago, were first populated between 30,000 and 40,000 years ago by Papuan (pre-Austronesian) language speakers. Lower sea levels during ice ages enabled people to move to new territory via land bridges or across narrow stretches of water using simple rafts and dugout canoes. As sea levels then rose, 10,000 years ago following the end of the last ice age, canoes and rafts were needed to move between areas that had been formerly connected by dry land. Around 6,000 years ago, a different people, speaking different (Austronesian) languages, moved from the southern Chinese mainland to the island of Taiwan²⁰. Canoe, sail and navigation technology, developed over several thousand years in the Indonesian, Philippines and Bismarck archipelagos, gave the Austronesians the means to move further out beyond the sight of islands.



Map 1.1: The Austronesian expansion from Taiwan into the Pacific. Source: CartoGIS, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

Austronesian speaking people voyaged to Melanesia from around 3,600 years ago, requiring impressive technology and navigational skills.²¹ They established settlements on islands and coastal fringes stretching from the Bismarck Archipelago to the Reef/Santa Cruz Islands and northern Vanuatu. There is evidence of long-distance trading of pottery and obsidian (highly prized volcanic glass).²² Lapita pottery—named after the site of an archaeological site on New Caledonia excavated in the early 1950s—has been dated back as far as 3,600 years; the Lapita culture lasted until about 2,000 years ago. Tonga and Samoa in western Polynesia were colonised by 1200 BC, the Marquesas

¹⁹ There is an extensive literature on the origins of the Pacific people, for example, Green 1991; Spriggs 1997; Kirch 2000; Attenbrow and Fullagar 2004.

²⁰ The Taiwanese origin of Pacific people has been convincingly demonstrated by language, genetic and archaeological studies. Papuan (or non-Austronesian languages) are older and split into dozens of unrelated families. Austronesian languages are much more similar in grammar and vocabulary, originating from a common aboriginal Taiwan language some 6000 years ago

²¹ Terrell 1986.

²² Green 1991; Kirch 2000.

and Cooks in eastern Polynesia by 0 AD, Hawai'i by 500 AD, and eventually Aotearoa (New Zealand) by around 1200 AD.²³



Map 1.2: Solomon Islands and neighbouring islands. The boundary between Near and Remote Oceania lies between Makira and the Santa Cruz Islands, 360 km eastwards. Source: CartoGIS, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

The people of Makira

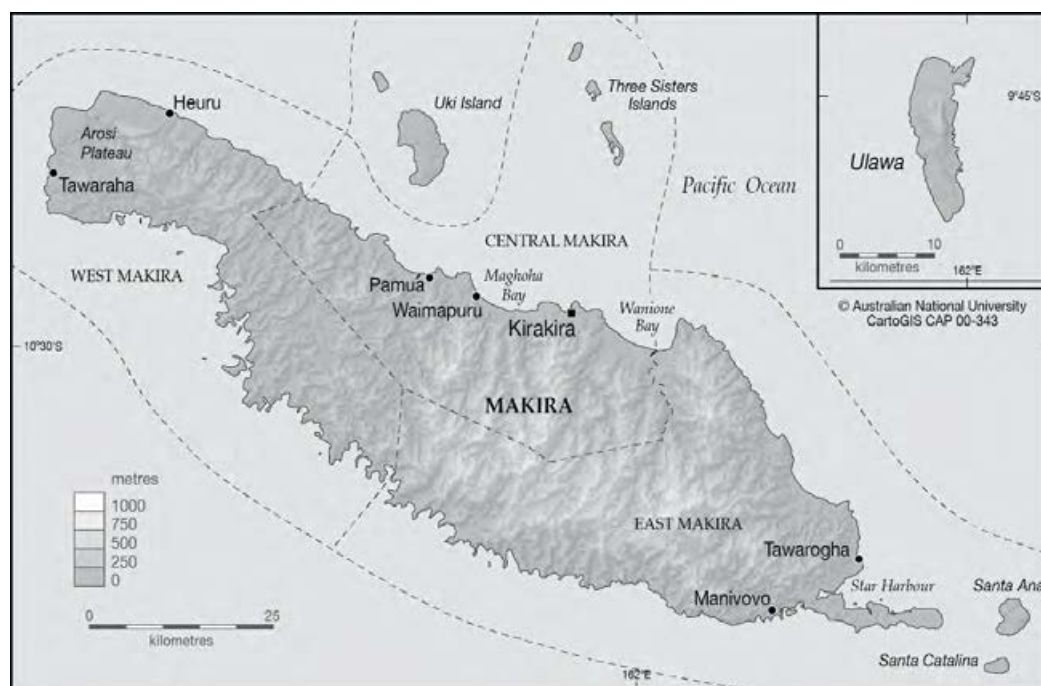
It is uncertain exactly how and when people first moved through the Solomon Archipelago to reach its south-east islands of Makira and the neighbouring smaller islands of Ugi, Santa Ana (Owa Rafa) and Santa Catalina (Owa Riki). The northern and western Solomons as far as New Georgia were settled by Austronesian-speaking agriculturalists and pottery makers who moved east from the Bismarck Archipelago, and eventually took over and mixed with Papuan-language-speaking people. The central and south-east Solomons, including Guadalcanal and Malaita, were probably settled between 2,700 and 4,500 years ago, most likely by Austronesian speakers, although it is possible that there were earlier Papuan speakers on Makira who were displaced or wiped out by Austronesian speakers. The boundary of the two migrations from east and west into the central Solomons is marked by a significant difference in languages (called the Tryon-Hackman line).²⁴

All four of Makira's languages are Austronesian, part of the Makira–Malaitan subgroup of Southeast Solomonian languages. Arosi, at the western end of Makira, has linguistic and cultural links to Ulawa and South Malaita. The Arosi language is spoken with little dialect variation and differs considerably in language and culture from the rest of Makira to the east with three languages

²³ For the lay reader, Jared Diamond has a very readable chapter ('Speedboat to Polynesia') synthesising the evidence on the peopling of the Pacific, in his book *Guns, Germs and Steel* (Diamond 1997, 334–353). For an excellent synthesis of archaeological, maritime, and historical data (including oral tradition), also see Christina Thompson, *Sea People: The Puzzle of Polynesia*, 2019.

²⁴ Pawley 2009, 522. Seven of the 13 languages in this group are spoken on Malaita, Ulawa, and Ugi (lying between Malaita and Makira), four on Makira, and two at the eastern end of Guadalcanal.

and several dialect variants, even among villages only a few miles apart. This suggests that the Arosi people were part of a later migration to Makira from Malaita .^{25 26}



Map 1.3: Makira (San Cristoval) and neighbouring islands. Source: CartoGIS, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

The island of Ulawa, 90 km to the north of Makira, is geographically, ethnically and linguistically closer to South Malaita. The island of Ugi (also known as Uki ni masi), just off the north coast of Makira, is closely linked to Ulawa through the legendary figure of Kalitalu—the big chief of Tae, an island of the Three Sisters group next to Ugi.²⁷ Just to the east of Makira, people from the smaller islands of Santa Ana (Owa Rafa) and Santa Catalina (Owa Riki) have a mixture of Melanesian and Polynesian characteristics and cultures suggesting that these islands were settled through migration, warfare, and trading exchanges by *tepuke* (ocean going canoes) from the Reef Islands, nearly 400 km to the east.²⁸

Renowned Anglican missionary, Dr Charles Fox—a remarkable linguist and anthropologist—believed that two clan groups originally formed the Makira population. The older clan, the Amwea, was culturally distinct from the Atawa—a term that refers to stranger or invaders from the sea. The Amwea and Atawa clans were distributed all over the island, especially in the central part of

²⁵ As we shall see, cultural and family links with Small Malaita (Maramasike) were important elements of Mamaloni's identity and later political connections.

²⁶ During the 19th century, links between South Malaita were reinforced when `Are`Are people used shell money to buy land on Ulawa, Ugi, and Arosi to expand their territory (Kenilorea 2008, 190; Scott 2007a).

²⁷ Ulawa also had close cultural and historical ties with Santa Ana (Owa Riki), including the famous maraufu initiation. Young boys spent up to two years learning the rituals, secrets and skills of bonito hunting. Like many traditions, the initiations gradually died out with missions and schools, with the last ceremony held in 1966.

²⁸ Pawley 2009, 535. Until recently, the three languages of the Santa Cruz, Reef Islands and Vanikoro were classified as Papuan, but with new data have been reclassified as Austronesian. It is unlikely that early Austronesian settlers had the advanced canoe technology needed to cross 360 km of open waters between Makira and the Reef Islands. The islands of present day Temotu were settled later by Lapita people who began travelling from the Bismarck archipelago around 3,500 years ago using advanced canoe technology, later used to cross eastwards to Makira.

Bauro, with a tradition of mutual hostility and opposition. The two clans were ‘exogamous moieties’—meaning ‘halves’ that marry outside their clan— and their differences lessened over time through intermarriage. Unlike other clan groups in Makira, neither Amwea nor Atawa had totems such as birds and sharks, which Fox believed were evidence of multiple waves of migration to Makira via Santa Ana, Ulawa and Malaita.²⁹

Beliefs in *kakamora* (or *pwapwaronga*)—a pygmy-type aboriginal hominoid—form part of the folklore and identity of Makira. There are tales of *kakamora* being captured and reports of sightings well into the 1990s.³⁰ They are said to be strong and fast, varying from two to four feet high, with long hair and sharp nails. Dr Charles Fox, who was nicknamed *Kakamora* because of his small size and strength, described several types in *Threshold of the Pacific*. It is possible that the *kakamora* represents original pygmy-like inhabitants who retreated into the deep bush as modern humans migrated and settled on the islands.

When the *Waetman* came to the Solomons

The first Europeans to reach the Solomons came via Peru in search of the great south land referred to in Inca legends. The Spanish explorer Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira arrived at Bughotu (Isabel) in February 1568 with two ships and 150 men. Signs of alluvial gold found in Guadalcanal promised great wealth and he named the archipelago after the legendary gold mines of King Solomon. Some Spanish names given to the islands survive today, including Isabel, Guadalcanal, the Floridas, Santa Ana, and Santa Catalina.

Several expeditions went inland to find food, despite harassment by Islanders, while a brigantine was being built.³¹ On Isabel, the Spanish seem to have behaved with relative restraint compared with their later marauding. Completed in April 1568, the brigantine began explorations down the north coast of Isabel, and then on to the Florida Islands, Savo, and Guadalcanal before returning to the other ships via the south coast of Isabel (see Map 4). Mendaña’s expedition departed Isabel on 8 May 1568 and arrived four days later at Guadalcanal at Puerto de la Cruz, now Point Cruz in Honiara, where they stayed for one month.

Some islands appear to have been heavily populated prior to the arrival of Europeans and introduced diseases. At Mt Austen on Guadalcanal, two Franciscan friars saw, ‘More than thirty villages of 10-20 houses within a league and a half. And all the slopes around the hills were full of huts, clearings and plantations, kept in very good order’.³² During first contact, there were misunderstanding, mistrust and fighting between the Europeans and Islanders. Nine sailors were cut to pieces on Guadalcanal. In retaliation, the Spaniards burned houses and killed Islanders. Desperate for food and fresh water, the Spaniards took whatever they could find. The Islanders tolerated the Spaniards as long as they stayed on their ships but attacked them whenever they attempted to land. The Spaniards responded to spears and arrows with liberal use of cannon and

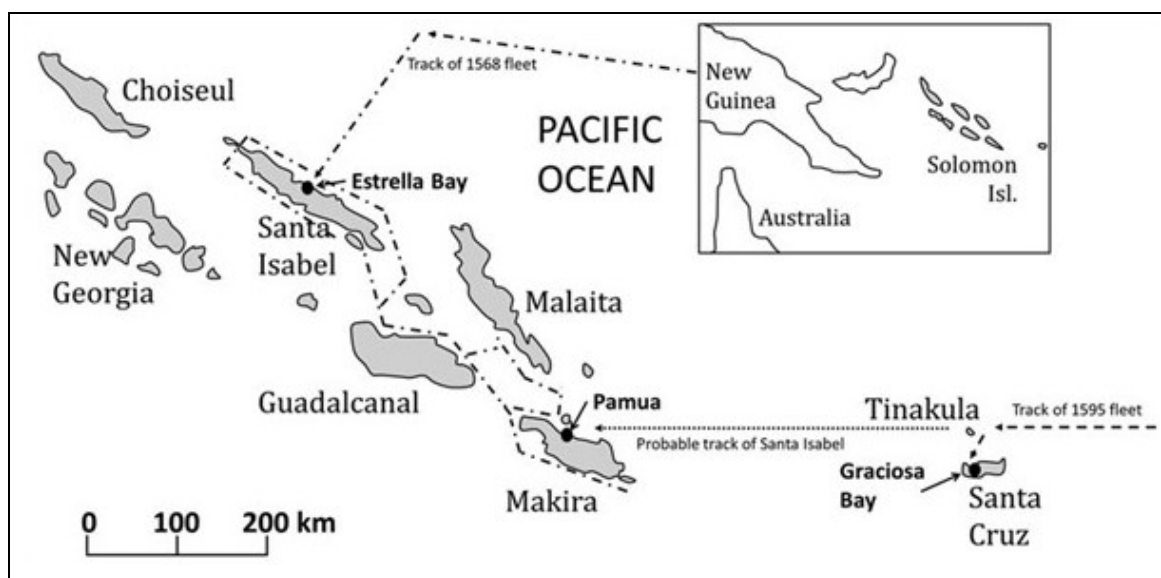
²⁹ Fox 1925, *The Threshold of the Pacific*, 138–39. His other publications include *Introduction to the Study of Oceanic Languages* 1910, his memoirs *Lord of the Solomon Islands* 1958 and *Kakamora* 1961, and dictionaries of local languages, including Arosi. His theories behind the origins of the Amwea and Atawa have been disputed and reinterpreted by modern anthropologists, including Michael Scott, ethnographer of the Arosi (Scott 2007a, 15–17).

³⁰ Scott, *The Severed Snake* 2007, 139–41.

³¹ A brigantine was a smaller ship with shallower draft for exploring and landing on coasts with reefs.

³² O’Brien 1995, 24.

arquebus (long rifles). They seized hostages to barter for supplies, helped themselves to food, water and pigs, set houses on fire, killed Islanders, and used firearms to fight off attacks and ambushes.



Map 1.4: The probable routes of Mendaña's first expedition, February to August 1568. Source: Martin Gibbs 2015.³³

A week after the main expedition arrived on Guadalcanal, the brigantine headed down the north coast of Guadalcanal to Marau Sound, turned east to Small Malaita (Ramos) and Ulawa (La Teguada), and then south to Three Sisters (Las Tres Marias), Ugi (San Juan) and Makira, which was first named Santiago. The Spanish learned that people on these islands were afraid of Ramos (Malaita), whose people were said to be continuously at war with others. After reaching Ugi, the brigantine sailed back along the coast of Makira to Puerto de la Cruz arriving on 6 June, 1568.

Another week later, the Mendaña expedition moved along the north of Guadalcanal to explore Makira (Santiago). Its two ships and the brigantine were forced by wind and weather to the south coast of Makira, which was thought to be a new island and named San Cristoval. The ships anchored at Makira Bay, which they named *Puerto de la Visitacion de Nuestra Senora* (Port of Our Lady's Visitation), later to become the site of the first Catholic mission in the Solomons. The brigantine explored the south coast to the two islands at the eastern end of Makira, which they named Santa Ana and Santa Catalina.

Mendaña and his *expedicionarios* departed Makira and the Solomons on 11 August 1568 after six months of exploration, and with no prospect of finding the great southern land in worm-eaten ships in various states of disrepair. They sailed back to the Americas with Islanders who had been taken as hostages to barter for food and water—a villager, his wife with infant at breast, and the wife's sister, and two interpreters. The captives were placed in the care of the Franciscans, and 'were shown kindness and showed no signs of sadness and laughed with everyone'.³⁴ Their fate is not recorded except that they became the first Christian converts from Solomon Islands.³⁵ The

³³ Gibbs et al. 2015, 432.

³⁴ O'Brien 1995, 26.

³⁵ During Maasina Rule, the independence movement after World War II, some Makirans believed that black American soldiers were the descendants of Mendaña's captives.

expedition reached Peru via Mexico, 22 months after their departure from Makira and a journey of ‘acute suffering, extreme hardship, and severe privation’.³⁶

After years of spruiking the islands as a potential colony and source of wealth, Mendaña returned to the Solomons in 1595. This second expedition comprised four ships with 378 men, women (including Mendaña’s wife, Doña Isabel Barreto) and children on board.³⁷ En route, in the Marquesas Islands in Eastern Polynesia, the pattern of misunderstanding and violence of the first expedition was repeated. The expedition reached the Solomon archipelago at Nende in the Santa Cruz group, 360 km east of Makira. One of the ships, the almiranta (or admiral’s ship) *Santa Ysabel* was separated overnight from the other ships and sailed on to Makira. Its fate is unclear but Spanish pottery found at Pamua on the north coast of Makira, as well as local history, indicates that the almiranta may have been wrecked on the north coast of Makira. Its crew may have been killed, or survived, repaired their ship, and sailed on to meet an unknown fate elsewhere.³⁸



Figure 1.1: Mendaña monument erected in September 2014 at the Solomon Islands National Museum, Mendana Avenue, Honiara. Source: author.

Mendaña’s attempt to create a colony at Graciosa Bay on Nende Island was a fiasco. The site was unsuitable, there were fierce divisions among the Spaniards, and all too familiar violent exchanges with Islanders.³⁹ Sickness and mutiny spread among the *expedicionarios*. Within two months, Mendaña and more than 40 of the expedition had died from fevers, possibly due to scrub typhus. Despite providing protection to the Spaniards, a local chief, Malope, was murdered by Spanish soldiers to spite Mendaña and force their departure. After the death of Mendaña and his successor,

³⁶ Jack-Hinton, 1962, 81.

³⁷ The four ships were: the *San Jeronimo* (capitana or flag ship), *Santa Ysabel* (almiranta), *San Felipe* (galeot) and *Santa Catalina* (frigate); only the *San Jeronimo* survived the expedition.

³⁸ Spanish pottery has been found behind Pamua school midway along the north coast of Makira (G. O’Brien. *Oceania* 1973 (xliii), 232–233). An oral tradition also tells of a boat that reached Wainone Bay on Makira where white men landed, then built a larger craft and sailed away taking several natives with them; this might also refer to Mendaña’s first expedition.

³⁹ Jack-Hinton 1962, 105.

his wife Doña Isabel assumed command of the expedition. The colony was abandoned and the expedition's chief pilot, Pedro Fernandes de Quiros, guided the expedition to the Philippines, an extraordinary feat of European Pacific navigation with only primitive charts. The voyage to Manila was horrendous, sailing against winds in ships badly needing repair and with starving crews. Matters were made worse by Doña Isabel, who refused to share her stores of food and water while the crew and passengers starved, including women and children. Fifty people died on board the *San Jeronimo*, while the *San Felipe* was found on the coast of Mindanao with its crew and passengers dead and decomposed. The *Santa Catalina*, carrying Mendaña's body, disappeared en route. Thanks to Islanders' hostility and Spanish misfortunes from hunger, illness, mutinous crew, and leadership disagreements, the Solomons archipelago was left with only a few place names. The islands were spared the violence and destruction of Indigenous peoples and cultures visited on the Americas by Spanish conquest.

The Solomons were 'rediscovered' in 1767 by Frenchman Phillip Carteret, who found the islands of Santa Cruz and Bougainville—so named the following year by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, who found more islands in the west and north of the archipelago: Choiseul, Ranogga, and Vella Lavella. Makira was rediscovered in 1769 by the French merchant captain Jean François-Marie de Surville, who arrived via New Georgia, Isabel, Malaita, and Ulawa. The Islanders did not make them welcome, with de Surville calling the archipelago *Terre de Arsacides* (Land of the Assassins or Cut-throats).⁴⁰

Ships passed with increasing frequency after the founding of the Australian penal colony at Port Jackson in New South Wales (NSW) in 1788. The French explorer, Jean François de Galaup, comte de Lapérouse, reached Botany Bay six days after the British First Fleet in January 1788.⁴¹ Six weeks later, the Lapérouse expedition sailed north-east to the Santa Cruz Islands, where both ships were wrecked on the reefs at Vanikoro and a group of his men was massacred by the local inhabitants. In 1792, the French Admiral d'Entrecasteaux visited the islands in search of Lapérouse, but failed to find any trace of the lost expedition.⁴² On Makira, d'Entrecasteaux named a large well-populated bay, Achard Point, which is next to Mamaloni's birthplace of Rumahui at the west (Arosi) end of the island. His ship met with a hostile reception at Ugi. Elsewhere, locals were delighted with iron nails, but were unwilling to barter and refused to give items in return. The Islanders tried to tempt the French with 'significant and lewd gestures about women ashore'.⁴³ In 1838, Captain Dumont d'Urville explored the South Pacific, including Makira, and invented the classification of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia—terms that have been used ever since to distinguish these broad Pacific cultures and island groups.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Sayes 1976, 27. Like de Surville, de Cartaret also had bloody exchanges with the Islanders and did not stay. Cape Surville on the eastern end of the main island of Makira is named after de Surville while Cape Arsacides is on the northeast coast of Malaita.

⁴¹ One of the unsuccessful applicants for Lapérouse's scientific expedition was a 16-year-old Napoleon Bonaparte. Had he been selected, 19th-century European and world history would have been very different.

⁴² de Roussel 1908. d'Entrecasteaux died of scurvy in July 1793. In 1826, Peter Dillon found evidence of the ships, *La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe*, on neighbouring Tikopia and Vanikoro (Jack-Hinton 1962, 326–328).

⁴³ Sayes 1976, 30.

⁴⁴ Polynesia ('poly' = many) includes Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Hawaii and the Maori of NZ. Micronesia ('micro' = small) includes Marshall Islands, Palau, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Northern Mariana Islands and Kiribati. Melanesia ('mela' = black), so-called because the islands and people are

From 1820, merchant ships made regular contact with the islands en route from the Australian colony, transporting cargoes of convicts and supplies to NSW and returning to America and England with tea from China. Fast clipper sailing ships rarely landed, but whaling ships from America and Australia came face to face with Islanders, mostly on Makira, which was regarded as safer than most of the islands.⁴⁵ Whalers cleaned and repaired their ships and took on fresh food and water. Makira Bay (a natural harbour on the south coast) was the most popular, not least because young women were made available for sexual favours in return for as little as an iron nail.

[Makira Bay] excelled all other ports of refreshment. The people there ... soon gained a good reputation among the whalers, one of whom remarked, 'they are cannibals, they are thieves, but with us they will keep faith'.⁴⁶

Europeans first appeared to Melanesians as supernatural beings—ghosts or spirits with extraordinary stores of wealth. In Arosi, whaling and foreign sailing ships were called *wa'ulinimarana* or *wa'uri matawa* (skin of distant sea), their boats *waka*, and sailors *wa abemarasini* (people with red bodies like parrots). As early as the 1830s, ships traded in *bêche de mer* (sea cucumber or *trepan*), pearl and turtle shell, and pigs. Taste for trade goods grew, particularly tobacco. Whalers bartered with increasing confidence with Islanders, some of whom also joined ships' crews. A trickle of deserters, castaways, and beachcombers became the first Europeans to live on Makira. According to historian Judith Bennett, about 30 deserters or ex-whalers lived at Makira Harbour between 1850 and the early 1870s.⁴⁷ Some Europeans proved useful to local people and were valued for their skills with weapons, warfare tactics, and technology.⁴⁸ Valued for their genes and skills, they mixed, married and interbred with Islanders, sometimes prolifically.⁴⁹

Then the missionaries came

The first Christian (French Catholic Marist) mission to the Solomon Islands arrived in December 1845 but stayed only 18 months. It landed in Makira and then moved onto Isabel, where Mendaña's Franciscan chaplains had first said mass. The mission's leader, Bishop Epalle, was murdered with two others. Under a new leader, Bishop Montrouzier, the missionaries returned to Makira Bay, which they named Port de Sainte-Marie. Assisted by 30 local young men, the missionaries built a fenced enclosure and house, where they lived under the protection of the *big-man*, Mahemara of Oni. They compiled an Arosi dictionary—the first in any language of the

generally dark-skinned—includes Timor, Papua, New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and the western part of Fiji. Such racial stereotyping is no longer acceptable and the term Oceania is now used for the Pacific islands. However, the term Melanesia is widely used by writers and Indigenous inhabitants (Moore 2018, 4).

⁴⁵ Bennett 1987, 350–355 recorded 23 American and 22 Australasian whalers reaching Makira—more than other islands.

⁴⁶ Bennett 1987, 27.

⁴⁷ Sayes 1976 cites references to 14 'drifters; by 1860, including three European sailors who lived near Makira Bay when the first Catholic missionaries settled there from 1846–47.

⁴⁸ The most well-known of the European beachcombers was Jack Renton, who lived for eight years among the people of Sulufou in the Lau lagoon in Malaita. He assisted the Islanders in warfare and skills in sailing, gardening and technology. He escaped aboard a labour recruiting ship and returned to his native Scotland. He returned to the islands as a government agent on labour recruiting ships and was murdered by Islanders on Aoba in the New Hebrides (Randell, 2003).

⁴⁹ An example from the turn of the century was Dick Richardson, an Afro-American castaway, who sired many offspring. Islanders even offered their women to him in order to have his children.

Solomons—and a basic catechism, which they taught to the local children.⁵⁰ After a year, the Marists had made no converts. Despite fertile soils, fresh water and relative safety, Makira Bay was considered unsuitable for a permanent settlement because of mosquitoes and malaria.⁵¹ The Marists' decision to look north for another location led to disaster. They lost the security of their main protector and the loyalty of the Oni people. People from the inland bush areas, the Toro, threatened to murder the Marists and regularly stole supplies at night. Three Marists were slaughtered by the Toro when they tried to cross the island to Wango on the north coast in search of another settlement. The remaining missionaries were evacuated in August 1847. By 1850, the Marists had lost two bishops and seven other confreres to illness and murder. They gave up their missions. The Marist Bishop, Montrouzier, wrote:

We have, I believe, exhausted every human means. We have lavished our instruction, encouraged by those who appeared better disposed. We attempted to win chiefs, to care for children that they might be raised in piety. All of this has come to nothing.⁵²

In 1851, two Marists from Australia and a third from New Caledonia landed in Tikopia—a Polynesian outlier and the most southern island in the Solomons. The missionaries were killed by *marus* (warriors) who were afraid that taking away the chiefs' sons for education would destroy the traditional religion.⁵³ Catholic missionaries did not return to the Solomons until 1898. It was the Anglicans who established Christianity in the Solomons in 1849, led by Bishop George Selwyn—the first Bishop of New Zealand (including Melanesia). A number of Arosi young men were educated at Selwyn's school at Kohimarama in Auckland, New Zealand. There they learned the new religion, as well as reading, writing, singing, carpentry, and agriculture, before returning to the islands after a year or two to evangelise their kin and translate the new faith into the local language. However, returning to their islands, they faced difficulties in persuading others to depart from traditional beliefs and customs. As young men, they lacked status and convincing people of the ideas of Christianity was very difficult. Selwyn's successor—the first Bishop of Melanesia, John Coleridge Patteson—moved the school in 1867 from Auckland to Norfolk Island, where the climate was more favourable for Islanders and there were few distractions (see Fig.1.2).

Islander converts to Christianity did prepare the ground for European missionaries who eventually established mission stations on the islands. Mission ships were a source of beads, axes, tobacco, and other goods highly valued by Islanders. The allure of these goods and the visits of the Melanesian Mission ship, the *Southern Cross*, were essential to making inroads with local villages. Young men and their elders were pragmatic—their motives for missionary training were to acquire goods, knowledge, and adventure. George Sarawia, recruited by Bishop Selwyn in 1858, recalled:

Now these were the thoughts when I first went with the Bishop. That I would go where everything began, and things a great many, for I thought that they were just lying about

⁵⁰ Arosi was the first Solomon Islands language to be written, initially by the French priest, Fr Leopold Verguet from the Marist mission, and then more completely by Dr Charles Fox (1970).

⁵¹ Verguet sketched and painted some of the earliest images we have from the Solomons. See Duffy and Greiler, Verguet's sketchbook 2014.

⁵² O'Brien 1995, 89. Montrouzier lived until 1897 and died in New Caledonia. Nicknamed 'Quicksilver' for his quick temper, he made few conversions during 52 years in Melanesia

⁵³ The fate of the French Marists on Tikopia has been confirmed by oral histories. See Treadaway 2007, 26–29.

and that I could collect any number for myself. I did not go for any other reason. I saw all these things in the ship and it thought I could bring a great quantity back with me. Also I wished to see the country of the white man, where it was and what it was like.⁵⁴



Figure 1.2: St Barnabas Melanesian Mission school on Norfolk Island, 1896. The Dining Hall was shared by the missionaries and students. Source: Beattie photo 221 (British Museum).

Similar motives also persuaded men to sign up as indentured labour for plantations in Queensland and Fiji, although many were ‘blackbirded’—captured or lured on board by trickery and violence—until better labour controls were legislated and enforced by the Royal Navy Australian Station patrols.

The (Anglican) Melanesian Mission was more egalitarian and respectful towards Islanders than other missions. Bishop Patteson exemplified ideals of equality and friendship between the races. He believed in the capacity of the Islanders:

If you treat Melanesians with confidence, making no distinction whatever between the English and Melanesian members of the mission as such: if no Melanesian is deterred from occupying the position of most authority if he is found fit to hold it, treating him, not as an inferior, but as an equal, not divided from you, there will be in them a sense of freedom and self-respect ... When the people become Christians, they will decide for themselves which customs are evil and must be given up.⁵⁵

Patteson was a gifted linguist, fluent in several local languages and conversant in many others, which were invaluable skills in dealing with Islanders. Except for murder, he respected many aspects of local cultures and told his missionaries not to destroy native customs because they could not be judges of them. He was a strong critic of abuses of the labour trade, which he compared to the African slave trade, and disputed claims that it benefited Islanders. Patteson himself was clubbed to death at Nukapu in the Reef Islands, possibly in retaliation for the blackbirding a few

⁵⁴ Hilliard 1973, 183.

⁵⁵ O’Brien 1995, 35.

days earlier of five local men by the *Emma Bell*.⁵⁶ Two local missionaries who accompanied him, George Akin and Stephen Taraoniara, died later from tetanus due to arrow wounds. His memorial cross reads, 'His life was taken by those for whom he would have gladly given it'.⁵⁷ This 'outrage' led to retaliation by the Royal Navy, resulting in the deaths of more than 20 Islanders and one crew member when the HMS *Rosario* destroyed Nukapu village and its war canoes. Patteson's death caused an outcry against the unregulated labour trade, adding pressure on the British authorities to control blackbirding, including giving the Royal Navy legal authority to stop and search ships suspected of blackbirding.

Subsequent Anglican missionaries also acquired detailed knowledge of customs and languages.⁵⁸ They also showed more concern for the wellbeing of the Islanders than did other missionaries and colonial authorities. Much later, Bishop Walter Baddeley stated:

What's the purpose—'tis just a sham—to tell people of harps in heaven when they are coughing their lungs out with TB, when leprosy has eaten away their limbs, and 40% of their babies die within a few hours of birth, and no-one seems to care: we need hospitals, where all may come for healing: doctors moving about the bush and salt water peoples: schools where lads and girls receive education: and an agricultural institution to make its contribution to the people's daily lives.⁵⁹

The Anglicans enjoyed a monopoly on Christianity in Makira until the early 1900s but evangelisation progress was terribly slow. Makira was described as 'one of the most heartbreaking and disappointing islands'.⁶⁰ The eventual success of the Christian missions owed more to Mammon than God, in the sense that Islanders wanted access to the wealth of the *waetman*, schools, and opportunities for their children. Christian coastal enclaves also offered protection from the violence and epidemics that regularly devastated bush communities, which traditionally had provided greater safety from coastal marauders.

French Catholic missionaries returned to the Solomons in 1898, 50 years after the disasters of its first mission. On Makira, the Marists established a foothold at Wainone on the north coast of Makira in 1909 and focussed on the area east and inland of Kirakira, but did not compete with the Anglicans in Arosi. Catholic missionaries were on friendly terms with Anglican Charles Fox, who once wrote to them with typical generosity, 'I shall always pray for your work and rejoice sincerely in your success'.⁶¹ The South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM) also started a school at Wainoni. Their presence was resented by the Catholics, who regarded SSEM missionaries as heretics.⁶² A comity arrangement (or cooperative agreement) between the SSEM and the Anglican Melanesian

⁵⁶ This version of Patteson's murder was swiftly used by the Melanesian Mission and its supporters in a campaign against the unregulated labour trade. This explanation has been challenged by historians who suggest other reasons for his murder, including Patteson's 'violation of principles of rank' (Hilliard 1978, 67-71; 1993) and the threat to the social order caused by his repeated visits to Nukapu (Kolshus and Hovdhaugen 2010, 353-355).

⁵⁷ Pogo 2000, 49.

⁵⁸ Early Anglican missionaries, such as Codrington, Fox, and Ivens produced detailed dictionaries of local languages.

⁵⁹ Baddeley 1936, quoted in Wrightson *Mission to Melanesia* 2005, 270.

⁶⁰ Southern Cross Log 1902, 162.

⁶¹ O'Brien 1995, 202.

⁶² Ironically, one of the Marist priests at Wainoni was evacuated on board the SSEM mission boat, the *Evangel*, where Dr Waite performed lifesaving surgery.

Mission gave the Anglicans responsibility for the area from Kirakira to Marou Bay along the north coast of Makira, while SSEM took the west and south-west coasts as far as Bia.⁶³

The SSEM had been established in 1904 in the Solomons by Florence Young as a branch of the Queensland Kanaka Mission (QKM) founded in Queensland, Australia.⁶⁴ It was an evangelical sect linked to the Plymouth and Open Brethren.⁶⁵ The QKM was established to convert sugarcane plantation labourers (*kanakas*), mostly from the Solomons and Vanuatu. Following federation in 1901, the racist White Australia Policy led to the expulsion of most non-white immigrants, including Asians and Pacific Islanders. Indentured contracts were not renewed from 1901–1905 and most remaining workers and their families were forced to return home between 1906 and 1908.

Returning SSEM converts were often at great risk, especially in Malaita, where people were still largely unconverted. SSEM followers established coastal enclaves for safety and bible schools for evangelisation, free from traditional practices. Sixteen SSEM converts returned to Makira and established centres at Wainone Bay and in Arosi at Mwata Bay and Anuta Island. By 1917, SSEM had established 13 out-stations and mission schools in Makira and had about 500 followers. Its teachers began to rival and supersede traditional leaders for power.⁶⁶ SSEM schools were teaching almost all the people in west and south Arosi where Mamaloni's parents were born and raised. SSEM organisation and education became the ground from which his family rose to prominence, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

⁶³ Scott 2007a, 100; Moore 2010b, 2013b.

⁶⁴ Florence Young also worked for the China Inland Mission but was forced to leave during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion. See also Bengé and Bengé 2005.

⁶⁵ For a detailed history, see Moore 2013b. The mission church changed its name to the South Sea Evangelical Church in the 1960s.

⁶⁶ Dr Norman Deck, *Not in Vain*, 1917.

Chapter 2. Colonial Rule and the Pacific War

Colonial rule, Christianity, commerce, and introduced diseases in the 19th century began to profoundly alter traditional ways of life in Makira and the Solomon archipelago. From the 1860s to 1890s, British colonialism developed new forms of authority over Islanders through Royal Navy patrols, ostensibly to prevent abuses by labour trade recruiters and respond to violence by Islanders, called ‘outrages’ by colonial authorities. In 1893, Britain declared a protectorate, initially administered by a Deputy Commissioner in Fiji and from 1896 by a Resident Commissioner, Charles Woodford. British authority was enforced by a scattering of colonial officers and a small native police force (*solodia*), but one backed by imperial force. Naval patrols and occasional demonstrations of overwhelming firepower allowed a handful of Europeans to establish control over a scattered archipelago inhabited by many fierce and independent Islanders.

The labour trade and ‘commodore justice’

From the 1860s, labourers were recruited to work mainly on sugar and copra plantations in Queensland and Fiji. Illegal recruitment, called ‘blackbirding’, involved kidnapping and trickery, and sometimes former slave-ships. Islanders retaliated by directing violence at recruiters, resident traders, and copra producers, which lead the Royal Navy Australia Station to patrol the islands to respond to ‘outrages’. Blackbirding became rare due to regulations imposed on recruiters and plantation owners and by the 1880s recruitment to the plantations had become largely voluntary and even a rite of passage for young men. However, working conditions on plantations were tough and death rates high, mainly from new diseases and minimal medical care for Islanders.⁶⁷

The labour trade saw rifles and steel axes proliferate, which led to increased warfare between Islanders and increased violence in the islands.⁶⁸ Between 1860 and 1896, more than 80 white men involved in trading in the Solomons were killed in outrages by Islanders greedy for trade goods or retaliating against offences by traders.⁶⁹ Prior to colonial rule, outrages were regarded as acts of war and punished collectively by Royal Navy Australian Station (RNAS) warships or ‘commodore justice’. Coastal people retreated inland as villages were shelled and houses, canoes and gardens destroyed. Hostages were taken until local chiefs were forced to surrender perpetrators or implicate their enemies. Anglican missionaries were appalled:

Natives die by the thousand as the result of the white man’s acts and nothing is done. One white man dies by the hands of some lawless natives and instantly the authorities are awake, the native police are marched out, men-o’-war steam up, and the misguided natives

⁶⁷ Labourers were mainly employed on copra and sugarcane plantations. Some also worked in marine industries, sheep and cattle industries, and domestic service. Some individuals signed up two or three times with 24,865 Solomon Islands labourers working in Queensland and Fiji between 1870 and 1911. Smaller numbers went to Samoa and New Caledonia (Moore 2007, 216; Moore 2020).

⁶⁸ Sources of rifles were returning plantation workers, labour recruiters, and whalers and traders in the western islands, where there was very little recruiting. Steel tools made agriculture easier and freed up men for more extensive warfare. Increased access to rifles led to increased raiding and headhunting. Snider-Enfield rifles were widely used during the Maori wars in New Zealand until 1872 and flooded the market when these guns were replaced by more accurate weapons (Moore 2007).

⁶⁹ Bennett 1987, 65.

are hunted to death, their gardens trampled down, their pigs shot, the villages desolated. Of positive help towards a better life, these people receive nothing.⁷⁰

Britain was reluctant to take formal responsibility for the Solomons. However, following French and German claims to territories to the south and north, Britain eventually bowed to pressure from the Australian colonies in NSW and Queensland, declaring ‘a sphere of influence’ over the central and eastern Solomon Islands in 1886 and a protectorate in 1893. Resident Commissioner Charles Woodford took up residence in 1896 and moved to Tulagi Island the following year.⁷¹ Woodford was an English naturalist who had toured the islands before his appointment and argued passionately for Britain to take control:

I know of no place where firm and paternal government would sooner produce beneficial results than in the Solomons. The numerous small tribes into which the population is split up would render any organised resistance to properly constituted authority quite futile, while I believe that the natives themselves would not be slow to recognise the advantages of increased security to life and property. Here is an object worthy indeed the devotion of one’s life.⁷²

The protectorate was expanded in 1899 when Britain relinquished its claims in Samoa to Germany in exchange for the Shortlands, Choiseul, and Isabel. Germany retained authority over Bougainville, resulting in an international boundary between islands little more than 10 km apart at its narrowest point from the Shortland Islands—a colonial legacy with consequences that have endured to the present day.

The execution of Suharahu

Solomon Mamaloni’s family experienced commodore justice when his great-grandfather was executed by a Royal Navy firing squad at Rumahui in 1892. Two Australian brothers, Tom and William Dabelle, had arrived in the islands from Sydney in 1886, setting up at Hada Bay in Arosi at the western end of Makira.⁷³ The Dabelles operated as agents for a Sydney firm, trading copra, ivory and nuts and selling goods such as steel axes, knives, and slabs of tobacco. In 1888, William Dabelle went to Sydney to purchase a small cutter, leaving his brother Tom behind. Meanwhile, Captain Samuel Craig, a Sydney trader and regular visitor to the islands, persuaded Tom to move from Hada Bay to the small island of Anuta, on the south-west coast of Makira. When William returned, he found the station at Hada Bay abandoned and sailed on to Rubiana (Roviana) near New Georgia, some 500 km northwest.

⁷⁰ Durrad 1922, 23.

⁷¹ As the first Resident Commissioner, Charles Morris Woodford laid much of the groundwork for the British administration, including pacification and alienating land in order to develop a plantation economy. He retired in 1914 but continued to write extensively on the people, flora and fauna of the islands. See Lawrence 2014.

⁷² Woodford 1890, 23.

⁷³ People on Hada Bay on the west coast of Makira were familiar with whaling ships, castaways and deserters from the 1840s. In 1865, two American survivors from a whaling shipwreck on Indispensable Reef were living at Hada Bay. Bayliss-Smith and Bennett’s *An Otago storeman in Solomon Islands* 2012 provides a fascinating account of William Crossman, who traded at Hada Bay in 1885-86, shortly before the Dabelle brothers took over the store.

In March 1889, Suharahu went to Anuta to obtain tobacco from Dabelle's store, accompanied by a feared warrior or *ramo* named Sautahanimae.⁷⁴ Arriving after dark, the pair went to the store where Sautahanimae killed Tom Dabelle and took off with a slab of tobacco. Upon discovering Tom's murder, local people helped themselves to the prized store goods. Details of Suharahu's involvement in the murder vary. According to some members of the Mamaloni family, Suharahu did not accompany Sautahanimae, but only lent him the knife used to kill Dabelle. In other versions, Dabelle was murdered with a long-handled axe (*kirakira*)—a weapon more likely that a *ramo* would use.

Before news reached him of Tom's death, his brother was also murdered three months later in June 1889 at Nusasongo Island in the Roviana lagoon. William Dabelle had been staying at the plantation of Pierre Edmund Pratt, a notoriously unscrupulous planter and trader. Dabelle was hacked to death along with two Malaitan labourers after disregarding Pratt's instructions not to trade with the local Roviana people, who were infamous headhunters.⁷⁵

Chief Sono (Johnson) of Hada was accused by merchant ship's captain Samuel Keating of having organised Tom Dabelle's murder. A naval patrol investigating the murder seized Sono and took him to Australia in 1889, where he was held in jail in Sydney and then transferred to Fiji in 1890. Anglican missionaries managed to convince Sir John Thurston, the Western Pacific High Commissioner based in Fiji, that Sono was not responsible for the murder and that the perpetrators were Suharahu of Rumahui and Sautahanimae of Onebia.⁷⁶ After two years in custody, Sono was exonerated and returned home by the Royal Navy in June 1891.

In 1890, British frigates retaliated to Tom Dabelle's murder by firing on the villages of Rumahui and Onebia, and a raiding party was dispatched to a village where the *ramo* Sautahanimae was thought to be hiding. In Arosi, people took to the bush to protect themselves. In 1891, the Royal Navy returned, resumed shelling of villages, and torched the village of Abaasi.⁷⁷ The following month, Tamahine (Taiemi), was executed in September 1891, ordered by Capt Davis of the HMS *Royalist* for the murder of Samuel Craig, killed and allegedly eaten earlier while trading that year at nearby Makira Bay. Davis then led the *Royalist* to Roviana to carry out collective punishment for William Dabelle's murder and other outrages by Roviana headhunters.⁷⁸

⁷⁴*Ramo* (or *lamo* in some languages) were particularly feared warrior leaders in Arosi and Malaita. They also functioned as assassins for hire.

⁷⁵The murders of Thomas and William Dabelle had consecutive case numbers (No. 31 and 32) in the RNAS archives and were followed up by Royal Navy patrols from 1889–92. The pursuit of the perpetrators and punitive actions are detailed in Commander-in-Chief Australia Station Correspondence, Journals, Register and Associated Records and Records of the Western Pacific High Commission. These are available on microfilm at the New Zealand National Archives and University of Hawai'i and originals are held at the University of Auckland library. My thanks to Michael Scott for copies of the materials.

⁷⁶Rev Richard Comins, an English Anglican missionary based on the north coast of Makira, convinced Thurston that Sono did not instigate Thomas Dabelle's murder and was innocent of plunder of the store. Bishop John Selwyn also wrote to Thurston on behalf of Sono, which reflects well on the Melanesian Mission.

⁷⁷Suharahu and Sautahanimae were reputedly paid by Sumata of Abaasi (a village inland between Rumahui and Mwata) to avenge the death of his son working in Queensland (Sayes 1976, 125–126).

⁷⁸HMS *Royalist* marines reportedly burned 400 houses and smashed 150 tomoko (canoes) and 1,000 skulls (probably an exaggeration) on Roviana. Villages were shelled there and on Simbo and Vella Lavella, after it was reported that the perpetrators came from the islands further west—such reports were employed by Islanders to cast blame on their enemies.

In 1892, Suharahu was persuaded by local chiefs to surrender or, more probably, ordered by them to prevent further retaliation. On 22 July 1892, he was handed over and taken onboard the HMS *Rapid* to Rumahui and in the words of Commander Kelham:

[after] certifying Suurahu's [sic] identity ... the prisoner confessed his guilt saying he had lost friends in Queensland ... arrived at Rumahui again early on the 24th, and having in the meantime carefully deliberated over the case, I landed with a party of men and had him shot.⁷⁹

While Sautahanimaie reportedly looked on from a cave above the bay, Suharahu was blindfolded with a piece of red calico, tied to a tree, and shot by two rows of marines. The impact of the hail of bullets where Suharahu was executed can still be seen in the large hole in the *hu* tree on the shore at Rumahui. It stands about 30 metres from the house where Mamaloni lived as a child some 50 years later.



Figure 2.1: Chief Hassini Angisa of Rumahui at the *hu* tree where Suharahu was tied and executed in 1892.

Source: author, 2010.

Most Makiran informants interviewed for this biography believe that Suharahu was not guilty of murder because he had not dealt the fatal blows.⁸⁰ The Mamaloni family also believe that Suharahu was innocent and that he gave himself up to spare the community from further reprisals. According to Gideon Row Suharahu, his descendent and namesake, Mamaloni was proud of Suharahu and his surrender to save people from further punishment. 'He showed he was truly a man of their own, a true native man; his sacrifice was deliverance from struggling and suffering'.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Kelham to Commander-in-Chief, Australian Station, August 31, 1892.

⁸⁰ Under the British law of common purpose, Suharahu was guilty because he accompanied Sautahanimaie for the purpose of theft during which the murder took place.

⁸¹ Interview with Gideon Suharahu Row, 10 January 2011.

In 1995, Mamaloni privately discussed creating a monument close to the execution site and asking Britain to pay—not surprisingly, it was never built. This episode of commodore justice in Mamaloni’s family history formed part of his anti-colonialism and antipathy to the British that was so evident in his political career.

The pacification of Makira

‘Pacification’ involved not only punishing acts of aggression and warfare but also creating incentives of giving up warfare and establishing colonial forms of justice. Britain established a protectorate the year after Suharahu’s execution, providing legal authority to control both Islanders and foreign nationals. Resident Commissioner Woodford was tasked with developing the protectorate without a financial burden on the WPHC and Colonial Office. Woodford’s plan was to develop a plantation economy in which the government could tax businesses and workers. The government created freehold and leasehold titles, which it sold to finance its administration.

By 1914, the government had been alienated or appropriated half a million hectares of land. Although representing only 5% of available land, this was often the best and most accessible coastal land. Land was declared alienated where there were no visible (to the colonial authorities) signs of habitation or agriculture. However, surveys were often cursory and undertaken from the deck of a government ship.⁸² The idea of ‘wasteland’ was foreign to Islanders—all land belonged and was valued by its historical owners—and permanent alienation ignored the complexities of Indigenous ownership.⁸³ Planter-traders who bought freehold titles later made extraordinary profits when they sold land to foreign companies wanting to invest in copra plantations. The plantation economy created a legacy of disputed lands between Indigenous people themselves and with outsiders, as well as destroying large swathes of tropical forests.

Between 1896 and World War 1, government administration was organised by the Resident Commissioner in Tulagi through district officers (DO) appointed to the Western, Malaita and Central Districts. Apart from occasional visits by patrol officers and labour inspectors, there was no resident colonial administration on Makira until 1918 because its population was smaller and there were fewer problems related to plantations and headhunting. For Makirans, the island was far from peaceful. Hunting parties regularly travelled from Malaita looking for unsuspecting victims. Charles Fox, who arrived on the islands in 1908, reported that the people of Makira actively enjoyed the taste of human flesh, with their victims trussed like pigs or kept fattened to await the next ceremony.⁸⁴ Human captives were traded between the people of Owa Rafa and the Haununu people in exchange for the valuable shell money made on the south coast. People could also be sold or killed for committing incest or adultery.⁸⁵

⁸² For example, Norman Wheatley bought Logha Island near Gizo for £50 worth of trade goods, and sold it to Levers for £12,000. Harry Wickham sold land for £6,400; he had paid £166. Billy Pope bought land on Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands for £300, which he sold to the Malayta Company for £35,000 (Bennett 1987, 143–144).

⁸³ Bennett 1987, 130.

⁸⁴ Fox 1962, 33.

⁸⁵ According to Fr Gerald Bruns SM, cannibalism was not universally practised on Makira and had cultural and economic, as well as culinary, motives. He worked as a missionary for 50 years on Makira from 1961 and became an expert on Kahua history, culture and language in eastern Makira. His unpublished manuscripts, including his autobiography, can be found at the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (PAMBU DOC 1415).

Frederick Melrose Campbell, an experienced police officer from Wee Waa, NSW, was appointed the first Commandant of the Native Constabulary in February 1912, based at Aoke (Auki) station on Malaita. Campbell first visited Makira in 1915 to investigate the murder of a white recruiter, Jack Laycock, who was killed in revenge for alleged blackbirding by a previous recruiter. A RNAS patrol had responded by shelling local villages but with little effect. Campbell travelled to Makira, where the local people, fearful of consequences, immediately told him who the murderer was (a man named Hauta). Campbell took Hauta's family hostage and Hauta surrendered a few days later; he was taken to Tulagi, found guilty, and hanged.



Figure 2.2: F.M. Campbell, Commandant of the Native Constabulary, native police (*solodia*), and boat in Malaita, 1915. Campbell came to Wainoni to investigate the killing of labour recruiter Jack Laycock. Source: T. Edge-Partington (British Museum).

Campbell was appointed DO Eastern Solomons and arrived in January 1918 accompanied by six local policemen to establish a government station at Kirakira, near to where he remained for the rest of his life. His successor, DO Jack Barley, noted:

Until three years ago the only official attention they had received consisted of punitive raids after murders and a few desultory enquiries into the ownership of land about to be alienated. It is small wonder therefore that they regarded the Government in the past simply as an impotent and altogether arbitrary engine of oppression, an irresistible power to be avoided at all cost, if possible. Eventually, after some 20 years of neglect, the Government awoke to some sense of responsibility towards the eight and a half thousand natives inhabiting the islands of San Cristoval and Ulawa and provisionally opened a Government Station in the District.⁸⁶

Campbell engaged local labour to build the government station and was 'met with great readiness' by the local people.⁸⁷ Buildings included a residence, courthouse and office, police quarters, male and female prisons, and a food store and boat house; large food gardens were planted.

⁸⁶ Barley, Eastern District Annual Report 1920.

⁸⁷ Campbell, Eastern District Annual Report 1918.



Figure 2.3: The District Officer's enormous residence at Kirakira, 1921— 'worthy of being considered a fitting and visible token of Imperial prestige in this far-flung outpost of the British Empire'. Source: Dr Sylvester Lambert (University of California, San Diego Library).

The government residence was one of the largest buildings in the whole Pacific—38m front, 15m deep, 49m back. As Campbell's successor, JC Barley noted, 'It will, I trust, prove itself worthy of being considered a fitting and visible token of Imperial prestige in this far-flung outpost of the British Empire'.⁸⁸

Campbell brought Makira under government control in less than two years, a task made easier by the missions and a local population severely weakened by endemic and introduced diseases.⁸⁹ He purchased unlicensed rifles, which considerably improved law and order. Murders and cannibalism, previously common, were virtually eliminated and there was very little crime. Colonial authority was enforced by armed police patrols, travelling mainly on foot around and across the island.⁹⁰ Campbell initiated a system of local administration, dividing Makira and neighbouring islands into eight areas and appointing district chiefs and village headmen. Headmen were responsible for village cleanliness and keeping good order. District chiefs had to visit their villages several times a year and report births, deaths and marriages, as well as offences. Fines and imprisonments were imposed for disobeying chiefs.

Mista Campbell, hemi gufala gavman

Sometimes Campbell would fine people to make the point of law, and then pay the fine himself, telling them '*yu no mekem moa diswan*' ('don't do it again'). This also created an obligation from the fined person. A drum (mara mara) song, famous in Makira and played at feasts was, '*Mista Campbell, hemi gudfala gavman, Yu go kot long moning, aftanun yu go bak!*' (You're in court in the morning and out by afternoon). This song was heard more than three decades after Campbell had worked for the government

⁸⁸ Barley, Eastern District Annual Report 1920.

⁸⁹ Bennett 1987, 112.

⁹⁰ Campbell and his successors as district officers had access to a government ship for only one or two months at a time but it was too small for the longer open sea voyage to Ulawa.

Villagers were forbidden to change their place of residence or to absent themselves for more than a month from their village without the express permission of the district officer. Adultery was punishable by imprisonment, which was regarded by Islanders as far too lenient and ineffective as a deterrent.

Campbell was scathing of local living conditions:

Natives live in deplorable filth and insanitary conditions ... houses of the poorest kind imaginable, villages filthy, and many simply quagmires, caused by the pigs and numberless half-starved dogs with all kinds of diseases lived in the houses. I have heard of native women suckling pigs from their breasts and to sleep with in the same bed was common. Their gardens, owing to the number of pigs, were in most cases long distances away and had then to be fenced in, and even then were continually destroying them and causing semi-starvation to the owners. Often only one crop a year is planted and if this is destroyed there is famine.⁹¹

Pigs had to be fenced away from villages, and any pigs found in villages destroyed, changes which deeply affected customary ways. Gardens appeared all around the villages, where previously they had been a longer distance away. Dirty villages were demolished and forced to move to healthier sites on the coast. Villages were ordered to build a road along the north coast from Wainoni Bay, east of Kirakira, and west to Maro`u Bay in Arosi. Later, the road was extended as far as Makira Harbour on the south coast, but no further due to difficult terrain and lack of population.

After only 18 months, Campbell resigned in June 1919 to become a planter and trader. He established a plantation at Waimamura, close to Kirakira. Over the years, he purchased several more plantations at Waiae, Waimasi, and Boroni on the north coast, Maro`u Bay on the west coast, and Hawa`a on the south coast. He occasionally deputised for DOs on leave and dealt with court cases brought to him at Waimamura.



Figure 2.4: A plantation worker at Waimamura, Makira, 1930s —a key reason for earning money was to pay the government head tax, introduced in 1921. Source: R. Lever photo (British Museum).

⁹¹ Campbell, Eastern District Annual Report 1918.

A large, easy-going man, Campbell was a good host, enjoyed a beer on the veranda and reciting the Australian poet, Banjo Patterson. He learned the Bauro language and knew Makira *kastom* (custom) well. He understood cultural leadership styles and operated like a chief to maintain order but could joke and adapt himself to the level of the person to whom he was talking. Campbell was twice briefly married to local women, and his fondness for native women was disapproved of by colleagues and superiors in Tulagi. He had no children with his first wife, Maria Kainaua, who was from the local area, and two sons, Jack and Pat, with his second wife, Kapinihare of Aona. Campbell remained the white patriarch of Makira until his death in 1953.

In 1921, the government introduced a head tax on adult males of five shillings (5/-) a year, which was beyond the means of most Islanders to pay and compelled them to work for local plantation owners and traders.⁹² The head tax, as well as dog tax and other fines, was greatly resented by Islanders, who received virtually no services in return. On Malaita, resentment of the head tax led to the massacre of DO William Bell and his police patrol at Sinaragu in 1927. The government reprisal led to executions, gang rape of women and children, and destruction of villages, gardens and *tabu* (sacred) sites.⁹³ Tactics that would now be regarded as collective punishment, and indeed war crimes in some cases, had the intended effect of permanently quashing armed resistance in Malaita.

Indirect rule through government-appointed village headmen was frustrated by unrealistic expectations and misunderstanding of local leadership. Traditionally, leaders' authority rested on prestige acquired by birth, distributing wealth, feast giving, fighting, and spiritual power provided by ancestral powers and spirits. Government-appointed headmen were usually neither established chiefs nor hereditary, but often young men with experience of working for *gavman* or Europeans. District officers lamented that headmen lacked authority and that real clan chiefs were not selected. After the war, DO Sandars wrote: 'It is doubtful whether anywhere in the Colonial Empire has the appointment of [headmen] been so haphazard as in this Protectorate'.⁹⁴ The missions, especially the South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM), encouraged the young men to deny their elders and traditional customs:

Their [the chiefs'] prestige has been undermined by Government and the missions which have put an end to many of the things by which they established their power ... The cooperation of the mission is needed for the revival of many of the harmless customs which give these people a fuller life.⁹⁵

In 1941, the colonial government established native courts and native councils, neither of which were popular or successful. Local people thought that paying head taxes meant that they were paying the district officer to settle problems. In addition, headmen were paid, whereas elders and chiefs were not, and were not prepared to work for nothing. One chief reportedly said: '*Mifala no wan wok prison*' ('we will not work for nothing like prisoners'). The only places that welcomed

⁹² Barley, Eastern District Annual Report 1920.

⁹³ Keesing and Corris, 1980, *Lightning meets the West Wind: The Malaita Massacre* is a most readable account of the massacre. See also Moore, *Making Mala*, 2017.

⁹⁴ Akin 2013, 359 fn 29.

⁹⁵ Forster, Eastern District Annual Report 1941.

councils were Ulawa and Santa Ana, where native customs prevailed and the elders were still respected and important.

Depopulation in Makira

Makira was severely affected by depopulation—an estimated third of the population died in the seven years prior to 1920 due to epidemics of dysentery, influenza, measles, and whooping cough, which caused high death rates in previously unexposed populations. A census organised by DO Campbell estimated the population of Makira in June 1919 at 8,434 (4,615 male and 3,809 female). Annual deaths exceeded births by 50% and sometimes by more than 100% and a variety of causes was attributed.

A psychologist visits a depopulated area and pronounces depopulation to be due to psychological causes; a missionary points to polygamy, an atheist to the dying out of polygamy, a malaria expert to mosquitoes and an anthropologist to the loss of powers by chiefs: yet guess work, aided by preconception, would be a more fitting name than science for their investigations.⁹⁶

Endemic diseases, including malaria and yaws, caused high mortality rates in infants young and children.⁹⁷



Figure 2.5 Islanders with endemic diseases, 1930s—swollen abdomens (often signs of worm infestation and enlarged spleen from malaria); yaws (front two boys), elephantiasis (1st L and 2nd R), and polio (1st R). Source: Dr Lambert Sylvester, Rockefeller Foundation, (University of California, San Diego Library)

⁹⁶ Baker 1929, quoted in Bennett 2014, 214.

⁹⁷ Yaws, also called framboesia (and *karukaru* in Makira), is passed by contact with open sores and caused by *Treponema pertenue*, closely related to *Treponema pallidum*, which causes syphilis and also has three stages. In the primary stage, a red raw sore with a yellow-white discharge can remain for a long time or heal with a scar. In the secondary stage, sores break out on the face, limbs and sometimes back. In the tertiary stage, which often occurs later, there are painful swellings on bones and deep ulcers in the nose, throat and on the feet. Modern treatment with Salvarsan 606, the first modern synthesized drug, began in 1910 but it was not cheap or widely available in colonial backwaters like the Solomons. After the Pacific War, penicillin proved more effective and was used for mass campaigns in the Solomons from the late 1950s onwards.

Radical changes to the conduct of warfare, village organisation, and especially control of pigs had certainly undermined many customary practices and local economies. Prior to colonial and mission rule, traditional leaders organised and managed village life, including dancing and feasting, marriages and ceremonies, undertaking war raids, and building fine canoes and *kastom* houses. The rich cultural life imbued everyday tasks with importance and meaning. Customs fell into disuse, forbidden or discouraged by colonial regulations backed by force, imprisonment, and fines. Colonial rule eliminated trade in humans for sacrifices at feasts and rituals. WHR Rivers, one of the earliest anthropologists in Melanesia, noted:

There is no more potent source of the lack of interest in life which is the bane of subject peoples than the knowledge that they are being ruled by men who do not understand them and apparently do not try to understand.⁹⁸

Administrators, missionaries, and early anthropologists like Rivers persistently attributed depopulation to psychological causes and racial inferiority. Rivers argued that underlying the depopulation of Melanesian people was the weakening of people's will to live—disease and despair, like sorcery, were fatal.⁹⁹ Abortion and infanticide, particularly of female babies, was known to occur, but was downplayed by authorities because it was virtually impossible to interfere in such matters. Fox, writing in 1959, claimed that the government was so disliked 40 years earlier that, 'Women were killing their babies so that they would not grow up in the "white man's Solomons"'.¹⁰⁰ Earlier, DO Forster believed that the introduction of new ideas by missionaries and government had been,

'... to destroy the political, social, religious, and artistic life of the people. Today the natives have a very low cultural state. Their main interests are women, food, and gardens. Other topics of conversation are rare'.¹⁰¹

The effect of missionaries on culture was often most direct, although, as mentioned earlier, the Anglican Melanesian Mission was more alert to local customs and traditional religion than other denominations. The authority of and respect for elders were lost. Mission teachers assumed some of the powers belonging to chiefs but few had the status of traditional leaders. Teachers were chosen who were easier to teach, usually younger men with no acquired social standing.

Christianity altered trading patterns between coastal and bush villages by ending funerary feasts and ceremonies that required the exchange of canoes, pigs, shell money, taro and yam. Changes in traditional trading patterns affected the exchange of news, wealth, and marriages. In 1939, Waddell reported that on Ugi there were many unmarried men of middle age due to the decline in trade, which had undermined arranged marriages. Marriage had become less of a cultural institution than a convenience, often without ceremony, and divorce was equally casual.¹⁰² By World War II, the shell money used for purchase of brides, canoes, pigs, and compensation was no longer being made on the south coast and existing stocks were being buried with 'heathen' (non-Christian)

⁹⁸ Rivers 1917, 31.

⁹⁹ Rivers, 1922.

¹⁰⁰ Fox, *Melanesian Messenger* July 1959.

¹⁰¹ Forster, *Eastern District Annual Report* 1941 and 1942.

¹⁰² Waddell, *Eastern District Annual Report* 1939.

people when they died. As Bishop Cecil Wilson wrote, ‘We are placed then by God in His infirmary, to work among a dying race, but a race which will certainly die a Christian race’.¹⁰³

Recent scholars have contested demoralisation as a cause of depopulation.¹⁰⁴ Rather, it was diseases introduced by visiting ships and returning labourers—such as dysentery, influenza, measles, and gonorrhoea—that increased infertility, morbidity, and mortality. Epidemics of dysentery wiped out almost whole villages, particularly in the bush areas where sanitation was worst. The trade in rifles added to population decline and stimulated more lethal warfare and headhunting in areas such as New Georgia and Russell Islands. Adding to depopulation was labour migration from 1870 to 1903, before Australia stopped overseas recruitment in 1906 and Fiji stopped importing indentured Pacific Island labourers after 1911.

Colonial oppression, reinforced by economic depression, gave rise to political resistance in the late 1930s with the Chair and Rule Movement led by Rev Richard Fallowes, an Anglican missionary priest, with participants from Malaita, the Russell Islands, Guadalcanal and Makira. The movement promoted politically modest reforms, including local government and political representation, plus more health dispensaries, vocational training, and higher wages.¹⁰⁵ Colonial authorities regarded the movement as a cargo cult and Fallowes as treasonous. The 1939 annual report reported:

[R]umours of utopia brought about by an ex-Missionary ... the more impossible the rumour, the more implicit was the belief, including a native who was to be the king of the Solomons, ridiculous scales of income and wages (£80 per ton and wages £10 per month).¹⁰⁶

Fallowes was deported by British authorities with the connivance of Walter Baddeley, the Bishop of Melanesia. However, the Chair and Rule movement had some impact, on Makira and Ugi in particular, and was a precursor of Maasina Rule (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4), the political anti-colonial movement that was to have major political significance after the Pacific War.

Schools in Makira

Education and literacy were central to persuading people to adopt Christianity, and pivotal to the position of Mamaloni’s family in Makiran society. By the 1920s, there were two boarding schools at Wainoni Bay—the SSEM Risuna Girls School and the Catholic Society of Mary School for boys and girls. Both focussed on reading and writing from the bible, singing hymns and completing devotional exercises. In 1939, the Melanesian Mission and SSEM established new boarding schools in Arosi at Tawatana and Rumahui—the latter started by Mamaloni’s parents. By 1942, nearly every village had its *skulu* or mission school in a church or prayer house, with lay preachers as teachers. At the centre of pre-war Anglican education were the two Melanesian Mission boarding schools in Makira—St Michael’s at Pamua (see Figure 2.6) and All Hallows’ at Pawa on Ugi.

¹⁰³ Wilson, Southern Cross Log, April 1905. Similar to the term, ‘smoothing the pillow of a dying race’, used towards Australian aboriginal peoples.

¹⁰⁴ See chapters by Bayliss-Smith and Bennett in *The Ethnographic Experiment* (Hviding and Berg 2014).

¹⁰⁵ See Moore, <http://www.solomonencyclopaedia.net/biogs/E000058b.htm>, 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Waddell, Eastern District Annual Report 1939.



Figure 2.6: St Michael's School at Pamua, founded by Charles Fox in 1911. Source: Southern Cross Log 1918.

The slow road to Anglican education in Makira	
1901	Pamua station started on the north coast
1903	Eight village schools up to Bia village on south coast
1905	14 village schools operating
1909	18 village schools operating
1911	St Michael's School at Pamua, the first boarding school in Solomon Islands, started by Charles Fox with 30–40 students
1917	26 village schools operating, which dropped to 20 with amalgamation and declining populations from epidemics
1922	St Barnabas School on Norfolk Islands moved to All Hallows' School at Pawa on Ugi Island

All Hallows' started when the Melanesian Mission moved St Barnabas' School on Norfolk Island to the Solomons in 1922. Under the iron discipline of headmaster Alfred Hill from 1938 to 1953, it became the best school in the Protectorate.¹⁰⁷

The natives receive very thorough instruction in English and Arithmetic with the result that by the time they have finished their course at Pawa they are ready for training as Priests, clerks, wireless operators, etc. Other subjects include history, geography, hygiene and general knowledge. The work of their school was carried out throughout the year ... in spite of the fact that it was entirely self-supporting. It would be a great advantage to the school if less time was spent on food production ... at present insufficient time is spent on games. Lack of discipline and the ability to cooperate with others are two Melanesian weaknesses which regular games might do much to lessen. During the year a number of students were sent to Fiji and NZ for further instruction.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Hill, a former merchant sea captain, was headmaster from 1938–1953 and became Bishop of Melanesia in 1954 (Moore, <https://www.solomonencyclopaedia.net/biogs/E000007b.htm>, 2020)

¹⁰⁸ Waddell, Eastern District Annual Report 1939.

The Pacific War comes to the Solomons

After World War I, Germany forfeited its colonial territories in New Guinea, which became a League of Nations mandated territory under Australian control. In January 1942, Japanese forces invaded the New Guinea islands and captured the inadequately defended base at Rabaul in east New Britain.¹⁰⁹ The Solomons, lying 500 km to the southeast, were undefended and the authority of the British evaporated as most administrators, missionaries and traders were evacuated, leaving Islanders to cope as best they could. On Makira, some people thought that the end of the world had come: 'SSEM MV Evangel visited most of their adherents and unfortunately created much distress by stories of the "LAST DAY" which was supposed to be approaching. Many natives disposed of their goods and sat down to await it'.¹¹⁰

In May 1942, Japan and US navies clashed for the first time at the Battle of the Coral Sea, southwest of the Solomons. At the same time, the Japanese occupied the unprotected colonial capital of the Solomons, Tulagi, and began to construct an airstrip on north Guadalcanal, from which they aimed to control Allied shipping to Australia, Papua, and the islands to the south of the Solomons. The Battle of Guadalcanal—the first American land offensive of the war—began on 7 August 1942, when Allied forces took control of the airstrip on Guadalcanal, as well as Tulagi. Shortly afterwards the Japanese navy inflicted the heaviest naval defeat of the war on the United States (US) Navy at Savo in the waters alongside Guadalcanal, which were renamed 'Iron Bottom Sound' due to the huge losses of ships and aircraft during the battle.

The Guadalcanal campaign lasted six months until early February 1943. Both sides suffered terribly in hellish conditions from massive bombardment and fierce jungle warfare. Malaria and dysentery were crippling problems for troops and nearly 20,000 Japanese soldiers died from disease and starvation. Japanese forces based in Rabaul and the Shortlands had increasing difficulty supplying troops due to superior Allied airpower on Guadalcanal, informed by the famous Coastwatcher wireless operation which monitored Japanese ship and plane movements. Allied victory on Guadalcanal was almost complete by the time Mamaloni was born in January 1943. The island then became the major forward base and staging area for Allied forces to drive the Japanese out of western and northern Solomons in 1943, and New Guinea in 1945, one of the longest campaigns of the war.

Makira, codenamed *Ebony*, was spared major action or damage from the war. A contingent of US marines was stationed on the small island of Bio, close to Ugi. Makira provided an escape route for downed aircrew who were helped to safety by Makirans until they were picked up by ship.¹¹¹ The Japanese never landed troops on the island although Allied soldiers came looking for Japanese soldiers in 1942 on the south coast at Hawa'a—a Campbell plantation managed by Mamaloni's father during and after the war. Submarines used Makira as a rendezvous for evacuating personnel, including Silas Sitai from Santa Ana, who went to Fiji where he studied as a radio operator and became a US Army scout during the war.¹¹² Local people assisted the war effort through voluntary and unpaid coast watching, which they did 'with constitutional irregularity', according to Frederick

¹⁰⁹ Lindsay 2010, 42.

¹¹⁰ Forster, Eastern District Annual Report 1942.

¹¹¹ Crichtlow, Eastern District Annual Report 1944.

¹¹² Silas Sitai later became a district officer, magistrate, and Chairman of the Governing Council—see Chapter 9.

Campbell, who was commissioned as a lieutenant in the defence force.¹¹³ Campbell with his young sons, Jack and Pat, had been camped at Gold Ridge on Guadalcanal when the Japanese landed in 1942. Along with other hard-up planters and traders, they were prospecting for gold because many plantations on Makira had closed due to the economic depression and low copra prices in the 1930s. The Campbell sons, like other mixed-race children, were sent to Fiji, along with the sons of Heinrich Küper, a trader and planter on Santa Ana. Jack Campbell served in the Fiji army militia and Pat Campbell in the Fiji Police.

Trading in and between the islands was suspended during the war, leading to an acute shortage of trade goods and rapidly rising prices. Chinese traders and their families from other parts of the country were evacuated to Kirakira; by 1943 they were surviving and thriving by selling artefacts and curios to generous US troops. Adding to Islanders' hardships, the government—never shy of alienating local people—collected taxes (still five shillings per adult male and a dog tax), 'to remind the native of the permanency of the existing regime at a time when it would not be unreasonable to doubt this'.¹¹⁴ Such unsympathetic administration guaranteed local grievance and fuelled political resistance after the war.

The Pacific War created enormous changes in Islanders' awareness of and interaction with the outside world. An estimated two million men passed through the Pacific and a flood of military equipment, machines, roads, wharves, and airstrips arrived at even the most isolated, least developed islands.¹¹⁵ Of particular significance was the Solomon Islands Labour Corps, which provided the manpower for handling the enormous quantities of supplies required for battle and the huge base at Guadalcanal from 1942 to 1945. Cumulatively, 8,000 men served in the Labour Corps, and became the impetus for the Maasina Rule movement after 1943. The colonial backwater in which Mamaloni's parents and grandparents had grown up was violently and irrevocably changed by war. It was in a profoundly transformed and modern world that Solomon Mamaloni was born and raised.

¹¹³ Campbell's commission as a naval lieutenant was a real bonus after the lean years of the depression. His salary of £115 p.a. was considerably more than Islanders' on the government payroll. For example, Native Medical Practitioner John Kere earned £30 per annum and Agriculture Instructor John Araubora £27 per annum.

¹¹⁴ Forster, Eastern District Annual Report 1942.

¹¹⁵ Bennett 2009, 141.

Part Two. Mamaloni's Family Background and Upbringing in Arosi

Part Two examines Mamaloni's family background and upbringing in Arosi before he began formal education at the age of seven.¹ He was enculturated through parents, grandparents, the SSEM church, and the Maasina Rule protest movement after the Pacific War.

Mamaloni's parents divorced when he was very young. He was raised mainly by his beloved grandmother, until he moved to live with his father and stepmother at age seven. He suffered painfully from yaws and owed much to the kindness of the women who looked after him and healed his sores. The love he experienced from his grandmother and stepmother stood in sharp contrast to his mother, with whom he always had a difficult relationship. These relationships in his early life appeared to affect his adult relations with women, for better and worse.

Mamaloni was socialised in Arosi at a time when it came under control of the Maasina Rule movement, which was an early influence with regard to colonial authority and things European. He had a lifelong love of *kastom* stories and war movies, weapons, and strategy. An active and often naughty boy, his sociability, playfulness, and leadership ability were evident from early on and became characteristics of his populism and political style.

The post-war expansion of colonial education created pathways to schools that educated the small elite who became leaders at Independence in 1978. Mamaloni's father, Joash Sunaone, also played an essential role in Mamaloni's becoming a political leader. The Sunaone name was his passport to election in Makira, and Mamaloni always used it as his middle name. Mamaloni's father provided a model of leadership, hard work, organising ability and hospitality. He achieved status as a provincial and national politician, although these roles were still largely symbolic in a colonial system. He was elected to the Makira Council in 1956 and became its president from 1958 to 1963, which gave him a seat on the Advisory Council and its successor, the Legislative Council. Mamaloni not only followed in his father's footsteps as a politician and businessman—he stood on his shoulders.

* * *

¹ As the Jesuit aphorism reminds us: 'Give me a child until he is seven and I give you the man'.

Chapter 3. Mamaloni's Roots in Arosi

The influence of the South Sea Evangelical Mission (SSEM)

Mamaloni was raised in an SSEM family and enclave at Rumahui on the southwest coast of Arosi. The SSEM, an offshoot of the Queensland Kanak Mission, was part of the Open Brethren movement in the Puritan and Baptist tradition. Its theology included the Holy Trinity, literal authority of the Scriptures, essential depravity of man, everlasting life of the saved, and eternal punishment of the lost. The Bible was used as a single source to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, and singing. Redemption and personal salvation came through faith in Jesus Christ alone, symbolised by adult full immersion baptism.² Except for Holy Communion and baptism, there was minimal ceremony in prayer meetings and services were moved and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

3

Believing in equality before God, the SSEM rejected clergy and instead used preachers or 'teachers'. In contrast, the SSEM's Anglican rivals operating on the north coast of Makira had an exclusively male and hierarchical clergy. The Anglicans tolerated local traditions if they considered them helpful or at least harmless, whereas the fundamentalist SSEM condemned anything traditional as unbiblical and satanic (*blong devil*). The SSEM regarded ancestors and spirits—the traditional custodians and guardians of the land—as 'evil spirits', and traditional priests as 'witch doctors'. It advocated total separation from traditional believers to protect its followers from harm and 'backsliding'.

The SSEM depended heavily on European women. Its founder Florence Young, the Deck sisters, and early female missionary volunteers dressed in long Edwardian dresses to teach the bible in bush chapels and classrooms. European women provided new role models for Islander women. Local female teachers became powerful and respected as women's leaders. Island women took on key roles, but were only allowed to teach the bible to children in Sunday school or lead Women's Fellowship—they were never paid wages, although neither were the men.⁴ However, women could not escape the patriarchal dominance in both Islander and European culture, the latter sanctioned by bible scripture that justified male authority.⁵

² Mamaloni was therefore not baptised during his childhood in Arosi. At school, he worshipped in the Anglican faith and may have been baptised there or earlier in 1951 when he was living with Fredrick Campbell, a Catholic, but who was close friends with Alfred Hill, who became the Anglican Bishop of Melanesia in 1954.

³ Hilliard 1969, 59. Unlike the SSEM, the Anglicans had ornate services (such as Matins and Evensong), as well as set prayers translated into local and Mota languages. In contrast to SSEM fundamentalism, the Melanesian Mission followed a High Anglican ('Catholic') tradition that regarded cultural traditions as neutral or beneficial unless they were explicitly condemned in scriptures, such as murder and adultery.

⁴ Women performed key roles in Sunday school, teaching Bible classes, and women's fellowship (Moore 2010b).

⁵ Examples of Bible passages justifying male authority are, 'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord' (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33) and, 'But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over a man; she must be quiet' (1 Timothy 2:12).



Figure 3.1: The main SSEM school at Onepusu in Malaita, founded in 1906. Women played an important part in SSEM, including teaching people to read the Bible and write. Source: SSEM photograph, Deck family.

Men were responsible for preaching, leading worship, administration, and decision-making. Male teachers worked unpaid for the mission and acted as preachers, leading meetings twice a day and three to four times on Sundays. SSEM teachers and elders ran the villages and wielded extraordinary authority.⁶ Colonial officers could even lose their job if they disagreed with teachers' rulings on marriage disputes, illicit fornication, feasting, and bride price.

Mamaloni's parents, Joash Sunaone and Bethseda Irageni, were born when the SSEM was being established on the west and south coasts of Makira from 1910 to 1920. During the 1930s, they trained as teachers at the SSEM Training School at Onepusu on the west coast of Malaita, and returned there regularly to renew their evangelising energy. They became teachers at Rumahui and were later encouraged or required to marry within the SSEM. Relatives arranged their marriage in 1939 or 1940, which was officiated by a white missionary from the SSEM.⁷ Their first son, Francis Tohe, was born in May 1940.

In 1938, Irageni and Sunaone began building the first SSEM boarding school in Arosi at Mahora'a, overlooking Rumahui.⁸ The school opened in 1939, accommodating 25 boys, and operated until 1942, when it closed due to the approaching war. DO Forster wrote, 'the teachers are keen, but lack the imagination necessary to make the dry bones of school subjects live'.⁹ The curriculum focussed on religious subjects, but also taught English and singing. Sunaone was known for his love of singing and keenness to show off his and students' voices. He and his students gave a programme of Christmas carols at the government station at Kirakira, a return journey of over 200 km on foot.

⁶ SSEM teachers were leaders of an Indigenous church, rather than agents of a foreign mission. In the 1920s, the introduction of the headman system also produced new contenders for local political power (Bennett 1987, 276).

⁷ Irageni and Sunaone's marriage was arranged through relatives of the present-day 'chief' of Rumahui, Hasini Angisa (shown in Figure 2.1), whose mother, Abilene Omahe, was Sunaone's cousin sister, while Hasini's father was Irageni's cousin brother, so both were well placed to broker the marriage between Sunaone and Irageni.

⁸ Four district boarding schools were run by local teachers at Tawatana (Melanesian Mission), Wainoni (Catholic), Risuna (SSEM) and Rumahui (SSEM). Forster, *Eastern District Annual Report*, 1941.

⁹ Forster, *Eastern District Annual Report* 1942.

Signs of marital tensions between Irageni and Sunaone were apparent before the war. According to several informants, two students appeared fond of Irageni, who was closer in age to them than Sunaone, who was about 10 years older than her. Sunaone allegedly hit her (*kilim nogud*) because she had become too familiar with the students. One of the students, David Ha`aru, who was a cousin of Sunaone, later married Irageni in 1947 after she separated from Sunaone.

Mamaloni's maternal line

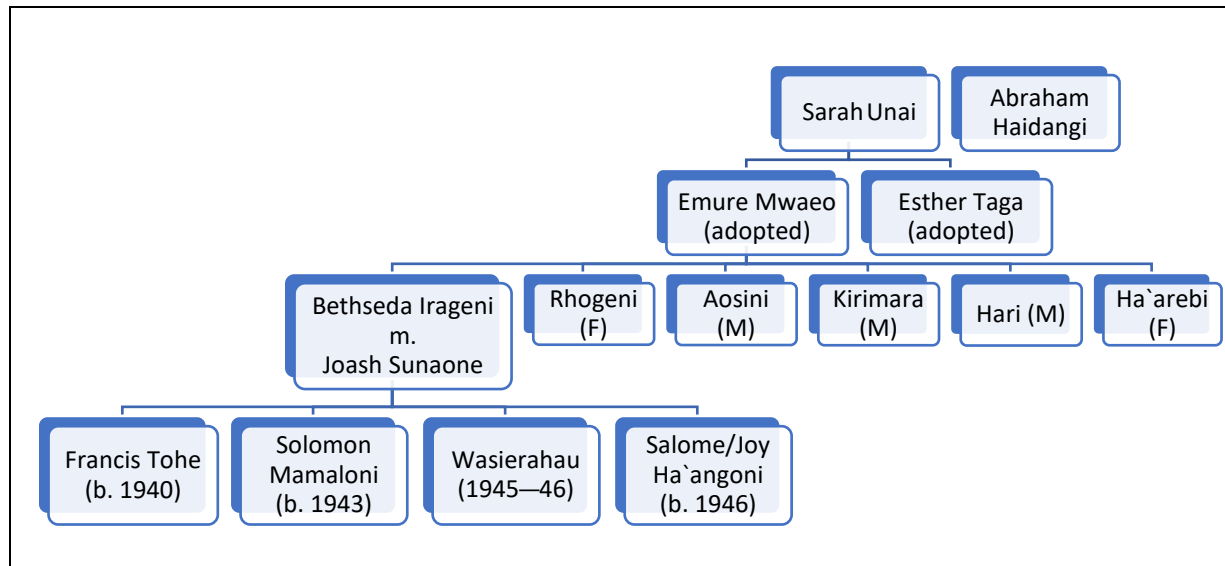


Figure 3.2: Solomon Mamaloni's maternal line¹⁰

Mamaloni's grandmother, Emure Mwaeo, had been adopted by Sarah Unai and Abraham Haidangi of Hunioa, a bush village above Rumahui. Unai and Haidangi were early SSEM converts who had no biological children of their own. They had already adopted another girl, Esther Taga, whom they had rescued from being killed at birth by parents with ancestral beliefs (*beden*).¹¹ Adoption was common in Solomon Islands and especially important, with the impact of depopulation due to introduced diseases, if there were no direct descendants left to inherit land. Female adoption maintained or laid claim to female lineages (*burunga*) through which land in Makira is inherited.¹² Mamaloni's grandmother, Mwaeo, was born in Matagasi village on Small Malaita. Her mother was Efukeni of Su`urii and her father was Raba of Marapona, who was said to be a brutal man. Mwaeo was adopted in exchange for 15 lengths of red shell money and one rifle. Around 1915, when she

¹⁰ Mamaloni's maternal line explained: Great-grandmother: Sarah Unai married Abraham Haidangi, and they had two adopted daughters, Esther Taga and Emure Mwaeo. Grandmother: Emure Mwaeo (born around 1900), adopted from Small Malaita (Emure is possibly an Arosi pronunciation of Mwaeo). She married Nicholas Pwarongo of Hunoa, and they had six children— Irageni (F), Rhogeni (F), Aosini (M), Kirimara (M) who died young, Hari (M), and Ha`arebi (F). Mother: Bethseda Irageni, who was adopted by Sarah Unai as Mwaeo's 'first fruit'. She married Joash Sunaone with whom she had four children—Francis Tohe (M), Solomon Mamaloni (M), Wasierahau (M), who died aged six months, and Salome Ha`angoni (F). Irageni then married David Ha`aru, with whom she had three children: Betty Kamai, Peter Nahutahi and Samson Teweoni.

¹¹ According to her grandson, Esther Taga was rescued by Mamaloni's great-grandparents. Esther's mother was not a Christian and Haidangi had asked her for the child before it was born. The mother was 'told by the devil' to throw away the baby, who was buried in the sand when it was born and covered with a clam shell. Haidangi heard that it had just been born and he rushed down from his garden and found where the baby was buried. He uncovered the baby, who was still alive, and paid the mother to breastfeed the child. Haidangi and his wife Unai then raised Esther and later Mwaeo. Interview with Agrippa Mono, 28 November 2013.

¹² Scott 2007a, 82–87.

was perhaps 12 to 15 years old, she was brought by canoe to Arosi with four other children from Small Malaita.

Mwaeo and the boat children from Small Malaita

Mamaloni's grandmother, Mwaeo, came in a canoe paddled from Small Malaita over 40 miles away. She arrived at Heuru with four other children (two young girls and two older boys) who were bought for adoption into different clans and parts of Arosi. The children who came in that canoe from Small Malaita to Arosi were:

- Mwaeo of Matagasi, the grandmother of Mamaloni, who went to Rumahui
- Itahais/Rawaniha`a, the grandmother of John Saunana, who went to Maro`u Bay
- Huania of Ululaha, the grandmother of Rachel and Mathias Taro, who went to Heuru
- Sura`au, the grandfather of Rex Horoi, who went to Tawatana
- Neheri, another older boy, who went to Maranu`u.

According to Rex Horoi, the chief welcomed the children with special lengths of shell money, called *garianwara*. When news came that a canoe had arrived at Ubuna from Small Malaita with children for adoption, Haidangi and Unai went to Hada Bay and then walked to Ubuna, where they paid for Mwaeo with shell money and a rifle. According to her youngest daughter Ha`arebi, Mwaeo took some time to learn the Arosi language and was very lonely. Sarah Unai, her adoptive mother, loved her and was not cruel, but raised Mwaeo in strict SSEM fashion.

Like Mamaloni, Mwaeo was short, with a lighter skin common on Malaita. Her skin was even lighter due to *bakua* (disseminated ringworm), which covered her body—Mamaloni would later joke that his grandmother had been bought to be eaten, but her *bakua* was so bad no one had wanted to eat her. Mwaeo married Nicholas Pwarongo of Hanengae when she was around 18 years old. They had six children, of whom Irageni, Mamaloni's mother, was their first-born. After Nicholas died in 1938 or 1939, Mwaeo married Nahan Wawaniha`a of Herenigau. Mamaloni was raised by them and, during his early years, believed they were his real parents, not Irageni and Sunaone. Mwaeo died in 1966 and was deeply missed by Mamaloni. Her Malaitan lineage was always well known and became an important aspect of his personal and political identity.

Bethseda Irageni, Mwaeo's first daughter, was born around 1920. When Irageni was small and had started walking, she was adopted by her grandmother, Sarah Unai, as Mwaeo's 'first fruit'.¹³ There is little information about Irageni's childhood, except that she was raised by her grandmother in the strict SSEM tradition. Irageni was part of the first generation of Makirans to grow up in villages separated from their traditional cultural beliefs and practices.¹⁴ The SSEM instilled habits of discipline, order, and hard work, which Irageni maintained all her life. She was educated at the village school in Rumahui, and subsequently at boarding schools at Wainoni Bay and Afio (on Small Malaita). Her education included reading, writing, singing, and religious instruction.¹⁵ She

¹³ It was a common cultural practice in Arosi for the first child of an adopted child or married child to be given back to be raised by the grandparents.

¹⁴ By 1917, nearly all people in Rumahui had adopted Christianity, many traditional practices had ceased, and sacred objects were thrown away. *Not In Vain* 1916–1917, quoted in Sayes 1976, 189.

¹⁵ Moore 2017, 425.

also learned skills in cooking and sewing. Irageni later trained to become a women's leader at the SSEM headquarters at Onepusu. Irageni was small, plump, and good-looking but bossy (*meri hem i tok tumas*). Her second husband, David Ha'aru, with whom she had three children, was said to have been a 'rough man' before they married, whom Irageni moulded to become 'her *hausboi*'.¹⁶ She was a fearless and formidable leader, qualities that Mamaloni also possessed. She became a senior leader in the Women's Fellowship (previously called the Women's Band) and was respected throughout the Arosi area. In 1946, when police came to arrest Maasina leaders, including her husband David, she screamed at the soldiers, telling them to arrest the women too.

Mamaloni's relationship with his mother was complicated because she had broken the maternal bond by giving him to Mwaeo to look after when he was very young. She was also difficult to live with and please. However, he reconciled with Irageni many years later, and chose to be buried next to the house he had built for her. She outlived her son and died just six months after Mamaloni in 2000 when she was nearly 80 years old.

Mamaloni's paternal line

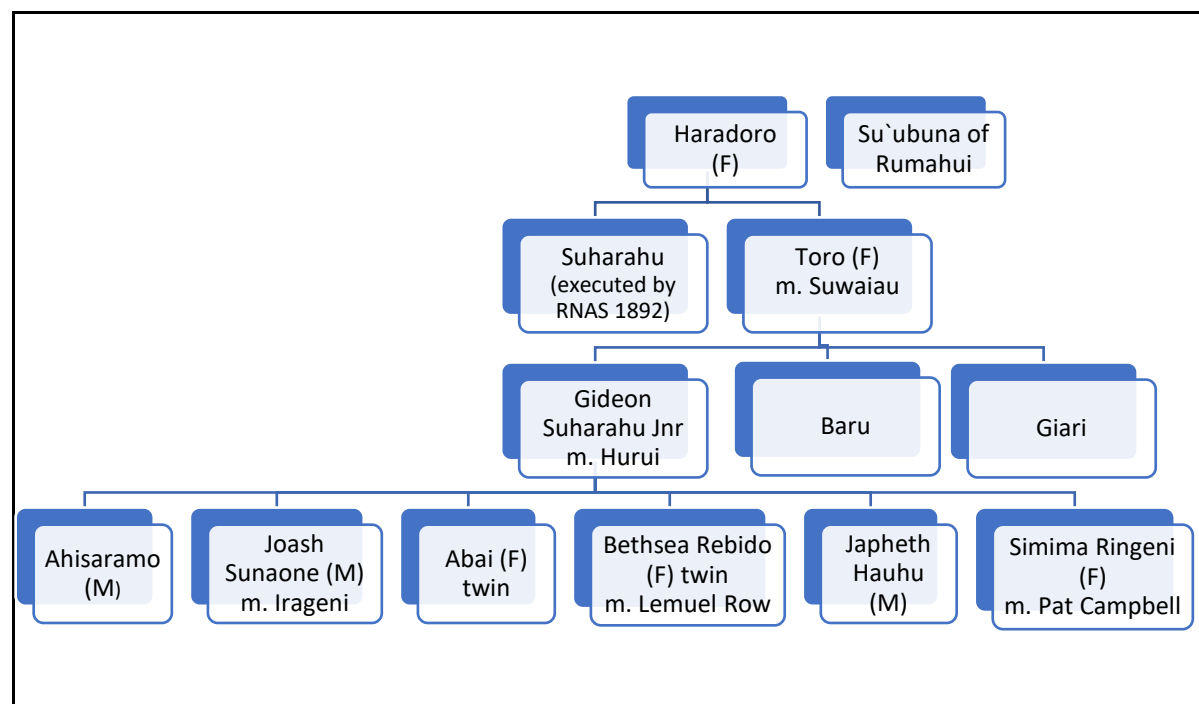


Figure 3.3: Solomon Mamaloni's paternal line.¹⁷

Mamaloni's father, Joash Stephanus Sunaone, was born in 1911 at Tabwaranga, just north of Rumahui. He was one of six surviving children, with three sisters and two brothers. He was the

¹⁶ Many family members made this comment about them.

¹⁷ Mamaloni's paternal line explained: Great-great-grandfather: Su'ubuna of Rumahui married Haradoro (F) and they had two children: Toro (F) and Suharahu (M). Great-grandfather: Suharahu executed in 1892—he had no children. His sister Toro married Suwaiau and they had three children and gave the name Suharahu to their son. Grandfather: Gideon Suharahu Junior married Hurui and they had six children: Ahisaramo (M), Sunaone (F), twins Abai (F) and Bethseda (Rebido) (F), Japheth Hauhu (M), and Simima Ringeni (F). Of the twin sisters, Abai and Rebido, the latter married Lemuel Row of Tawaraha, who was jailed as a Maasina Rule leader, and then became a policeman and was later elected to the Makira Council. Another sister, Simima Ringeni (Nancy), married Patrick Campbell, the wild younger son of Frederick Campbell.

second-born son of Gideon Suharahu (Junior) and the grandson of Suharahu, who was executed by naval firing squad at Rumahui in 1892. Although he died without children, his sister Toro named her son after Suharahu to create a lineage and thus Sunaone and Mamaloni are considered his direct descendants.¹⁸

Sunaone was also connected to Guadalcanal through adoption.¹⁹ Shadrack Sese from Guadalcanal listened to stories by his own great-grandfather Jimi Vataluvu (also known as Jimi Lologhuna in old age). At the age of 18 or 19, Jimi went to work on plantations in Bundaberg, Queensland, where he was known as Jimi Solomon. Whether he had been properly contracted or blackbirded, he and other recruits travelled in the ship's hold, where their food was thrown down to them 'like caged animals'. A very tall man, Jimi was tough, strong, and not afraid to use his fists—he punched out a white foreman who whipped the workers. He was a talented bare-knuckle boxer who defeated Bill Forcelyn, a Queensland titleholder. Jimi returned from Queensland at the end of his contract and disembarked on Makira, where he stayed for some years, working at the Three Sisters plantation, and later helping to establish a plantation at Aboru in Arosi. He met and married Sarah Unuasi, a woman from Bauro who had previously been married and had lived in Queensland. They had no children of their own but adopted Hurui (her Christian name is unknown), who later married Gideon Suharahu Junior and gave birth to Joash Sunaone.²⁰ Jimi and his wife used to come to Arosi to visit and help their daughter and her children, including Sunaone. After Sarah Unuasi died, Jimi moved back to Areata in the Talise area on the Guadalcanal weathercoast and did not return to Makira. He lived to a great age and died in 1974. According to Shadrack Sese, Mamaloni eventually found his great-grandfather by adoption on the Guadalcanal when, as an executive officer in Central District, he was on patrol in 1966 to 1967. Both men were very excited to meet each other and Mamaloni spent days talking with Jimi about his life and times in Queensland and Makira.

Like Irageni, there is little information about Sunaone's early life.²¹ Both were among the first generation in the Solomons to grow up with the relative peace and security of Christianity. In contrast to traditional villages, SSEM villages had access to resources and reasons to be secure. Sunaone was locally educated by SSEM teachers and later attended the Teacher Training School at Onepusu. As well as becoming a teacher, he worked on board the SSEM missionary vessel, the MV *Evangel*, as an engine hand ('greaser') and cook.

Irageni was four months pregnant with Mamaloni when the war started in August 1942. The family, including their firstborn son, Francis Tohe, moved into the bush above Rumahui where Mamaloni was born on 21 January 1943. The family moved to Hawa'a, on the south coast close to Onebia, where Sunaone became a caretaker of one of Frederick Campbell's plantations. A third son, known

¹⁸ In Arosi custom and Melanesia more generally, the child adopts the status and descent line of their namesake.

¹⁹ Mamaloni's connections to Guadalcanal have been difficult to establish definitively. He acknowledged his Guadalcanal lineage when relatives visited him in Honiara, and some travelled to Rumahui for his burial. Former PM Ezekiel Alebua considered him a fourth cousin. According to some Makiran informants, Sunaone's mother Hurui's biological father was from Talise on the weathercoast. Others say the connection was through adoption.

²⁰ According to family informants in Makira, Hurui was put in a basket hung in a tree by her biological mother, Mumuta'i, and raised as a foundling by Sarah Unuasi and Jimi Vataluvu.

²¹ According to Andrew Wahunia, who worked as a cook for Sunaone in later years, Sunaone was breastfed by another woman because his mother's breasts were dry. Her name was Kamuhui from Makamai in Central Bauro.

only as Wasierihau, was born some time in 1944 or 1945, but died aged six months.²² Most plantations had closed before the war due to the worldwide economic depression and crash in copra prices. Restoration of the plantations did not begin until 1945 when Sunaone began to manage the plantation labourers, trade store, and Campbell's ships.

Divorce and separation in Makira were common and often remarked upon in colonial reports. Sunaone and Irageni separated in 1946 and she returned to live at Rumahui. Their fourth child, Salome Ha`angoni (known as Joy), was born after Irageni married David Ha`aru with whom she subsequently had three more children.²³ The cause of Irageni and Sunaone's separation is not certain, but there have been suggestions of infidelity by both parties. Sunaone had taken an undue interest in Hasada Daraburu, a domestic servant (*hausgeh*) from Anuta Island, who came to work at Hawa`a when she was 15 years old. Interviewed in 2010, Daraburu said that she had not wished to have anything to do with a married man more than twice her age and so had run back to her village.²⁴ However, after Sunaone had separated from Irageni, he wrote to Daraburu asking her to return to Hawa`a. Daraburu's version of events was that Irageni liked David Ha`aru and Sunaone liked her, so they separated and married anew.

Family members describe Sunaone as a jealous, sometimes violent man, and this may have underpinned the split. He may well have struggled to deal with a strong-minded, outspoken, and modern SSEM woman. Irageni was a bossy woman, a women's leader unhindered by *kastom*, opinionated, and by all accounts smarter than her husband. This would have been particularly galling to an aspiring *big-man*. In contrast, Daraburu was young, unschooled and obedient. In 1946, she returned to Hawa`a and married Sunaone in a customary marriage. Meadows, the first of their 12 children, was born in 1947. They lived at Hawa`a until 1951, when they moved to manage another Campbell plantation at Waiae on the north coast. Sunaone was short, similar in height to Mamaloni, and physically strong. In private, he had a bad temper, but was not a person to row or swear in public. He was very sociable and welcomed all visitors with betel nut and food, adopting the style of the Makiran *araba*—'enemy to none, and friend to all'. He was fond of singing and loved organising *singsing* events. After the Pacific War, Sunaone helped Frederick Campbell and his sons to restore their various plantations. Education, discipline, practical skills, and leadership experience made Sunaone a good right-hand man for Campbell. A strict disciplinarian, he kept business in good order, organising labour, records, and accounts. At a time when clinics were scarce, he treated workers and many others with injections and medicines. He also skippered Campbell's ships, the *Aona* and *Kirio*, between plantations and trading stations. Sunaone became almost a son to the Campbell patriarch and an older brother to Jack and Pat Campbell; he mediated between the brothers when they quarrelled, which was often.²⁵ The reputations of, and close ties between, the Campbell and Sunaone families gave Mamaloni a platform from which he launched his political career in 1970, as we shall see in Part Four.

²² Mamaloni's brother Wasierihau died after a fall. Unfortunately, Salome Ha`angoni, born in 1946 and who grew up with Irageni, died in 2009 before I had the opportunity to learn more details.

²³ Irageni had three children with David Ha`aru—Betty Nalulahi (1947–2014), Peter Nahutahi (1950–2005) and Samson Teweoni (1954~).

²⁴ Interview with Daraburu Hadasa, 15 April 2010.

²⁵ Interview with Fred Campbell, 18 April 2010.

Chapter 4. Childhood in Arosi 1943 to 1950

Solomon Mamaloni spent his first seven years living in Arosi, mainly at Rumahui, his mother's village on the southwest corner of Makira, and at Hawa'a on the south coast, where his father managed a Campbell plantation. Mamaloni was badly afflicted with yaws, a severe skin disease particularly affecting children, which was very prevalent at the time.²⁶ He had secondary stage yaws, which spread over much of his body— 'he looked like Naaman from the bible with leprosy', according to his aunt Ha`arebi. He went to live with his grandmother Mwaeo at Herenigau, close to Rumahui, who offered to take him because she was afraid he could die without proper care; Irageni may also have been protecting her next born child, Wasierihau, because yaws was often fatal in infants.

Mamaloni responded to his grandmother's love, care, and traditional food. He developed such a craving for the soft *taumwa* or Makira six-month pudding that, later in life, he would not allow anyone else to touch it when it was sent to him from home. He needed gentle handling because of his widespread sores. His aunt Ha`arebi, then just entering her teens, remembers carrying him everywhere, which transmitted yaws to her. Mamaloni spent most of his time in female company until he was older and stronger. His sores improved with daily washing with heated banana leaf, warm water and soap, but he was not cured until treatment with penicillin became available sometime after 1950.

Maasina Rule

In 1946, Mamaloni moved with Mwaeo and her family back to Rumahui, a Maasina Rule stronghold. Initially known as the 'Native Council Movement' and also Maasina Ruru, it was called 'Marching Rule' by the British, a mispronunciation or misinterpretation of *maasina*, broadly meaning brotherhood in `Are`Are.²⁷ Maasina Rule has been variously described as a protest movement, as proto-nationalist, as anti-colonialist, as pro-development and as a cargo cult.²⁸ It was started in 1943 by Aliko Nono`ohimae in `Are`Are, Malaita who had supported the Chair and Rule movement in the 1930s. He joined the Solomon Islands Labour Corps on Guadalcanal, where his ideas developed through contact with American troops and other Malaitans. The term Maasina was adopted in 1945, and the movement began a campaign of civil disobedience in Malaita in support of Indigenous self-government and better working conditions. The movement arose from Islanders' wartime experiences, which had heightened their resentment of racism and the humiliations of colonial rule. They enjoyed much more companionable relationships with Allied soldiers than with Europeans bosses and *mastas*, many of whom had deserted them prior to the arrival of Japanese forces. They found the Americans especially generous, friendly and willing to eat and share food with them, which was culturally very important.²⁹ Black soldiers in uniform

²⁶ During Maasina Rule, government dispensaries in Arosi, Wainoni, and Star Harbour were closed until May 1950, allowing yaws to again become widespread.

²⁷ In `Are`Are language, *maasina* means sibling, cousin, or close friend—or, more broadly, brotherhood. Authorities thought that Maasina was a Pijin corruption of 'marching', one of the visible activities of the movement that colonial officers could readily understand, or a local pronunciation of Marxist or Marx's law (Akin2013, 165–166).

²⁸ Key texts: Akin, *Colonialism, Maasina Rule, and the origins of Malaitan kastom* 2013; Keesing, *Maasina Rule in historical perspective* 1978; Laracy, *Pacific protest: The Maasina Rule movement* 1983; Moore, *Making Mala*, 2017.

²⁹ Very few colonial personnel ate with Islanders. In 1954, Baha'i pioneers, Alvin and Gertrude Blum, seemed remarkable because of their hospitality and willingness to offer food to Islanders (Saunders 2003, 206).

lived and fought alongside white soldiers, which contrasted sharply with colonial norms. American soldiers were called 'Joe' by Islanders and appeared much less subservient to authority and their officers, who were rarely addressed as 'Sir'.³⁰

Factors contributing to Maasina Rule

- The poor quality of British administration prior to the Pacific War.
- The arrogant and patronising attitudes of many colonial personnel.
- Islanders feeling abandoned and left to fend for themselves as the war approached.
- The stark contrast between white colonials' and American service men's attitudes and generosity.
- The boundless quantities of material cargo and supplies that accompanied Allied forces.
- The confiscation and destruction of Islanders' possessions earned or given by American and Allied soldiers.
- Attempts by colonial authorities to re-impose pre-war relationships after the war.



Figure 4.1: Solomon Islands Corps labourers packing belongings to return home, 1943. Clothing, equipment, and gifts from US soldiers were often confiscated by British authorities. Source: R. Robbins, US Marine Corps, 1943 (University of Hawai'i Library.)

Maasina Rule grew rapidly throughout Malaita, as well as on neighbouring islands of Makira, Guadalcanal, and Ngellas. There was remarkable solidarity given traditional differences. The SSEM church, which often disagreed with colonial authority, provided structure and leadership for Maasina Rule, and many SSEM followers were prominent in the movement.

Maasina Rule followers refused to pay the much-resented colonial taxes and were forbidden from cooperating with the white man. They refused to provide their labour or census information and boycotted clinics. A key Maasina Rule strategy was to gather people in villages into collective villages or towns (*taon*), emulating the army camps in which the Solomon Islands Labour Corps

³⁰ A favourite Mamaloni expression was 'iumi Joe, ia'—meaning 'we're US army soldiers, i.e., 'we can do this' or 'we can do anything'.

served with the Allied forces. *Taon(s)* were clean and well-organised; new houses for newcomers and outsiders were built in straight lines and arranged according to clans. *Taon(s)* were fenced with security gates, through which everyone was checked in and out. Guards obsessively protected the *taon* from spies and enemies. Elements of army rituals included flag raising and lowering ceremonies and parade drills with both real and wooden weapons. Bells sounded times for work, meals, and rest. Women marched in pairs to and from the huge collective gardens needed to feed the *taon*, where they worked watched over by guards.

Maasina regulations were enforced by courts and formal procedures led by a hierarchy of leaders, often SSEM teachers and elders. Customary laws and traditions that had been abandoned by followers of Christianity, forbidden by churches, or outlawed by government were codified. Traditional *kastom* was codified by recording details of genealogies, land ownership and histories. Discipline and rules were strictly enforced by ‘minor chiefs’ with specialised roles, such as *habamasta* (harbour master), who controlled all craft coming to and from shore. Funds were collected to pay for a teacher, medical officer and agricultural adviser. All local produce was valued and counted, including household food, firewood, *motu* (earth oven) stones, and leaf panels. Clerks (*klaka*) recorded the data in books, which were hidden from the government in the bush.

Rumours circulated that the Americans would return with landing craft and Liberty (cargo) ships. American soldiers were rumoured to be hiding in the bush, and villagers were told to stand by for action. Followers wore white *kaliko* on their wrist—so that the Americans would recognise them as supporters—and anyone moving around outside at night had to carry a glowing ember to be seen. Maasina Rule leaders ordered people to stay inside the fence at night, and pretended to hold secret meetings in the bush at night. Accordingly, colonial authorities labelled it a cargo cult and dismissed Maasina political claims. There were certainly elements of cargo beliefs and rituals, but as Joan Herlihy argued, ‘The key factor ... is not the cargo or the nature of the result but the use of rituals—often a combination of traditional and modern rituals—to achieve the desired ends’.³¹

In Makira, colonial authorities responded mildly at first to Maasina Rule, even welcoming the improvements and discipline in villages:

Arosi is the only area in San Cristobal [Makira] where Marching Rule is clearly understood and has enough enterprise to put into practice ... The people of Arosi and [John] Araubora in particular appear to be sufficiently shrewd to realise that they can only achieve their aims in collaboration with government ... the whole thing is in keeping with the general line of policy persuaded by the [Arosi] Council and appears to be envisaged as operating through lawful Council channels.³²

Tolerance turned to repression as resistance grew and strikes threatened public order. In September 1947, authorities arrested Maasina Rule leaders in Malaita, Makira, and Ulawa, justifying their actions with charges of coercion, misuse of funds, and strike action. The leaders, including Mamaloni’s stepfather David Ha`aru, were found guilty of operating illegal courts and sentenced

³¹ Herlihy 2003, 5. Cargo expectations, which were strongly influenced by extraordinary experiences during the war, were also emphasised by colonial officers keen to discredit the movement.

³² Assistant DC Allan to DC Central, February 1947.

to jail from three months to two years.³³ Followers refusing to give their names for the census or pay the head tax were fined and jailed. Although the arrests generally did not encounter much resistance, police at Rumahui met a flotilla of canoes full of angry men and women, including Irageni, who yelled at the police to arrest the women too. Key leaders were imprisoned in Honiara and Gizo, while supporters were held for shorter periods at Kirakira and Malu'u in Malaita. Maasina prisoners were used as forced labour in Honiara, which became the colonial capital of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate after Tulagi had been destroyed during the war.

By late 1949, repression was clearly not working. Colonial authorities began changing their tactics from suppression and direct rule to offering gradual political representation in return for civil obedience. Maasina leaders were released in 1950 on the condition that they urge followers to pay taxes, comply with the census, and obey village hygiene regulations.³⁴ In return, reform and representation in the form of island councils were promised. Combined with the release of leaders, the government change of strategy allowed Maasina followers to claim victory.

In Makira, support for Maasina Rule was already fading, partly because daily living and collective duties were arduous and oppressive, particularly for women, and partly due to the failure of the Americans and cargo to arrive. According to district political reports, leaders in Wainoni, Arosi and Haununu were discredited:

The explosion of the American myth has contributed greatly to the improvement of the situation. Leaders everywhere ... had quite convinced people that there were Americans hidden in various parts of the bush friendly to the Maasina Rule cause and in daily contact with the leaders. At last ... [when] they followed the leader into the bush for their so-called conferences ... they discovered straightaway that the tale of meeting Americans was a complete fabrication.³⁵

People returned to their villages and life gradually returned to normal over the next three years, although support in some inland areas lingered well into the 1950s. Elections to island councils were introduced first in 1952 in Malaita, where Maasina Rule had been strongest, and in Makira in 1953. Island councils had limited powers and authority but were a symbolically important realisation of Maasina aspirations. The status of Maasina Rule leaders was enhanced by their resistance and imprisonment. Many were elected and they threw themselves into service of councils and local works. Councils became pathways for the first generation of pre-independence politicians, including Mamaloni's father, Joash Sunaone, who became President of the Makira Council in 1958. Maasina Rule was the forerunner of modern Solomon politics, as Mamaloni acknowledged in a 1995 interview:

³³ Leaders on Makira included John Araubora, a former government agriculture instructor who became a key SSEM teacher and leader in Arosi. He and other delegates from Arosi, including Mamaloni's stepfather, David Ha'aru, had paddled by canoe to Ubuna and then to 'Are'Are to meet with Alick Nori and Alik Nono'himae, the Malaitan leaders of Maasina Rule. Other Maasina leaders from Arosi were Lemuel Row from Tawaraha, Peter Suniabu and Timothy Manihau.

³⁴ Prisoners from Makira were released soon after an accident in Honiara on Christmas Eve 1949 when a lorry crashed carrying a work gang of Maasina prisoners while descending the Lengakiki road; two men died and others suffered fractures, including David Ha'aru, who suffered a broken arm or shoulder.

³⁵ General Political Report, Makira, May 1950. There would often be signs of army movements on the beach, such as tyre marks and boot prints suspiciously similar in size.

When you look back at the Marching Rule struggle, everywhere except the Western province, all of us were in it. It was a struggle which a lot of people play down but to me it was the beginning of organised politics. The significant thing about it and its relation to independence was that most of the leaders—like David Kausimae and Jonathan Fifi'i, were still alive.³⁶

Living in a Maasina *taon*

From four to seven years old, Mamaloni lived at Rumahui with his grandparents, Mwaeo and Nahan, as well as his aunt, Ha`arebi—the youngest of Mwaeo's five surviving children. Rumahui was the second-largest village in Arosi after Heuru, and became a Maasina Rule 'taon'. According to the 1948 Eastern District Report:

Hada, Ahia (Marou Bay), Ubuna, Tawatana, Heuru, Wango and Mwanewaro were rebuilt with bush people going to salt water [coastal] villages ... Still considerable rebuilding and reorganisation, villages are built in the usual Marching Rule frenzy and are not very good. Rumahui bids fair to become the finest in Eastern District and has a Marching Rule fence.³⁷

This was an extraordinary time and place in which to grow up. Children were told that the bush was dangerous and abounded with American soldiers ready to rescue the island from the British. There were rumours of submarine landings and Liberty ships loaded with cargo on their way. Children made small trucks and ships, played games of US soldiers, and pretended to drill.³⁸ Although they were treated strictly, there was no formal school and children were educated in customary ways, which enjoyed a revival. Children listened to *kastom* stories and the oratory of Maasina leaders and elders (*olos*)—this may have stimulated Mamaloni's lifelong interest in *kastom* and storying with *olos*. His faith in decentralised government, a core element of his political philosophy may also have begun with the highly organised Maasina *taon*(s) and connections between them.

Mamaloni and his brother Francis moved around and stayed with different relatives in Rumahui and Hada Bay. Irageni lived separately in a house nearby with her grand-mother, Sarah Unai, by then in her 70s. According to Ha`arebi, the family made their own candles from local nuts, had no proper plates, and ate with bowls and spoons made from coconut shell. Ha`arebi remembers Mamaloni as a gentle boy who played quietly and was not a troublemaker. His sores had improved but his body was still small. Bigger boys would send him on errands and make him fetch arrows shot into the bush halfway down the cliff. However, Agrippa Mono, a childhood playmate, recalls a much more assertive Mamaloni—one who was a ringleader and disobedient as he grew older.³⁹

³⁶ Ian Johnstone interview with Solomon Mamaloni 1995.

³⁷ Onebia and Bia were also Maasina strongholds on the south coast of Makira. There was also strong support for Maasina Rule in east Makira (from Wainoni to Star Harbour and Santa Ana). West of Kirakira, the north coast of Arosi was mainly affiliated with the Church of Melanesia, whose clergy were at odds with Maasina Rule (Fox, *Kakamora*. 1962, 127–35).

³⁸ Exciting tales of American soldiers and weapons in the bush may well have stimulated Mamaloni's lifelong interest in weapons, military matters, and war films.

³⁹ Interview with Agrippa Mono, 2 November 2013.

A naughty boy and gang leader

‘During our childhood, Mamaloni was able to group and lead his peers. He knew us very well and could easily bend our noses to fulfil his plans. He’d collect us together and tell us his plans. “Today when people go to their gardens, we will go and take all the eggs from someone’s house. I’ve already seen those eggs.” He’d assign us to do this and that and where to stand when we go to someone’s house to steal the eggs. Whenever someone was coming, we’d whistle an alert that someone was coming. Sometimes we failed and, on one occasion, he was caught red-handed, but talked his way out of it. When he was asked what he was doing, he replied, “I was hungry and I want to eat these ripe bananas” and got away with it’.

‘We did a lot of petty stealing and even spoiling other people’s property and stealing coconuts. One bright moonlight, he got us to chase all the ducks and as a result two large ducks died. The chiefs in the village called on our parents and all of us were whipped very seriously. Another time, Mamaloni ordered us to go inside the area where Chief Waiau lived. He told us to make all sorts of noises and then the chief came out and chased us up the hill. Mamaloni gave orders to roll big stones behind us, one of which rolled down and almost killed the chief’.

Neither Irageni nor Sunaone supported Mwaeo and Nahan in caring for their sons. Mamaloni was not aware until sometime later that his grandparents, Mwaeo and Nahan, were not his real parents or that he was adopted. His aunt Ha`arebi recalled:

He thought I was his real sister and Mwaeo and Nahan his parents. One day Sunaone came to Rumahui and gave him a ball. Mwaeo came back from the garden and saw him playing with the ball; when she asked him where he had got the ball, Mamaloni said a man had come and given him the ball but he didn’t know who he was. Another woman told them it was Sunaone. Mwaeo wept and then she told him it was his father and also that Irageni was his mother. Mamaloni went very quiet when he was told.⁴⁰

Mamaloni ran away from Rumahui when he was about seven years old after an argument with Irageni. Details of the incident differ according to family and friends. The story, as told by Mamaloni to a close friend, Selwyn Suriramo, runs as follows: Irageni had gone to the garden and left cooked taro for Salome (Joy), her small daughter, to eat. A hungry Mamaloni went to her house and ate the taro. When she came back, Irageni found out and was so furious that she whipped him (in other versions, she threw yams or stones at him).⁴¹ He was so upset with her that he had to be stopped from jumping down the cliff above Rumahui. He ran away to Hawa`a to live with his father, whom he hardly knew, which showed how much he resented Irageni.⁴² His reaction was not just about being beaten; he was furious at being punished for taking food when he was hungry—the antithesis of culture surrounding food and hospitality in Makira.

⁴⁰ Interview with Bethlyn Ha`arebi, 30 April 2010. According to Mamaloni’s close friend, Selwyn Suriramo, it was Jack Campbell who told Mamaloni that Sunaone was his father when he visited Rumahui with Sunaone.

⁴¹ Beating children was, and still is, commonly accepted in Solomon Islands. Irageni’s youngest son, Samson Teweoni, says Irageni was cruel and beat him too. Her mother Mwaeo told Irageni not to beat Samson, saying that ‘he was just a pikinini’.

⁴² When Mamaloni ran away from Rumahui, his brother Francis was already living at Hawa`a with their father. Francis Tohe started school at Alangaula in 1951, followed by Mamaloni in 1953.

After leaving Rumahui, Mamaloni lived with his father at Hawa`a until he was eight years old, when he slipped and was wounded while holding a knife on board one of the Campbell boats. His father took him to the mission hospital at Kerepei on Ugi, where he was treated by Francis Kikolo, a recently qualified Assistant Medical Officer who later became a member of Mamaloni's Cabinet. In a speech to the Legislative Assembly in 1974, Mamaloni referred to the accident and his treatment by Dr Kikolo in 1950, claiming that the knife had threatened his heart (more likely it was his spleen). Describing himself as,

[A] tiny man with a very huge heart ... but the surgeon's knife could not make any cut in this great big heart of mine which was found to be very big and very tough and I was quickly sewn up again. I retain my heart as it was and because of this I am a very emotional person.⁴³



Figure 4.2: The Melanesian Mission hospital at Kerepei near Pawa on Ugi, 1947. Sr Hewitt with patients, dresser, and nurses at the dispensary. Mamaloni was treated there by Dr Kikolo for his knife wound in 1950. Source: Melanesian Mission photo 162, 1947 (British Museum).

After recovering from his accident, Mamaloni went to stay with the Campbell family at the Waimamura plantation near Kirakira. These moves, first to live at Hawa`a with his father and then away from SSEM to Anglican territory, changed his life chances significantly and gave him the opportunity to attend Anglican schools, including Alangaula and All Hallows' School, nearby on Ugi, where he and many others were educated to become future leaders.

Having experienced both rejection and kindness from women in his early life, Mamaloni sought female company and kindness throughout his life. The affection and love he had for his grandmother, aunt, and stepmother stood in contrast to his difficult relationship with his mother, who had given him away when he was very small and from whom he later ran away. Family informants all agree that the women he most loved were his grandmother Mwaeo, aunt Ha`arebi,

⁴³ Mamaloni, Legislative Assembly, 10 October 1974. It is more likely that the knife wounded his spleen, an encapsulated organ that often becomes enlarged (splenomegaly) with repeated malaria and, unlike the heart, is not necessarily lethal if wounded or ruptured.

and stepmother Daraburu, whom he referred to as his mother. Mamaloni's wife, Mary, did not find out that Irageni was his real mother until they had been together for some years⁴⁴

Mamaloni avoided staying with Irageni when he visited Rumahui. In later years, when Irageni visited Honiara, he treated her less well than Daraburu. Although he sent gifts and food supplies, she complained that they were not enough or that others had received more. According to his stepbrother, Samson Teweoni, Mamaloni favoured the Sunaone side of the family over his mother's side. He preferred to visit and gave goods to his paternal aunt Bethesda Rebido at Tawaraha, rather than Irageni at Rumahui. At his two-storey *Waet Haus* in Honiara, the Sunaone relatives stayed upstairs, enjoying the breeze and best views, while Irageni and maternal relatives were accommodated on the lower floor.⁴⁵ Mamaloni's relationship with his mother remained strained for many years.

⁴⁴ Some of his personality traits are characteristic of reactive attachment disorder—a more recent psychological concept—that can result when the vital bond between a mother and child is ruptured. Signs include being socially uninhibited, unusually impulsive, and very careless with possessions, all of which were characteristics of Mamaloni.

⁴⁵ Interview with Barnabas Row, 27 March 2010. Mamaloni asked Rebido to come to Kirakira to help his second wife Ellen care for the children, saying that she was his mother. However, it is common in Melanesian cultures for aunts and uncles to be accorded equal status and authority as parents and to be called mother or father.

Chapter 5. His Father's Footsteps

Joash Stephanus Sunaone preceded—or ‘broke the bush’ for—his son in provincial and national politics. He became a respected leader after the war, having remained loyal to the government during Maasina Rule, when many Islanders had resisted the government or behaved with sullen hostility. Sunaone worked as a manager for Campbell & Sons, first at Hawa`a on the south coast and then at Waiae on the north coast until the late 1950s, when he became President of the Makira Council. He and Jack Campbell worked closely together and both became well-known Makiran politicians in the colonial era. They represented Makira in the Legislative Council in Honiara, becoming modern equivalents of appointed chiefs (*aberua*) in Makira, who traditionally ‘hold everyone together’.⁴⁶

Sunaone—patriarch and ‘dictator’

Sunaone acquired the status of an *araba* through his personal leadership style and connections with the Campbell family, although he was not born into an *araba* clan or line. In Makira, hospitality, peace and unselfishness are hallmarks of cultural leadership. He always provided betel nut, food, and accommodation, helped anyone who asked or was in trouble, and resolved disputes. Sunaone was not only a trusted employee and family friend, he also became an in-law of the Campbell family. First, he arranged a wife for Jack Campbell (Kairopo from Santa Ana) and then his own sister Ringeni married Pat Campbell, the younger of Frederick Campbell’s two sons. A Campbell family joke is that Sunaone deliberately chose wives from opposite ends of the island to keep the peace between Jack and Pat in their quarrelsome relationship. Pat Campbell was a tyrant and violent when he was drunk, which was often. He walked around armed with a .303 rifle and bayonet knives strapped to his sides. On one occasion, Sunaone disarmed Pat and then escaped out of the window holding his own son, Johnson, in one hand and the gun in the other. He also protected Pat’s sons, Frank and Don, who were often brutally punished by their father.⁴⁷

In marked contrast, one of Jack Campbell’s sons, John, remembers Sunaone calling the children to him, joking with them, and letting them hold his pipe.⁴⁸ Sunaone was less kind to his own children, whom he disciplined with a large belt—‘*no obey, big belt kam nao*’—so it is unlikely that Mamaloni was spared. Despite his public demeanour, Sunaone was quick to anger and slow to forgive. At home, he was a petty tyrant with a violent temper: his diminutive second wife, Daraburu, not only bore him 12 children, but also bore physical punishment and he would hit her if everything was not to his satisfaction at home or he was angry (*keros*) with others.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Traditionally, there were several types of leaders (*araba*) in Makira: *aberua* or *abeberua* (appointed chief), *araba mamoto* or *kiramo* (warrior or enforcer) and *boboasi* (*kastom* priest). A useless chief was called *araba bonwaion* (bonito empty head). Interview with Stanley Ia, 4 April 2010.

⁴⁷ During the war, Pat Campbell was discharged from the Fiji police force for drunkenness and violence. In 1948, Alec Maena, son of Harry Wickham, died during a drunken fight with Pat and Jack Campbell. Both were charged with murder but acquitted with the help of a defence lawyer from Sydney hired by their father.

⁴⁸ Interview with John Campbell, 20 April 2010.

⁴⁹ Reports of domestic violence by Sunaone come from several sources, including immediate members of the family. Mamaloni was also violent to his wives at times. Domestic violence was and still is widespread in the Solomons.

Three of Sunaone and Daraburu's sons—Allen, Johnson, and Isa—were sent to live with other families; each was harshly treated and ran back home to escape mistreatment.⁵⁰ Even when they were fully grown, Sunaone continued to treat his sons harshly. After one row, Allen decided to run away to Honiara when he was 21 years old, while Joash, who was six years younger, went to Kirakira to stay with Jack Campbell. The two sons did not reconcile with their father until he was near death in 1979.



Figure 5.1: The only family photograph of Joash Stephanus Sunaone, 1975. Source: Mamaloni family.

Sunaone was also tough with his daughters. He forced his second daughter, Grace, to marry Davidson Fekau, a *man Tikopia*, while his third daughter, Kidron, an attractive, bright, and talented girl, obeyed her father at great personal cost. She was removed from school at the age of 14 to look after her parents. When she was 17, he arranged an unhappy marriage to an older husband—the son of a local chief—telling her, ‘A good looking man belongs to many women but an older man can look after you and he belongs to his wife only’.⁵¹ During his final illness, she forgave her father after he asked her forgiveness and they prayed together. After his death in 1979, she continued to look after her mother at Masidonia until Daraburu died in 2015.

Sunaone—an early politician

After Frederick Campbell died in 1953, Sunaone became an entrepreneur and businessman in his own right. In the late 1950s, he secured land on the north coast belonging to Daraburu's lineage, where he established a family homestead called Masidonia. The site, 42 km west of Kirakira, provided better shelter than the west coast and was free from disagreements over land with Ahisiramo, his eldest brother.

Sunaone became a political *big-man* in Makira, alongside Jack Campbell and Silas Sitai. He was one of the first generation of modern politicians in Makira, first as an early member of the Makira (San Cristobal) Council and then as a president of Makira Council. As president, he served at the national level as an appointed member of the Advisory Council from 1958 to 1960, and its successor body, the Legislative Council, from 1960 to 1963.

⁵⁰ Allen was adopted by Pat Campbell, Isa was adopted by Edmond Mangone, and Johnson was adopted by Wakiu at Hawa'a. Allen recalls Pat Campbell's often sadistic treatment towards his family and others; he ran back when he was about six years old. There was scarcely a positive word said about Pat Campbell in any interview with family, relatives, or contemporaries.

⁵¹ Interview with Kidron Sunaone, 12 April 2010.



Figure 5.2: Silas Sitai (left) former US Scout, Assistant Administrative Officer, Eastern District, 1945–1958; Dick Richardson (centre) former Coastwatcher, and Sub-Inspector of Police; Walter Togonu (right), Senior Clerk, Kirakira, 1957. Source: James Tedder collection.

The Makira Council was established in December 1953 as part of the government's response to Maasina Rule demands for more representation and services. The 1954 district report declared this 'the most important event in the political history of San Cristobal'.⁵² Elections were held around the islands—the first direct representative elections in the Solomons—in each of seven sub-districts. Members were selected by 'whisper elections', which meant that voters whispered the names of their preferred candidate to an official in each village (see Figure 5.3). Elected members held their seats for three years, with one-third re-elected each year in rotation. The government also nominated one member for each sub-district to ensure that it had some trusted members. A president and vice-president were elected annually by a ballot of council members.⁵³ In the second council elections in 1955, Sunaone was elected for the area in which he was born, South Arosi, and later represented West Bauro after establishing his homestead at Masidonia.⁵⁴

In the first years of the council, many members were ex-Maasina Rule leaders, whose reputations had been enhanced by their time in prison. Some made ambitious claims about the powers of councils, although they had only limited municipal powers: real power remained with government officials—the district commissioner (DC), district officers, and assistant administrative officers. Nevertheless, the Makira Council was described in 1957, as 'very much alive and a forceful body which has to be congratulated on its progressive attitudes'.⁵⁵ Services and infrastructure were gradually improved. Roads were cut along the north coast and health clinics built, with the council deciding where to build and contributing to wages and the cost of supplies. The council started its own junior primary schools and met the costs of mission school wages, books and equipment. Other projects included building water supplies and market buildings.

⁵² Eastern District Annual Report, 1954.

⁵³ The colonial government tried to convince people that the councils had arrived despite (rather than because of) Maasina Rule. Although councils only had municipal powers and responsibilities, supporters of Maasina Rule and Islanders regarded the establishment of the councils as a victory, along with the release of Maasina prisoners.

⁵⁴ Sunaone's name as a council member first appears as president in *Eastern News* in 1958. Members were elected for three years, and his wife Daraburu reports that he was first elected in 1955.

⁵⁵ San Cristoval Quarterly Report, December 1957.



Figure 5.3: DO Tony Hughes recording a whispered vote, 1962 Malaita Council elections. Source: A.V. Hughes collection.

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Council activities were funded by a head tax for adult men, together with dog taxes and licences for businesses, radios, and guns. The council’s work was limited by small budgets and the availability of voluntary labour of council members and villagers for road building and maintenance. In 1961, Sunoane wrote a one-page article about the necessity of paying taxes in the *Eastern News* newsletter:

You must therefore remember that your master has a lot of his own business to think over and also has to pay his own tax same as you too. So please try and help your master as you can. There is no excuse whatsoever to say you don’t know what time you should pay your tax. If anyone says that it is because he is only careless. A careless man always ends up in trouble, so don’t forget this one talk. DON’T BE SLACK ... PAY YOUR TAX.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ San Cristoval Quarterly Report, December 1957.

⁵⁷ *Eastern News*, September 1961. ‘Master’ was the commonly used term in English and Pijin (‘masta’) for any white person in authority.

Sunaone also made important contributions personally, including resettling residents of Tikopian, one of the Polynesian outliers on the eastern edge of Solomon Islands, where overcrowding meant that settlements were needed elsewhere. He supported and welcomed the establishment of Tikopian settlements at Nukufero, 30 km west of Kirakira, where ‘alienated’ plantation land was divided into five-acre blocks. He also supported Willy Vaka, a government carpenter from Tikopia, to settle his family on alienated land at Nukukaisi near Masidonia.⁵⁸ Sunaone’s support and friendship with Tikopians locked in later electoral support for Mamaloni. An often-told story is of an election rival who went to Nukukaisi to campaign; however, before he could make his pitch, he was asked, ‘*Waswe, Mamaloni bemi dae nao?*’ (‘Has Mamaloni died?’)—indicating that the rival was wasting his time campaigning there. Sunaone also displayed courage and conciliation skills when he brokered and led a reconciliation event between people from Ulawa and Wainoni after an Ulawan man was butchered by a Wainoni man at the Three Sisters plantation in 1958.

Sunaone was a government loyalist whom Mamaloni regarded as too compliant, according to his brother, Allen Uta—an opinion reinforced by James Tedder, DC Eastern District from 1955 to 1959, who recalled:

[Sunaone] was a smooth operator but just a little untrustworthy. He had a bit of mask and I was not entirely sure who he was. He told you what he thought you wanted to hear in a smooth way. He was always very polite and very obliging, helped everything and kept a good handle on the work of the President of the Council. But there was always a nagging fear; you just didn’t get to know the man.⁵⁹

As president of the largest council in the Eastern District, Sunaone was appointed as a non-official member of the Advisory Council in 1958, requiring him to travel to Honiara twice a year for meetings. In those days, these were token appointments by the colonial authorities, with the names of six loyal and trusted Islanders put forward by district administration.⁶⁰ British officials of the Advisory Council outnumbered and controlled unofficial members (or non-officials) and matters of any importance were decided in advance by the administration.

The slow transition to independence saw the Advisory Council replaced in 1960 by a Legislative Council (LegCo), still with official as well as unofficial members but with more authority, and an Executive Council (ExCo). Sunaone was an unofficial member of LegCo from 1960 to 1963. LegCo’s unofficial members comprised six Solomon Islanders and four European residents⁶¹, described as ‘educated men who belong in the Solomon Islands, men who know a lot about business, mission work and men who are senior government officers’.⁶² However Tom Russell, who served for 26 years as a colonial administrator and eventually became Chief Secretary, described the new arrangements as ‘a “front” to conceal the continued government of the country

⁵⁸ In Tikopian language, Nukukaisi means land (*nuku*) that was asked for (*kaisi*). The Tikopian population on Makira grew rapidly through intermarriage and high fertility, necessitating further government leases and land purchases from customary landowners (Treadaway 2002, 99).

⁵⁹ Interview with James Tedder, 24 October 2010.

⁶⁰ The other Solomon Islander members of the Advisory Council in 1958 were Stephen Koadavaru, Sadiu Murisaiga, Jacob Vouza, Rev Dudley Tuti and Salana Ga’a (Moore 2010, 8).

⁶¹ *BSIP Newsletter*, October 1960. Other Solomon Islanders in LegCo were Father Leonard Alufurai, Mariano Kelesi, Francis Bugotu, Willie Paia, and Kiko Jimuru Ragoso.

⁶² *BSIP Newsletter*, October 1960.

by the old colonial machinery'.⁶³ Real power remained in the hands of government officials and Europeans, with government officials on LegCo (11) outnumbering non-official members (10), and Europeans (16) outnumbering Solomon Islanders (6).

LegCo adopted British parliamentary procedures. Colonial officials and Solomon Islanders had to learn to use formal language and procedures, which further cemented the dominance of European officials and representatives. Photographs and speeches of the opening ceremony of the LegCo provide a glimpse of the colonial pomp and ceremony. BSIP newsletters show the High Commissioner and officials dressed in what Ted Wolfers called 'the full colonial catastrophe'—duck white uniforms, shoes and Wolseley (sun) helmets with plumes, parading swords and exchanging salutes—revealing the military underpinnings of the colonial administration.⁶⁴ In his memoir, Tom Russell recalls a British Resident Commissioner wearing his helmet next to a very tall French Resident Commissioner, whereupon a Frenchman was heard to utter, '*Oh regardez! Un petit champignon*' ('Oh look, a little mushroom!').⁶⁵



Figure 5.4: Sword and plume. High Commissioner Sir Michael Gass, '*un petit champignon*'. The opening of Legislative Council, 1969. Source: *BSIP Newsletter*, June 1969.

Sunaone—the businessman

Sunaone stepped down as Makira Council president in 1963 and moved full-time to his Masidonia homestead. This proximity to Kirakira provided opportunities for business and political influence, and also gave his children easy access to Anglican schools on nearby Ugi, where the standard of education was much higher than SSEM schools. From 1963, Sunaone concentrated on business ventures, starting with the Mamafu Association, formed between Masidonia and two villages on either side: Manitanuahi and Faghani. The cooperative association transported and marketed trochus and goods using a fibreglass boat and engine. A new store was opened at Manitanuahi, employing secondary school leavers, and was well managed by Sunaone. In the early 1970s,

⁶³ Interview with Tom Russell, 30 September 2011.

⁶⁴ Interview with Ted Wolfers, 3 December 2009.

⁶⁵ Russell, 2003, 122.

Sunaone formed the Hoto Development Company, which worked with villages along a 10 km stretch west from Manitanuhi to Kakaora`ana. The Hoto Development Company ran for about three years but was ruined by Pat Campbell, who used the company's assets for his own business. Although Sunaone was an experienced plantation manager and a strict boss, he could not stop or control the black sheep of the Campbell family. Sunaone still needed to work to support his family and seven children still at school. He moved to Yandina in the Russell Islands with his wife and younger children to manage the John Tom Store from 1972 to 1973. At the time of self-government in 1976, he was appointed to the Copra Board and travelled to Honiara for meetings. Shortly before his death in 1979, he was appointed to the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

Sunaone established a political dynasty, with four of his sons becoming politicians. Solomon Mamaloni went on to serve six terms as Member of Parliament (MP) for West Makira from 1970 to 2000. Jackson Sunaone was elected four times to the Makira Provincial Assembly and after Mamaloni's death in 2000 won the by-election for the national seat of West Makira. He lost the seat in the 2001 elections and failed to be re-elected in three subsequent national elections. Allen Uta served as a provincial member for two terms in the 1980s. Meadows Sunaone served as a provincial member from 2011 to 2015.

Joash Sunaone became a SSEM teacher, plantation manager, *araha*, businessman, pioneer provincial and national politician. Mamaloni followed in his father's footsteps as a politician, businessman, and even a plantation manager. He always used Sunaone as his middle name, which provided access to his father's social and political capital. Sunaone gave his sons access to some of the best education available in the Solomons at the time. He provided a model of leadership, hard work, organising ability and hospitality. Mamaloni was hard working and hospitable too but lacked his father's discipline and business acumen, as we shall see in later chapters. His lapses of judgment in public and his private life were also deeply disappointing to his father and caused a rift that was not healed either by political success or time prior to Sunaone's death in 1979. Ultimately, both men were different characters and products of changing colonial contexts.

Part Three. Roads to Power, 1951 to 1970

Part Three, comprising Chapters 6 to 8, traces Solomon Mamaloni's journey through the post-war colonial education system and his early career until he entered politics in 1970. Colonial boarding schools laid the platform for his career and shaped him as a young politician, a little more than a decade later. From 1953 to 1959, he attended two Anglican Melanesian Mission schools—St Barnabas' at Alangaula and All Hallows' at Pawa on the small island of Ugi, close to the mainland of Makira. He was among the first generation to undertake government secondary education at the King George VI School in Malaita from 1960 to 1963. He finished his secondary education at the Te Aute Maori College in New Zealand in 1964 to 1965.

Mamaloni's cheeky and rebellious nature made him popular but got him into hot water at school and later in the public service. He was clever but not academically successful, failing his 'O' (Ordinary) level and matriculation exams. Despite these disappointing results, his education ensured that he was part of a small, educated elite who assumed positions in government and politics in the lead up to Independence in 1978. After several adverse probation reports by his colonial bosses from 1966 to 1968, his career was saved when he was appointed Assistant Clerk to the Legislative Council (LegCo), where he absorbed parliamentary procedures and craft. In 1970, five years after leaving school aged only 27, he was bold and ambitious enough to stand for election. Thanks to a combination of family background, education, and personality, he won the seat for the Eastern Inner Islands constituency, which included Makira, Ulawa and surrounding islands, and launched a political career that lasted almost unbroken until his death.

* * *

Chapter 6. The Road to Pawa, 1952 to 1959

The young Mamaloni enjoyed some of the best education then available in the Solomons. He was one of the first students at the Waimapuru District School.¹ He attended Anglican Melanesian Mission primary schools before undertaking secondary schooling at the government King George VI (KGV) School on Malaita.² Finally, he attended Te Aute Maori College at Hawke's Bay in New Zealand, finishing his schooling at the age of 22.

Mamaloni's schooling 1952 to 1965	
1952	Waimapuru, Melanesian Mission District (Primary) School, Makira
1953–1956	St Barnabas' Junior Primary School, Alangaula, on Ugi Island, Makira
1957–1959	All Hallows' Senior Primary School, Pawa, on Ugi Island, Makira
1960–1963	King George VI Government Secondary School, Aligegeo, Malaita
1964–1965	Te Aute Maori College, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

Prior to the Pacific War, almost all modern health and education services were provided by churches. Mission schools were a crucial ingredient in nation building, bringing together and socialising students from all areas, languages, and beliefs.³ Melanesian Mission schools were also open to non-Anglicans, and many of their students went on to become leaders in the church, public service, and politics. The Anglicans provided possibly the best education in the Protectorate, although Catholic schools in Central District and Methodist and Seventh Day Adventist schools in the Western District were also growing in strength and quality.

Alangaula Junior Primary School, 1953 to 1956

Under an agreement between the churches, the Melanesian Mission had primary jurisdiction along the north coast of Makira. Just offshore, on Ugi Island, St Barnabas' Anglican School at Alangaula was one of several feeder schools for the senior primary school at Pawa close by. St Barnabas opened in 1936 using the stipend of Dr Charles Fox, who established a plantation on Bio—a small uninhabited island near Ugi—to generate income for the school and the local hospital at Kerepei, as well as leaf for buildings.⁴ After the war, its headmaster was Captain Thomas, an ex-army officer who imposed brutal discipline, even for minor offences. Students were beaten on the backside with a cane or hit on the knuckles with the sharp side of a ruler. He used binoculars to spy on students working in the school gardens, descending on those he judged to be slacking and hitting them painfully on the ankle with his swagger stick.⁵ Mamaloni was able to escape the brutal headmaster when Thomas was replaced by Rev Rodger Mountfort in 1953, who with his wife,

¹ The Campbell family started Waimapuru District School in 1952. The school had 63 students in 1953. It was reorganised as a junior primary school in 1957. It became a provincial secondary school after Independence and was upgraded to a national secondary school in 1984, second only in status to KGV in Honiara.

² King George VI School was originally named the Auki Experimental School. It opened in 1948, in part as a response to Maasina Rule. After an uncertain start, the school reopened in 1952 and had 72 students that year. It was renamed following the death of King George VI in February 1952.

<http://www.solomonencyclopaedia.net/biogs/E000154b.htm> (Moore 2020).

³ Two notable examples of Methodists educated at Pawa were Francis Talasasa and Norman Palmer; both converted to Anglicanism, as did Mamaloni from the SSEM Church.

⁴ Dr Charles Fox was headmaster of Alangaula from 1936 to 1937. He had also worked on plantations to experience the life of labourers (MacDonald-Milne, 2003, 133).

⁵ Interview with Francis Tohe, 13 April 2010. Mamaloni's brother did not escape the brutal Captain Thomas, who slapped Tohe's face for having inkblots in his exercise book—easily done with old-fashioned nibs and ink wells.

Jennifer, taught Mamaloni from 1953 to 1956. Reporting in the *Melanesian Mission periodical*, the *Southern Cross Log*, the Mountforts described some of the conditions at the school at the end of their first year. The school uniform was a four-foot (1.2 m) length of calico wrapped around the waist and held up with a sash band; students went bare-chested until 1963. Accommodation was very basic, and students were often cold. Two original classrooms were in poor condition: ‘barns would be a better name, with two classes in each unlined room which echoed every sound’.⁶ Facilities for cooking and eating were:

... a disgrace, with rickety tables and tops unsuitable for rubbing [down] and the flies were terrible in spite of constant raking of the coral floor. Vegetables were prepared in a stream and cooked in kerosene drums but the cooks produced ‘surprisingly good’ ... [food and] the boys eat huge meals.⁷

One year after arriving, the Mountforts noted that the school was ‘tough on teachers and boys’, but that great progress had been made and the school had been virtually rebuilt. The boys helped repair classrooms and the dining room, ‘[O]ne of the sights and sounds of Melanesia is to see and hear them bringing in a big post. Screaming and whooping with excitement seem to be a necessary part of the job’.⁸

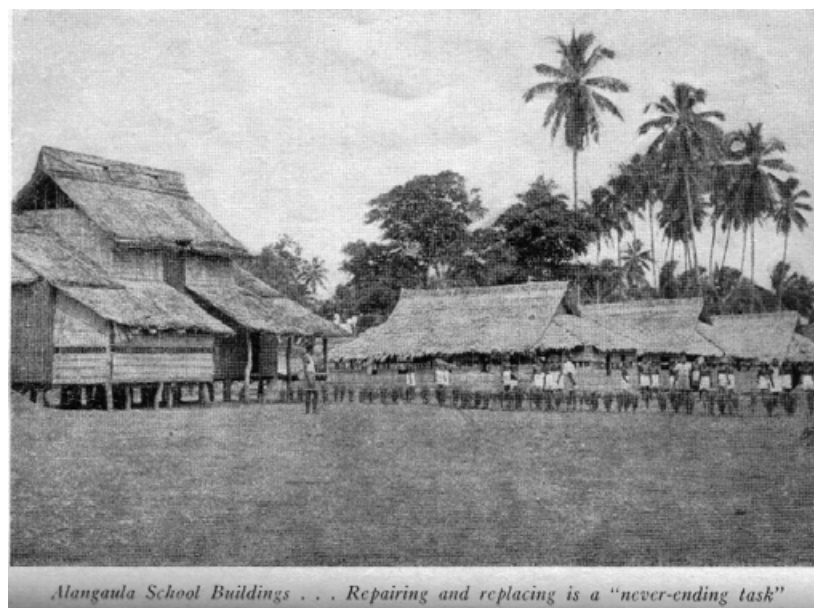


Figure 6.1: Alangaula school buildings. Source: *Southern Cross Log* November 1953.

The school routine was quite usual in mission schools in the Protectorate and also New Zealand. Classroom lessons occupied only three hours of a 15-hour day; manual work in the school gardens or grounds occupied the same amount of time. George Amo, who attended the school several years later, described Alangaula as a ‘working prison farm’.⁹ The school gardens were as big as farms but with very few machines and tools except the multi-purpose *busnaef* or machete, used for clearing bush, cutting crops, weeding, digging, dressing sticks and posts— ‘which the boys wielded

⁶ *Southern Cross Log*, November 1953, 30.

⁷ *Southern Cross Log*, November 1953, 31.

⁸ *Southern Cross Log*, March 1954, 13.

⁹ Interview with George Amo, 16 April 2010.

expertly and carried everywhere except to chapel and classes'. A copra plantation attached to the school provided considerable revenue to the mission. Copra produced on Melanesian Mission stations brought in \$3000 in 1953. Most of the work was done by labourers but every Thursday, the boys spread across the plantation, each carrying a bag to carry the nuts and heap them near the sea shore. Labourers husked and halved the nuts for drying while the students helped to ram the copra into the bags and carry them to the ship. The Mountforts viewed matters differently:

We have been very impressed with ability and willingness of the boys to work hard. Building and garden work is very heavy but it is done cheerfully and well. The boys will do anything we ask them and consider it a privilege. Their needs are very simple but they do deserve good tools and materials.¹⁰

The Mountforts described the standard of schoolwork as 'very low'. Rather than attribute this to the lack of lesson time, they blamed students' previous schooling, language diversity and Pijin, which colonials despised as a debased type of English and rarely bothered to learn properly.

Our boys come here from scattered islands and varying degrees of 'scholarship' but for many their previous schooling has been very rough. Language is a major problem ... English is the only language we can use and the boys find good English very hard to master. Pijin ... is our worst enemy—it undermines all ideas of grammar ... Every boy is very keen to learn and very disappointed if anything happens to interrupt school. They are especially eager to read but we have nothing suitable for them. They read and re-read their prayer books and a few worn out bibles.¹¹



Figure 6.2: 'Melanesian schoolboys: Every boy is keen to learn'. Source: *Southern Cross Log* November 1953.

On weekends, students worked their own bush gardens. They remained at the school during holidays, enjoying the freedom to go to their bush gardens or go fishing every morning after breakfast—'it is a bad time for local fish'.¹²

¹⁰ *Southern Cross Log*, November 1953, 32.

¹¹ *Southern Cross Log*, June 1958, 33. Prohibition and punishment for using Pijin continued until the 1970s.

¹² *Southern Cross Log*, March 1954, 13.

Alangaula School routine 1953 ¹³		
Time	Weekdays	Weekends
6.00 am	Rising drum call—boys on cooking rosters (<i>kukset</i>) got up earlier	Saturday morning: cleaning dormitories and grounds
6.30 am	Ablutions (swim in sea)	
7.00–7.30 am	Chapel service and breakfast	
7.30–9.00 am	School lessons (3 lessons × 30 minutes)	
9.00–9.30 am	Break—cooks (<i>kukset</i>) prepare lunch	
9.30–11.00 am	School lessons (3 lessons × 30 minutes)	
11.00–11.30 am	Lunch	
11.30–12.30 pm	Rest, siesta	
12.30–3.30 pm	Garden work—weeding, feeding pig Free time—soccer	
3.30–4.30 pm	Ablutions (in stream)	
5.00 pm	Chapel—evensong	Sunday: Holy Communion at 7.00 am Free time after high breakfast: working on own bush gardens, fishing, sports (boys prepare meals from their own gardens)
5.30 pm	Dinner	
6.00 pm	Classroom singing	
6.30 pm	Study prep (in later years)	
7.00 pm	Free time	
7.30–8.30 pm	Back to dormitories	
8.30 pm	Lights out (9.30 pm on Fridays)	
		Saturday evenings: listening to radio programmes

Boarding schools broke down island differences and created often lifelong bonds between students.¹⁴ Former Alangaula and Pawa student, future Governor-General Sir Nathaniel Waena, recalled:

There was an atmosphere of intimacy between students and the teachers that was so caring, the students were in tears when they left ... you could see the bonds of friendship and harmoniousness developed at school became important later when they came to Honiara.¹⁵

Friendships and solidarity were intensified by students staying at school during holidays because neither the Melanesian Mission nor parents could afford to transport them home for holidays, and was anyway impractical for students from further afield, including New Hebrides (Vanuatu). Thus, students were away from home for four years during junior primary school, and another three years in senior primary. Being so close to home; Mamaloni was more fortunate than most students because he was able to see his own family members at sports carnivals and celebrations for the Queen's Birthday and New Year's Day.

¹³ *Southern Cross Log*, November 1953, 32–33.

¹⁴ The ages from 12 to 15 are especially formative years for peer bonding. An example was the bond between Mamaloni and Fred Soaki from Tikopia, who were in the same class at Alangaula and went together to Pawa in 1957. Soaki was appointed Commissioner of Police by Mamaloni in 1982.

¹⁵ Interview with Sir Nathaniel Waena, Honiara, 12 November 2010. Waena overlapped with Mamaloni at Alangaula for one year in 1956.

Sports competitions were held at Kirakira with teams from Pawa, Alangaula, Wainoni and Pamua. Mamaloni, a skilful and mad-keen soccer player, was part of the Alangaula team that beat Pawa at soccer at Christmas 1954, a considerable feat given the age difference in students from the senior school. A major public event during his time at Alangaula was the celebrations for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953. According to the colonial reports, visitors came from all parts and ‘official celebrations were conducted with impressive dignity and solemnity and many testimonials of loyalty to HM (Her Majesty)’.¹⁶ A massive bonfire and supply of Chinese crackers burned at Kirakira for days. The Western Pacific High Commissioner toured Alangaula and was treated to a further display of dancing before returning to Pawa for dinner ashore where the boys danced and sang until midnight.

All Hallows’ School, Pawa

All Hallows’ School replaced the former Melanesian Mission School on Norfolk Island, St Barnabas’, which closed in 1919. Situated on a 240 hectare copra plantation on Ugi Island, close to Kirakira on the mainland, All Hallows’ was started by Rev Reginald Hodgson in 1922. Dr Charles Fox replaced him in 1924 and student numbers grew to 120 boys in his nine years as headmaster.¹⁷ During his time, the school was relocated to the hilltop from the coast, where land was limited, swampy and mosquitoes abounded. The swampy area became the site of Kerepei hospital, a sports field, and school gardens, where 25 acres of kumara were planted (plus 15,000 yams on the hill). Copra, which subsidised the school, was produced on the old plantation with coconuts gathered by the students; in their best year, the cost to the mission for each boy was just 10/- per year. During Fox’s years as headmaster, 40 boys sought ordination and most Indigenous priests were Pawa boys. Richard Rudgard succeeded Dr Fox in 1932 and when Rudgard retired in 1938, he was succeeded by former marine captain, Alfred Hill, who enhanced the school’s reputation for discipline and practical training. His motto was, ‘Work hard, pray hard, play hard’.¹⁸ It was rumoured that Hill had once punished a boy from Malaita too hard and a group of boys confronted him in his office, held him down with a bush knife to his throat, and threatened him with more serious consequences if he did the same again. Hill left Pawa in October 1953 and was appointed Bishop of Melanesia in May 1954.

Pawa occupied pride of place for the Anglicans and was often described in government and mission reports as ‘the finest’, ‘the cream’ and ‘the Eton of the Pacific’, at least until KGVI School took over as the top school in the late 1950s. A typical tribute was, ‘No other school has achieved so much for Melanesians and Pawa well deserves its reputation as being “the finest school in the Protectorate”’.¹⁹ The school had a proud reputation for education and character training. It produced leaders and workers for the church, government, and business, filling every kind of position open to Melanesians. Every Melanesian Mission school was staffed by Pawa-educated boys. Many of the first Indigenous priests and bishops were Pawa ‘old boys’—Leonard Arufurai, Dudley Tuti, Norman Palmer (who became the first Melanesian Archbishop) and Mamaloni’s

¹⁶ San Cristoval Annual Report 1953.

¹⁷ Fox had started St Michael’s School at Pamua in 1911.

¹⁸ Sir Baddeley Devesi remembers Hill as a hard man, who refused to use Pijin and called it a ‘bastard language’. Interview with Sir Baddeley Devesi, 4 December 2010.

¹⁹ *Southern Cross Log*, March 1954, 30.

older brother, Francis Tohe, who became an Anglican priest in 1970. Pawa produced many of the earliest local doctors (called native medical practitioners), such as Francis Kikolo and Michael Ala. Graduates included senior government officers, such as Silas Sitai and Francis Talasasa; teachers and administrators, such as Francis Bugotu and Baddley Devesi; and politicians, such as Mamaloni, Nathaniel Waena, and Michael Maena. Many less famous students went on to become stalwarts in their communities and churches.



Figure. 6.3: The headmaster's house and lawns, Pawa School. Source: *Southern Cross Log*, June 1963.

The school uniform was a simple blue calico worn during school days and white calico for Sundays and Feast days. Like Alangaula, the boys did not wear shirts until 1963 when shirts and shorts replaced bare chests and calico. Along with the 'native' uniform came a colonial school anthem. The boys also stood to attention and sang the British national anthem when it was played. Pawa was also renowned for its festivals and feasts, such as the All Hallows festival when the students from all parts of Melanesia dressed in traditional costumes. Easter and Christmas were also full of excitement with island dancing, singing, treasure hunts, and sports. Visits by Royal Navy ships, high commissioners, and other dignitaries were occasions for students to demonstrate their virility and virtuosity, while guests enjoyed the soccer matches, swimming, and shooting parties.

The Pawa school anthem

From islands girded by the restless sea
From near and far of diverse tongues and race
By our one faith united now, are we
A band of comrades gathered in this place.
O may each with the shield of faith advance
To quench the fiery darts of devils might
With helm of hope and love's victorious lance
At last to stand complete our Christian knight.
And this same faith and hope and love may we
In future days reflect by deed and word
To make our people happy, brave and free
To make our lands a kingdom for the Lord.



Figure 6.4: Pawa students *kastom* dancing on feast days and patron saint days. Source: *Southern Cross Log* March 1959.

Mamaloni at Pawa, 1957 to 1959

Mamaloni excelled in organising, negotiation and leadership of other students. He was not afraid of authority, and publicly complained when classes stopped due to food shortages and more time was spent on garden work. He argued that students had not come to school to be labourers, and suggested there should be two days of school and two days of gardening until the situation improved.²⁰ The work was very heavy, especially for smaller boys:

[B]right buttons mentally—but physically hardly capable of the tremendous physical burden which are part and parcel of the daily school routine, the cutting of wood, the husking of nuts, the carrying of huge sacks of flour and rice, the mounting of the kumara mounds, and the splitting of huge logs for the copra drier. There are many of us who pray for the emancipation of the schoolboy from the duties which are onerous, time wasting and confusing. But without a few Hercules among the secondary boys, it would be extraordinarily difficult to run the school.²¹

Corporal punishment was regarded as normal at Pawa, even for senior students who were often 18 years and older but could still be caned in front of the class or school. Being whipped on a bare backside was painful and deeply shameful for the victim, as well as demoralising for the observers. Francis Tohe recalls one headmaster's wife, a white woman, caning a fully grown student on his bare backside for failing to stand up when she came into the classroom. Fred Campbell remembered public canings reducing students to tears and described 'the long-time meanness' as disheartening for both the observers and the punished.²² By contrast, some ex-Pawa students, such as George Amo and Nathaniel Waena, responded to the school regime with 'it never did me harm—it was best thing that ever happened to me'.²³ Experiencing and witnessing the humiliations and punishments of students at school may have prompted or reinforced Mamaloni's anti-

²⁰ Interview with Samson Teweoni, 25 July 2009.

²¹ *Southern Cross Log*, June 1963, 58.

²² Interview with Fred Campbell, 18 April 2010.

²³ Nathaniel Waena went to Pawa in 1960 and completed Form 2. He was a long-serving MP for Ulawa-Ugi from 1987 to 2004, a minister several times, and governor-general from 2004 to 2009.

colonialism. Other psychological effects of boarding school were noted by Mamaloni in a speech to the Governing Council:

If a child goes to boarding school that child has already left some of his parents' care or advice. When he gets to Senior Primary he goes to a boarding school and he is completely cut off altogether from the normal home life. He has left his parents at an early age to go for schooling and during those school years life has changed him a lot. Then he goes to secondary school where he perhaps matures.²⁴

Humiliated hausboi

Francis Tohe was a hausboi at Pawa—first for the sisters at Kerepei clinic and then for the headmaster. For £2 per month, he had to get up at 5.00 am, prepare the food, and then go back for his own breakfast; he also had to do housework, wash floors and wash clothes. Worse than doing 'women's work' was 'latrine detail'—carrying, emptying and cleaning four-gallon (17-litre) latrine cans at the beach for the sisters and their guests. On one occasion, Francis did not collect the bucket and the headmaster ordered him to empty it. Francis decided to open a new can, rather than clean the old one, so he threw the can away and lied that it had broken. Baddeley Devesi also recalls throwing latrine buckets away that he was supposed to clean and return. One 'Are' Are boy refused to carry the bucket unless he was given red shell money as compensation.

Another of Mamaloni's brothers, Meadows Sunaone, was a hausboi for the Alangaula headmaster's family from 1964 to 1967. For £3 per month, his duties included 'latrine detail' and cleaning the cans at the beach. He remembers another boy on 'latrine detail' who walked in on the headmaster's wife using the toilet when he came to collect the bucket. The boy was completely embarrassed, but she was nonplussed and told him cheerfully that he should come back. When he came back, the contents were very fresh, smelly and—worst of all—belonged to a female. Meadows told the boy just to accept it—there was no point in protesting. Both of Mamaloni's brothers recall their shame and disgust at carrying latrine buckets. Such humiliations undoubtedly affected a generation of young Solomon Islanders. Fifty years on, the memory still rankles with Francis, who said, 'Sapos mi lukim Sista Barrett, bae mi askem compensation long hem'.

Sports featured strongly at Pawa, with highly competitive house teams and school sports events, which girls from Pamua sometimes attended. In his last year at Pawa, Mamaloni won the Hill's Cup—the all-rounder's award for school results, discipline, and character—suggesting that he behaved well enough to be recommended for the prize by his class teacher and headmaster. Mamaloni was popular at Pawa—a source of jokes and fun who enjoyed being the centre of attention. He would sometimes stand on a chair and give speeches in English to the other boys. According to his brothers, he regularly got into trouble but was skilled at using charm, humour, and quick thinking to avoid physical punishment.

Mamaloni was a skilful soccer player, fleet of foot and a clever dribbler. He was also a good middle-distance runner (880 yards and mile) and was part of the Pawa school team that won Makira Sports Cup in 1957. While Mamaloni's soccer skills saw him play for the 1st XI each year at Pawa, they also got him into trouble. On one occasion, he was part of the cooking group (*kukset*) who had to rise early to prepare breakfast. Seeing the full moon, he persuaded the *kukset* to play a quick game

²⁴ Mamaloni, Governing Council, 16 March 1972.

of football, which made them late to light the fires. He went to the chapel to get a light from the altar candle. For this sacrilege he had to stand by the altar for a week during prayer time for everyone to see his disgrace.

Evidence of Mamaloni's feisty character can be found in two letters published in the Church of Melanesia newsletter, the *Melanesian Messenger*. His first letter in 1961, signed 'Solo', was written when he was at KGVI, which had a more humane regime.

Extracts from Mamaloni's letter to the Melanesian Messenger in 1961, signed 'Solo'

'Well friends, are you angry with me if I am astonished if these pupils are expelled who had mercy on us, and have to go home because they gave us bedding and food? Why not tell our Bishop when he is good to us to go home! Do you expel for good reasons? Is it because you are angry with them for not obeying rules? What is the use of expelling? I am a Solomon Islander and I think that all children attending schools are of great importance, though they may be dull. Because we are struggling towards civilisation, every single person is important. Is it better to throw away a broken chair or to keep it and repair it? My European friends, you have thousands and hundreds of qualified men in your lands. What is the use of expelling our pupils, seeing we so need men of our own who can understand our cultures, whom we can trust and obey?

Are we to be equal, with no thought of colour? I think there is discrimination in the Solomons, there are signs of it already, and sooner or later there will be trouble in these islands, a country so peaceful and humble and so poor.'

In the letter, he disputed the expulsion of a number of Pawa students for breaking the rule of going out at night. The students had provided kumara, tea, and bedding for a canoe crew who were too tired to cook for themselves, having brought the district commissioner and his wife to Pawa. Dr Fox defended the expulsions because the students had broken the rules against night meetings, and the school was required to maintain discipline. However, Fox did not defend racism—he detested 'the colour feeling'. As he commented on Mamaloni's letter:

Why do we still speak of Melanesians as 'boys'? They are men. This is the fault of the white people all over the world. We must kill it. The only way to kill it is to be really and truly friends.²⁵

Later, when Mamaloni was at Te Aute College in New Zealand in 1965, he wrote to the *Melanesian Messenger*, signing the letter 'Kako' (short for *kakamora*). He complained that a letter that he had written to a female cousin at Pamua had been opened and read by a teacher. He argued that private letters should not be opened and read like a public newsletter, but only checked for money, as school principals did in New Zealand.²⁶ These letters reveal a young man who was not afraid to express his opinions and challenge authority, characteristics for which he got into trouble in the public service and renowned in politics.

²⁵ *Melanesian Messenger*, Easter 1961, 24.

²⁶ *Melanesian Messenger*, Easter 1965, 35.

Chapter 7. KGVl and Te Aute College, 1960 to 1965

By 1960, the British had accepted the inevitability of independence for Solomon Islands and a 15-year target was set.²⁷ This target added to the urgency of educating Solomon Islanders to become informed citizens to run the country. Colonial officers had to identify and train understudies for expatriate positions, while school teachers identified students for further training and scholarships. The government funded and run King George VI School (KGVl) became the premier school in the country with the explicit aim of educating future leaders and administrators, and fostering national consciousness. As Christine Jourdan explains:

The Solomons inherited from the colonial era an education system that was mostly run by the various religious denominations present in the country ... In the later years, the colonial government implemented an education system that was relatively uniform in all parts of the British Empire ... the History books taught the history of Britain. Values were those of colonial powers. Those who did well in that system were sent abroad, to England, New Zealand or Australia to further their education, and they usually came immersed in the values of the 'motherland'. It was this first elite generation, well educated, brought up in the British tradition and imbued with British values who were given the reins of government upon independence.²⁸

Mamaloni at KGVl School, 1960 to 1963— 'Aligegeo is my place'

KGVl School started as a secondary school in 1958 at Aligegeo, near Auki in Malaita. It was an expansion of the KGVl primary school begun in 1952. Modelled on British boarding schools, KGVl School operated with colonial rituals, including flag raising ceremonies, only speaking English, and school houses named after European explorers.²⁹ As a government funded school, KGVl had more resources than mission schools, taught a four-year secondary school curriculum, and employed better qualified, mainly expatriate, teachers.³⁰ Students could spend more time on studies and less on manual work than in mission schools, which needed to be more self-reliant. Acting headmaster, Stanley John Patnum, said that he wanted to run a school rather than supervise a prison farm and in 1960, Mamaloni's first year, an hour of labouring was dropped to allow more time for classes.³¹ Later, the school employed gardeners to look after the grounds, gardens and farm animals.

Discipline was strict and the school day highly regimented. *Kuksets* had to get up earlier to prepare breakfasts before morning drum at 6 am; students swept the dormitories and classrooms, which were inspected by a duty master before school assembly. The daily school uniform was a khaki brown *sulu*, plus a white *sulu* on Sundays and special occasions.³² Coloured belt sashes marked out

²⁷ Russell 2003, 138.

²⁸ Jourdan 1995, 136.

²⁹ KGVl school houses were named Quiros, Mendaña, Carteret, Bougainville, and Shortlands. Students were assigned to houses and competition encouraged between them.

³⁰ Stephen Sipolo, who taught woodwork, was the only Indigenous teacher.

³¹ Lee 2016. Mike Lee, an expatriate teacher at KGVl, has written an informative and well-photographed history of the school from the 1950s to 1966 when the school moved to its present site in Honiara and became fully co-educational the following year.

³² A family photograph taken at home of Mamaloni in 1960 in his white *sulu* is unfortunately too damaged for publication.

different ranks: red for ordinary students, yellow for assistant prefects, green for full prefects, and purple for the school captain or head prefect. In his autobiography, Sir Peter Kenilorea describes the *sulu* as, ‘a colonial relic of being a native, dressed only to the waist with a bare chest’.³³ He went to the new headmaster, South African Hugh Hall, to request a change in the uniform:

The headmaster exploded at my request. ‘Get out of my sight! Neither you nor your children will ever wear shorts in this school’. I left in total shame but I realised how irrational he had been. What did he think boys wore when playing soccer or doing the high jump? Boys also wore shorts after school. His paternalistic, racist comments were totally uncalled for but they were quite typical of colonial officers of the time.³⁴

Prefects were eventually allowed to wear shorts and shirts in 1963, but only during their own time and at their own expense. By 1964, the year after Mamaloni left, the whole school was wearing white shorts and shirts.

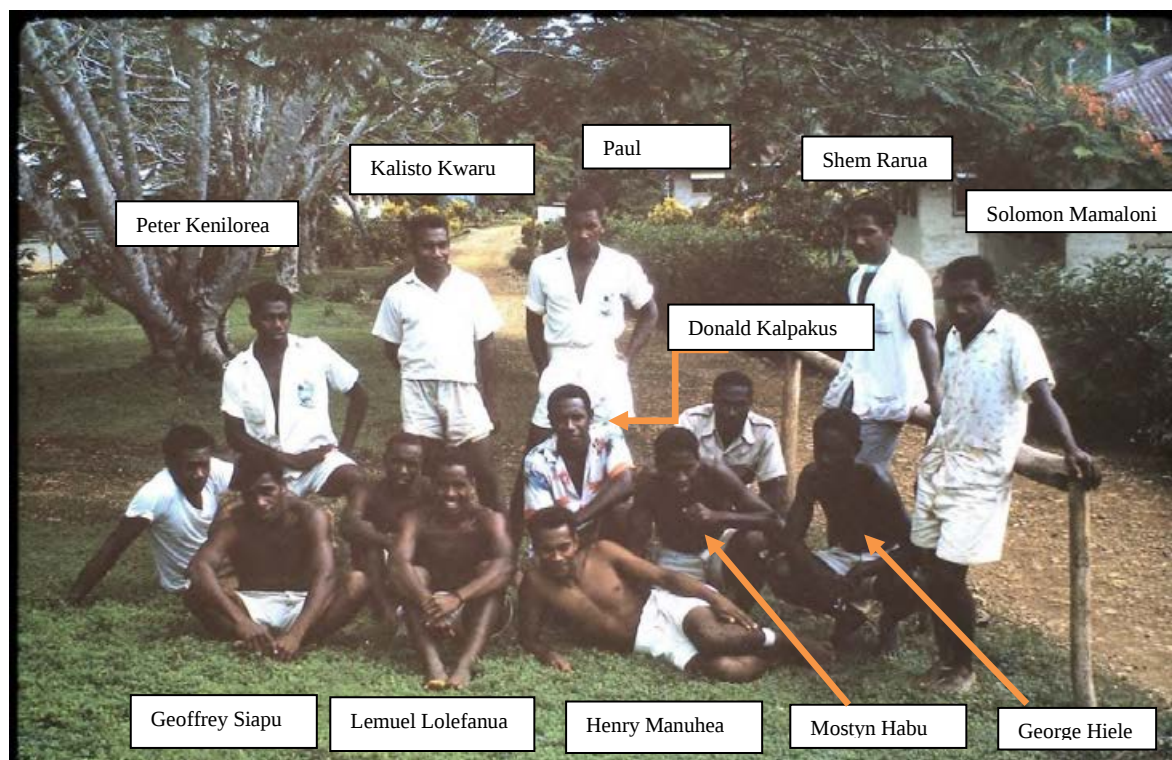


Figure 7.1: Future leaders at KGVI, Form 4 in Aligegeo, 1963. Source: Mike Lee.

KGVI was run by senior and junior prefects, part of a deliberate leadership training structure. Kenilorea became head prefect in 1962 and Mamaloni was appointed a junior prefect in Bougainville House. In his funeral oration for Mamaloni in 2000, Kenilorea told the story of how, as head boy of KGVI, he was consulted by the headmaster, Henry Hall, about whether Mamaloni should be appointed as a prefect. Hall thought that Mamaloni had some admirable qualities as a sportsman and was popular, but might be too friendly. Kenilorea’s advice was that Mamaloni should be given the opportunity to prove himself, and he was subsequently appointed an assistant

³³ Kenilorea 2008, 85.

³⁴ Kenilorea 2008, 85.

prefect. However, he never disciplined or reprimanded anyone—and Kenilorea was not asked for his opinion again.

George Lepping, who later became governor-general, confirms that Mamaloni did not want to discipline people and could not keep quiet at night himself. Because he was quick witted, crafty, and funny, Mamaloni avoided getting into too much trouble. He was a bush garden leader, but did not limit himself to his Makira section, going to all sections depending on where the pickings were best. He was accused one day of stealing pineapples from another section. Even though there was an irrefutable smell of pineapple coming from him, he got away with it by claiming that was how kumara smelled.

Mamaloni did not take prefectship or study too seriously. His favourite subjects were History and English—reading, writing, and oratory—which were necessary for academic progress and examinations. The school invested great effort to improve students’ use of English; students were punished for speaking Pijin or local languages. Mamaloni and Kenilorea both enjoyed public speaking and would give speeches on behalf of students. According to fellow Makiran, Zachariah Quina, Mamaloni used correct English and sounded good.³⁵ Mamaloni loved being the centre of attention and playing the joker (*man fo mek fan*). He had many friends and was always a leader and organiser. He would boss others around and was skilled in avoiding work; other students always wanted to work with him because he was a fun leader. Part of his popularity stemmed from his extracurricular activities as a footballer, writer, and actor.

‘Kako’ at KGV

Mamaloni was nicknamed Kakamora or ‘Kako’ at school because of his Makiran origin and height. At flag ceremonies, prefects lined up according to height, and Mamaloni always tried to avoid being the shortest by making himself taller. According to George Lepping, Mamaloni regularly measured his height, did stretching exercises and sported a large Afro hairstyle to make himself look taller. An exception was in 1962, when Mamaloni and Kenilorea went to see the headmaster to seek permission for an unusual haircut. Mamaloni wished to shave his hair so he could play the part of the bald headmaster in the school play. To Mamaloni’s delight, his request was granted. He played his part to the full, then grew back his hair as quickly as possible.

Mamaloni, a talented but flashy soccer player, played for the 1st XI and was nicknamed ‘Stanley Matthews’ (after the famous Blackpool and England winger) because of his dribbling ability. He would sometimes show off his skills by deliberately ignoring an open goal and dribbling the ball away. He was also a good middle distance runner, which gave him added stamina and strength as a soccer player. He was a keen cricketer and learned the difficult art of leg spin bowling from Maloney, the cricket master, but not the art of batting.

An important difference with mission schools was that there were no daily religious services at KGV, partly because there was a range of different denominations among the students. Mamaloni chose to attend outside SSEM church services, meaning that he could escape the school grounds and expatriate teachers, who were unlikely to attend SSEM services. He and other SSEM students went to church services at Kwaibala village and later Kilusakalo village for service, food, and a

³⁵ Interview with Zachariah Quina, 14 April 2010.

swim. He used to return with food from his uncle John Erei, a policeman based in Auki. Another difference between KGVI and mission schools was that students were able to go home for annual holidays and even end-of-term holidays, if they lived close enough and transport was available. KGVI students travelled free on government ships and were accorded priority and great respect by the public and local administrations. Mamaloni could holiday not only at home in Makira but also with friends, such as George Hiele from Munda in Western District.

Compared with the schools on the small island of Ugi, there was much more going on at KGVI and in town. On Friday evenings, students were allowed to go to see films at a cinema in Auki, built in 1959 by the Blum family, the original Bahai pioneers. On Saturday afternoons, boys were free to go into Auki town, unless they were being punished with hard labour for some offence. Mamaloni was well known for flirting with girls passing by the school and in town. According to a schoolmate, Stephen Das, he often talked to girls and followed them to their homes. This infuriated the teacher, Stephen Sipolo, who punished him. Mamaloni had girl friends in Ambu village and would try to attract others; he also contacted nursing students from Fauabu and even travelled 30km to visit them there. In 1963, the first two local girls started attending KGVI primary school as day students. Kenilorea was given the task of supervising them, a responsibility and privilege that made him the envy of other students. It was certainly not a task that Mamaloni could be trusted with. Boys could be expelled for 'girl business' and a student from Makira who was sacked for consorting with the wife of a neighbouring farmer was reported by the boys themselves because it spoiled the reputation of the school and Malaita.

The Ordinary ('O') level curriculum was compressed into four rather than five years because students were relatively older, having often begun primary school later. Mamaloni finished Form 4 and was 20 years old when he sat the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate exams in 1963. Although he failed these exams, he had already won a government scholarship to undertake sixth form and matriculation studies in New Zealand.³⁶

Boarding schools forged intense bonds and life-long friendships between young men (and also between young women), which were reinforced when they went to live and work in Honiara and provincial centres, where they socialised and played sports together according to old school loyalties. As the colonial rulers intended, mission schools and KGVI promoted a national consciousness among an educational elite. But the schools removed them from their families and cultures, and strictly enforced Western *modus operandi*. In *The Alternative*, the first published novel by a Solomon Islander, John Saunana used his experience of the Anglican education system to produce a highly critical view and often angry commentary into colonial education of the time and the cultural alienation of a western educated elite.

³⁶ Scholarships were selected on interviews prior to exam results. His results arrived from Cambridge in March 1964 after Mamaloni had already started at Te Aute in New Zealand.

***The Alternative*, a novel by John Saunana** ³⁷

The Alternative was based on Saunana's schooling in the 1960s at Alangaula and Pawa (called Frigate Bird School in the novel) and KGV I (called Prince Edward School). Prince Edward School exists because a 'a civil servant in far-off Whitehall had ... awoken from a slumber in which he had dreamt that the little-known of Solomon Islands might have to be given its independence one day'. The main character is named Maduru Buru (*buru* means black in Arosi language)—an angry young man, who could have been modelled on Mamaloni but, according to the author, was not. Maduru constantly finds himself in conflict with authority figures, including females—beginning with his mother. He is alienated by his education from his village life and mother. He is a very good soccer player, but soccer is a source of legitimated violence between groups at school. There is also bullying by prefects and gangs from other islands.

At Prince Edward School (KGV I), Maduru leads a student rebellion to demand the dismissal of a useless white teacher. He is expelled and blacklisted by the white community. Unable to find work, he becomes one of the young unemployed (*masta lin*). He leads a rebellion against apartheid drinking laws at a local hotel. When the Islanders challenge the white men in their bar, a fistfight and riot ensue. Maduru is jailed as the ringleader but emerges a local hero. He campaigns for an alternative to the colonial ways, against apartheid drinking laws, and for better housing and pay for local people. Meanwhile, news of widespread civil disobedience and revolt in Europe and the USA against racial discrimination and the Vietnam War filters through to the new educated elite in the Solomons, but they are still dominated by white teachers and administrators with colonial and racist values. The book ends suggesting that Maduru will win the seat of Honiara in the LegCo and become a populist politician, like Mamaloni.

Te Aute College, New Zealand

From KGV I, Mamaloni had the advantage and prestige of attending Te Aute College, a renowned Maori boarding school in the Hawke's Bay region of North Island. Founded in 1854, the school had a long tradition of educating Pacific Islanders as leaders and bringing Christianity to their communities: The school was run according to Anglican boarding school traditions interwoven with Maori culture. Noel Vickridge, headmaster from 1965 to 1973, believes that Te Aute combined the best of both cultures but was never anti-*Pakeha* (white New Zealander).³⁸

Te Aute has been a platform for Maori education over the past 150 years, one of New Zealand's most enduring educational institutions that has contributed enormously to the development of the nation and the advancement of the Maori people.³⁹

Te Aute's long history mirrors the Maori peoples' struggle for status and respect. The school has struggled through catastrophic earthquakes and economic hardships to stay afloat and maintain enrolments. Pride in Maori culture and strength have always been core Te Aute values. The school motto, *Whakatangata kia kaha*, is a translation of 'Quit ye like men, be strong'.⁴⁰ The school has

³⁷ John Saunana, 1980. Saunana was one of the country's first university graduates (from the University of Papua New Guinea). A man Arosi, Saunana became the member for West Makira when Mamaloni resigned from the Legislative Assembly in 1977 and education minister in the Kenilorea government. Before his death in 2014, he generously read and commented on early drafts of this book.

³⁸ Interview with Noel Vickridge, 8 February 2013.

³⁹ Interview with Professor Mason Durie Te Rangi Hiroa, 30 June 2014.

⁴⁰ 'Quit' meant to acquit or conduct oneself (St Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

passionately fostered Maori advancement and leadership. Te Aute takes great pride in the many leaders and prominent national figures it has produced at both community and national level.⁴¹

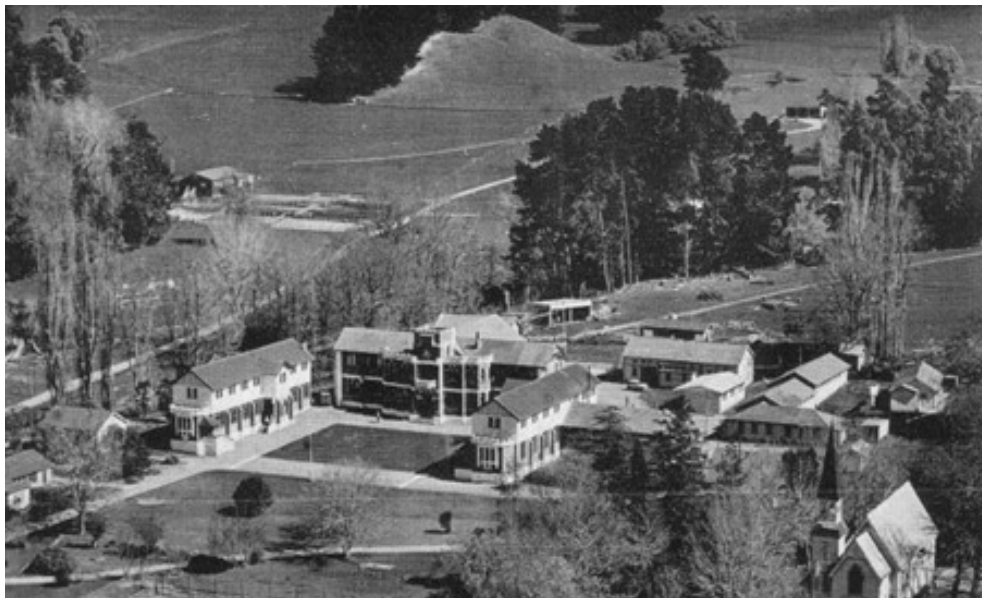


Figure 7.2: Te Aute College as it looked in Mamaloni's days. The main building and twin wings were demolished in the late 1970s following earthquake damage. Source: John Wehipeihana (Te Aute College, Koiri 1854–2004).

Mamaloni at Te Aute, 1964 to 1965

Mamaloni travelled to New Zealand in January 1964 with Peter Kenilorea, Henry Manuhea, and George Hiele. Kenilorea described their journey in a now-famous story, told during his oration at Mamaloni's funeral and repeated in his autobiography:⁴² The four young Solomon Islanders, dressed in shorts and shirts, left Honiara for New Zealand aboard a 12-seater Megapode Airways plane. Kenilorea acted as their protocol officer, having learned some table etiquette from SSEM missionaries in Honiara. He showed Mamaloni, who had started first with dessert, how to eat food with the correct utensils and in the right order. Arriving in Nandi at night, Mamaloni insisted on shopping for some clothes, although it was late. He bought an oversized pair of long trousers and an undersized pair of shoes, neither of which he had tried on because he insisted that he knew his sizes. Nor did he try them on at the hotel until early the next morning, when they continued their journey to Auckland. This is when he discovered what his comrades had been trying to tell him. Hobbling in undersized shoes, he had to hold up his trousers with one hand, which were far too long for his short legs. Rather than remove the crippling shoes, Mamaloni kept them on and complained continuously about his feet. Kenilorea had to carry Mamaloni's case—a task he was to repeat years later when he was Secretary to Chief Minister Mamaloni in 1974. Arriving at Auckland, Kenilorea was happy to hand over his duties as baggage master and protocol officer to

⁴¹ Famous old boys include Sir Apirana Ngata, who became a cabinet minister and deputy prime minister New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s, and Sir Peter Buck, a doctor who became a professor of anthropology at Harvard University. In modern times, Te Aute old boys have included high court judges, such as Sir Eddie Durie; academics, such as Sir Mason Durie and Professor Piri Sciascia, and Pita Sharples, Minister of Maori Affairs 2008–2014.

⁴² Kenilorea 2008, 97.

Henry Manuhea for their last leg of the journey to Te Aute, while he and George Hiele went to another Maori school, St Stephen's, at Pukekohe, south of Auckland.



Figure 7.3: Solomon Islands students heading overseas to study in 1964. Source: BSI Newsletter.

Hawke's Bay was bitterly cold in winter, especially for Solomon Islanders. John Wehipeihana, who taught English at Te Aute, remembers giving Islander students hot chocolate to drink at his house during wintertime. They huddled wrapped in blankets in front of a roaring fire, and, when they were as hot as possible, they rushed to their dormitories and jumped into bed.



Figure. 7.4: Church and rugby—two pillars of strength and success of Te Aute. Source: author.

Te Aute has a famous rugby union tradition, but unfortunately for Mamaloni, not soccer, so he could not display his prowess. He is remembered for being a smooth middle distance runner and playing cricket for the school in the Hastings 2nd XI competition. Alan Titchener recalls that he was neither batsman nor bowler, but a brilliant fielder:

He was worth his weight in gold as a cover fielder; he would look benign and disinterested at cover but when the ball went in his direction, he would swoop with deceptive speed. He had an amazing baseball like throw. He was worth at least one run out per game.⁴³

According to Professor Piri Sciascia, dux of the school in 1965, Mamaloni was known as ‘Soli’. He was very popular with other students: ‘a great guy, very funny, much enjoyed by other boys. He was cheeky—a scallywag’.⁴⁴ He also tried to teach his Maori peers some phrases in Pijin, such as ‘*iumi no kam fo paki, yumi kam fo makel*’, which Sciascia could remarkably recall 50 years later.⁴⁵ Mamaloni refused to rake the gardens as part of the duties required of students, being four to five years older than most. He was more mature and less boisterous than the others, although often very humorous according to Sciascia. He would try to talk seriously, to ‘do a serious number’. Other students would josh him, tell him to shut up or say, ‘Who do you think you are?’ He would reply, ‘You should listen to me—one day I will be prime minister of Solomon Islands’, which would be greeted with more derision by his schoolmates.



Figure 7.5: ‘Soli’ Mamaloni (left) , Makameone Taumoepeau (from Tonga and head boy, centre) and Edward Iamae (right) at Te Aute, 1965. Source: Dr Makameone Taumoepeau.

Local students who could go home on weekends sometimes took Mamaloni with them. He used to stay with the Tiffen family, who lived on a farm at Otane about 16 km from the school. During end-of-term holidays, Mamaloni sometimes stayed with Aileen Condor and her family at

⁴³ Interview with Alan Titchener, 3 February 2013. He was in Form 5 when Mamaloni was in Form 6 at Te Aute

⁴⁴ Mamaloni’s popularity at Te Aute was confirmed by fellow students whom I interviewed—Alan Titchener, Professor Piri Sciascia, Thomas Harrison, and Dr Makameone Taumoepeau. Other key informants were Noel Vickridge, a former headmaster, and John Wehipeihana, who edited the commemorative book, *Te Aute College, Koiri 1854-2004* (2005).

⁴⁵ This is an old Pijin joke that pokes fun at people from a number of local language groups who pronounce ‘b’ and ‘p’ as ‘p’. A woman at the market in Honiara was purportedly told off for putting (parking) her goods in the wrong place. She thought the man told her that she was not allowed to ‘f*ck’ (*pake*) and told him directly that she had not come for intercourse, but to sell her produce at the market.

Cambridge in the Waikato area. He became close to them and later named his first daughter Aileen; he also visited her family during an official visit in 1975 when he was chief minister.

Te Aute has a proud tradition of army cadets and army service by many former students in the Maori Battalions, which fought with distinction in both World Wars.



Figure 7.6: Te Aute army cadets posing with weapons in the late 1960s. Source: John Wehipeihana.

As Piri Sciascia recalls:

We had a strong cadet training time—two weeks in summer, with khaki uniforms, we were in khakis for that time, and wore them again for follow up weeks several times in the year following. These included times at the rifle range in Hastings and later the rifle range at the college itself where our school shooting team was put together. Soli was in his house team at one point ... I think [he] quietly loved it.

Mamaloni had a fondness for weaponry and enjoyed the esprit de corps. His experience in the cadets also taught him about leadership and he later credited his army cadet training for helping him during the capture of the *Jeanette Diana*, caught fishing illegally in Solomon waters in 1984.⁴⁶

Mamaloni failed the university entrance exams in 1964 because he was insufficiently prepared, according to the school reference sent to the Education Office in Honiara.⁴⁷ He repeated the exams in 1965, but his marks barely changed. His marks placed him close to the bottom of his class but he was given good results for effort, industry, and cooperation, suggesting that he was trying hard. Piri Sciascia recalls that Mamaloni struggled with written English, which helps to explain his difficulties with passing examinations. As his final school report noted:

He has worked consistently during the two years he has spent at this school; his standard of spoken and written English has much improved; at such subjects as Divinity, History, Geography where the requirement is memory he has had quite sound results. His Technical Drawing is not good.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Mamaloni in Kengalu, *Embargo*, 1988, 42 (an excerpt can be found later in Chapter 13). Sir Baddeley Devesi also credited his cadet training with helping him when he was kidnapped by the Malaita Eagle Force in June 2000.

⁴⁷ Letter ED/P/42, 21 December 1965, Solomon Mamaloni Personal File.

⁴⁸ Te Aute School report, 1965.

Mamaloni's matriculation exam results		
	1964	1965
History	34%	41%
Geography	34%	36%
English	27%	33%
Biology	23%	—
Technical drawing	6%	11%

Former headmaster, Noel Vickridge, says that he would have persuaded Mamaloni, who was very good at languages, to take Maori as a subject, rather than Technical Drawing, in which he had dismal results.

I would probably have persuaded him to take Maori in 1964! He was living in a Maori influenced environment. He might have made it in Maori. I don't see that he lacked application or ability. Most Te Aute seniors were not good exam sitters. I fancy the new NCEA [continuous assessment] of the present when assignments during the year count a great deal would have suited the island boys'.⁴⁹

Ironically, in view of his later private life, his highest marks were for Divinity—a subject in which memory, quotations, and biblical references are particularly valued. Mamaloni later described English literature and History as his favourite subjects. He developed an abiding interest in world history, colonialism, and independence movements, particularly the American War of Independence and Indian Independence. He became absorbed in the political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi—indeed, this was so important to him that he stole a book on Gandhi from the library and took it back to the Solomons.⁵⁰

Solomon Mamaloni's school examination results, 1965					
Subject		Examination	Classwork		
	Place in form	Marks	Industry	Cooperation	Attainment
English	7/14	49%	A	A	B
History	1/3	45%	B	B	B
Geography	2/8	52%	B	B	C
Divinity	5/14	61%	A	A	A
Tech. drawing	3/3	28%	A	B	C
Maori	-	-	-	-	-
Science	-	-	-	-	-
Overall:	11/14	47%	Effort points 55/60		
General remarks:	A very satisfactory year's work				

⁴⁹ Personal correspondence, Noel Vickridge, 8 February 2013.

⁵⁰ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni 1995.



Figure 7.7: His final year Certificate of Merit at Te Aute, 1965. Source: Mamaloni family

Mamaloni's two years at Te Aute appear to have influenced him in a number of ways. The strong emphasis at the school on leadership and strengths of Maori culture appears to have been an enduring legacy for Mamaloni, contributing to his characteristic fearlessness. As a former student, Professor Mason Durie observed, 'When you left [Te Aute], you were aware that you had a tradition to follow. You were expected to lead'.⁵¹ As if to confirm this, Mamaloni proudly returned to visit the school only ten years when he was Chief Minister. And significantly, he chose to wear his Te Aute school blazer when he was sworn in as Chief Minister in 1974.

Mamaloni's studies of history and experiences in New Zealand gave him a deeper understanding of colonialism and imperialism. He learned about British duplicity, racism, and colonial violence, as well as histories of dispossession and resistance in a settler colony. Learning about and experiencing Maori pride and resistance shaped or reinforced his pride in Indigenous cultures. According to his contemporaries, Maori self-determination and politics probably had a greater influence on him than the distant Civil Rights movement and black riots in the USA of the 1960s, which barely resonated in New Zealand or Solomon Islands. He witnessed Maori people being more self-assertive and less deferential than Solomon Islanders. He held New Zealand in much higher regard than Australia or Britain, and always supported Kiwi sporting teams.

At Te Aute, Mamaloni was exposed to the history of Maori politics, self-reliance, and business. The Te Aute Students Association formed as far back as the 1890s and later became the Young Maori Party, which was a catalyst for national reform and played a key role in revitalising the Maori people. Some of the ideas of Sir Apirana Ngata, a Te Aute alumnus, can be recognised in the cooperative business that Mamaloni established in 1973, which he called 'People's Attempt to Self Help Association' (Patosha).⁵² Mamaloni's unusual economic ideas were also shaped by the ideas

⁵¹ Professor Mason Durie, Te Rangi Hiroa lecture, 30 June 2004.

⁵² Sir Apirana Ngata (1874–1950) was an outstanding Maori politician, leader, land reformer, and scholar. He advocated incorporating and consolidating Maori lands into shareholder companies to create opportunities to increase production and returns to Maori farmers. Ngata founded the Waiapu Farmers Cooperative early in the 20th century, and advocated cooperatives to overcome the problems of debt that had led to forced mortgage sales by Maori landowners (Sorenson 1996).

of the Social Credit movement to which he was introduced when he stayed at the home of Bruce Beetham, a leader of the New Zealand Social Credit Party.⁵³

The topography and landscape of Te Aute and the North Island may also have influenced Mamaloni's attitudes towards land development and logging. The land around Te Aute had been transformed from bush, fern, and swamp into farmland. Native forest had been extensively logged from the early settler days in the 1840s. The landscape of bald hills and plantation forests that Mamaloni saw in New Zealand, as well as his geography studies, provided practical examples of long-term and large-scale logging for Solomon Islands, provided arguments for Indigenous self-reliance and employment. His efforts to free up customary land for logging in the 1980s and his plans in the 1990s for large-scale logging and agriculture development on the Arosi plateau may have been influenced by the logged landscapes and farms that he saw during his time in New Zealand.

Mamaloni was one of the early beneficiaries of the post-war education system in the Solomons. He was one of the privileged few who had the advantage and status of a six-year secondary education.⁵⁴ Not all Solomon Islanders agreed with such privilege. Fellow Makiran and later political rival, Benedict Kinika, wrote in 1968, 'Never in the history of the Solomons has so much money been spent so unwisely for the benefit of so few'.⁵⁵ When Mamaloni arrived home at the end of 1965, his lack of academic success was not such an obstacle as it would have been in later generations. Although his father and colonial authorities expected him to follow a career in the public service, Mamaloni had made his intentions clear and prophesied his political future while at KGV I and Te Aute. But failure in exams did cost him professionally and personally because it meant that he entered the public service at a lower level than others like Peter Kenilorea who matriculated and qualified for tertiary education.⁵⁶ This left him with a chip on his shoulder and, combined with his anti-colonial attitudes, hastened his entry into politics. It may also explain his mistrust of advice from those who had been to university and possibly, why only one of his own children went on to university.

Mamaloni had endured the colonial boarding system and harsh school discipline, designed and controlled by white men. A few years later, he made clear his hostility towards the colonial education system—it was, he said, 'an imported philosophy that encourages social ostracism, cultural confusion, a clearly defined failure element, disillusioned graduates, and misfit citizens'.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the education system provided him with the pathways and advantages without which he could not have reached the heights of politics and power that he later achieved.

⁵³ Mamaloni's unorthodox economics and links to the Social Credit ideas movement in the 1980s are discussed in Chapter 13. He may have been influenced through Sam Dwyer, a long-serving teacher, whose son, Jeremy Dwyer, also taught at Te Aute and later became deputy leader of the Social Credit Party and Mayor of Hastings.

⁵⁴ In the 1960s, many students in the Solomons only completed Forms 1 and 2 at secondary school, equivalent to Years 8 and 9 in Australia, but still sufficient for entry into teaching and nursing professions in the Solomons.

⁵⁵ Benedict Kinika, *Eastern News*, March–April 1968. Kinika was an early political leader from Makira in LegCo and later one of Mamaloni's rivals before and after Independence.

⁵⁶ His fellow passengers on board the Megapode plane in 1964 fared better and all three passed their University Entrance—Peter Kenilorea went on to Ardmore Teachers College, George Hiele to Victoria College, and Henry Manuhea to the School of Medicine in Fiji. However, only Kenilorea finished his tertiary studies, qualifying as a teacher in 1968 and becoming only the second Solomon Islander teacher at KGV I.

⁵⁷ Mamaloni, Governing Council, 18 August 1972.

Chapter 8. A Disobedient Public Servant, 1966 to 1970

When Mamaloni returned home at the end of 1965, decolonisation was gathering pace around the world and the British were preparing Solomon Islands for political independence by 1975.⁵⁸ Direct elections to the Legislative Council (LegCo) were introduced in 1967, a significant advance because Solomon Islanders could directly vote for their own politicians. Although island councils had been promoted since the 1950s, the colonial administration and officers were firmly in control. Lloyd Maepeza Gina, who became a district commissioner (DC) and the first speaker of parliament at Independence, described some of the problems with local councils and colonial officials:

Local Councils depended on the willing involvement and proper understanding of the people before they became workable. It was an English concept from that of the county system, which they had taken, modified and designed to be suitable in the African and Indian colonies. They then introduced it to the Solomon Islands.

Where [colonial officials] were and what they did made no difference to them. They acted as if they were still working in Africa, or India or Malaya. They looked on us as part of their administrative work, as they had in Africa and India. Therefore they tried to bring about many changes along the lines they knew to be workable in those countries: such as local government, village councils and district headmen.⁵⁹

Elections in such a dispersed archipelago involved a great deal of work to register voters and candidates, as well as to produce electoral papers and ballot boxes which then had to be shipped to polling booths in many distant locations. Mamaloni himself featured in a government booklet explaining how to vote using individual ballot boxes for each candidate, which were introduced for the first time.

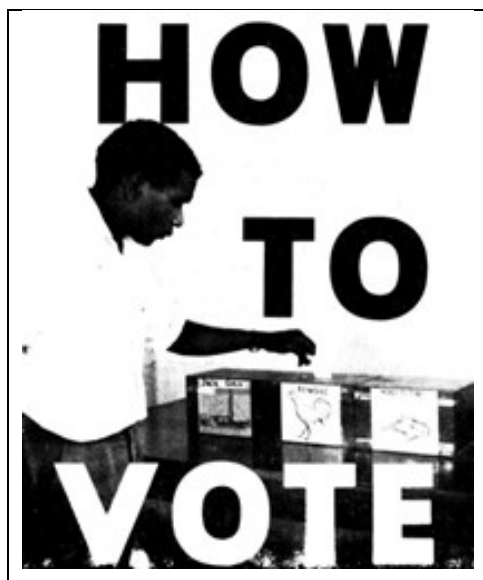


Figure 8.1: Executive Officer Mamaloni demonstrating how to vote, 1967. Source: BSIP booklet.

⁵⁸ Starting with India, Pakistan, and Ceylon from 1947 to 1948; Gold Coast, Malaya, Cyprus, Nigeria, British Somaliland, Tanganyika, and Sierra Leone from 1957 to 1961; and Uganda and the West Indies Federation (broken up into Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago) in 1962, plus another 10 colonies from 1963 to 1973 (Russell 2003,106).

⁵⁹ Gina 2003, 49–50.

Central District Administration, January 1966 to May 1968

Mamaloni's career in the colonial public service was short and not sweet. He began at executive officer level in the district administration of the protectorate with an annual salary of £300. His appointment letter read, 'In recognition of your secondary education at KGVII and Te Aute, you will be permitted to enter government service as Executive Officer @ £300 with a probationary appointment of three years'.⁶⁰ His lack of exam success came at considerable cost. Had he matriculated, Mamaloni would have started with a considerably higher starting salary (£1,040) and prospects of promotion to administrative officer and district officer. Less than three weeks after starting, he applied for the first of several advances (for AUD \$240, amounting to 40% of his annual salary) to buy a 100cc Suzuki motorbike.⁶¹ He soon became a dashing sight in Honiara, driving on his motorbike, which he used both for touring and romantic rendezvous.

Mamaloni worked in the Central District Office from February 1966 to May 1968. Based in Honiara, Central District covered a wide and scattered area, including Guadalcanal, Isabel, Nggela, Savo, Russells, Rennell and Bellona, with a total population of 42,000.⁶² Several Solomon Islanders serving in the administration became a 'who's who' of post-independence politics and administration—these included Maepeza Gina, Peter Kenilorea, Fred Osifelo, Francis Talasasa, Silas Sitai (Mamaloni's *wantok* and elder) who were district officers; while Francis Waelilia, Bobby Kwanairana and Alesasa Bisili were assistant administrative officers. The Central District administration was headed by an Australian, DC James Tedder, who served as a colonial administrator from 1952 to 1974 in all four districts (Western, Malaita, Central, and Eastern).⁶³

One of Mamaloni's first responsibilities was to acquire land around Guadalcanal for rural clinics and supervise the building of a remote clinic at Nuhu, in the mountainous terrain southeast of Honiara. The clinic was hardly used, as explained by Dr Roger Webber in his memoir:

It was here [at Nuhu] that we came across the site of a major planning blunder. A magnificent concrete walled clinic had been built complete with corrugated iron roof and glass in the windows ... for all this labour the clinic had remained unused due to the simple fact it was sited in the wrong place and no medical assistant would work here. Rather than build it in a main village, it had been placed between two with the thought that it would equally serve both, but what had been forgotten was that the staff working here would not be living in either village so would not have the support of a community ... This was a sad waste of resources that could ill be afforded.⁶⁴

Not only was siting of the clinic ill-judged but so were some of Mamaloni's supervisory techniques.

⁶⁰ W. Low to S. Mamaloni, 28 January 1966. The salary of £300 (= AUD \$600) was quoted in Australian pounds (£) just before decimalisation in February 1966.

⁶¹ PF 1794, Personal File, Solomon Mamaloni. His public service record in the Solomon Islands National Archives details requests, rejections, and repayments of advances. Mamaloni's indebtedness continued for much of his life.

⁶² Tedder 2008, 149. Fifty years later, the population had increased approximately fivefold.

⁶³ Tedder has written a very useful memoir, *Solomon Island years: A district administrator in the islands 1952-1974*. He was a forthright critic of both British colonialism and post-independence governments but retained his sympathies for Solomon Islanders.

⁶⁴ Webber 2011, 208. Like Tedder, Dr Webber worked in all four districts of the country and the two men toured more of Solomon Islands than probably anyone in the post war era.

Facing Mt Tatuve: Building a clinic in the middle of Guadalcanal

As an executive officer for Central District, Mamaloni was supervising a clinic building in the middle (*midol bus*) of Guadalcanal at Nuhu—a full day’s walk 20 km inland. Unknown to his boss, DC Tedder, Mamaloni devised a crafty ploy to get KGVl students to carry materials up to Nuhu. Waeta Ben and David Sitai were students at the time who signed up for the sortie after they saw a poster at the school asking volunteers to carry materials to Nuhu. The notice was worded so that the boys thought they would be going to a small island off Guadalcanal, also named Nuhu, where the school and Honiara residents sometimes went for picnics. Lured into thinking they would be enjoying a swim and barbeque after their exertions, the boys had little hesitation in signing up.

A Bedford truck came to pick up around 50 students and instead took them inland to Chuva (now Suva) School, arriving around evening time. There they slept, without any sheets, feeling very cold from the night breeze off the river. Then they were expected to carry bags of cement slung between poles (as one would carry a pig), as well as roofing iron, rods, toolboxes and kerosene. The cement bags were so heavy that some boys lightened the load by punching holes in the bags.

Waeta Ben (who was from the Guadalcanal bush) and his partner decided that sleep was impossible and started off early in the dark, following the Turarana River. The walk involved hours of crossing the Sutakama River, climbing to 700 metres, and then walking on to Parina and down to the next river. The route was very hard and at the end there was neither picnic nor barbeque, as they had been led to expect. The return journey was lighter, but still no stroll in the park. David Sitai remembers that some of the KGVl boys tried to take shortcuts and got lost, arriving back up to two days later so tired that food had to be brought to them in the dormitory.

Mamaloni seems to have managed to hide or deflect any complaints about lost KGVl students because, according to Tedder’s memoir, the villagers carried all the materials and there is no mention of any supervisory role by Mamaloni.

Mamaloni’s responsibilities mainly concerned Guadalcanal, which often involved arduous work. Guadalcanal bush villages were sometimes situated above 1,500 metres, accessible only by strenuous climbs in steep terrain, made treacherous by enormous rainfall on the south coast, the weathercoast called *Tasimauroi*. During his two years working in Guadalcanal, he claimed to have visited almost every village but this was a considerable exaggeration, according to Tedder.⁶⁵ Mamaloni certainly related well to village people and enjoyed walking and talking with people to find out what they were thinking and what problems they had. He spent a lot of time on the south or Weathercoast of Guadalcanal, where he had kinship links in the Talise area through his father’s line. The area was also home to the Moro movement, which advocated a return to *kastom* and continued to do so after Independence. Mamaloni loved the opportunity to story with elders and find out about local *kastom*, as he had done as a boy during Maasina Rule. He was more interested in being popular than in administrative work. In a telling quotation from a 1995 interview, Mamaloni recalled Silas Sitai telling him: “You know, my son, the best administrator is the one who gets very unpopular. If you are very popular, you are not a good administrator”. ... I [Mamaloni] was not a good administrator⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Interview, James Tedder, 24 October 2010. During the Tension in 1999, Mamaloni declared that he knew Guadalcanal better than any of its elected politicians from his time as executive officer in Central District.

⁶⁶ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni, 1995.

According to Tedder, Mamaloni was adept at talking with people, but his reports were ‘sympathetic and sentimental’; he did little or nothing to fix problems, saying, ‘No, I don’t do those sort of things’.⁶⁷

Solomon Mamaloni may have been a good politician but he was not a good administrator. He would be sent off to the Weathercoast to deal with some issues and on his return, he would report that there were problems but he had made no attempt to solve them.⁶⁸

Mamaloni and the *Vele*

In a village near Kolosulu, Mamaloni came up with a ploy to deal with a problem with the *vele*, the much famed and feared murderous spirits of Guadalcanal. He said that he had medicine to cure the *vele* and he would use magic to stop *vele* from attacking a village. He went off to a banyan tree and, in the privacy afforded by its roots, defecated on a leaf. He parcelled it up in several layers of leaves and brought it back to the villagers. He told them that this was the remedy (*meresin*), tied it in a vine rope and marched it round the village. Speaking in the local language, he asked them, ‘Do you approve?’ and people yelled ‘Yes!’ He dug a hole, put the parcel inside and shouted three cheers. The *vele* did not return.

Old men still talk about ‘Solo’ in the bush as ‘*son blong mijala*’ (our son). He brought them biscuits, slept with them, and storied with them. He told parliamentarians Waita Ben, Ezekiel Alebua, and Sethuel Kelly that they had not walked about in the bush, on the real ridges—‘you don’t know the real needs of Guadalcanal’.⁶⁹

In his first probationary report up to 31 March 1966, after only two months on the job, Tedder made some critical and prescient comments: ‘shows a tendency to run before he can walk’ and has ‘a certain tendency to look after himself before all else’. His knowledge of English, spoken and written was, ‘Only fair considering his education’.⁷⁰ Although reputed to be a ‘fierce’ reporting officer, Tedder remembered Mamaloni as almost the only local subordinate about whom he had to write such negative reports.⁷¹ In his second probationary report the following year, Tedder was more positive:

‘Good, keen to learn and accept responsibility, has reasonable ability though liable to jump to conclusions due to inexperience ... Not afraid of hard bush touring and seems to have a genuine interest in district administration and its aims’.⁷²

Prior to his second probationary report, Mamaloni wrote to his superiors complaining of a lack of work—a tactic guaranteed to offend Tedder and his colleagues. Mamaloni did not get on with the four expatriate DOs who supervised him. He became increasingly moody and worse at dealing with problems and producing reports. Mamaloni’s performance and relations with his superiors deteriorated in the latter part of 1967 and into 1968.

⁶⁷ Interview with James Tedder, 24 October 2010:

⁶⁸ Tedder 2008, 168.

⁶⁹ Interview with Gideon Suharahu Row, 10 January 2011.

⁷⁰ Mamaloni’s spoken words was often more impressive than his writing.

⁷¹ Probationary report, 4 February 1966 to 31 March 1966, Confidential File CPF 3406.

⁷² Probationary report, 1 April 1966 to 31 March 1967, Confidential File CPF 3406.

Third Probationary Report (1 April 1967 to 31 March 1968) ⁷³

Head of Department: James Tedder

General conduct: Has been slack in his duties and morose in past 6 months complaining of lack of work

Ability: Reasonable

Supervisory capacity: Yes *Cooperation:* Quite good *Knowledge of English spoken and written:* Fair

Training received: On the job under Mr Edwards DO (C)

Criticisms made of the officer: After a written complaint of lack of work, and being placed under DO (C), Mamaloni was interviewed and the following faults pointed out—lack of initiative in seeing the work (there is no lack of it), frequent unexplained absences from the office, inability to complete a job, frequent mistakes in his work, lack of concentration

Examinations passed: Colonial Regulations, General Orders and Circulars, Financial Instructions, Stores Instructions—No results seen of February exam

Extenuating circumstances: With experience and correction of these faults he could become a very useful officer. Since the interview a month ago, Mamaloni has improved, however, he has an inflated idea of his ability. Due for leave in September and recommend transfer to another District.

Not surprisingly, Mamaloni disagreed with these opinions of him and listed his achievements in Guadalcanal in a letter to the Public Service Advisory Board in 1969, in which he complained about not being promoted or confirmed as permanent in the position.

Mamaloni's list of his achievements in Guadalcanal, 1966 to 1967

- General council work in Guadalcanal and Russells, Native Courts inspections, council meetings, council estimates, accounting and extensive touring.
- Supervision of construction of a rural health clinic in Guadalcanal Bush—one of the most difficult areas on this island. 'Designs and plans for this were all made by me and I was highly praised orally for this work.'
- Dealt with over 20 land leases on Guadalcanal and Russell Islands.
- Reconnaissance work on damaged areas in Central District during 1966/67 cyclones.
- Registration officer for Honiara and other Central Council voters.
- Presiding officer in over 10 polling stations during elections for LegCo and local councils on Guadalcanal, Gela, Savo, Isabel and Russells.
- Acting executive officer, Guadalcanal Council, for about a year.⁷⁴

Secretariat for Protectorate Affairs, May 1968 to April 1970

Dissatisfaction with Mamaloni's attitude and work in district administration saw him moved to the Secretariat for Protectorate Affairs as Assistant Clerk to the Legislative Council. The Secretariat maintained relations with the Colonial Office and Treasury in London, drafted and amended legislation and closely controlled finances. Detailed budgets submitted by the four districts for all

⁷³ Probationary report, 1 April 1967 to 31 March 1968, Confidential File CPF 3406.

⁷⁴ Solomon Mamaloni to PSAB, 12 July 1969.

expenditure headings were scrutinised with a fine-tooth comb. Administrators had to be careful not to go over budget allocations. According to Tedder, officers of the Secretariat made decisions without consultation, ignoring what the districts had been doing or known about for years. They would approve schemes proposed by the district administrations, but then knock or cut them back, giving preference to Honiara projects. As was the case for decades, the Colonial Office and Treasury pressured colonial administrations to limit local expenses and recurrent funding (called ‘grants in aid’).

Mamaloni’s appointment proved a pivotal moment in his career and saved him from being consigned to obscurity. LegCo had superseded the Advisory Council in 1960 and both expatriate and local administrators, as well as elected members, had to learn parliamentary procedures and conventions. Mamaloni’s duties included handling procedural matters, as well as arranging transport, accommodation, and the welfare of members and their wives. He was encouraged to develop his interest and skills in parliamentary matters by expatriate officers, including Chris Cochrane, Clerk to Legislative Council (LegCo), Chief Secretary L.M. (‘Bim’) Davies and M.F. Kissani, Assistant Secretary for Establishment. A.V. (Tony) Hughes saw Mamaloni in action as Clerk and remembers him as ‘bright but a bit odd’.⁷⁵ But when Mamaloni was elected in 1970, he could confidently command and correct most other members, as well as the Chairman (the equivalent of Speaker).

Outside LegCo sessions, his work involved dealing with local council statistics, registering marriages, and recording membership of various boards. He does not appear to have overly exerted himself. Hilda Kari, who became the first female MP after Independence, remembers Mamaloni as a popular character who always reading newspapers and magazines which came from London.

He was his own person – stubborn, complaining, anti-colonial— ‘lez fo harem waetman’ [I don’t want to listen to whitemen’]. He did not want to take instructions and wanted to do his own thing. He would say to junior officers, ‘Yufala harem!’ (Listen to this!) and laugh at their obedience and make fun of them’.⁷⁶

In his memoir, former Chief Secretary Tom Russell describes the bureaucratic fine-tuning to manage the careers and pension security of colonial officers in a shrinking empire. Ex-Africa hands (‘African exiles’) started to arrive in larger numbers in the mid-1950s and were generally regarded as a hindrance because they thought they knew better and that regulations were not strictly followed.⁷⁷ They were often racist and contemptuous of the more relaxed style of colonial rule in the Pacific. Many of them and their wives complained that Solomon Islanders did not match the standard of African servants and staff.⁷⁸ A younger generation of new colonial officers who began

⁷⁵ Interview with Tony Hughes, 17 November 2010.

⁷⁶ Interview with Hilda Kari, 29 August 2012.

⁷⁷ Interview with James Tedder, 24 October 2010.

⁷⁸ For example, Trevor Clark’s 2004 memoir, *Good Second class (but not even C.3). Memories of a Generalist Overseas Administrator*, is replete with nostalgia and comparisons with his experiences in Nigeria. Clark was Deputy Governor-General in Solomon Islands from 1976 to 1977.

arriving in the 1960s found many ex-African and conservative colonial officers insufferably racist. The *Kakamora Reporter* satirized the ‘African exiles’ thus:

The African Exile

The African exile once lived in Africa. He was very happy there. He still cannot understand why he had to leave. He thought everyone loved him. He wishes that he still lived in Africa. Sometimes he closes his eyes and he thinks he is back in Africa. It is easy to tell an African exile. As a rule he has a round stomach and a faraway look in his eyes. He also has a familiar cry. At regular intervals he will throw back his head and call “Boy!” in a loud voice. He is very sad if no one comes running up when he makes this cry. This is unfortunate because these days fewer and fewer people are running for him. The African exile is quite a nice man. His main trouble is that he has a habit of making the same mistakes over and over again. He made a lot of mistakes in Africa. Now he is making the same mistakes here. So he is not at all harmful, just a little bit lost.⁷⁹

In a 1995 interview, Mamaloni recalled:

I’d quite a few exchanges with my bosses. At that time when our university graduates were coming back, there was a big anti feeling against ex-African colonials, you know, these colonial servants from Britain. Every time a country in Africa got independence, they sent people down here to become someone, you know. It got into the nose of these young people who had studied so much about liberation and all those terms. It didn’t affect me very much.⁸⁰

Working in the colonial administration

According to Sir Peter Kenilorea, the public service that ruled the protectorate was a white colonial club and an ordeal for young up-and-coming Solomon Islanders, “There were certain colonial officers still wallowing in the cliché of “white is right, if you are brown, stick around, and if you are black, get back””.

‘In the later colonial years in the Solomon Islands, your worth was judged either by the colour of your skin, the job you held, or your upbringing, and the number of letters after your name. There was a Cambridge-Oxford clique amongst the British officers who had made their careers out of “governing natives” that we locals could never enter. Many of these officers had served previously in other areas of the British empire, particularly in Africa, and they brought with them preconceived ideas about what was good for Solomon Islanders ... Even when I was a District Commissioner ... my superior was free to rush into my office without the courtesy of knocking, but when I did the same to him, I would go down as a disrespectful officer who had no regard for his superior!’⁸¹

Lloyd Maepeza Gina also described colonial discipline: ‘If subordinates did not stand up straight or say “Sir”, they would be very properly rebuked and be very embarrassed indeed. It could also badly affect annual assessment reports. It was based on military discipline and obedience evident all the way to the village level. Whether in the office, touring or walking through the village, it was customary and became a habit that people would stand up and be at attention whenever a DC or DO arrived. One could only talk when the DC spoke directly and must always be answered by “Yes, Sir”’.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Kakamora Reporter*, October 1970.

⁸⁰ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni, 1995.

⁸¹ Kenilorea 2008, 159–160.

⁸² Gina 2003, 116.

Colonial manners perpetuated British public school and military rituals. On ceremonial occasions, high commissioners and (from 1976) governors wore tropical white uniforms and white pith helmets, adorned with plumed feathers. In his memoir, Russell provides glimpses of entertainment at Government House with colonial officers in formal dress—short white tuxedos (‘bum freezers’ or ‘monkey jackets’), black evening trousers and cummerbunds for men, and long evening dresses for their wives—waited upon by Melanesian servants. After dinner, port was served, a toast was proposed to the Queen, and the ladies withdrew; the men enjoyed more port and then repaired to the lawns to relieve themselves—a ritual called ‘visiting Africa’.⁸³

Unwritten but well-understood social rules reinforcing British superiority. Douglas Freegard, who had spent 11 years working in three Pacific colonies and was highly patronising.

‘Good afternoon, Penguin’—the insubordinate subordinate⁸⁴

I met my own boss, the Head of Protectorate Division, going down the stairs as I was going up and he greeted me “Good morning, Solomon” so I replied the same way “Good Morning, Douglas”. Now that was very bad—you cannot call your superior officers by their first name. He took me into his room and he said, “You can’t call me by my first name, I’m your boss. I’ve served HMG for more than 24 years. I’m 45 and you must address me as ‘Sir’”. One of the young officers from England and Scotland saw me crying and asked what had happened. I told him. He challenged me, “If you’re from Makira, this afternoon when you meet him, say the same thing ... say what you want”. Douglas Freegard, waddled a bit when he walked. When we met later, he said “Good afternoon, Solomon” and I said “Good afternoon, Penguin”. I was severely reprimanded; wages cut, probation extended and I started getting a hard time. He was a senior officer, but I saw nothing wrong in addressing him by his first name, and him calling me by my first name. I felt we were colleagues and I had been in the office long enough, doing important work and taking big responsibilities to the extent that we could say, OK, we are fair and square, both important. I never had this anti colonial feeling—I probably got it more from the university students than creating it myself. Those incidents marked chapters in my career. I always recall them and make fun of them when we have a function or a party.’

Mamaloni also recalled, ‘At the time the Secretariat wasn’t well equipped with stencilling machines. I think that was the real boiling point in my career as an administrator. As Clerk to the Legislature, I had priority over the machine. The Financial Secretary’s secretary was a South African lady and one morning when I was producing papers for the Legislature she came over and asked “Who told you to do this?” I said “These are my orders”. So she pulled out my papers so I swore at her. I was taken up to the boss and he dressed me down, “You are a very young officer. You shouldn’t be doing this. You have big potential. We’re going to send you to Westminster for a course”’.

Tensions simmered between younger, more educated Solomon Island public servants and some of the colonial officers—not only due to their manner and their racist approach to locals, but also because of the apartheid-like differences in housing, pay and benefits between whites and locals. On one occasion, Mamaloni, Baddeley Devesi, Francis Talasasa, and Isaac Qoloni led a demonstration by public servants at the Town Ground to protest their salaries and unfair differentials enjoyed by their white counterparts. Some younger colonial officers were on the political left and sympathetic to the plight of Solomon Islanders. The 25 Club was an intellectual

⁸³ Russell 2003, 77.

⁸⁴ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni 1995.

discussion group started by Tony Hughes and Francis Bugotu. Members were the rising politicians and public servants and included Mamaloni, although he was an occasional member.

With the move to the Secretariat, Mamaloni's attitude was more positive according to his 1969 annual probation report. He had made good progress as Clerk to LegCo but was judged to take longer to dispose of LegCo business after meetings than an administrative officer because of his educational background. He completed some administrative exams, the first that he had passed for some years, which perhaps showed what he was capable of when he focussed. Mamaloni became eligible to become 'permanent and pensionable' in February 1969, but his probation was extended by six months due to his annual reports, which were still 'by no means enthusiastic'.⁸⁵ Although Bim Davies and Tom Russell were more tolerant and supportive of Mamaloni, the Secretary for Protectorate Affairs, Roy Davies, thought him unsuitable, hardly surprising given that he insisted on being called 'Sir' and Mamaloni infuriated him by calling him 'Ray'.

Annual (Probationary) Report (May 1968 to May 1969)

Section I:

Qualifications: Schools Certificates only. Failed university entrance examination (NZ)

Instruction and Training undertaken: None, but very eager for further educational courses particularly in the field of Local Govt Admin work and International Laws

Section II: Report on qualities and performance of duties

Outstanding: No categories

Very Good: Knowledge of English written and spoken;
Relations with colleagues; Relations with public;
Intelligence and judgment

Good: Quality of work; Reliability; Initiative and powers of organisation

Poor: None

Ability to supervise: No opportunity for assessment

Section III: (to be completed when reporting on an officer in probation)

Has passed examinations required before confirmation—Colonial Regulations, General Orders and Circulars, Financial Instructions, Stores Instructions, Miscellaneous BSIP Laws

Suitability or otherwise for confirmation in appointment: As due

Section IV: To be completed when reporting on an officer confirmed in appointment

Not qualified for promotion due to inexperience

General Remarks: Has shown considerable reinforcement in his general duties as he gains experience and confidence. Possibly he has not had his duties defined clearly enough and varies from under to over employed.

Criticisms of officer's work and or conduct: No

⁸⁵ Mamaloni to PSAB, 20 February 1969.

In July 1969, Mamaloni wrote to the Establishment Secretary and Public Service Advisory Board (PSAB) expressing frustration at his extended probation. He argued that his work had exceeded executive officer responsibilities and that he had performed the tasks ‘competitively, if not efficiently’:

Sir, from the gossips [sic] that I hear around the place some Executive Officers and Clerical Assistants appointed after me are due for confirmation or promotion to higher grades ... Some ... have not passed these preliminary exams. It appears that the decisions on confirmation and promotion must be based on favouritism, in which case I am an unfortunate victim.

I do not blame the different superior officers, who changed frequently, but blame circumstances and situations, which are inevitable ... No one is aware of my mental struggles or my talents and capabilities ... I am depressed and morally hurt as a result of these inevitable situations.⁸⁶

Although his letter to the PSAB was judged improper, he was eventually confirmed ‘permanent and pensionable’ in August 1969. But he already had his eye on politics and four days before he was confirmed, he sought permission to stand for election to the Honiara Town Council. This was refused due to the possible conflict of interest as a government officer. By the final LegCo session for 1969, Mamaloni had made up his mind to stand in the forthcoming Governing Council (GovCo) elections. Nor was he afraid to express his political views. In April 1969, he made an oral submission to a Special Select Committee on Constitutional Development. He described the proposed GovCo Committee system as similar to customary gatherings of village people and argued:

If we adopt these proposals ... we will be turning the clock backwards. Our cultures, traditions and customs are primitive. The village discussions were held in the open and topics discussed were not topics involving this fast-moving world. These kinds of customary meetings took time and the participants were not in a hurry. They sit, chat, chew betelnut and pass the time as much as they can. Their world was the slow everyday life—a big contrast to ours of this 20th century. If we adopt a constitution based on these lines, I fear we are going backwards instead of forward.⁸⁷

Chief Secretary L.M. (Bim) Davies was keen to localise positions and persuaded Mamaloni to stay on with the incentive of overseas trips in 1969 to represent Solomon Islands at Commonwealth Parliamentary Association seminars in London, Scotland, and Ireland, and the South Pacific Forum meeting in 1970. He also visited Papua New Guinea (PNG) in March 1970, where he spent three weeks observing House of Assembly meetings in Port Moresby. There he attended the Waigani seminar at the University of PNG (UPNG), where he listened to radical critiques of colonialism by academics and students. He also met with Solomon Islander students, including John Saunana and Augustine Manakako. Before going to PNG, he asked for 75 days’ leave and—

⁸⁶ Mamaloni to PSAB, 12 July 1969.

⁸⁷ Mamaloni, in Paia 1975, 86-87.

as ever, short of cash—took an advance on his salary. He even claimed he was going on holiday to Western District—possibly because it attracted a bigger travel allowance than his home province. On his return from PNG, he began his campaign for the seat of Eastern Inner Islands, which included Makira, in the 1970 GovCo elections.

I moved because the British were giving me a hard time ... I left the public service because I wasn't a good public officer ... All I was interested in was trying to help the people in my province of Makira, almost the backwater of Solomon Islands. Nothing much was going on there and I thought I would do better than my father, who was the first member, and then my uncle Jack Campbell. Both were very unhappy about my joining politics, my father was always saying, 'You should make a career in the public service'. I defied his sentiment so I walked in.⁸⁸

Although his father and Jack Campbell did not want him to enter politics, Mamaloni was elected on 25 May 1970. But he never forgot or forgave his treatment as a junior public servant by some colonial bosses, and was determined to control the public service throughout his political career.

Personal and social life in Honiara

Mamaloni displayed talent and bravura as a young actor and writer. In 1967, he starred in a play called *Stranger at Borokua*, written by Tony Hughes, about the building of a rural health clinic supervised by a British volunteer posted to Borokua, an island near the Russell Islands. The play explores what happens to the volunteer and the culture clash between an alien modern world and a Melanesian *kastom* man, Old Lakiti, played by Mamaloni. Lakiti attempts to frighten people and persuade them not to build the clinic. He is confronted by different versions of Christianity and the wonders of modern technology. As Hughes noted, 'He echoes the cry by Gauguin on another Pacific Island nearly a century before—Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?'⁸⁹

Excerpt from *This Man* by Tony Hughes and Francis Bugotu (1967)

Where have they gone, Olo?
Where are the people of your time?
The gardens are empty, Olo,
The people have gone to the town.
The dancing is finished, Olo,
The men's house is broken and gone.
The hills are silent, Olo,
The pipes and the drums are dead.
The canoes are rotting, Olo,
The axe heads are heaped in the bush.
And only the ghosts remain.

⁸⁸ Ian Johnstone interview with Solomon Mamaloni, 1995.

⁸⁹ *BSIP News Sheet* 9, 1967.

Mamaloni was a fine actor but had difficulties with some words:

He was a pain too because he wanted to say things his own way ... One of the problems I had with him was in a speech where he is praising the past, 'they carved great feasting bowls', which he pronounced 'bowels'. No matter how many times I told him, it came out as 'they carved great feasting bowels' in rehearsal and the public performances.⁹⁰

Mamaloni also wrote published poetry and plays. While he was supervising work on the clinic at Nuhu, he wrote a poem, *O Great and Mighty Tatuve*, about one of the biggest mountains in Guadalcanal, which was later published in a collection of Solomon Islands poetry.⁹¹ In *The Census*, he reset the Christmas nativity into the time of the 1970 Solomon Islands census.⁹² Later in the 1970s, he wrote *Aedo*, which was the first full-length work written in Solomons Pijin, apart from the New Testament. *Aedo* vividly revealed the urban–rural divide and difficulties of life in Honiara. It was performed on SIBS radio but a follow-up play, *Aedo at Easter*, was banned in 1979 from radio because some scenes and language were considered unsuitable.



Figure 8.2: A young beauty with man about town Mamaloni in 1969. Source: *Kakamora Reporter*.

In 1970, Mamaloni described a three-tier class system and racial discrimination in Honiara.

The three-tier class system in Honiara ⁹³

First class—white people and more sophisticated and highly paid Solomon Islanders who joined rich men's clubs (Guadalcanal Club, Yacht Club and Golf Club).

Second class (Mamaloni's own)—products of secondary school and people with professional jobs who joined the Honiara Club, KGVI Old Boys, Kakamora, and Marist, consisting predominantly of senior civil servants who wished to maintain social identities and flexible social mixing.

Third class—classified workers and labourers who went to church, but had nowhere else to go for social functions, except for bars in Chinatown.

⁹⁰ Interview with Tony Hughes, 29 August 2014.

⁹¹ In *Twenty Four Solomon Islands Poems*, edited by Dennis Lulei, E.J. Nash, and John Saunana 1977.

⁹² *The Census Day* 1979.

⁹³ Mamaloni's maiden speech, GovCo 1st meeting, 20 July 1970.

White people received better service in shops, garages and housing than did Solomon Islanders.⁹⁴ The second and third classes had to accept what the white man gave them and had to live in unhealthy houses. The social divide—some would call it apartheid—was exemplified by housing, which was allocated according to a hierarchical staffing structure, ranging from Class 1 spacious colonial bungalows for expatriates on the ridges with pleasant views and coastal breezes to Class 10 concrete hot boxes for Solomon Islanders at Kukum beside the main road in Honiara. When he started in the public service, Mamaloni lived in one of the concrete houses at Kukum.



Figure 8.3: Mamaloni's single quarters at Kukum, with external toilet, shower, and kitchen. Source: author.

According to Baddeley Devesi, junior officers were not entitled to beds and mattresses, and he and Mamaloni took turns sleeping on a sprung mattress procured from a clinic. Mamaloni also shared the house with other young men, mainly from Reef Islands, Rennell and Bellona, who had the front room while he shared the back room with Devesi, when he was teaching at nearby St Nicholas. At that time, he and Mamaloni were very close, 'more like brothers than housemates'.⁹⁵

Another social division was the restrictions on sales of alcohol to Solomon Islanders, which were overturned in 1967. Solomon Islanders could only drink in certain bars and were barred from the Mendana Hotel until the late 1960s. Discrimination continued to be practised by the racist and much-disliked owner of the Mendana Hotel, Ken Dalrymple-Hay, who would serve alcohol to local people. The Guadalcanal Club was a venue largely for expatriates and popular with personnel from visiting warships, while the Honiara Club (next to where the new Central Honiara Market stands) was most the popular venue for Solomon Islanders to drink (often to excess on fortnightly pay days). Sport, especially soccer and cricket, was one of the few areas where Islanders could excel and demonstrate superior skills. Former DC for Eastern District, Robin Low remembered Mamaloni 'making a complete arse of me by repeatedly dribbling the ball around me and through

⁹⁴ An unwritten rule was that white officers did not go out with Islander women, at least in public, nor Islander men with white women—although Mamaloni reportedly did have relations with white women.

⁹⁵ Interview with Sir Baddeley Devesi, 4 December 2010.

my legs'.⁹⁶ Mamaloni and Devesi were prominent members of Kakamora, the Anglican ex-students club, which was very influential in sporting and social terms, especially for young Solomon Islanders coming to Honiara.⁹⁷

Playing to the crowd

Mamaloni and Devesi played cricket and soccer for Kakamora Club, the sports club for Church of Melanesia members and old boys. Baddeley Devesi tells the story of playing Sunbeam Club in Auki on tour in 1968 to 1969. Sunbeam scored first, and then Kakamora levelled the score. Devesi wanted to pull all the team behind the ball and defend the draw away from home. When the frustrated Malaitan crowd started swearing and throwing stones on the field, Mamaloni was afraid of being punched and encountering further violence. So he scored a deliberate own goal to allow Sunbeam to win and placate the crowd. Devesi was furious with him, but Mamaloni said, '*Yu no wari* (don't worry)—Makira and Guadalcanal *no fitim* (no match for) Malaita'.⁹⁸

Mamaloni met his first wife Dorothy Qila Kulebe in 1966 when she was perhaps 17 or 18 years old and in standard 6 at the Government Secondary School (now Honiara Secondary School).⁹⁹ Qila was engaging and forthright, of similar height to Mamaloni, very attractive and dark—her father was from Choiseul and her mother from Botomoli in the Marau area of South Guadalcanal. They met at the youth section of the SSEC church, where Mamaloni taught the occasional Sunday school class. Hassini Angini, a cousin from Rumahui who was working at the Public Works Department close by the school, says that he acted as courier (*solair*), passing messages between them. Mamaloni would arrange to meet Qila at the Fijian quarters near the school and race off with her on his motorbike.

Fooling Qila's father

Ashley Wickham, who was working for the Ports Authority at the time, once found Mamaloni lying on the road, being helped by Qila's father, Kulebe, who worked as a groundsman for the Mendana Hotel. Qila's father asked Ashley, 'Help this man to go back to Kukum'. Ashley took him on the back of his motorbike and Solo hung on like a drunken man. He soon began laughing and said, 'Mi no dranga, mi lia long ol man, mi kripim dota blong hem' ('I'm not drunk, I was pretending to be drunk to the old man, I was creeping his daughter'). They rode back to Kukum roaring with laughter.¹⁰⁰

Mamaloni and Qila married in 1968 and moved into married quarters at the Bahá'í Centre, and then moved to a house near St John's School and the SIBS radio studios. Aileen, their first child, was born in February 1969, followed by Polini in 1970. Qila was feisty and assertive, rather like Mamaloni's mother Irageni. Their marriage did not survive Mamaloni's infidelities. He was a jealous husband and later accused Qila of infidelity while he was overseas. She then refused to cook for his brothers—a rebellious act for a woman in Melanesian culture—saying, '*man hemi hanggri*,

⁹⁶ Interview with Robin Low, 18 August 2011.

⁹⁷ *Kakamora Reporter* No. 2, April 1970.

⁹⁸ Interview with Sir Baddeley Devesi, 12 December 2010. Appeasing the largely Malaitan crowd foreshadowed his approach to Malaitan riots in later years.

⁹⁹ Job Dudley Tausinga was a classmate of Qila in standard 7 in 1967.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ashley Wickham, 5 January 2011. 'Creeping' means 'stalking or spying with lascivious intent' (Jourdan and Maebiru 2002, 112).

hem i inaf kuki fo hem seleva ('if you're hungry, you can cook for yourselves').¹⁰¹ Although they divorced in 1972, he and Qila had another child together, Kate, born in 1975.

By 1970, only five years after leaving school and still aged only 27, Mamaloni had launched his political career, thanks to a combination of his family, education, and personality. In Makira and then Honiara, he had the fortune of being in the right places at the right time as the country moved from colonial government towards independence. However, it took ambition, courage, and considerable confidence to take advantage of these favourable circumstances. Mamaloni was ready to move into the limelight, where he would stay for the rest of his life.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Hassini Angisa, 30 March 2010.

Part Four. A Rising and Falling star, the 1970s

Mamaloni's political career in the 1970s began with his election in the first Governing Council in May 1970 and ended abruptly with his resignation from the Legislative Assembly in January 1977. He went from being a firebrand young radical to first chief minister in August 1974 and leading the country to self-government in January 1976—the final step before Independence. Mamaloni's first administration revealed his strengths and weaknesses, popularity, and resilience, pet issues and policies. His reputation was damaged by the Letcher Mint affair in 1975, industrial and political unrest, and three cabinet reshuffles in a little over a year. These became signatures of his later administrations and hallmarks of Solomon Island politics in general.

After the 1976 elections, damage to his reputation and doubts about his reliability saw him lose the ballot for chief minister to the newly elected Peter Kenilorea. Mamaloni refused Kenilorea's offer of a ministerial position, and he also lost the ballot for opposition leader to Francis Talasasa Aqorau. When Aqorau died suddenly at the end of 1976 due to a heart attack, there were rumours that he had been poisoned and that Mamaloni was also at risk. He used this as a reason to resign from the Legislative Assembly and take a break from politics. The rising star had fallen rapidly to earth.

Out of politics, Mamaloni took no part in the negotiations in Honiara and London to finalise the independence settlement with Britain. Instead, Kenilorea led the negotiations and became the country's first prime minister in July 1978. Meanwhile, Mamaloni managed a copra plantation on Guadalcanal and a cooperative trading business in Makira. Although out of the parliamentary limelight, he was never completely out of the political game and engineered a merger of his People's Progressive Party with the Rural Alliance Party. He stood for the position of speaker of the newly independent parliament and narrowly lost the ballot.

Mamaloni's personal life became increasingly complicated in the 1970s. He separated or divorced his first two wives, Qila and Ellen, and began de facto marriages with two women from Isabel, Mary and Carolyn. By the end of the 1970s, he had sired nine children by four women, with two more children on the way. As Mamaloni was preparing to recontest his seat in West Makira, his father, Joash Sunaone, died in August 1979, freeing him from his father's shadow and critical voice.

* * *

Chapter 9. A Rising Star: Governing Council, 1970 to 1974

In the 1970 general elections, Mamaloni defeated Ben Kinika and Geoffrey Küper to win the seat of Eastern Inner Islands, becoming the fourth Solomon Islander to represent Makira.¹ At age 27, he knew that he was regarded by many in Makira and Honiara as too young:

[There is] much ill feeling and mistrust among those I represent ... perhaps due to my adolescence. I can assure my people before this Council that I shall do all my best in the bringing their problems to the government, and to do my duty as a good Councillor.²



Figure 9.1: Solomon Mamaloni, aged 27, the new member for Eastern Inner Islands (Makira/Ulawa), 1970 .
Source: *BSI News Sheet*, 1971

The Governing Council (GovCo) replaced the Legislative Council (LegCo) in 1970, only three years after members had first been directly elected by popular vote.³ The new arrangement was designed to give local politicians more authority and experience of governing. All 17 elected members and nine government officers served on one of five committees to allow members to learn the ropes of parliamentary government and promote national consensus.⁴ GovCo effectively created non-party government, with expatriates still firmly in control of the bureaucracy. Meetings were held three times a year at the High Court building, Kalala House, using complicated parliamentary procedures and language that placed most elected members at a disadvantage.

Mamaloni's experience as Clerk to LegCo prepared him to both shine and show off his knowledge of parliamentary procedures. He frequently interrupted on points of order and was not afraid to engage boldly with officials in debate. He was on his feet like a jack in the box, introducing and

¹ Joash Sunaone, Jack Campbell and Ben Kinika had previously represented Makira on the LegCo. The Eastern Inner seat comprised Makira, Ulawa, Ugi, Owa Riki, and Owa Rafa.

² GovCo, 20 July 1970.

³ From 1967, unofficial members were elected by popular vote (except for Eastern Outer Islands). For full details of constitutional developments, see Moore 2010a.

⁴ The GovCo committee system was based on the Donoughmore Constitution, which had been tried in Ceylon. There were five committees: Communications and Works, Education and Social Welfare (on which Mamaloni served), Health and Internal Affairs, Natural Resources, and Finance. The Finance Committee—comprising the Committee Chairmen, plus three government officers, and headed by the High Commissioner—effectively operated as the Cabinet.

supporting motions, and asking questions; he was listed more often than any other member in the index of proceedings of most sessions of GovCo.⁵ He prepared questions carefully and knew how to ask supplementary questions correctly. He raised many issues in support of rural people, including support for agriculture and transport. He criticised the government's focus on higher education and promoted vocational and technical training. In his memoir, Tom Russell, described Mamaloni as, 'showing remarkable initiative in policy making'.⁶

In a long maiden speech Mamaloni announced himself— 'I am a rather radical politician, Sir'.⁷ He quickly became a leading light and people gathered in the gallery when he was speaking. He was combative, provocative, humorous, and cheeky, for example: '[the High Commissioner's] address has given us much meat to chew on, however I find some of it unable to swallow ... Lord give us this day plenty of local beef for our daily consumption'. After a motion had been passed requiring members to come dressed in shirts and ties, he came to the house wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with a naked woman. According to Russell, Mamaloni was always a showman who delighted in making speeches that flirted on the edge of courtesy— 'a political animal but a nice man who did not create animosity'.⁸

Mamaloni speeches were in marked contrast to older members such as Mariano Kelesi, whose speech in the same debate was more polite—or sycophantic—depending on one's point of view:

Thank Her Majesty and her people for the help she has given to us, that she and her people have been prepared to involve themselves in the growth of our people. We here realise the brotherhood of man is freely present with us here as we in this house, of different colours of skin, work together for my people, yes our people, the people of Solomon Islands.⁹

Mamaloni rarely missed an opportunity to express his cultural pride and anti-colonialism:

Today we express remorse for the loss of our cultures, traditions and custom, even our own identity. Some of the expatriate laws are responsible for this but largely the churches must be answerable for all of it. In their spread of the gospel they have also commanded 'thou shalt not do custom dances, thou shalt not pay for your bride, chew betel nut' and so on. The once beautiful and dignified customs and cultures of this country are doomed to the threat of extinction. Solomon Islanders are therefore left with two options: either to be completely westernised or undertake the long struggle to regain their own identity ... if nothing is adjusted when you depart from these islands you will be leaving a country not of broken hearts or even sweethearts but a simmering pot of troubles. I hope that the phrase, 'A black man's country is a white man's paradise', does not become a reality in the Solomon Islands.¹⁰

⁵ In the GovCo 1st Meeting reports, he is listed in the Hansard index 55 times, followed by Mariano Kelesi (48), Rev Peter Thompson (45), Chief Secretary Bim Davies (44) and Financial Secretary Tom Russell (41).

⁶ Russell 2003, 57–58.

⁷ GovCo, 20 July 1970.

⁸ Interview with Tom Russell, 30 September 2011.

⁹ GovCo, 21 July 1970.

¹⁰ GovCo, 20 July 1970.

His attacks on colonial officials and colonialism were often heated. Accused of being emotional in his argument, Mamaloni attacked colonialism and expatriates thus:

I read about Africa and what the British did there, and I believe they are the cause of all the present trouble on that continent. I've expressed emotion because naturally I live with my people, I'm part of my people, I eat with them, I sleep with them, not with women only, but my father also. I am hurt, sir, when I am being accused of expressing emotion. If a man does not have emotion, he is inhuman. Africans today are inhumanly treated as a result of British colonialism. I do not want this to happen in the Solomons. Most of the expatriates ... you never go out to see the people in the villages. You cannot just command from the office.¹¹

As a newly elected member aiming to secure re-election, he was keen to bring the problems of Makira to the attention of the government and public. Between meetings, he was based in the provincial capital, Kirakira, and had a clear grasp of developments and the lack of them on the ground. Mamaloni made frequent demands on behalf of Makira, such as an overseas port or three extra ships. His technique was to table multiple questions requiring detailed answers from the administration. He called the Eastern District 'the Cinderella of this country' compared with services and infrastructure in other districts:

People may wonder why I have to talk about Makira all the time. They might be accusing me of having regional feelings but in actual fact, I am not a Makira man. I am 'Are'are, I am from the Guadalcanal Weather Coast and from South Malaita. At the moment Makira is my home but with the present situation I feel like emigrating somewhere else ... the Eastern District is the Cinderella of the SI [Solomon Islands]. When I threatened to secede to France, some people thought it was a joke—well it was not a joke.¹²

Occasionally, the firebrand realised that he had been grandstanding and banging the drum for Makira too hard:

We have never asked for much in the Eastern District or even if we had, you gave us nothing. Sir, I did say that if this motion is defeated I will walk out of the house ... I have already asked too much for my constituency.¹³

Mamaloni also addressed national matters—for example, introducing an amendment to abolish medical treatment fees and a policy requiring patients to pay their own fares home, which discriminated against the poor:

I do not think it is the right time to adopt such a policy ... at the expense of the poor Solomon Islanders with no regard for the human souls ... Whenever we legislate, we must legislate for the majority of people here who will live here in the future ... not only for the businessman, for the expatriate, for the civil servants (even if they are Solomon Islanders). We must legislate for everyone in the Solomons.¹⁴

¹¹ GovCo, 27 July 1970.

¹² GovCo, 2 April 1973.

¹³ GovCo, 30 July 1970.

¹⁴ GovCo, 24 July 1970.

Another long-running complaint of Mamaloni was the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Service (SIBS) and its use of high-level English, lack of good Pijin, and programming, which he found:

[j]ust unbearable, such as ‘Doris Day singing “Move over darling”, followed by “Let’s pray”, the Light and Easy programme on Saturday morning presented by people sounding like little kids eating Paddlepops by a swimming pool’.¹⁵

The *Kakamora Reporter* announced Mamaloni as its first ‘GovCo Personality’ and printed a dozen of his best quotes.¹⁶ It also published political commentary, critical letters, and satirical pieces, such as the one written by Tony Hughes below.¹⁷

Cruelty to politicians—a satire

‘... the Melanesians, although so-called Christians for many years, still use many practices of great cruelty, and endure much physical and mental suffering in the worship of strange gods. For example in Honiara, the capital city of one group of these wild people, I saw one day a group of twelve to fifteen miserable creatures being loaded into a motor bus marked “Government Stores”. They were clearly in great distress.

These men, aged between 25 and 45 I should say, had each been completely parcelled up in thick cloth from head to foot. The packaging was in several layers, apparently of a material which could not absorb moisture, made to fit closely about the body and limbs so as to restrict movement and prevent air reaching the skin. It was all fastened up with zips and cruelly strained buttons. At the top of the package it was tightly closed around the neck of the prisoner (for such I guessed these poor wretches were) by a length of material wound around the neck and tied in a vicious knot. The feet of each prisoner were tightly encased in black boxes made slightly smaller than the foot and then brutally laced by some cruel jailer to crush the skin and blood of the foot. The prisoners were clearly suffering great pain. Their faces ran with sweat, eyes bulged and rolled wildly, their limbs moved with great effort.

An onlooker told me these poor beings were called “Politicians” who were chosen in nationwide rituals every two or three years; but in the great pagan ceremonies called “GovCo” their strange and cruel uniforms, in a huge circular playhouse in the centre of the city ... the Europeans who previously governed the country, taught the unsuspecting politicians that only a man who suffered this sweltering indignity could earn the respect of his people. So strong was this belief, said my informant, that even men who in every other way were wise and sensible had accepted it and willingly suffered the torture I was now seeing. I went away, silently wondering at the strange tricks the human mind can play upon the human body.

The *Kakamora Reporter* prints this amazing report as part of its campaign for a Fair Deal for All Politicians. “Free them from the cruelty! An end to suits and ties!”

¹⁵ GovCo, 28 July 1970.

¹⁶ *Kakamora Reporter* No.7, September 1970. The *Kakamora Reporter* (KR) was an independent newspaper, written by Solomon Islanders and expatriates.

¹⁷ *Kakamora Reporter*, No. 8, October 1970. According to Tony Hughes, he modelled this on a satirical book *The Travels and Surprising Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, which was made into a 1988 film by Terry Gilliam.

Championing rural development and localisation

Rural development and localisation were key issues for Mamaloni from the beginning of his career. He understood full well that rural people were his constituency and regarded them as the backbone of development—‘we’ve got to develop rural areas. This is the only answer, and for a long time I want rural development’.¹⁸ He demanded the construction of a proper road from Kirakira to Maro`u Bay on the west coast of Arosi. He raised the subject so often that it became known as ‘Mamaloni’s road’. Successfully moving a motion for a surfaced road west from Kirakira in 1971, he argued, ‘I do not want Kirakira to stay beautiful ... I want it to be ugly because ugly means development and progress’.¹⁹

Mamaloni was critical of large government schemes, such as the oil palm plantations on Guadalcanal and the promotion of cattle, cocoa, and copra. He criticised the lack of practical support for village people, such as training centres and incentives to boost agricultural productivity. He thought that the government should decentralise programmes and support smallholder projects such as piggeries, rather than the cattle industry, which was an expensive failure. He advocated small shareholding enterprises, incentives for business-minded people and Indigenous ownership. His support for logging and resource development on customary land demonstrated his passion for rural development, combined with a pro-business philosophy. He regarded these developments as providing opportunities for local people to reap rewards from their resources. Mining of minerals on Makira had good prospects but Mamaloni deplored the paltry royalties that landowners might receive and the British-based colonial law that allocated ownership to the government of everything six feet or more below the surface.

Mamaloni promoted devolution of power to local councils:

Local councils are the only ones with real understanding of their areas. They do not have the money but they know the place and the people. I do not like to see departments of government dictating to local councils ... we have got to think carefully during our constitutional changes about the position of local councils. Local councils can make a lot of difference in developing rural areas ... if we make local councils stronger and give them more autonomy they will solve many of the problems in their areas.²⁰

Like many of Mamaloni’s ideas, words proved easier than deeds. For example, when changes were made in the 1980s to develop provincial enterprises through the Makira Development Corporation, the provincial government proved such a hopeless manager that ‘Makira’ became a byword for incompetence.

Mamaloni argued that political and economic stability could only be achieved by spreading rural development widely and evenly between West, Central, Malaita and Eastern Districts. When Financial Secretary John Smith prepared an audit of progress of the 6th Development Plan—the blueprint for development of the colonial government—Mamaloni reviewed the audit and

¹⁸ GovCo, 25 August 1971.

¹⁹ GovCo, 20 November 1970. Prophetic words given how logging companies destroyed forests, rivers, and reefs along the coastline of Makira from the 1980s onwards.

²⁰ GovCo, 11 November 1971.

estimated that two-thirds of projects for Makira had been delayed or not implemented.²¹ He often did his homework better than other members, and could produce detailed critiques of government spending and priorities, despite admitting that he was ‘a very poor mathematician and not a good economist either’.²²

Mamaloni passionately believed in localising positions for Solomon Islanders to take over from expatriates as soon as possible, whether or not they were qualified, or the country was ready for self-government. Compared with other colonies, the Solomons had an unduly large number of expatriates and their wives working in the public service, shops and clubs. He thought the government’s attempts to localise were too slow compared with churches (except for the Catholics, whose clergy were predominantly Europeans), private business and other developing countries. He was bitter at the way local public servants were treated:

They are suppressed both in salary and seniority by newly arrived officers and by newly arrived African boys. Yet these new arrivals’ knowledge of local people is nowhere near those I have referred to. You want to restrict and maintain and establish the African club members. Many of our Solomon Islanders are heavily suppressed by these African club members. We have lost a great deal of confidence in ourselves, we have to regain confidence.²³

In a heartfelt speech, he explained the personal reasons for his grievances:

I was in the civil service, Sir, an ex-NZ schoolboy ... when I went for an interview with the DC [James Tedder] he said that we want people who use their own initiative. And when I started to use my initiative, the DC turned around and sacked me to the Secretariat. I have never been to University ... I sat my University Entrance and failed but I have got more local knowledge than any expatriate who has been for years. I applied that and the DC blew me up.

... Why was long term planning for localisation not done years ago? There are people who have served in the civil service as senior clerks, higher clerical officers, for years. This is nonsense. You are not training us. You are making fools of us, that is all.²⁴

In another speech in November 1972, he again savaged the expatriates:

Localisation in this country is a bluff—[you] must train Solomon Island people; I do not think that all the expatriates here have a heart and I don’t think that any of them are prepared to bury their hearts here ... I don’t think that expensive people who do not give their best to the development should remain here any longer.²⁵

For both political and personal reasons, gaining political control of the public service was an early theme in Mamaloni’s career. Here are two quotations from 1971 and 1972:

²¹ GovCo, 2 April 1973.

²² GovCo, 27 November 1970. In a later meeting, he said: ‘In the Solomons, money means only two things—get it and spend it. They forget the word ‘saving’—an apt description of his own economics. GovCo, 23 August 1972.

²³ GovCo, 25 August 1971.

²⁴ GovCo, 20 November 1970.

²⁵ GovCo, n.d. November 1972.

The dominating bureaucratic system must be unfooted entirely. I condemn this system especially in this 20th century era. It is outdated and a government applicable only to dogs and animals not human beings ... the reign of bureaucracy was ruthless and inhuman at times ... our people have also sacrificed much more than one realises submitting themselves to the corruptions of the white man ... Government is dominated practically by bureaucrats, a situation created by the absence of an opposition.²⁶

I do not like to see the civil servants playing politics. If they want to come into politics they must stand for election as candidates ... Even though I have inflicted many wounds by words on the bureaucratic system here I deeply respect it ... let the public service serve the government of the day without complaint ... like the beehive, we will live under the same hive and go about doing various duties devotedly.²⁷

In 1970, the 2,000 Islander and 350 expatriate public servants were envied and criticised for their smart clothes, paid holidays, and higher salaries than any other group. Expatriates were further privileged, enjoying better housing, a home plus local salaries, overseas leave, and paid school fees for their children.²⁸ The *Kakamora Reporter* again cast a mordant eye: '[f]rom the inside the civil service looks like a big cage of half-mad people, chasing each other round and round with papers and forms and orders and circulars and dockets and vouchers and pay slips ... and what about the people?'²⁹ Politicians also came in for criticism and satire from the *Kakamora Reporter*.

A Prayer for Politicians³⁰

Lord, teach us to serve them as we deserve,
To give little and to count the cost,
To toil through the 270 foolscap page development plan in two days,
And not to think of handing out certificates and prizes as rest.
To labour through the advice of assistant secretaries
And to ask for bigger reward,
To say one thing to one group at one time
And to say another to a different group at another time.
Moreover, O Father, that we work out our salaries in secret,
That thou who seest things in secret,
Will reward us openly in the last day of GovCo;
To feel safe, big, respected,
And our will be done O Lord. Amen.

From 1970 to 1973, Mamaloni was a member of the Education and Social Welfare Committee. He was highly critical of the education system— 'a pathway to the white collar job haven of rest, catering for clerks, officials, and administrators'—and scornful of:

²⁶ GovCo, 11 November 1971.

²⁷ GovCo, 15 November 1972.

²⁸ Russell argued that without housing and local salary, it would be very difficult to recruit experienced personnel and if the scheme had been applied to local staff, it would have been both unaffordable and inequitable.

²⁹ *Kakamora Reporter*, No. 11 January 1971.

³⁰ *Kakamora Reporter*, No. 16, June 1971.

superficial education, short-sighted, unrealistic ... ridiculous curriculum content—knowing more about English Queens and American Presidents ... helpful for the limited elite but not for the Solomon mass ... an imported philosophy that encourages social ostracism, cultural confusion, a clearly defined failure element, disillusioned graduates and misfit citizens.³¹

He proposed practical alternatives in another long speech in 1972. After finishing primary school in Standard 7, students should be streamed into professional, technical, and practical agriculture. Those who dropped out earlier should be streamed at Standard 4 to focus on more practical jobs, and not come to Honiara. He advocated establishing vocational and training centres in villages, and providing functional literacy education for adults. He attacked the imbalance in primary school funding for 34,000 students versus the amount provided for 4,500 secondary and tertiary students. He recommended that primary education be made free to reduce the burden of school fees on parents and relatives. He saw no need for expensive uniforms, half-joking that girls could go back to wearing skirts and remain topless, while boys should revert to wearing calico with belts, as he had done.

A source of great pride for Makirans, and Mamaloni in particular, was the appointment of Silas Sitai in August 1971 as deputy chairman of GovCo—the first Indigenous Speaker of parliament.³² Mamaloni had regarded Sitai as an uncle and mentor when he started work in Central District in 1966. With Sitai in the chair, Mamaloni was more polite and interjected less than when the high commissioner Sir Michael Gass was chairman.



Figure 9.2: Silas Sitai, Chairman of the Governing Council, August 1971 to October 1972. Source: Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia.³³

After presiding over only three meetings, Sitai, a chain smoker, died suddenly from a heart attack aged only 52 in October 1972.³⁴ His death was widely mourned and deprived the Solomons of an

³¹ GovCo, 18 August 1972.

³² GovCo members were fulsome in their praise for him and his appointment as chairman of GovCo. Sitai and his children were very close to the Campbell and Sunaone families. Mamaloni was a regular visitor to Sitai's house and would sometimes borrow his car.

³³ <http://www.solomonencyclopaedia.net/objects/D00000392.htm>

³⁴ Silas Sitai had premonitions of his death and had been putting his affairs in order with his eldest son. Interview with David Sitai, 20 September 2014.

elder statesman who many thought would become governor-general at Independence. As *man Makira*, Mamaloni gave one of three tribute speeches in the House and said he had ‘lost a father, and Makira their reigning champion’. His tribute to Sitai reflected Makiran values— ‘His greatest wish was that his country should continue to exist in peace and friendship and that all the island groups should combine and cooperate as one’.³⁵ When Sir Michael Gass took over again as Chairman, Mamaloni resumed his earlier hostility in speeches and interjections.³⁶

Orator and firebrand

Mamaloni’s reputation as an orator was established from his early days as a parliamentarian. Writing was never his strongest suit, as his exam results had shown, and he took great pains over speeches that lasted an hour or more:

I make long speeches. It takes me about a night and full day to compose my speeches and compile my words ... when the topic is a difficult one. I am not an Englishman. English is not my language, it is foreign.³⁷

Sometimes his speeches and interjections were eccentric, along with his choice of words. Oratory was his strength, especially in comparison with other members, such as Peter Salaka and Jonathan Fifi`i, the old Maasina Rule leader, whose Hansard records are often incomprehensible due to their use of Pijin, which was transcribed by white stenographers.³⁸

Stealing the porn

Mamaloni loved risqué jokes and being humorous. During a debate in parliament, an MP was holding up some pornography as an example of evil pollution and passed it around for inspection. Mamaloni appeared to be asleep as the magazine went to the next person but whispered to him to put the magazine in Mamaloni’s pocket. The MP on his feet started to look anxiously for his magazine to come back. It did not.

Mamaloni also made great play of his name, boasting of the prophetic powers and wisdom of his namesake, King Solomon:

They used to say that Solomon had a lot of wisdom, this is very true, and I am going to give a stern warning to the leaders of this country because I think a few of my prophecies have already come true, so I will make some more.³⁹

His hostility was mostly directed at the colonial administration and British government, whom he accused of insincerity and hypocrisy. Mamaloni rarely missed an opportunity to tweak the noses

³⁵ GovCo, 6 November 1972.

³⁶ Fred Osifelo took up the post in March 1974 and became speaker of the new Legislative Assembly from September 1974 until Independence.

³⁷ GovCo, 20 November 1970.

³⁸ The proceedings of the debates (Hansard) were transcribed by stenographers, who had difficulties translating the colloquial Pijin of older members such as Jonathan Fifi`i. By contrast, Fifi`i’s 1989 autobiography, translated from the Kwaio language by renowned anthropologist, Roger Keesing, reveals a highly articulate and engaging leader.

³⁹ GovCo, 30 March 1973.

and insult the colonial ‘masters’, ‘Mr Chairman, if I ever vacate my seat before the life of it ends it is because I am tired of hearing boring speeches from you’.⁴⁰

I congratulate the Governor for not bursting into tears at the frustrations of having to read such a long speech. I felt like humming an old hymn— ‘Guide me, o my Great Redeemer, Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more’.⁴¹

Former Financial Secretary John Smith regarded Mamaloni as the most anti-colonial GovCo member, who always ‘had an eye for the main chance, always ready to use the situation to his own advantage’.⁴² For example:

[I]f the British only took notice of colonies that caused problems, then let us cause trouble even if we are spilling a bit of blood and I mean it’... Britain is only interested in profits, not the people of this country ... out of 600 politicians in the UK only about 10 or less are interested in our affairs; Britain wants to join the Common Market because she cannot get a profit from copra in the BSIP ... If Britain cannot help us then who will? Australia, New Zealand, Mao Tse Tung? Whenever I attend the movies I do not bother to stand up for the national anthem, ‘God save the Queen’. British people have been degraded themselves and they have got to learn again. I do not care if you leave Solomon Islanders wrongly and come back and cut Solomon Islanders’ necks but when I get the chance Mr Chairman, I will give you the same treatment.⁴³

Underpinning the aggressive rhetoric was his personal experience of racism and colonial paternalism:

I had one unpleasant experience when I called a very senior officer by his first name ... he said, ‘Son, I am 40 years old and have been in the service 20 years, call me ‘sir’. I never called him ‘sir’ but by his first name. So there is evidently a colour bar in this country and I know of expatriates who do not get degrees but hold works in this country. I can do any of these works as efficiently as them. I did not join politics of my own accord. I ran away from the civil service because I know there is something rotten in this country.⁴⁴

Time and again, Mamaloni played his trump cards of attacking colonialism and blaming foreigners. He attacked the secretive and undemocratic way that Japanese fishing company, Taiyo, was brought into the country.⁴⁵

Mr Chairman, you have fooled us long enough. You have fooled Africans because they are fools themselves, not Solomon Islanders. We are a people of intelligence. We do not

⁴⁰ GovCo, 19 August 1971. He proceeded to deliver a speech that took up six pages of Hansard.

⁴¹ GovCo, 28 August 1972. Michael Gass had been in the Solomons from the late 1950s to 1965 before returning as High Commissioner from 1969 to 1973.

⁴² Interview with John Smith, 14 December 2011.

⁴³ GovCo, 10 November 1972.

⁴⁴ GovCo, 22 November 1970. The details changed slightly when he told the story in 1995 (see ‘Good Afternoon, Penguin in Chapter 8). His relationship with Roy Davies, Mamaloni’s senior officer after moving to the Secretariat, was particularly difficult. They continued to clash in GovCo. Davies had been DO in Malaita and Makira in the 1940s during Maasina Rule. His disdain and fear of Islanders verged on paranoia (Akin 2013, 250).

⁴⁵ In his memoir John Smith (2011, 53–70) describes the negotiations with Taiyo in detail. He argues that BSIP not only negotiated a good deal for one of the Solomon Islands’ most important natural resources but also gained a fleet of ships to counter illegal fishing by other countries.

want to follow their footsteps of Africa. Look at them today, what they are having. Yes I know they have economic viability but socially and politically due to oversuppression by the colonial boys they are in some of those countries in hell today ... Solomon Islanders you have been suppressed too long. This is the time to agitate—for good or for bad.⁴⁶

Mamaloni justified his approach in a 1972 speech:

I thank the heads of departments and chairman of the Council for patiently listening to all the curses I have so often thrown at them in the past ... I shall remain faithful, a servant not only to those people [in Eastern District] but above all to the national cause of this country.⁴⁷

Mamaloni could be generous in his praise if he thought someone had done a good job on behalf of Solomon Islanders. When Tom Russell was leaving after 26 years in the Solomons to become governor of the Cayman Islands in 1974, Mamaloni said, 'We will try to make the Solomons the place you have tried to create'.⁴⁸ He was also generous to John Smith, an 'African exile':

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Honourable Financial Secretary [John Smith] on his appointment as Designate Governor of the Gilbert and Ellice colony. I thank him for the very hard work he has done as our Financial Secretary in the short period he has been here ... And in great admiration I could see him sitting there calmly listening to all the accusations. This is indeed, Sir, a sign of a great man, a gentleman. Those of us who have so much to do with him will miss him as a friend. This country, Sir, will lose an asset. May I, Sir, wish him and his family every success in their new post in Gilbert and Ellice. Thank you.⁴⁹

Constitutional developments 1973 to 1976

Mamaloni was a leading critic of the GovCo committee system. Even with an elected majority of Solomon Islanders, he thought that the committee chairmen were controlled by expatriate civil servants, and that the 17 elected members were 'rubber stamps'. At the fifth GovCo meeting in 1971, Mamaloni introduced a motion for a select committee to consider the next steps of constitutional development for self-government, scheduled for 1975. In a complicated speech, he referred to revolutionary leaders, such as Marx, Mao, Nkrumah, Nehru, and Nyerere to make the point that political reform was a precondition for social and economic reform.

The 1972 Select Committee on Constitutional Development was hardly select, comprising all members of GovCo, and was criticised for being led by Chief Secretary Russell. The consultation process with communities was extensive and included visits to other colonies, such as Ceylon. However, the different types of constitutional arrangements were lost on most people with less education and little English.

⁴⁶ GovCo, 25 August 1971.

⁴⁷ GovCo, 23 August 1972.

⁴⁸ Russell 2003, 165.

⁴⁹ GovCo, 2 April 1973.

1972 Select Committee recommendations on constitutional development

- Move from a committee to a cabinet ministerial system.
- Re-designate the High Commissioner as Governor, with the powers of pardon, reserve powers in defence, external affairs, internal security, and police.
- Re-designate the Chief Secretary as Deputy Governor, responsible for the civil service.
- Rename the Governing Council as the Legislative Assembly, with 24 elected and three ex-officio members, and remove the requirement that members read and speak English.
- Extend the term of government from three to four years.

Although Mamaloni liked to claim credit for these constitutional developments, the BSIP had followed a well-trodden path to decolonisation since World War II. John Smith described the usual route to decolonisation in British colonies and territories, followed also in Solomon Islands:⁵⁰

- Begin with a report of a select committee of the legislature, debated by the whole house.
- Hold negotiations between colonial government and Whitehall at Lancaster House.
- Draft an Order-in-Council giving legal expression to agreed proposals.
- Hold general elections prior to independence as a referendum on the constitutional agreements.

Following the select committee's report, changes to the BSIP constitution were agreed to by Whitehall and came into effect in 1974. The amended constitution provided for an elected chief minister, appointed ministers and a cabinet government system, which required the formation of political parties. Solomon Islands political parties have never achieved the size and discipline required for stable politics. Underlying this was the intrinsic difficulty of delivering cohesive national government in a country as culturally diverse and geographically dispersed as Solomon Islands. GovCo and the committee system was abandoned too easily, according to Tony Hughes, who served as secretary to the Local Government Committee chaired by Mamaloni from 1973 to 1974, and head of development planning from 1974 to 1976:

They didn't like it [GovCo] because they didn't have ministerial prestige and privileges but the idea of the GovCo format had a number of very attractive features in the context of Solomon Islands. It's interesting to speculate what might have happened if we'd stayed with it. The way that we're struggling now with political parties and everything you can see that the standard constitution has got all sorts of problems.⁵¹

From firebrand to fireman, 1973 to 1974

Elections were held in May-June 1973 in preparation for a 24-member Legislative Assembly to start the following year. Mamaloni easily won the newly created seat of West Makira with 74% of the vote. His only opponent, Nathaniel Waena from Ulawa, stood little chance against an incumbent who had advocated so vociferously for Makira. Mamaloni was one of only five GovCo members who were returned, which gave him seniority in the new Assembly.⁵² Still only 30 years

⁵⁰ Smith 2011, 184-185.

⁵¹ Interview with Tony Hughes, 2 October 2014.

⁵² The other re-elected members were Willie Betu, Jonathan Fifi'i, David Kausimae, and Rev Peter Thompson.

old, Mamaloni was one of the few experienced parliamentarians in the Assembly. He became a member of the Finance Committee, which was effectively the cabinet, and chair of the Local Government Committee.⁵³

Mamaloni had established a popular profile and was positioning himself for election as Chief Minister in 1974 in a parliamentary ballot. Though still prone to inflammatory rhetoric, he now had to behave more responsibly; his role had changed from lighting fires to putting them out:

[W]e know we will be depending on British aid for some years to come so we are not going to do silly things ... The last council members did a lot of barking, did not get us anywhere; we need to bark silently and bite loudly.⁵⁴

He chastised members for unnecessary motions and questions, advising new members against using too much political jargon, 'sweet and empty catch phrases without action'. He complained about members showing off in the chamber 'with no respect for us [chairmen] and no appreciation of what we do'.⁵⁵

Two young newly elected politicians who ignored his advice were Waita Ben from Guadalcanal and Ashley Wickham, the new member for Honiara. Wickham had defeated Peter Salaka, who had formed the National Union of Workers and then misused union funds. Wickham took over from Mamaloni as a firebrand, jack-in-a-box interjector, and champion of the oppressed. He was antagonised by Mamaloni's patronising tone and said, 'We come here on majority votes from our people, and we are here to speak for our people. We must all have respect for each other'.⁵⁶ Like Mamaloni, Wickham was anti-colonialist and pro-worker, but also more anti-business regarding the Chinese, whom he criticised for 'hell for leather investments in land, building, and rentals'.⁵⁷ Waita Ben also spoke against racial discrimination against Solomon Islanders in Chinese shops.

Mamaloni was pro-business while supporting decent basic wages and having sympathy for the lower-paid. He had a rocky relationship with trade unions, which he regarded as another colonial import, ill-suited to a newly independent and backward country.⁵⁸ He worried that organised wage earners would act against the interests of rural people and local business. He disagreed with prohibiting elected members from having business interests because he wanted members to play a part in local ventures. It was around this time that Mamaloni started his own company, Patosha, on similar lines to island trading companies in Isabel and Malaita that had started in the early 1970s. He continued to denounce expatriate experts, large-scale projects, and Western economics, which he thought humiliated a country of rural people reliant on subsistence agriculture.

⁵³ Mamaloni was the obvious choice as chairman of the Local Government Committee, given his interest in decentralisation and rural development. David Kausimae took over the Commerce and Industry committee, and Willie Betu remained chairman of Education and Social Services. Newly elected Phillip Solodia Funifaka and Dr Gideon Ziloveke later became committee chairmen.

⁵⁴ GovCo, 13 July 1973.

⁵⁵ GovCo, 13 July 1973.

⁵⁶ GovCo, 25 July 1973.

⁵⁷ Ashley Wickham had been a government information officer and contributor to the *Kakamora Reporter*. When he was MP for Honiara he described government, capitalism, and foreign concepts—'like a shoe that does not fit'. He was instrumental in setting up the Consumers Cooperative as an alternative to the Chinese business cartel.

⁵⁸ GovCo, 19 July 1973.

Mamaloni outlined his vision for rural development in a 10-point plan, which included making birth control available to address the alarming population growth rate of 3.5 per cent:

I can easily see a time when there will be half a million people in these islands within the lifetime of some of our members—we cannot expect people to be better off without birth control combined with rural development. Otherwise we will be caught in the developing country trap of poverty, ignorance and disease.⁵⁹

Mamaloni's 10-point plan for rural development, 1973

1. More roads, wharves, transport, and communications to plan rural development.
2. Market and agriculture development in all areas, so everyone can take part in major projects.
3. Manufacturing and processing in rural areas, employing more labour than machines.
4. Decentralise government departments, while staff focus on rural development, not sit in their offices.
5. Decentralise district administration into local councils and get bureaucrats into villages.
6. Reform education to promote and improve the rural way of life.
7. Make it a priority to provide public health and medicines to the lowest level.
8. Examine the costs of services to towns and ensure that rural areas are not subsidising towns.
9. Refuse to be frightened and give into large numbers coming to town—help people in rural areas first.
10. Control the population rate.⁶⁰

Mamaloni acknowledged the importance of addressing geographical and ethnic diversity:

[W]ithout harmony among the different races here there is no hope for the Solomons ... [we] need to solidify the small numerous divisions into one whole body because I believe this is a prerequisite to national identity let alone unity ... our subjects will only feel secure when they see equality given to them in any sphere of development.⁶¹

Mamaloni organised reviews of local government and labour. He promoted local councils and courts. He proposed a local government development policy aimed to strengthen administration and technical support for planning and coordination of local and area plans. The policy was adopted unanimously in November 1973.

Mamaloni's star was firmly in the ascendant by the time of the final GovCo meeting in March 1974. He had set out his manifesto and was straining at the leash to lead cabinet government with the power to make policies and decisions that public servants would have to implement, rather

⁵⁹ GovCo, 13 July 1973. His views changed in later years when he condemned others, particularly foreigners, for promoting population control. In 1990, he accused Tony Hughes of genocide when the Central Bank governor pointed out the problems created by population growth.

⁶⁰ Mamaloni contributed to rapid population growth more than most others by having (at least) nine children of his own by 1979. The population of Solomon Islands reached 500,000 in 2005.

⁶¹ GovCo, 24 July 1973.

than the other way round. And he revelled in his growing status and authority, particularly being able to tell the British what to do and where to go. It was a remarkable change of circumstances from only a few years before.

* * *

Outside of politics, his personal affairs became increasingly entangled and public knowledge. His marriage to Qila was on the rocks but she stayed in Honiara with their children. According to one source, he chased Qila out of their married quarters and burned some of her possessions after he came back from a trip to the UK in June 1971. While campaigning for election in 1970, he had started a relationship with Ellen Ha`ateni, a primary school teacher. When GovCo was not in session and he was not required for committee work, Mamaloni lived with Ellen in Kirakira, where she taught at Campbell School. They married in 1971 and had three children in quick succession—Maria (1971), Millie (1972), and Stephanus (1973).⁶² Mamaloni told his local priest, Lonsdale Usumae, that he had legally dissolved his marriage to Qila and wished to marry Ellen. Bishop John Chisholm replied to Fr Usumae that Mamaloni could marry in a civil marriage, but not in the church.⁶³ According to Ellen, Mamaloni was often away and always busy when he was home, so he had little time for his family. He was unfaithful, they often argued, and there was domestic violence. They separated in 1973 when Ellen was expecting their third child.⁶⁴ Mamaloni also separated from Qila but was legally responsible for supporting her and their children, and he gave Qila money whenever she came to his office.⁶⁵ They divorced in 1972 but he and Qila had another child together, Kate, born in 1975; in the same year Mamaloni also had a son, Audie Murphy, with a third wife Mary.

Mamaloni's serial marriages and infidelities left him open to public and private criticism. As Bishop Chisholm noted, 'his irregular behaviour was in the public view, seen and known by all'.⁶⁶ Alcohol abuse and infidelity were common among politicians in Honiara. In Mamaloni's eyes, his behaviour and multiple wives would have been unremarkable for a traditional *big-man* or chief. However, his womanising and marriages were problematic for a modern politician set to become the first Chief Minister of a highly Christianised country. But throughout his career, risk-taking and scandal were never far away nor far from sight.

⁶² Stephanus later died from malaria or pneumonia in 1982, aged only nine years old.

⁶³ Letter from Bishop John Chisholm to Fr Lonsdale Usumae, 28 April 1971. Copy of correspondence courtesy of Bishop Terry Brown.

⁶⁴ Ellen Ha`ateni, was born in 1948 at Heuru in Arosi 1. She was the only one of Mamaloni's wives who remarried (and some informants argue, was allowed to remarry). After she divorced Mamaloni, she married John Urasuria in 1975. They had six children together and lived at Herenigau, where she taught until she retired in 2003. According to Ellen, John was a kind man and their marriage was a happy one. Interview with Ellen Ha`ateni, 31 March 2009.

⁶⁵ Qila introduced Baddeley Devesi to his future wife, June Barley. When Qila became pregnant with their third child in 1975, Devesi advised Qila that her divorce was invalid and that she should claim maintenance. Mamaloni rang him to tell him 'not to put ideas into the woman's head' (interview with Sir Baddeley Devesi, 4 December 2010). Some informants believe that Qila and Mamaloni were never legally divorced.

⁶⁶ Bishop John Chisholm to Rev Peter Thompson, 6 September 1974. Copy courtesy of Bishop Terry Brown.

Chapter 10. First Chief Minister, 1974 to 1976

The new constitutional arrangements in 1974 replaced the Governing Council (GovCo) with a 24-member Legislative Assembly, which elected a chief minister to appoint and preside over a Council of Ministers. Mamaloni was elected as chief minister, defeating Ben Kinika by 14 votes to 10 in the sixth round of the leadership ballot. On 27 August 1974, he took his oath of office and charge of government at the age of only 31. His first administration, which lasted until elections in June 1976, provided a steep learning curve in the realities of leading a government and dealing with political rivals and opponents both inside and outside the Assembly.⁶⁷

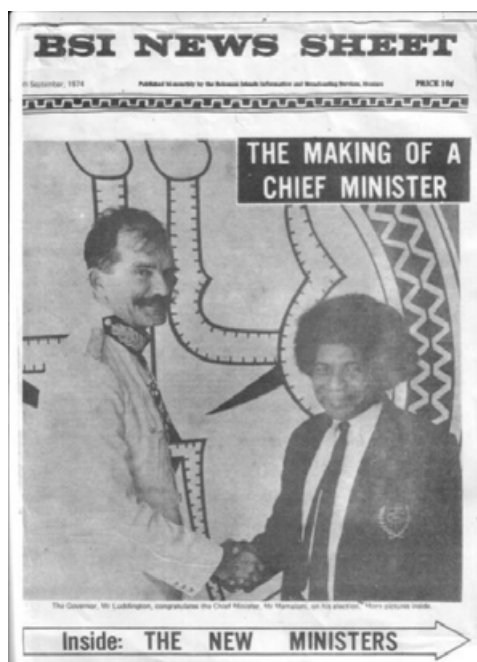


Figure 10.1: Governor Sir Donald Luddington with newly elected Chief Minister Mamaloni wearing his Te Aute blazer, August 1974. Source: *BSIP News Sheet*.

Mamaloni laid out the principles and priorities of his government in an opening speech.

Principles of the Mamaloni administration, 1974 to 1976

1. Decentralisation (local councils should be the effective means of government)
2. Self-reliance (making the best possible use of natural resources)
3. Equitable distribution of aid and economic development
4. Greater responsibility and control over own resources
5. Participation and involvement
6. Pride in unique heritage and cultures
7. Regional cooperation and protection from exploitation and pollution
8. Law and order and constitutional government.

⁶⁷ The only remaining official members in the Legislative Assembly were the Chief Secretary (who became Deputy Governor), Finance Secretary, and Attorney General; all three lost their voting powers upon self-government in 1976.

Mamaloni chose experienced men as ministers—David Kausimae, Willie Betu, Gideon Zoleveke, Rev Peter Thompson, Silas Cheka, and himself. He retained the Home Affairs portfolio, which was responsible for local government reform, his favourite topic. The move to a Westminster-style cabinet government provided a greater role for an opposition and political parties. Most Assembly members were backbenchers (committees engaging all members having been abolished in the new arrangements), leaving them with no role except to be adversarial.

Under GovCo, politicians could blame the committee setup and colonial bureaucrats for government shortcomings but they now had to accept more responsibility. Political parties had a brief and unsuccessful history in the 1960s, and in 1974 there were only two recently formed parties. Prior to the elections in 1973, Mamaloni had formed the People's Progressive Party (PPP), a name he borrowed from the party of Julius Chan in PNG, who was also a young pro-business leader. The second party was the United Solomon Islands Party (USIPA) formed by Benedict Kinika, which included Phillip Solodia Funifaka, Gideon Zoleveke, and Ashley Wickham.⁶⁸ Independents, led by Willie Betu, held the balance of power in the Assembly.

Differences between the PPP and USIPA reflected allegiances to Anglican and Catholic schools respectively. Waita Ben from Guadalcanal attacked the anti-Catholic bias of the government: 'I am appalled at the anti-RC feeling in PPP—we do not want another Northern Ireland. PPP could stand for Peoples Perverted/Pornographic/Purposeless Party'. Mamaloni was infuriated by their 'disgraceful and treacherous' attempts at religious hostility, and rounded on his opponents:

God knows I am not a model Christian. But I am a human being and I cannot bear and will not stand for attempts to divide my people and turn them one against the other just because they happen to have been to different schools and to worship on Sundays or Saturdays in different churches ... artificial divisions—all of them imported from overseas by the missionaries themselves.⁶⁹

At the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly in October 1974, the opposition walked out in protest against the appointments of Rev Peter Thompson (a white man) to Cabinet and a white planter, J.H. Page, as Deputy Speaker. Mamaloni, who had gained notoriety for his attacks on expatriates, now defended them:

I have had a lot of experience of dealing with expatriates. A few are completely useless, a few are extremely valuable and most of them are just ordinary people with some technical knowledge which we can make use of if we can handle them properly. They are of course handicapped by not being Solomon Islanders. But if you treat them with kindness and understanding like I always treat my secretaries and apply firm discipline, you can get good work out of them and even inspire them with loyalty to our country's objective ... and without getting as excited about the colour of their skins as some of the honourable members do.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kinika stood down as leader of the USIPA because he and Mamaloni were both from Makira and it was considered unsuitable to have both government and opposition leaders from the same island.

⁶⁹ Mamaloni, Legislative Assembly, 10 October 1974.

⁷⁰ Mamaloni, Legislative Assembly, 10 October 1974.

Phillip Solodia gave Mamaloni a dose of his own medicine, accusing him of 'licking the shoes of the colonial bureaucracy'.⁷¹ Solodia, Ben, and Wickham were aggressive in their attacks but all three later became government ministers under reshuffles. Mamaloni quickly learned that choosing the best person for the job came second to the need to maintain numbers and control the opposition. The acrimony finally lessened when, in December 1975, Mamaloni brought in five members of the opposition to form a coalition government. Ministerial horse-trading became a trademark of his leadership and Solomon Island politics.

Despite often-acrimonious debates, there was a heavy legislative workload in the lead up to self-government with many colonial and legal issues technicalities to be resolved. These included setting a timetable for independence and transferring colonial legal titles, reforming local government, education, and land, and setting up new institutions such as the National Provident Fund and a Monetary Authority (the forerunner of the Central Bank). Structural economic problems also had to be addressed, such as an underdeveloped agricultural sector, export vulnerability to world prices and demand, dependency on imports, and inflation (averaging more than 10% p.a.).

Mamaloni also had to deal with unrest in Honiara from students and trade unions. Student strikes over conditions at the Honiara Training Institute proved relatively easy to defuse; but trade unions were a good deal more troublesome. Bart Ulufa'alu, leader of the Solomon Islands General Workers' Union (SIGWU), was keen to flex the union's political muscle and prove his own credentials. One of the first Solomon Islanders to earn a degree (in economics), he had returned from the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) with experience as a leader in student politics. In August 1975, the SIGWU organised a strike by stevedores in pursuit of a 30% wage rise and recognition of the union. A tribunal failed to award the union demands and Ulufa'alu raised the stakes and led a general strike that affected 24 companies. Mamaloni negotiated with Ulufa'alu at a meeting and agreed on a five-point plan to resolve the dispute. However, Ulufa'alu broke his agreement when he led a demonstration of union members to the Governor's office; he was convicted of unlawful assembly in September 1975, and again in December 1975. The unions demanded new general elections, as well as unrealistic demands that went far beyond working conditions and pay, such as the removal of expatriate employers who displeased the union.² Unions also made demands on political issues such as Bougainville, education, broadcasting, mining, cattle, tax, alienated lands, and delaying self-government.

Mamaloni denounced the strikes as a political move 'aimed at giving power to a small group of irresponsible people in Honiara'. He was critical of Ulufa'alu and union leaders who were 'violently and foolishly breaking things, trying to frighten people and getting into trouble with the law'.⁷² Mamaloni demanded common sense and sensible leadership from both employers and employees. The fractious relationship between the two men later had consequences when Ulufa'alu was elected opposition leader ahead of Mamaloni, following the death of Francis Talasasa. A new era of big-man rivalry had arrived that was both political and highly personal.

⁷¹ Phillip Solodia Funifaka (hereafter Solodia), Legislative Assembly, 10 October 1974. He took over from Kinika as leader of USIPA, but soon joined Mamaloni's government.

⁷² Mamaloni, Legislative Assembly, 17 January 1974.

Decentralisation and localisation

Mamaloni drove the agenda for decentralisation from 1973 to 1974 as chairman of the GovCo Local Government Committee. He sought to counter the over-allocation of resources to Honiara and to satisfy aspirations for more power and resources at the local level. Gideon Zoleveke took over the portfolio from Mamaloni in late 1974 and presented a Local Government Amendment Bill which sought to give political control to local councils and coordinate planning at district level, taking over functions previously exercised by DCs, DOs, and administrative officers. Mamaloni wanted to localise the bureaucracy as quickly as possible. This was his opportunity to use his newfound authority to free himself from expatriates and to exact revenge for humiliations endured under them.

For years we were patted on our heads— Mamaloni ⁷³

I have personal views on this [localisation] based on my own experience, which is shared by most of my people who have worked in the public service or private companies with expatriates. I worked in the public service at a time when it was a great and unusual event for a local officer to take over from an expatriate. The bitterness and frustration of our own people who for year after year were patronised, patted on the head, laughed at in the expatriate clubs, shouted at in the office, and denied the training and help which would have equipped us for promotion. All this is in our blood and is still not understood by expatriates, especially the long service carriers of the white man's burden.

We are determined to control our own destiny as best we can. So the top policy making jobs must be held by our own people ... jobs being created by our development must be aimed at our people and our people must move as quickly into our jobs now held by expatriates. Localisation must be based on intensive and effective training by re-definition of aims and more inspired leadership.

The real potential of most of us has never been realised under the colonial government ... people have the brains and education to take over the jobs now held by expatriates. Some of our public servants are some of the best in the South Pacific and would have gone to far higher positions overseas than they have so far been given in their own country ... We shall need and welcome expatriate assistance in some fields for many years to come but it must be reduced to a level which does not get in the way of our national objectives.

The USIPA opposition had fully supported the decentralisation policy in 1973 but now opposed it in the Legislative Assembly, leading Mamaloni to accuse them of opposition for the sake of it. He was also forced to withdraw an Education Plan and condemned this lack of cooperation by the opposition:

When I extend a hand of cooperation ... I do not want it cursed or spat upon. Members of this house know that I can fight political fights with the best of them. But I do not want our people to see we here are throwing insults at each other or carrying our private jealousies into the pages of PIM [Pacific Islands Monthly]. If we do that we shall degrade the democratic political institutions we have been trying so hard to set up.⁷⁴

⁷³ *News Drum*, 7 March 1975.

⁷⁴ Mamaloni, Legislative Assembly, 17 January 1975.

Independence coming—ready or not

Independence by 1976 seemed probable and the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office were keen ‘to get independence from the Pacific’ as soon as possible.⁷⁵ In January 1975, Joan Lestor, the British Under-Secretary of State talked to Mamaloni in Honiara without advisors present as ‘politician to politician’. Asked by Lestor what he wanted, Mamaloni responded, ‘Internal self-government, that’s all’, to which she replied, ‘Is that all? Of course you may have it, before the year’s end, it’s the next step anyway’.⁷⁶ Mamaloni claimed that he was in no hurry:

I don’t really care—I’d rather not be too precise about target dates ... There is a great deal of re-thinking of policy to be done and we are insisting that all key decisions are made by our own people. This takes time and we have also to clear away the entanglements, sometimes deliberately set up under the colonial administration... We are not impressed with people who tell us what has happened in other colonial territories after what they say was too hasty independence. We have not been independent before ... when we say we are ready for independence that will mean that we have consulted our people and prepared our plans and that will be the time when we take the big step into nationhood.⁷⁷

There was much debate about the country’s readiness for independence and many feared that the process was moving too fast. Mamaloni led a delegation to London for talks in May 1975, with Willie Betu, Ashley Wickham, Phillip Solodia, and Solomon Mamaloni representing each of the four districts. A date for self-government was set for the end of 1975, with new elections to be held in 1976, and independence 18 months later. The British insisted on elections prior to independence to create a mandate and ensure the public understood the changes. Mamaloni argued for independence before the elections and the *Kakamora Reporter* suggested that he wanted people to think he was responsible for self-government and independence.¹⁸

Independence was granted to PNG in September 1975 and to Solomon Islands three years later. Both were threatened by secessionist movements demanding independence. In PNG, North Solomons Province (comprising the islands of Bougainville, Buka, and outlier atolls) shared a border and strong traditional links with the western part of Solomon Islands. It was the most advanced province in PNG thanks to the Panguna copper mine on Bougainville, although most of the profits went to Rio Tinto Zinc, its subsidiary Conzinc Riotinto of Australia (CRA), and the PNG government. Bougainvilleans demanded better returns for their resources, and a secessionist movement began in the late 1960s. Conscious of the need to maintain good relations with PNG, the Mamaloni administration took the line that the Solomon Islands was neutral in the matter of recognising a separate Bougainville. Waita Ben from Guadalcanal accused Mamaloni of being weak, gutless and fearful for not recognising Bougainville.

In the Solomon Islands, demands for succession by the Western Council had emerged in May 1975 and three years later it refused to take part in independence celebrations. Twenty years later, Mamaloni recalled visiting the west in 1975:

⁷⁵ Clark 2004, 228.

⁷⁶ Clark 2004, 228–229.

⁷⁷ *Solomons News Drum*, 28 February 1975.

I went to the West and there was a big demonstration at the wharf at Gizo so we sat down and I said, 'I think the idea of secession is not good, it will never work because when you go to the west, it's already a cosmopolitan place; you have everybody there, Malaita people, Makira people, so if it's west for west only, you can forget that idea, it will never work'. We gave them a bit more, I said 'OK, we'll get you a bit more in your copra returns'. These were public funds—it was just a matter of fiddling with the percentages, 'specially for timber they were producing. All the timber, I think at that time, came from the Western province.⁷⁸

The Letcher Mint affair, 1975

The defining moment of Mamaloni's first administration came when Mamaloni sensationally announced his resignation as chief minister under a banner headline, 'I caused embarrassment'. The scandal was created by his agreement with an American company, Letcher Mint, to produce special commemorative coins for self-government. Soon after his elevation to chief minister, he was introduced in September 1974 to a Letcher Mint representative, Barney Phillips, by Martin Wickham—elder brother of Ashley Wickham, the member for Honiara. He met again with the company in November 1974 during on an official visit to Japan. Letcher Mint used high pressure salesmanship (flattery and inducements) to persuade Mamaloni to sign an agreement without the approval of his ministers back home. The agreement included a design for the commemorative coins with an inscription and on one side, the head of Mamaloni and on the reverse, a cuscus (a large possum and an emblem of Arosi). Reportedly 10,000 gold coins worth \$100 and 40,000 gold-on-silver coins worth \$30 were to be minted and the coins would be legal tender. The coins were supposed to be legal tender, and \$130,000 would be paid to the government, plus the company agreed to spend USD \$250,000 to advertise and promote the Solomon Islands and attainment of self-government.

The *Pacific Islands Monthly* produced pictures of the \$30 coin with the inscriptions, 'Freedom and Self Government 1975' (Figure 10.2a) and the emblem of a large possum (cuscus) (Figure 10.2b).



Figures 10.2a and 10.2b: The proposed \$30 Letcher Mint coin to commemorate Solomon Islands self-government due in 1975 and which led to Mamaloni's resignation. Source: *Pacific Islands Monthly*.

⁷⁸ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni, 1995.

The \$30 coin was explained in the same issue of the *Pacific Islands Monthly* in January 1976:

[A] centre showing the Solomons animal, the Cuscus....and bears the inscription, "Freedom and self-government. The "freedom" part of it might have annoyed Whitehall. The reverse side (see Figure 2a) shows the Solomon Islands coat of arms with the Lion of the Royal Standard, symbolic of British protection (or perhaps domination) across the top. The remainder is quartered. Top left there is an eagle with folded wings, representing Malaita District; top right, a turtle for the Western District; bottom left, a dancing shield representing the Eastern and Central Districts; and, bottom right, frigate birds for the Outer Islands.

Apart from the word 'freedom' causing offence in Whitehall, the deal ran into legal problems with colonial authorities. Currency and coinage were still the responsibility of British authorities and no other face was permitted apart from the Queen's. In September 1975, the financial secretary and attorney-general, both colonial officers, decided that the agreement was so badly drafted that it could not legally bind the government. Moreover, the royalties were deemed too small and it was doubted that the standard of coins would be good enough for circulation.



Figure 10.3: Mamaloni resigns over the Letcher Mint affair, November 1975. Source: *Solomons News Drum*.

The Letcher Mint affair, as it came to be known, led Mamaloni to resign on 18 November 1975 but only 13 days later, he was re-elected to the top job by 18 votes to 4 in almost farcical circumstances. According to Ashley Wickham, he and other opposition members conferred with the attorney-general, who assured them that the issue was merely unprocedural, rather than a criminal matter, as there was no evidence of money changing hands. Seeing little value in taking over with only six months to an election, the opposition members told Mamaloni that they would re-nominate him if he resigned and apologised. Waita Ben stated that Mamaloni was the best person to clean up his own mess. Mamaloni obliged and then appointed five members of the opposition to his cabinet. Only two previous ministers kept their positions, and only one had the same portfolio. Mamaloni made a virtue of necessity, claiming later that he was appointing people from different factions for the purpose of national unity. The manoeuvre of ditching members of his own party and bringing five opposition members into the Cabinet was a precursor of the political coup he executed in 1990.

In his defence, Mamaloni claimed to have not agreed for his image to be on the coin but admitted that he had failed to consult with his colleagues or examine the agreement properly. He justified his actions by saying that he had wanted to use funds from Letcher Mint to pay for a proper parliament house.⁷⁹ The Inquiry into the Lecher Mint Affair in May 1976 found that Mamaloni had acted unconstitutionally but that there was no evidence of bribery.⁸⁰



Figure 10.4: Having resigned over the Letcher Mint affair, Mamaloni was re-sworn as Chief Minister by Governor Sir Donald Luddington, December 1975. Source: *Solomons News Drum*.

A coalition government allowed Mamaloni to see out his term until elections in June 1976. However, he had lost a great deal of political skin, and the affair almost certainly cost him the leadership ballots following the next election. It was a precursor of the scandals that dogged each of his administrations after Independence. The affair demonstrated his character and leadership flaws—autocratic, impetuous, a casual attitude to formality, and a susceptibility to carpetbaggers. It also displayed his resilience and ability to slip out of the noose. These traits became evident in each of his periods in power, infuriating his critics and delighting his supporters.

Self-government, 1976

Mamaloni led the country to self-government, the final step before independence. He was unable to take much pride or pleasure in the occasion because it was marred by a protest by Ulufa'alu and the SIGWU, bizarrely against self-government.²⁸ Despite requests not to ruin the important milestone, Ulufa'alu flexed trade unions' political muscle to demand that self-government be delayed. This was opportunistic, because Ulufa'alu was even more nationalist and anti-colonialist than Mamaloni, as the latter recalled in 1995:

⁷⁹ Legislative Assembly and later National Parliament meetings were held in the High Court building. A Solomon National Parliament building was completed in 1993 funded by the US government as part of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal.

⁸⁰ BSIP 1976, Report of the Inquiry into the Lecher Mint Affair.

Bart Ulufa`alu came back and started a union then the union went into politics and they really resisted self-government. We were not ready, according to them. I laughed quietly and said that's the fellow yelling his head off at the community centre who wanted to get rid of the colonials and here he is protesting about self-government. I told him afterwards, I said you have so many faces, you double faced bugger. It was a fight for wages; conditions were very bad, and they were yelling their heads off about the terms and conditions for MPs, and then protest against self-government was the biggest one, when they smashed all the buildings along the road and the police had to use tear gas.⁸¹



Figure 10.5: Police responding to demonstrations at the birth of self-government, 2 January 1976. Source: *Solomons News Drum*.

During the strike action in 1975, Ulufa`alu denied he would ever stand for politics and said that he would retire back to his village after he had finished serving his members.



Figure 10.6: Mamaloni addressing demonstrators on 2 January 1976. Source: *Solomon News Drum*.

Mamaloni led the country for another six months until the June 1976 elections ended his first administration.⁸² His final speech in the Legislative Assembly was sparsely attended, showing how

⁸¹ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni, 1995.

⁸² There was one more Cabinet change in May 1976, when Jeriel Ausuta resigned because he did not agree with the way Cabinet was run.

much support he had lost.⁸³ He blamed Assembly members, the public service, and the unions for destabilising his government, while accepting that he would be blamed as the leader of the government. He said that his government would go down in history as one ‘filled with walkouts, reshuffles, resignations and political disobedience’. It was the shape of his administrations to come.

1976 elections—Mamaloni ran and then ran away

The 1976 elections saw 177 candidates stand for the Legislative Assembly, which expanded from 24 to 38 seats in preparation for independence. Mamaloni retained the seat of West Makira and barely needed to campaign, winning 78% of the vote against his only opponent, John Marahora. Fourteen of the 24 existing members were returned, including five other ministers. Peter Kenilorea was elected unopposed in East `Are`Are. In May 1976, Ulufa`alu and the SIGWU had started the National Democratic Party (NADEPA), winning six seats, including Ulufa`alu who was returned in the seat of Honiara. Other new members included former politicians Mariano Kelesi and Matthew Belamatanga, while others would become well known, such as Francis Billy Hilly, Paul Tovua, Sethuel Kelly, and Daniel Ho`ota. In the ballot for chief minister to lead government, Mamaloni lost to newcomer Kenilorea in the seventh round of voting. A majority (21 to 16) of members trusted Kenilorea—a teacher, an upstanding SSEC lay preacher, and a political cleanskin—as a more reliable leader to take them to independence.

BALLOT NO.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7-8	9	10	TALLY
F. ADIRAI	5	6	6	5	5	5				3
D. HO`OTA	2	1								7
M. BELAMATANGA	1									8
P. KENILOREA	2	4	3	3						5
B. MARAHORA	9	0	2	14	17	16	21			1
S. MAMALONI	4	2	1							6
G. ZOROVANT	0	13	14	15	15	16	16			2
	4	3	3	3	3					4

Figure 10.7: The tally board for the election of Chief Minister, 1976. Source: Solomon Island Parliament House.

Mamaloni was not overly disappointed and in a 1995 interview said:

My feelings were mixed. I needed a rest because they'd given me a hell of a time while I was chief minister. First, the issue of Letcher Mint—people capitalised on it as a big scandal and I ended up in a committee of inquiry, and then there was mass rioting by unions almost every week. 1975 and 1976 were the worst two years.⁸⁴

⁸³ His loss of support included family friend and fellow Makiran, Jack Campbell, who went to see Peter Kenilorea, the DC for Makira, and successfully urged him to run in the 1976 elections. Kenilorea had unsuccessfully stood for election in Honiara in 1970 and East `Are`Are in 1973 but had barely campaigned.

⁸⁴ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni, 1995.

Kenilorea came with considerable administrative experience. He was one of the very few Solomon Islanders who became a district commissioner and he had worked for Mamaloni in 1974 to 1975 as secretary to the chief minister and deputy secretary to cabinet. In his memoir and interviews, Kenilorea said that his experience of working for Mamaloni was invaluable practice when he himself became chief minister. He wanted a constructive unity government involving all the members, not a repetition of the previous acrimonious assembly. He knew Mamaloni well and offered his old schoolmate a place in the Cabinet; Mamaloni declined, although he intimated that he might accept a post in future if there was an increase in the number of ministries. Solomon politics and post-independence history would have turned out differently if Mamaloni had agreed to add his experience and work under Kenilorea. One possibility for his decision is that he did not want to be involved any further with constitutional negotiations in London, which he had not enjoyed at all in 1975.⁸⁵ A more straightforward explanation is that he would not, or could not, work under another leader.

Having refused a cabinet position, Mamaloni lost the ballot for the position of opposition leader to the newly elected Francis Talasasa Aqorau.⁸⁶ The first Solomon Islander to gain a university degree, Aqorau was a firebrand and fervent anti-colonialist—he described colonialism as ‘the root of all evil ... like an umbrella that spread throughout the country’.⁸⁷ He became a district commissioner despite his rebelliousness, quick temper, and fondness for drink. Mamaloni found it difficult to work under Aqorau, although they were personally close, linked by family, cricket, drink, and fondness for New Zealand, As Mamaloni recalled:

When he [Kenilorea] took over, there was no problem. Where we had all the problems was in the opposition, where this firebrand Bart Ulufa`alu was marching in the streets and wanting to become the leader of the opposition. At that time we had two firebrands, Francis Aqorau and Bart Ulufa`alu and we were quite open—we said, you people who are talking against us, well you try it.⁸⁸

According to his son, Transform Aqorau, Francis Aqorau was a man on a mission, with a sense of urgency in everything he did.⁸⁹ Kenilorea did not have a majority in the Legislative Assembly and it was not long before the Opposition, with Mamaloni as chief whip, moved a no-confidence motion against him in November 1976. However, the opposition was split into factions and divided by big-man competition between Aqorau, Ulufa`alu, and Mamaloni. Kenilorea survived, serving out a full four-year term with the support of Independents.

Mamaloni may have lost political office but not his anticolonial views. In the 1976 assembly, he returned to his pet themes of colonial bureaucracy and the need to press ahead with decentralisation and localisation. A major point of difference with Kenilorea was Mamaloni’s dislike of centralised government, large joint-venture schemes, and subsidy of government enterprises at the expense of small business and rural farmers. He attacked the Honiara

⁸⁵ Interview with Ashley Wickham, 5 January 2010.

⁸⁶ Francis Talasasa added his mother’s name Aqorau during the 1976 election, which he won narrowly. Two other members of the Talasasa clan contested the elections in neighbouring constituencies.

⁸⁷ *News Drum*, 19 September 1976.

⁸⁸ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni, 1995.

⁸⁹ Interview with Transform Aqorau, 31 October 2012.

bureaucracy and highly paid public servants seen in clubs during official hours as ‘irresponsible and dishonest’. He decried colonial red tape and accused Trevor Clark, the deputy governor (formerly the chief secretary position), of controlling the recruitment of redundant colonials from other British colonies. He wanted to sell Government House, occupied by Sir Colin Allan—the universally disliked last colonial governor, who had replaced the popular Sir Donald Luddington in October 1976.⁹⁰ At Independence, Allan behaved disgracefully towards Baddeley Devesi, the new governor-general—refusing to lower the British flag at Government House, not allowing him to move into Government House on time, and removing valuable artefacts. He refused to brief Devesi, and his wife refused to show June Devesi through the house.⁹¹

Mamaloni’s shock resignation and political exile

The first year of self-government ended tragically with the death of opposition leader Francis Aqorau, who died suddenly while playing tennis on 28 December, most probably from a heart attack. His death was ascribed to sorcery (called *poisin* in Pijin), as is often the case in Solomon Islands unless a person is very old or very young. Mamaloni told his wife Mary that in custom terms (*kastom*) this meant that the death was meant for him.⁹² Although he was unafraid, he never underestimated the power of *kastom*, *poisin*, and Malaitan power. John Saunana recalled going with Mamaloni to the Guadalcanal Club to pay compensation money to Willie Kai and a Malaitan group as insurance against any harm coming to him. Afterwards, Mamaloni shook hands with the group saying, ‘Everything is OK now’.⁹³ Solo appeared happy to Saunana but he nevertheless resigned the following week, and years later gave his version of events.

Why Mamaloni resigned in 1977—in his own words ⁹⁴

At the time I was also running a small community business ... a little bit of Kausimae style you know ... Maasina ... I had something called Patosha. We had about three boats then and there was no management. The other one [reason] was very personal. According to sources, some people from Langalanga wanted to terminate my life. There were widely circulated rumours that people were marking me to knock me off, terminate me because I became Chief Minister and it looked as though I would be again. This was almost nation-wide. Around Christmas and New Year my house at Vura was surrounded by people—friends of the family, eastern people from Santa Cruz, Reef Islands, Tikopia ... everywhere ... they said “We’re here to protect you—they are going to kill you”. But instead of me dying it was Francis Aqorau who died. This thing went on for years afterwards ... I never feared for my life. People create rumours and when they come from family friends, you’ve got to believe them. When you look back at it, it’s a typical Solomon Islands situation, believing in superstition and all that. Anyway, I went off.

⁹⁰ Sir Colin Allan KCMG, OBE (1921–1993) was a New Zealander. He worked in Malaita as a DO and DC during and after Maasina Rule, going on to hold senior administrative positions from 1954 to 1975 in Honiara, New Hebrides and Seychelles, before returning as the last governor of Solomon Islands before independence. Peter Kenilorea fell out with Allan over his performance in the constitutional talks in 1977 and refused to meet with him for weekly briefings. Deputy governor Trevor Clark found him impossible to work with and in his memoir calls Allan, ‘Ichabod’, a malicious priest ‘without glory’ mentioned in the first Book of Samuel (Clark 2004, 246–255).

⁹¹ Interview with Sir Baddeley Devesi, 12 December 2010.

⁹² Interview with Mary Mamaloni, 16 November 2013.

⁹³ A payment to compensate for the accusations against Malaitans. John Saunana was elected to the seat of West Makira in January 1977 in a by-election held simultaneously with one to replace Francis Aqorau. Interview with John Saunana, 24 November 2010.

⁹⁴ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni, 1995.

Mamaloni went from man of the moment to yesterday's man. He had more than enough reasons for resigning, which relieved him of several burdens. One was his unwillingness to work under Ulufa`alu, who had become the new opposition leader.⁹⁵ He also needed rest and time to lick his wounds from leadership defeats. He had considerable financial pressures, including demands for assistance from his constituents. He also had to cover some expensive habits on a backbencher's salary—cigarettes, alcohol, and betelnut—and hospitality, not to mention a new wife and paying maintenance for two former wives and seven children. His personal life had become even more complicated—he had separated from Ellen in 1974 and started a relationship with Mary around that time.⁹⁶ By resigning, he could pursue his business and private interests out of the limelight.

Mamaloni's slide from atop 'the greasy pole' (Disraeli's apt description of politics) was dramatic. As we will see in the next chapter, his political exile saw him manage a copra plantation at Vatu on the north Guadalcanal coast and a beach trading operation in Arosi. However, his exile was only temporary, and he soon returned to centre stage. Well might it have been said of him— 'you can take the man out of politics, but you can't take the politics out of the man'.

⁹⁵ Ulufa`alu suffered reputational damage from repeated appearances in court for unlawful assembly, being drunk and disorderly, and womanising. In 1978, he served two months in jail for drunken affray, along with Francis Saemala, Secretary to PM Kenilorea. When Ulufa`alu was jailed, he issued a statement claiming to be Solomon Islands' first political prisoner—conveniently forgetting the thousands of political prisoners from his own island who had been imprisoned during Maasina Rule.

⁹⁶ Bishop Chisholm advised that his second marriage (to Ellen) would need to be dissolved by custom by repaying bride price if he wished to be free to marry Mary. Letter, Bishop John Chisholm, 6 September 1974.

Chapter 11. Out of Politics, into Business, 1977 to 1979

While Peter Kenilorea was leading independence negotiations with Britain, Mamaloni was occupying himself with his business, Patosha, which stood for ‘People’s Attempt towards Self Help Association’. He had started Patosha in 1973 to market copra and trade goods in Arosi. It was one of several provincial development companies started earlier by other politicians.⁹⁷ Shareholders bought shares in the company through small contributions of cash or copra, and were also encouraged to start village stores (‘canteens’) and to plant communally owned coconut trees.

Patosha had trade stores in Arosi at Ngarigohu and Maro`u Bay, plus a separate copra trading arm. The company operated two ships (M.V. *Julie and Gopal*) and had the periodic loan of a government vessel, the *Laumoa*.⁹⁸ Its ships sailed up to four times a month along the Makira, Ugi, and Ulawa coasts, carrying goods bought on credit from the Chinese trader Leong Hang and bags from the Copra Board. The ships ‘beach traded’, which meant buying copra, trochus, and beche-de-mer from smallholder producers, and selling them goods in exchange. People could get better prices through beach trading than were offered by Chinese traders. On the outward journey, the copra bags were dropped off at points along the way and paying passengers were also taken on board. Three days later, the ships returned to load up copra, paying 15c/kg, which was worth 30c/kg landed in Honiara, and traded for store goods. When the ships returned to Honiara, the smallholders’ produce was sold and Leong Hang was repaid. The Patosha office was situated above the Y. Sato store on Constitution Avenue, leading down to the Point Cruz wharf. Chinese trader Leong Hang also occupied the office above Y. Sato.

Patosha’s copra trading arm included a coconut plantation, leased from Mrs Giselle McColl, situated en route to Makira at Vatu, 50 km east of Honiara. Employing a mainly Makiran labour force, Mamaloni followed in his father’s footsteps as a plantation manager and journeyed back and forth from Vatu. When he was in Honiara, Mamaloni could be found in the Patosha office, storying over betel nut with his feet on the desk, or drinking at the Honiara Club, according to Mathias Sitana, a Patosha manager from 1974 to 1976. Sitana resigned because he grew tired of working ‘too hard for a boss who did nothing’.⁹⁹ Another former manager, Ben Aharo, recalled that Mamaloni, ‘used to travel to Makira to relax, not to manage. He would go out fishing all night or play *kura* (a favourite card game), chew betel nut, and *stori*’.¹⁰⁰

Patosha had a considerable turnover of copra and cash, which allowed Mamaloni to buy and renovate a house in Honiara.¹⁰¹ But the business became a *ranlus* (loss-making) operation, largely

⁹⁷ Other provincial development companies were the Malaita Development Co started by Rev Peter Thompson, the Maasina Development Co started by David Kausimae in 1967-8, and the Isabel Development Co started by Willie Betu in 1971. In Makira, Ben Kinika had also started the Gari Farmers’ Association. Of the various development companies stated in the 1970s, only the Isabel Development Company survived.

⁹⁸ Mamaloni was fond of acronyms, and the name of the MV Gopal stood for ‘God, People and Land’. Interview with Gabriel Hareni, 5 April 2010.

⁹⁹ Interview with Mathias Sitana, 28 December 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ben Aharo, 20 April 2010.

¹⁰¹ The house at Vura 1 was bought for \$3,000 in the early 1970s and sold in 1979 for \$40,000 to fund the launch of the People’s Alliance Party. Interviews with Mathias Sitana, 28 December 2010, and Mary Mamaloni, 16 November 2013.

because he used the company as a personal bank. He wrote cheques to be cashed at Chinese stores or organised for goods to be taken on credit, as well as food and alcohol for his own household.¹⁰² He helped friends with cash and school fees, including for his brothers and Rex Horoi. His finance manager, Dick Annett, complained about cheques being issued with no accountability, but was told to ‘just put them under Solo’s expenses’.¹⁰³ As signatories to the account, Sitana and Annett were asked to sign cheques for up to \$50,000 to Mamaloni. He could not say ‘no’ to the many people who made demands and conversely, few said ‘no’ to him. According to Ben Aharo, ‘Solo’ did not know how to manage a business. He was a good planner but overrode managers’ decisions, which made it difficult for the business to run properly. He employed people he trusted or liked, as opposed to people who could do the work. Managers were appointed without any qualifications or experience—including his brothers. In 1976, he pulled his younger brother Jackson Sunaone out of Form 5 at KGVI and made him a manager at the age of 19.¹⁰⁴

Two years later, at an official opening of a new trade store in 1978 at Maro`u Bay, Jackson claimed that the company had served 3,800 members, and had survived despite financial difficulties and failures since it was founded. A year later, Patosha folded.¹⁰⁵ and its assets were given away or sold at below value to pay off debts.¹⁰⁶ Few of its nearly 4,000 members were repaid for their shares. The ships *Julie* and *Gopal* were sold at a loss and the *Laumoa* returned to government service. The failure of Patosha was hardly unusual for a local enterprise in the Solomons—indeed, it is an exceptional business that can survive the demands for sharing by *wantoks* and relatives.¹⁰⁷

Small business remained a core part of Mamaloni’s political philosophy. In January 1978, he established the Solomons Small Business Association, with himself as chairman, to represent small businesses that were not represented by either the Chamber of Commerce or Cooperative Association. On the front page of *Solomon Toktok*, he criticised the Kenilorea government for ignoring small businesses while supporting large joint ventures, foreign companies, and cooperatives, arguing: ‘Small business is vital to growth, the only vein and blood of development that will penetrate into the poorest parts and people after independence’.¹⁰⁸

During his break from politics, Mamaloni returned to creative writing with the play *Aedo*, the name of the main character.¹⁰⁹ The play was written in Pijin and proved popular with Solomon Islands radio audiences.

¹⁰² According to multiple informants, Mamaloni indebtedness to traders, such as Y. Ping, Kwan Hung, Leong Hang, Leong Ching, and Y. Sato, began in the 1970s and allowed him to dispense goods and cash throughout his career.

¹⁰³ Interview with Mathias Sitana.

¹⁰⁴ Later in life, Jackson considered being taken out of school to work with Patosha as ‘a blessing in disguise’. He went on to have a long career in the copra business and was a board member of the Commodity and Export Marketing Authority and chairman from 1995 to 2001. He was elected as a provincial MP several times and MP for West Makira from 2000 to 2001 after Mamaloni died. Interview with Jackson Sunaone, 23 November 2013.

¹⁰⁵ *Solomons News Drum*, 30 April 1978.

¹⁰⁶ Mamaloni appeared in court at the beginning of 1979 for ignoring a court order to repay \$1,130 owed to Giselle McColl, owner of the Vatu plantation. He agreed to repay the money over 10 months.

¹⁰⁷ Reciprocity and the pressure for generosity by relatives and kinsmen who cannot be refused has been called ‘demand sharing’ (Peterson 1993).

¹⁰⁸ *Solomons Toktok*, 25 January 1978.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Aedo’ meant a cigarette butt and, according to Peter Kenilorea, was a coded reference to what remained of a white man’s cigarette for Solomon Islanders. In colloquial Pijin, it also meant a butt crack (at the top of the buttocks). and was culturally insulting.

***Aedo*, Mamaloni's character and play**

Aedo was the first major literary work in Pijin by a Solomon Islander. Written for radio, much of the play is autobiographical and very funny, but also a biting social commentary on urban life and modernisation in the Solomons. The title character, *Aedo*, is a middle-aged man—Mamaloni was 35 at the time—who has been working in the public service for a number of years. He finds urban life alienating and confusing. His trials and tribulations include family problems, insufficient cash, conservatism, frustrations with his superiors, colonial racism, Western doctrines, and commercialisation. *Aedo* contained swearing, rudeness, and suggestions not considered suitable for broadcast, such as squeaking bedsprings and a conversation while on the toilet. The play was banned because 'it was depicting a lifestyle not in accordance with the traditional ways of life'.¹¹⁰

Three episodes were broadcast on SIBC radio in October 1978 before a script for an upcoming episode, *Aedo at Easter*, was considered unsuitable because it included ideas that Jesus had not been crucified and had gone to India. Told by the government not to broadcast the programme, SIBC proposed using one of the earlier episodes instead but in April 1979, Minister for Law and Information, Colin Gauwane, used his powers to ban *Aedo* altogether.¹¹¹

And the band played on ... to Independence, 1978

During Mamaloni's political hiatus, Kenilorea and members of the Legislative Assembly negotiated the endgame with Britain. A constitutional committee set up in 1975 had consulted widely and concluded that the nation wanted a constitutional monarchy rather than a republic. Independence was scheduled for 1977, but this was delayed by a year to settle three contentious issues—land ownership, citizenship, and the financial settlement from Britain.¹¹² As Kenilorea explained in 1995:

I thought they were going to force it on us that non-Indigenous people would have equal rights to land and that was just not on as far as I was concerned. They were also trying to make it very easy to have citizenship here and I said there's no problem in having citizenship but please do not relate that to land ownership, which is to do with our own affinity and affiliation to our own custom rights and traditions.¹¹³

The British authorities wanted to guarantee citizenship protection for non-Indigenous people, but Solomon Islands politicians dug in their heels.¹¹⁴ Gilbertese (i-Kiribati) immigrants were a particularly sensitive issue in Western District, where they had been resettled from the Phoenix Islands by colonial authorities—the Western Pacific High Commission. Eventually, it was agreed that they would have perpetual title to the specific land they had been granted on Gizo and Wagina Islands in the Western District. Another non-Indigenous group were the Chinese, who had long

¹¹⁰ Gauwane to SIBC, 23 April 1979 (reported in Solomons New Drum, 8 June 1979).

¹¹¹ Technically, the ban remains in place up to the present day. SIBC has copies of the recordings and the author has a scanned copy of the play, courtesy of Julian Treadaway.

¹¹² Kenilorea 2008, 210–217 has a detailed insider account of independence negotiations in London.

¹¹³ Ian Johnstone interview with Sir Peter Kenilorea, 1995.

¹¹⁴ Earlier in Uganda in 1972, 70,000 people of south Asian descent were deported and their assets stripped by dictator Idi Amin. The British government did not want to accept such a large influx of coloured people and reluctantly accepted 27,000 Asians, while the majority were forced to find homes elsewhere.

experienced racial hostility and felt that their contribution to the economy was unappreciated. One-third of Chinese residents left due to uncertainty over their rights to citizenship and ownership of land.¹¹⁵ After lengthy discussions and stand-offs in negotiations, citizenship was eventually agreed for long-term residents, people who were born in Solomon Islands, and people married to Solomon Islanders. However, dual citizenship was not permitted, forcing foreigners to decide whether to renounce the rights and passports of their countries of origin.¹¹⁶

The second significant problem related to land previously alienated for government or business use, particularly for plantations. Legislation in 1977 converted all freehold and leasehold titles (some of them 999 years) held by non-Indigenous people to 75-year government leases. Existing owners were required to rehabilitate derelict plantations or develop virgin land, which persuaded expatriate owners to sell without great profit. In response to demands by landowners for greater control over their own lands, logging on customary land was to be allowed, and customary landowners were permitted to deal directly with logging companies.¹¹⁷ This was to have major implications for Solomon Islands' forests and its political economy in the post-independence era.

The third problem to be resolved was the terms of financial settlement from Britain. In May 1977, Kenilorea led negotiations in London, where Britain offered a £18m loan for development, £5m for a resources development fund, and £3m for budgetary deficits, as well as aid for technical assistance and advisers. The Solomon Islands delegation gained most of their demands at a second round of talks in London in September 1977, including a settlement that was unencumbered by loans. Britain still got off lightly, while ensuring sufficient support to deter any tempting offers of assistance from Russia and China, which were seeking blue water facilities in the Pacific for their navies. Mamaloni believed that a better deal could have been negotiated, given Britain's haste to divest its colonies. He later came to regret this absence from politics, saying, 'The most unfortunate thing was I didn't stay in politics to see the whole thing all the way to the independence talks and negotiations'.¹¹⁸

The Western Breakaway and 'Ode to the West Wind'

Peter Kenilorea not only negotiated the formalities accompanying independence but also dealt with breakaway threats from the Western District. Secessionist sentiment in neighbouring Bougainville fuelled demands for state government by the Western Council. A Western Breakaway committee was formed in Gizo in February 1978, led by John Talasasa, who had replaced his brother Francis Talasasa Aqorau as a member of the Legislative Assembly. Some people from the Western District wanted state government, while others favoured secession, but all were united by a sense of injustice. Western District generated more government revenue than other districts, particularly from logging, but this was not matched by government spending, development projects, or parliamentary representation compared with Guadalcanal and particularly Malaita. Westerners hated being told what to do by Malaitans, who had spread out across their islands for

¹¹⁵ By 1978 about 580 Chinese remained. Chinese stores were closing, which was no great loss in Honiara but did have a significant impact in some provincial centres (Bennett 1987, 335).

¹¹⁶ John Roughan and Tony Hughes were married with children to Solomon Islanders, renounced their original US and UK citizenships to become Solomon Islands citizens. Dual citizenship was eventually permitted in 2018.

¹¹⁷ Allen 2011, 283

¹¹⁸ Ian Johnstone interview with Mamaloni, 1995.

plantation work, stayed on, and often intermarried. As one newspaper letter stated: 'You have to be a Westerner to understand this ... if you don't understand the feelings of the western people why not just shut up?'.¹¹⁹

Concessions to the Western Council failed to break the deadlock. Francis Billy Hilly and other Western members walked out of the Legislative Assembly during a debate on the independence constitution because it did not contain provisions for state government. Hilly resigned from Kenilorea's cabinet in 1978 to join sides with the Western Council. Anti-Malaitan sentiment was whipped up by an outrageous poem, 'Ode to the West Wind', written by a Malaitan under a fictitious name and published in June 1978, just one month before Independence.¹²⁰ The 'West Wind' poem was a racist diatribe against people from the Western District and their demands for statehood. The poem does not bear reprinting in its entirety, but an idea of its offensiveness can be gleaned from milder lines such as, 'You Western people, kneel down and just be HUMBLE!' and 'proud and lazy, manpower have they none'. The poem was written by Lemuel Maelalatha, a Malaitan agriculture officer based in Auki, who was later sentenced to three months' prison for seditious intention. The poem had somehow passed through the editorial process of the *Solomons News Drum*, a government newspaper, which was bad enough, but an even worse threat to national unity and integration for a government headed by a Malaitan about to lead the country into independence.¹²¹ The following month, *The Solomons News Drum* published a letter by 'a Galekana [Guadalcanal] man' also expressing anti-Malaitan sentiments:

[I]llegal settling on land, parasiting on our land, butchering our people ... our island has been used as a trading centre, where anyone can come and make money for himself and go back to his poor useless island. We seek help from Red China. We have our oil palm, rice, copra, cattle and gold. We will get by.¹²²

Antipathies between Guadalcanal and Malaita were stoked by Colin Bentley, a Malaitan firebrand, who responded thus to Guadalcanal resentments towards outsiders and demands for state government:

You and your people are not fit for anything. You see from Honiara to Aola the Whitemen have taken all your lands. You sell your lands for sugar and bread, you see Malaita people or District, the Whitemen have taken nothing away from them, because they have clever brains and hearts. But if you want any local war between Malaita and Guadalcanal OK let us go. We are people of Malaita in Honiara.¹²³

The Western Council boycotted Independence Day in July 1978 while the rest of the country celebrated. There was an angry face-off between Westerners and Malaitans in Gizo, but violence was averted by calmer heads, led by Lloyd Maepasa Gina. Compensation was eventually paid to the Western Council for the offence caused by 'West Wind'. The 1979 Kausimae report on provincial government promised greater devolution of authority. Western Council's government

¹¹⁹ *Solomons Toktok*, 7 April 1978.

¹²⁰ *Solomons News Drum*, 9 June 1978.

¹²¹ Frazer 1997, 5 (5) May, 5.

¹²² *Solomon Toktok*, 27 September 1978.

¹²³ *Solomons Toktok*, 27 September 1978. Colin Bentley was also jailed for seditious intention.

grant was also increased, leading them to agree to celebrate Independence Day on the first anniversary in 1979.

These hostilities in the late 1970s presaged the Tension 20 years later, when island rivalries escalated into armed conflict between Guadalcanal and Malaita with spill over effects in Western Province. Using government funds for compensation to resolve the West Wind affair set a precedent for compensation whenever provinces or their inhabitants were offended or injured. In 1998–2000, another prime minister from Malaita, Bart Ulufa'alu, struggled to deal with enmities between islands while Mamaloni, who better understood how to ensure peace, was on the outer.

Independence at last

Mamaloni was a bystander when Solomon Islands gained political independence on 7 July 1978. He and his brother Allen watched proceedings through the fence along with the crowds at the Lawson Tama stadium.¹²⁴

Watched by church and traditional leaders dressed in their own finery, the Queen's representatives, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, and colonial officials handed over the deeds of the country to the first prime minister and governor-general of Solomon Islands, Peter Kenilorea and Baddeley Devesi. The British flag was lowered and the now familiar blue, green and yellow Solomon Islands flag was raised. Guests included the American astronaut John Glenn and Michael Somare, the Prime Minister of newly-independent Papua New Guinea. Celebrations included state dinner parties for the high and mighty, as well as five days of public holidays filled with events, films, and sports. It suited Mamaloni to miss the celebrations, given his dislike of formality particularly British pomp and ceremony with duck white uniforms, gold braid, and Wolseley helmets. Mamaloni was not interested to attend; telling Matthias Sitana, 'ah, waste of time— go bak long haus nomoa'.¹²⁵



Figure 11.1: Swearing in of Peter Kenilorea as Solomon Islands first prime minister, Independence Day, 7 July 1978. Sir Baddeley Devesi, the first governor-general, is on the left. Source: SIG Communications Unit.

Peter Kenilorea would always have the honour of being the Solomon Islands first Prime Minister but he was given only the briefest of honeymoons after Independence Day. During the opening

¹²⁴ Interview with Allen Uta, 13 April 2010.

¹²⁵ Interview with Mathias Sitana

session of National Parliament, MP John Talasasa moved a no-confidence motion, allegedly because the government was unsettled, but the Opposition had insufficient votes to bring down the minority government. His minority government survived thanks to the support of Independents, led by Willy Betu, and the inability of the Opposition to work together under Ulufa'alu. The opposition leader and Francis Saemala, Special Secretary to the PM, were in jail during the first parliamentary session, having been sentenced to two months for drunk and disorderly behaviour.¹²⁶ Public disapproval of MPs' misbehaviour and drunkenness only increased when MPs voted themselves salary increases, while workers and rural people struggled.



Figure 11.2: Peter Kenilorea, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands at Independence, 1978. Source: Solomon Islands Parliament.

Solomon Islands' political history might have been quite different had Mamaloni been elected as the first speaker of Parliament in August 1978.¹²⁷ He stood for the position but was unexpectedly defeated by Lloyd Maepeza Gina—his third ballot loss in as many years. However, he was clearly on the comeback trail. He joined an attack on Kenilorea's 1978 budget with his familiar anti-colonial rhetoric, calling the finance minister, Ben Kinika, a lickspittle:

Appeals [by Kinika] to restrain wages by firms and workers clearly illustrates political blunder and economic stupidity ... strict measures are typical of the colonial mentality of this early century and later 19th century political blunder and economic stupidity ... Mr Smith from England even forced the Solomons to bow to its greatest invader, the Japanese. Can the Solomons continue to let the handful of Brits keep writing our national budget, let alone draw our economic plans? I think it's about time they stop and either leave this beautiful country or join the local private sector. The government's economic

¹²⁶ Francis Saemala and Bart Ulufa'alu were sentenced in March 1978 to two months in prison for being drunk and disorderly and Ulufa'alu was also ordered to go to Malaita. Their appeals were rejected and both went to jail. Ulufa'alu's residence order was dismissed but the sentence cost him his seat as a councillor and chairman of the Finance Committee with the Honiara Council.

¹²⁷ The position of speaker of Parliament is not chosen from among current MPs, while the deputy speaker is. The candidates for the position were the Legislative Assembly incumbent, Sir Fred Osifelo, Mamaloni, Lloyd Gina, Bill Bennett, and Ben Buchanan.

policy is to keep on feeding the fat cats in this country with finance development company and let them monopolise and do everything for you. I predict that the motto of the 1980 budget would be: 'Nationalisation or Aminisation' [referring to the Uganda dictator Idi Amin].¹²⁸

Throughout his career, Mamaloni regarded conventional economics with contempt and maintained a firm belief in the wealth of the Solomons and its people. He had been persuaded by the influence of the ideas of the Social Credit (Socred) when he was at Te Aute College. This was a populist fringe movement in Canada and New Zealand with unorthodox economic ideas underpinned by Christian principles. A central Social Credit was that land and people are the real wealth of a country, which cannot be bankrupt except by the banking and international financial system, which impoverish people and countries.¹²⁹



Figure 11.3: NZ Social Credit representative, Maurice Kenny posing with PM Kenilorea, February 1979.

Source: *Solomons Toktok*.

In February 1979, Mamaloni facilitated a visit by a New Zealand Socred spokesman, Maurice Kenny, to promote a barter agreement to exchange timber for goods from New Zealand. Mamaloni organised meetings with PM Kenilorea and Minister for Works Kelesi. The *Solomons Toktok* printed a front-page photograph of Kenny shaking hands with Kenilorea at Henderson Airport. But Kenilorea, who was aware of Mamaloni's role in the visit and wary of a possible Letcher Mint scenario, denied that any discussion with Kenny had taken place.¹³⁰

A further indication of Mamaloni's political comeback was his submission to the Constituency Boundary Commission in June 1979. He argued successfully against increasing the number of

¹²⁸ *Solomons Toktok*, 13 December 1978. A lickspittle is a person who behaves obsequiously to those in power.

¹²⁹ Other Social Credit ideas that appealed to Mamaloni were national self-development, economic democracy, and removing control of production from government and banking institutions.

¹³⁰ Manasseh Sogavare, who became Mamaloni's protégé and successor as opposition leader in 2000, later adopted Social Credit ideas and formed the Solomon Islands Social Credit Party (Socred) prior to the 2006 election but won only two seats.

constituencies, citing the dangers of constituencies that were small or defined by ethnic composition or population size. He also poured scorn on MPs, their salaries, and motives:

A politician must sweat his brain out just like anyone else if he is to be rewarded with such a huge out-of-proportion salary he is getting. It is simply a made [matter] of ethics where a person must be rewarded according to his performance ... the Boss is still the Nation and People—NOT you and me. We are all servants of the people in one way or another—that should be our prerogative to rule. The Voter must be served; he must be led.¹³¹

Mamaloni set out his pitch for the first post-independence elections in a series of articles in October 1979.¹³² He attacked the government for the continuing expatriate staff in public service positions and its slowness to localise positions. He accused the government of financial dictatorship, of causing economic disaster and of being responsible for the 12% annual inflation rate. He critiqued the government's economic policy—with its emphasis on manpower training to tertiary level, employment, and centralised planning—as a carryover from British colonial policy. He attacked big business, government joint ventures and subsidies for commercial firms, state-operated enterprises, cooperatives, and the Solomon Taiyo fishing venture. He even used reports from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank—institutions that he heartily despised—to support his arguments for investing in education and training, diversifying economic growth, and providing employment in rural areas. His attacks on the economic record of the colonial government and first Kenilorea government seem ironic in retrospect, considering the economic record of all Mamaloni's administrations. Compared with subsequent decades, the economy and economic management at the time were essentially sound. The Solomon dollar (SBD) was worth roughly the same as the Australian dollar. The country could boast canned fish and rice production, high copra prices, and expanding oil palm and sustainable logging industries, while cattle farming was the only industry failing to thrive.

Having lost three successive ballots, Mamaloni needed political support to win leadership again. In October 1979, he made a strategic alliance between his PPP with David Kausimae's Rural Alliance Party (RAP) to form the People's Alliance Party (PAP). Both the RAP and PPP favoured rural development, small businesses and cooperatives, and were against big business and government. According to Billy Gina, a close ally, Mamaloni was the brains and Kausimae the wise man.¹³³ They shared 'Are'Are heritage, and Mamaloni called Kausimae '*maasina*' (brother). The PAP manifesto, largely written by Mamaloni and John Saunana, reflected social credit ideas, including hostility to foreign control by banks and economists. PAP policies were also designed to appeal to and hold together different parts of the country, so Western Province demands for a fairer return from resources were included, and PAP received strong support there in the subsequent election in 1980.

The merger of the two political parties in Solomon Islands reinforced Mamaloni's status as a political *big-man* and leader. With the support of a political party and a popular public image,

¹³¹ Submission by Mr S Mamaloni, Solomon Islands Constituency Boundaries Commission Report 1979. The number of constituencies was eventually increased from 38 to 47 in 1993 and 50 in 1997.

¹³² Solomons Toktok, October 1979.

¹³³ Interview with Billy Gina, 6 January 2011.

Mamaloni was an overwhelming favourite to win back the seat of West Makira from John Saunana, and ready to challenge for national leadership again. Bart Ulufa'alu, a populist like Mamaloni, was preferred by lower wage earners because of his strong union background. He was acknowledged for his 'smarts' but had disgraced himself publicly. Mamaloni and Kenilorea enjoyed unrivalled status as the first chief minister and first prime minister. Mamaloni was admired for his experience as a politician and ability to relate to the people. A newspaper analysis of political leaders in March 1978 enthusiastically endorsed Mamaloni: 'He's the man for the year! Because he is the Solomons spirit. Indomitable, enthusiastic and always sure that something interesting lies around the bend'.¹³⁴ Kenilorea was respected as a devout Christian and honest administrator. He had survived four no-confidence motions and successfully led a minority government for four years. He suffered only two defections from his cabinet, whereas Mamaloni had shuffled his cabinet three times and changed his ministers like a dispatch rider changing horses. As a former supporter wrote in 1978:

[T]ime has proved that Mr Mamaloni is not a good leader after all. He was a bad loser. He refused to accept any ministry and had to resign after he lost the chief minister's election. If he was interested in leading the country then he should have stayed on.¹³⁵

The passing of his father and an era

An inveterate pipe smoker, Joash Sunaone died from throat cancer in August 1979 while his son was preparing to contest the 1980 elections. They disagreed about political and personal matters. Mamaloni believed that his father was too compliant and subservient to the colonial government, while Sunaone disapproved of his son's revolving-door marriages and sometimes reckless decisions. Mamaloni was not close to his parents due to their lack of bonding in early years and had spent only brief periods with his father while at boarding school.¹³⁶ Mamaloni did not play the dutiful son, even when his father was dying. His father preferred to stay in Honiara with his daughter Joy and according to his cousin, Gideon Row, Mamaloni did not sit down with his father when Sunaone was sick and came to his house at Vura 1. One day, Fred Campbell saw Sunaone walking along the road in town and picked him up. He had been waiting for Mamaloni to take him to hospital, but his son had let him down. Sunaone was upset by this, with tears in his eyes, and said to Fred, 'Son, can you take me to the hospital?'. His wife Daraburu and son Allen flew to Honiara and were at his bedside with Mamaloni when the old man died aged 68 in August 1979. With the death of his father, Mamaloni was freed from his critical voice and shadow. The tone of that voice can be gauged from the letter Sunaone wrote to the *Solomons Toktok* in May 1978, criticising the new generation of politicians and the lack of self-reliance in government policies. His harsh words recalled the brutality of the plantation and colonialism, 'Do you know what they all deserve? A cat o' nine!'.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ *Solomons Toktok*, 8 March 1978.

¹³⁵ *Solomons Toktok*, 10 May 1978.

¹³⁶ At primary school, he had only two annual holidays in 1956 and in 1959. At KGV from 1960 to 1963, government transport was available for students to go home at the end of each year. Some of Mamaloni's school holidays were spent in Arosi, but not always with his family. He also chose to spend school holidays with the family of George Hiele in Western Province.

¹³⁷ *Solomons Toktok*, 14 May 1978. A cat o' nine tails is a leather whip with frayed ends. It was used by the navy and during pre-war colonial administrations for corporal punishment of adults, while birches were used on juveniles.

His disapproving father

Thinking of and acting for others was the essence of an *araba* leader. One of Mamaloni's brothers, Isa, tells of a major row between Mamaloni and Sunaone after Mamaloni borrowed a canoe and 8 hp engine without permission. Sunaone ordered him to take it back, saying, 'Why do you take the transport we use for emergencies? How can people get to the clinic? Your company has a ship, big things—why do you take small things? You think you school good, *iu kleva bat iu no kleva*. You need to analyse good your decision first'. Mamaloni realised he was wrong, apologised, and returned the canoe.

On another occasion, Sunaone told Mamaloni, 'You don't listen. What and who you are is because of who I am'. Finally, on another occasion, Sunaone gave Mamaloni's brother, Jackson, a dressing down: 'You stupid man! You must think of others—don't think of yourself!'.¹³⁸

Sunaone was highly critical of his son's personal life, which became even more complicated in 1977 when Mamaloni started a relationship with Carolyn Siota—a cousin of Mamaloni's third wife—and only 21 years old. His younger brother and driver, Allen Uta, kept lookout during their romantic assignations on the outskirts of town. Mary was suspicious, and rumours of an affair began to circulate. Carolyn's brother, Thaddeus Siota, threatened to beat her and she moved out of his house. She fell pregnant with her first child, Brenda, in 1979. In the same year, Mary had a second child, Anita, and, in the following year (1980), both women gave birth—Mary to Solomon (Junior) and Carolyn to Billy.¹³⁹ Carolyn went on to have a third child to Mamaloni, Faye, born in 1985. Carolyn would often stay with Mamaloni when Mary, a public servant, was seconded to work in Makira (from 1980 to 1982) and Isabel (from 1983 to 1989).¹⁴⁰

Mamaloni attended events and celebrations on his own, so it was never clear who his wife was. Looking ahead to when he became prime minister in 1989, he was advised that he should have a family with him in Honiara as an example to the nation. Mary returned from the provinces with her children and took up the position of his official wife. She did not make Carolyn's children welcome at the house, although she did accept Qila and Ellen's children. Carolyn and Mary never resolved their differences and Carolyn continued her relationship with Mamaloni into the 1990s.¹⁴¹ These were not Mamaloni's only relationships—he was far from a faithful partner—and it seems that he disregarded the emotional costs to his wives, or the risks involved in a town where keeping affairs secret was virtually impossible.¹⁴²

The 1970s saw Mamaloni rise and fall from grace, walk away from a political career, and then relaunch it. This decade revealed some of his trademark strengths and weaknesses, his political risk taking and resilience, his core values, and anti-colonialism. The colonial officials and rules that had held him in check prior to Independence now made him more determined than ever to throw off the colonial shackles and boldly lead an independent Solomon Islands in a new era.

¹³⁸ Interview with Isa Sunaone, 12 April 2010.

¹³⁹ By 1980, Mamaloni had 11 children under the age of 12 born to four women.

¹⁴⁰ Mary Mamaloni from Isabel was educated at secondary school in Queensland. She trained as a nurse in Australia but never practised as a nurse in the Solomons due delays in approving her nursing registration. She started work at the Inland Revenue in 1970 and remained a public servant until after Mamaloni's death and served as a public service commissioner.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Paul Daokalia, 27 November 2013.

¹⁴² Interview with Carolyn Siota, 11 January 2011.

Part Five. A Hopeful Decade, 1980 to 1989

The 1980s were a decade when the optimism of new nationhood were combined with the inherited strengths of colonial administration and British parting gifts. Mamaloni won back his seat in West Makira in the 1980 election but lost the top spot to Kenilorea for the second time—his fourth ballot loss in a row.¹ As opposition leader, he undermined support for Kenilorea, who resigned in August 1981, and Mamaloni took over as PM until November 1984.

Back in charge, Mamaloni was impatient for radical change and decolonisation. Provincial governments were given increased powers and authority. Public service positions were localised and expatriate staff numbers reduced. Legislation introduced in the previous government to release customary land for development ushered in the widespread destruction of rainforests and of the integrity of political and public life by corrupt logging companies. Mamaloni defied his own cabinet to open diplomatic relations with Taiwan (Republic of China), rather than the communist People's Republic of China. The arrest of the *Jeanette Diana*, an American fishing vessel, led to a David and Goliath stand-off with USA, from which Mamaloni and Solomon Islands emerged with considerable credit.

His 1981–1984 administration was again marked by scandal and ministerial reshuffles. After the 1984 election, Mamaloni lost the leadership ballot to Kenilorea and spent the next four years in opposition. Cyclone Namu in 1986 caused massive destruction and led to the resignation of Kenilorea, who was replaced as PM by Ezekiel Alebua. In opposition, Mamaloni kept the government continually on edge. In March 1989, he and his People's Alliance Party (PAP) swept back to power with the largest proportion of seats won by a single party before or since, providing Mamaloni with a strong mandate for reform, including introducing a republic or state government. The end of the decade proved to be the high-water mark of his political career.

* * *

¹ Overall, Mamaloni's record in leadership ballots was nine wins and eight losses, including three to Peter Kenilorea.

Leadership ballots won by Mamaloni	Leadership ballots lost by Mamaloni
1974, 1975—Chief Minister	1976—Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition
1981, 1989, 1994—Prime Minister	1978—Speaker of National Parliament
1980, 1984, 1993, 1998—Leader of the Opposition	1980, 1984, 1986, 1993—Prime Minister
	1997—Leader of the Opposition

Chapter 12. Back in the Limelight, 1980 to 1981

The 1980 election

Mamaloni won back the seat of West Makira in the 1980 election with consummate ease and 83% of the vote, replacing John Saunana.² Political experience, status, and local campaign managers made the victory a walkover, but he left little to chance. The PAP mounted ‘a massive campaign’ in Makira, winning two of the island’s three seats and losing the third seat, to Ben Kinika, by only 12 votes.³ The PAP branded itself as ‘the party of the villager’. Its manifesto included rural development, decentralisation of power to the provinces, and balanced development between rural and urban areas. It favoured foreign investment and tourism, strengthening local cooperatives, increasing local participation in larger enterprises, worker shareholding, and making use of customary land. It advocated price controls for food, free education, low-cost permanent housing, and piped water supplies for all. Mamaloni emphasised his anti-colonial credentials, accusing the Kenilorea government of being ‘a colonial hangover’, ‘The majority of Solomon Islanders are frustrated at what is happening today which is no more than re-colonising these islands by building up a heavy-handed and expensive central bureaucracy’.⁴

The 1980 elections saw a pattern that would be repeated over the next three decades. Half of the contestants were chosen or endorsed by parties—Mamaloni and Kausimae’s PAP, Kenilorea’s United Party (UP) and Ulufa’alu’s Nationalist (later National) Democratic Party (NADEPA)—with the remainder standing as Independents and campaigning as individuals. The UP had the best organised and financed campaign, with a manifesto and anti-colonial ideals quite similar to PAP. The Independents’ manifesto was more limited but also emphasised provincial government and devolution of functions.

Leadership qualities and reputation were more important than policies or manifestos. The UP emphasised the strengths of Kenilorea—a steady hand and a teetotaler with strong Christian values—in contrast to the smart but erratic Mamaloni and Ulufa’alu, and their less than Christian lifestyles. UP ran smear campaigns against the PAP and NADEPA candidates, referring to them as ‘devils’ and ‘communists’. The PAP and NADEPA countered with accusations that Kenilorea was under the control of the SSEC church and foreign advisers.⁵ A small public opinion poll in Honiara indicated that Kenilorea was preferred over Mamaloni, by 64% to 36%, because he was a devoted Christian, a good leader, and had been the first prime minister. Mamaloni was valued for his political and leadership experience.⁶

² After Mamaloni resigned in 1977, he encouraged Saunana to stand in the West Makira bye-election, which he won. A UPNG graduate, Saunana had written a paper of self-government for Mamaloni in 1974 and co-written the PAP manifesto. However, Mamaloni avoided Saunana and did not inform him of his intention to contest again in 1980. When Saunana found out, he stood instead for the seat of East Honiara against Ulufa’alu but had little chance of winning against union workers’ support and a majority of Malaitan voters. Interview with John Saunana, 24 November 2010.

³ Larmour and Tarua 1983, 92.

⁴ Solomon Islands People’s Alliance Party Election Manifesto 1980, 111.

⁵ NADEPA were accused of being communist and godless due to their links with the National Union of Workers and Soviet-led World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

⁶ *Solomon Toktok*, 25 June 1980.

The UP won 16 of 38 seats overall, including nine of 11 seats in Malaita which, along with Kenilorea's leadership, gave it the appearance of a Malaita party. The PAP won 12 seats overall, but two MPs defected to the UP, and won only one seat in Malaita. David Kausimae, the PAP co-leader and most experienced politician, lost and never won a national seat again.⁷ PAP winners included George Mengale, Peter Salaka, John Ngina, and Paul Keyaumi. All were later appointed ministers under Mamaloni but proved to be men of dubious character.⁸

Results of the 1980 elections by political party	
United Party	16 seats
People's Alliance Party	10 seats
Independents	10 seats
Nationalist Democratic Party	2 seats

Ulufa'alu's leadership style and reputational damage hurt NADEPA—he was labelled as un-Christian and communist. His party fared badly, winning only two seats, and it would take Ulufa'alu the better part of 20 years to regain credibility as a national leader. Independents won 10 seats but lost Willie Betu, their experienced and respected leader, who was replaced as leader by Francis Billy Hilly, a future PM; other notable Independents were Ezekiel Alebua, another future PM, and Waeta Ben.

Undermining the Kenilorea administration, 1980 to 1981

As the incumbent PM and party leader with the largest number of seats, Kenilorea was best placed to lead a coalition government. In the ballot for PM, Kenilorea convincingly beat Mamaloni for the top spot for the second time—25 votes to 13—and was sworn in as PM on 29 August 1980. He appointed a cabinet of 12 ministers. Only two Malaitans, including Kenilorea himself, were given cabinet positions to accommodate the Independents and balance provincial representation. Kenilorea expanded his cabinet by two in April 1981, allowing him to bring in more backbenchers from Malaita. This move was attacked by Mamaloni, although he used the same tactic of expanding his cabinets each time he was in power. Ben Kinika was reappointed finance minister and, for the next four years, engaged in lively debates with Ulufa'alu—his opposite number—over economic policies.⁹

As opposition leader, Mamaloni claimed that he had almost equal salary and status as the PM and demanded a proper office, staff, and vehicle. He immediately began to lobby MPs to undermine the government majority, made easier by jealousy between UP backbenchers from Malaita, who initially had only two ministerial positions, and Independent MPs, who had six ministers. Independents began to lose faith in Kenilorea, particularly because of delays in provincial government devolution. Makira-Ulawa Province also threatened secession—no doubt urged on by Mamaloni. He made political capital out of the country's economic situation, which was worsening due to a worldwide recession. The terms of trade—the ratio of the price of exports to

⁷ In 1984, Kausimae won the seat of West 'Are'Are but was disqualified after a petition by Alfred Aihenu.

⁸ All four men were involved in scandals during the 1981 to 1984 government.

⁹ Kinika and Ulufa'alu were both regarded as smart men and economically competent; their differences were more political than economic. Interview with Tony Hughes, 17 November 2010.

imports—worsened and foreign reserves declined. The Solomon dollar (SBD) was devalued in March 1981, beginning a long historical decline against the Australian dollar (AUD). A USD \$20m foreign loan was arranged to protect foreign reserves, plus a standby loan of USD \$1.6m from the IMF. Inflation reached 15% per annum, which added pressure to demands for salary increases by teachers and Honiara workers, who threatened industrial action. The government demanded more responsible unionism and introduced a Trades Disputes Bill. The unions countered with a mass protest in May 1981, presented a petition declaring that the government was no longer competent to govern, and demanded pay increases for workers and civil servants.

PM Kenilorea was closely identified with public service bureaucracy and centralised government, which Mamaloni strongly opposed:

Centralisation is an enemy of economic and political growth. It breeds totalitarianism and neo-colonialism. It places power in the hands of very few people who, for some reason or another, believe (wrongly of course) that such powers are used to serve the welfare and interests of the masses.¹⁰

Kenilorea's government came under attack from teachers, trade unions, businesses, and provincial governments. Matters were made worse when it accepted a parliamentary committee report recommending increasing MPs' salaries, termination grants and fringe benefits. In Parliament, Mamaloni accused MPs of putting themselves ahead of the nation. He relentlessly attacked the policies and performance of the government, criticising it for not being sufficiently nationalist or pro-business. Kenilorea, as leader of the government since 1976, 'had become answerable for the problems of both the colonial period and decolonisation'.¹¹

Leaders are notoriously vulnerable to intrigue when they travel overseas. This proved to be the case in August 1981 when Kenilorea went to a South Pacific Forum meeting in Vanuatu. In his absence, Mamaloni persuaded all six Independents to resign and Peter Salaka, a supporter of Mamaloni, announced a motion of no-confidence. On his return, Kenilorea tried to gather support from other MPs, but Mamaloni claimed that he had the numbers and urged the governor-general to dismiss the PM and hold another ballot.¹² He argued—without irony, given his previous administration—that, 'The people want an active government that can rule the country with honesty, efficiency and integrity'.¹³ Kenilorea was honest and conservative, with the bureaucratic training of a former district commissioner, but Mamaloni's ambition and political guile proved more than a match for him. Three candidates stood in the subsequent ballot for PM—Kenilorea, Mamaloni, and Ulufa'alu. The latter was nominated by Mamaloni but withdrew just before the ballot, giving his crucial votes to Mamaloni, who won 20 votes to 17, with the support of 10 PAP, two NADEPA and eight Independents.

¹⁰ Mamaloni, PAP Manifesto, 1980, 30.

¹¹ Hegarty 1983, 243.

¹² In 1981, Mamaloni claimed that he had the numbers to form government and urged the governor-general to dismiss the PM and call for a new ballot for PM. He was to repeat this tactic in 1994 to topple the government of Billy Hilly, and again in 1998, when PM Ulufa'alu clung to government only with the Speaker's casting vote. In 1981, Kenilorea stood down, but Hilly and Ulufa'alu refused to do so in 1994 and 1998.

¹³ *Solomons Toktok*, 10 August 1981.

Although Kenilorea's re-elected government lasted only 12 months, he had led the country calmly for five years. The country's first prime minister, he was knighted in 1982, as former prime ministers and governors-general are customarily honoured.¹⁴ At the age of 38, Mamaloni now had a second opportunity to prove that he was up to the top job, but this time as leader of a newly independent sovereign nation and without colonial authorities telling him what he could and especially, what he could not do.

¹⁴ Mamaloni refused a knighthood several times but did accept an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), which he said was good enough for him and stood for 'My Bloody Effort'. In 1989, Speaker of Parliament Waeta Ben told Mamaloni that he wanted to nominate him for a knighthood but Mamaloni refused, saying, 'I'm still a cowboy; it's too big a title for me'. Interview with Waeta Ben, 25 April 2010.

Chapter 13. Back at the Helm, 1981 to 1984

Mamaloni completed his political comeback and became the country's second prime minister on 31 August 1981. He expanded Cabinet to 15 ministers with the creation of five provincial 'super-ministries' to fast-track provincial government. The new ministries added extra cabinet positions with which to lure MPs to his side. The Cabinet contained five Independents, as well as several mavericks who later disgraced or embarrassed the government. His old antagonist, Bart Ulufa'alu, became finance minister,¹⁵ while Kamilo Teke was appointed deputy prime minister to acknowledge the alliance between Mamaloni's PAP and Kausimae's RAP.¹⁶



Figure 13.1: Mamaloni's first press conference as prime minister, 31 August 1981, Honiara. Source: *News Drum*.

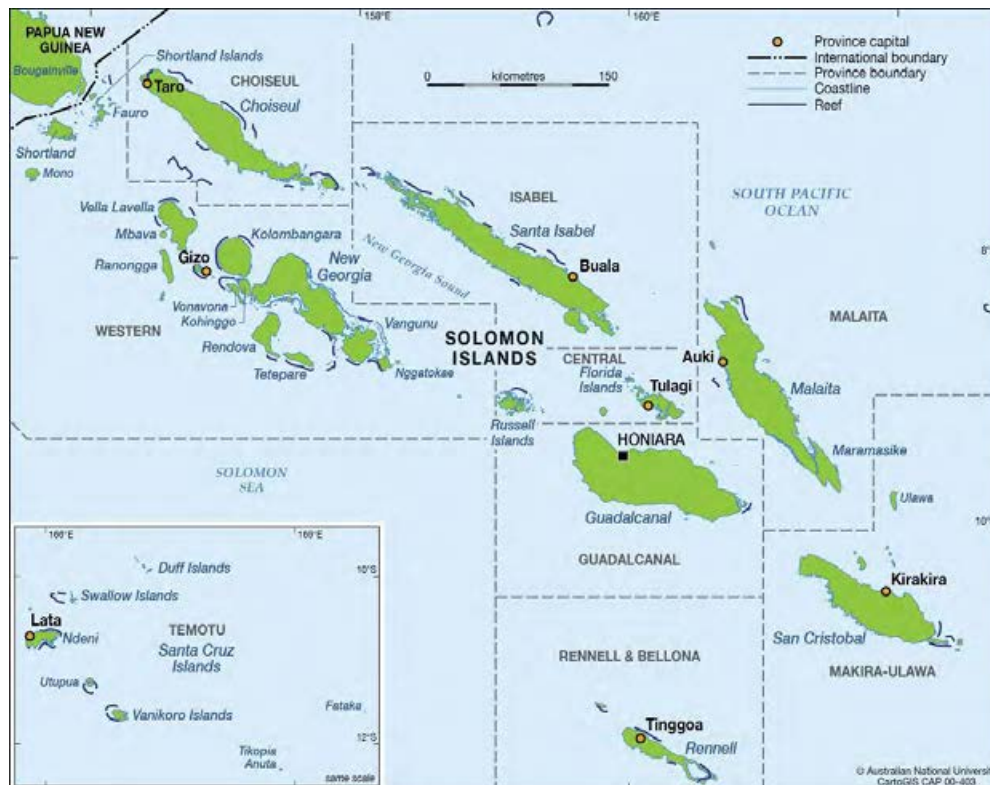
Mamaloni was ready for action with an agenda based on the PAP election manifesto. Within three months, the *1981 Provincial Government Act* was passed. The seven provinces were each granted a provincial assembly with a premier and provincial ministers, mirroring the national government.¹⁷ Below the level of provincial governments were area councils to work in consultation with provincial members, and which could pass by-laws and employ local constables. Five super-ministries were created and represented in cabinet—one for each of the three big provinces (Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Western) plus joint ones for the four smaller provinces. These ministries were designed to be focal points through which initiatives could flow between central government and the provinces but resulted in confusion because the provincial affairs ministries could not make decisions without the approval of the ministry for home affairs. Fellow Makiran, Ben Kinika, complained that the transfer of responsibilities resulted in no mail, no medical supplies,

¹⁵ Ulufa'alu had declared on his return from PNG in 1975 that he would never work for a corrupt Mamaloni administration—which Tony Hughes, his permanent secretary, reminded him of in 1981 when he became finance minister.

¹⁶ Mamaloni's first cabinet in November 1981 comprised Kamilo Teke, Adrian Bata, Richard Harper, Paul Keyaumi, John Ngina, George Talasasa, Ataban Tropa, Peter Salaka, Bart Ulufa'alu, and Independents Ezekiel Alebua, Waeta Ben, Geoffrey Beti, Michael Evo, and George Suri.

¹⁷ The seven provinces were Western, Isabel, Central Islands, Malaita, Guadalcanal, Makira/Ulawa, and Temotu. Honiara remained a town council, headed by a president.

and no contact with smaller islands. The shipping services run by the Makira provincial government became so unreliable that it became the target of jokes. Mamaloni was committed to decentralisation but found it much more difficult to implement in practice, according to Waeta Ben, who had been elected for a third time and briefly headed Guadalcanal provincial affairs.¹⁸



Map 13.1: The Solomon Islands provinces and provincial capitals. Seven provinces were created by the 1981 Provincial Government Act while Choiseul and Rennell & Bellona became separate provinces in 1992 and 1993. Source: CartoGIS, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

Localisation and controlling the public service

Localising the public service and removing expatriate control had long been top priorities for Mamaloni. The PAP manifesto had declared:

REMEMBER always that the public servants DO NOT make money for a country. They merely collect money and decide what to spend it on. It is the INVESTORS and PRODUCERS who make money for a country and, sooner than expected, they will demand to know how their hard-earned cash is being used by public servants and politicians.¹⁹

Mamaloni was determined to control the public service and created a second cabinet secretary position responsible for planning and public service to achieve this. His instinct was to appoint and trust local people, whether they were suitable or not, behaved badly, or did not perform. He backed Solomon Islanders to do things rather than foreigners. As John Fugui wrote later:

¹⁸ Interview with Waeta Ben, 25 April 2010.

¹⁹ PAP Manifesto, 1980.

On many occasions, he [Mamaloni] emphasised that Solomon Islanders should control the country and do things for themselves. In particular, he wanted to see a lot of upcoming Solomon Islanders who had enthusiasm and ambition to excel in life—to go on and do what they think is right to help the country.²⁰

‘Solo’, the quiet dictator

Mamaloni was known as ‘the Boss’ and had an authoritarian streak, particularly regarding foreigners. He was threatened by the experienced and outspoken Tony Hughes at the ministry of finance, and summarily dismissed him while he was overseas. Hughes learned of his sacking from his wife as they drive home from Henderson airport.²¹

Mamaloni’s brother, Allen Uta, tells the story of Mamaloni returning to Honiara from a holiday in Makira during his first government. At the Kirakira airfield, ample supplies of his favourite *taumwa* (Makira ‘six-month pudding’) were waiting to be loaded on to the plane by Jack Campbell, his son John, and Allen, who was then a provincial member.

The plane’s Australian pilot had recently arrived in the country and did not want to take the *taumwa* on board due to its weight and strong smell. Allen and Jack pointed out to the pilot that it belonged to the PM who was on board the plane, and that it would not be wise to separate the country’s PM from his favourite food. The pilot went up the plane steps to talk to Mamaloni. Allen, who by his own admission had been drinking with Solo for some time, grabbed the pilot and ripped off one of his lapels. Mamaloni stood up and said, ‘*Oraet, livim nao*’ (okay, leave it). They took off without the *taumwa*, but Allen knew from Solo’s voice and manner that the pilot was ‘dead meat’; indeed, he was deported the next day. Jack, John, and Allen were charged with assault by the police who had escorted the PM to the plane. They pleaded guilty and were fined—\$100 for Jack and \$50 each for John and Allen—all paid by Mamaloni.

Nearly 1,000 expatriates were employed in the public service at the time, enjoying superior housing and salaries, and earning on average 10 times more than local public servants. Expatriates’ contracts were terminated and one-quarter of expatriates had been replaced by the end of 1982, including three permanent secretaries. Another five permanent secretaries who had conflicts with Mamaloni were retired or sacked. Mamaloni wrote and rewrote detailed operational instructions. He also had a reputation for telephoning mid-level public servants in ministries—‘Do you know who this is? It’s the PM’—and telling them what to do.²² There was resistance from the public service and opposition to rapid localisation because there were not enough experienced personnel to implement both decentralisation and localisation. The *Solomon Star* (newly privatised from the *News Drum*) complained:

[Regarding] The wholesale replacement of expatriates by Solomon Islanders, regardless of qualifications and experience ... As a result there is an atmosphere of uncertainty and *laissez-faire* in the public service, because no one knows what to do at any particular time, except for purely routine matters.²³

²⁰ Fugui 1994, 51.

²¹ Interview with Tony Hughes, 20 December 2010.

²² Interview with Tony Hughes, 17 November 2010.

²³ *Solomon Star*, 23 July 1982.

Localisation resulted in the public service bureaucracy expanding while its efficiency declined.²⁴ Ulufa'alu considered the bureaucracy too large and its standards too low. Mamaloni publicly disputed this and reiterated the need for more localisation and devolution.²⁵ Paradoxically, some measures enhanced centralisation rather than the opposite. In 1983, planning functions moved to the PM's office from the ministry of home affairs because Mamaloni thought that the latter was not doing its job properly. Junior officers were promoted to the PM's office and as clerks to provincial assemblies.

The economy

Mamaloni commonly used hyperbole, particularly when he was in opposition. Prior to taking over from Kenilorea, he had greatly exaggerated the country's economic plight:

People must realise that if I take over, it will be like taking over a wrecked ship! They will have to accept tough measures. Anybody with a sound mind will know that the economy of this country is in a stage beyond collapse.²⁶

The reality was far less dire and economic affairs were in reasonable shape. By 1982, the recession had eased and the country's terms of trade, foreign reserves, and inflation had improved, for which Mamaloni took credit. He also had a qualified finance minister in Ulufa'alu, a university economics graduate who relished argument and did not take disagreement with his prime minister personally. Given Mamaloni's stance on localisation and antipathy to foreigners, Ulufa'alu had anticipated Hughes' sacking and appointed him to head the Solomon Islands Monetary Authority, which soon became the Central Bank of Solomon Islands (CBSI), with independent status and statutory safeguards against political interference. CBSI annual reports became an important and independent source of economic analysis. The CBSI protected the economy from government plunder through control of treasury bills and key financial instruments. Its independence as an institution proved essential in preventing several financial scandals by politicians susceptible to corruption and scams.

Mamaloni's 1981–85 economic programme aimed to open up the economy for local businesses, smallholder farmers and fishermen. The government also took on the banks and Mamaloni wrote directly to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in July 1982, accusing it of lending policies that discriminated against locally owned businesses. Approvals were accelerated for development projects on customary land, especially logging. Price controls on essential items were expanded in early 1982 to ease cost of living burdens. Privatisation was designed to raise revenue and reduce government expenditures. Government houses and assets were sold off cheaply, including the *News Drum*. Selling government houses with a 50% discount made them affordable but controversial because senior government employees and political friends bought prime real estate and then rented houses back to the government.

²⁴ According to Larmour and Tarua (1983, 259), the extent of localisation was overestimated because it did not apply to expatriates who worked under technical assistance, overseas volunteers, expatriate teachers, or were employed in state-owned enterprises and private businesses.

²⁵ *Solomon Star*, 4 April 1983.

²⁶ *Solomons Toktok*, 10 August 1981.

Mamaloni's economic philosophy was essentially pro-business. He preferred private enterprise to bureaucracy, entrepreneurs to managers, and financiers to bankers. But practice did not consistently reflect his philosophy when he was in power. Government funded projects valued at SBD \$30m were approved in 1983, foremost in logging, but also in shipping, tourism, and manufacturing. There was controversy over foreign investment, especially by Chinese businesses operating in areas reserved for Solomon Islanders.²⁷ Chinese-owned businesses—selling cheap goods and food of inferior quality—came to dominate the retail and wholesale economy. Letters and comments in the press complained about licences and passports being issued to Chinese investors who were unable to speak or read English words or numbers.

Foreign aid was an important source of funding, particularly for development projects. Mamaloni was neither grateful nor compliant to donors because he disagreed with the conditions attached to aid and expatriate control, including consultants. According to David Sitai, Mamaloni wanted funds to be given unconditionally, saying: 'I have told you already what we need, why don't you just give us what we ask'.²⁸ He argued, with some justification, that donors' self-interest drove development aid, much of which ended up back in the donor country.

Unleashing the hounds in the forests

Solomon Islands' logging boom began with the first Mamaloni government after Independence. Prior to 1977, commercial logging was limited to government-owned or leased land, primarily in Western Province. After 1977, following changes to legislation in the Forest and Timber Amendment Act, logging was allowed to expand onto customary land.²⁹ Annual log extraction was intended to take place at a sustainable level, but it quickly increased beyond sustainable levels as logging companies from Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea moved in to log on customary land.³⁰ One year after coming to power, the Mamaloni government increased the national timber extraction quota to 495,000 m³ (cubic metres) per annum—50% above sustainable levels with no commercial replanting.³¹ The number of logging licences increased four-fold between 1981 and 1983, which saw a dramatic increase of foreign logging companies operating in Choiseul, Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Makira. Asian-owned logging companies were ready to pounce as southeast Asian countries were being logged out and their governments becoming more restrictive towards logging. These Asian companies often smoothed their deals with bribes, gifts and favours, which were more explicit and closer to the Solomons way of doing business and than the European way. An unhealthy alliance developed between logging companies, middlemen, politicians, and government.

Prime tropical hardwood became the country's largest ongoing export earner but was sold for a fraction of its true value.³² Landowners saw little of the revenue, with logging companies and the

²⁷ Areas reserved for Solomon Islanders under the Foreign Investment Act 1979 included road and sea transport, middleman marketing of primary products, small-scale and low-tech industries, and construction.

²⁸ Interview with David Sitai, 6 December 2010.

²⁹ Frazer 1997, 42. The Act allowed for contracts between logging companies and customary landowners. The Act was legislated by the Kenilorea administration 1976–1980 prior to independence in response to demands for greater control by landowners over their own lands.

³⁰ Allen 2011, 284–285.

³¹ Dauvergne 1997, 9.

³² Bennett 2002, 9. In 1982, 323,000 m³ of timber was exported for a total value of \$23m or \$71 per cubic metre.

government taking the lion's share. Timber processing was much more expensive than round-log extraction and export, as one logging company admitted:

Who would want to invest in the timber industry in the Solomon Islands? It's much easier to run a logging operation in this country than invest in a mill. You just load all your equipment on to a couple of barges and walk in. Any trouble and you load it back on to the barges.³³

Forestry officials were concerned by the rate and scale of extraction from the beginning of the 1980s. At the beginning of 1984, it was estimated that Guadalcanal would be logged out in six years without replanting.³⁴ At the end of 1982, Minister of Finance Ulufa'alu increased duties on logs and sawn timber and stipulated that one-third of the duties collected would go to reforestation. In 1982, the government spent \$1.35m on reforestation; however, this only occurred on logged crown land, not customary land. Only 500 hectares per annum were being reforested compared with 3,000 hectares needed to replace annual harvests.

There was little supervision or protection for the environment and villagers once logging licences were issued.³⁵ In April 1982, dissident landowners attacked the Levers Pacific Timbers operations in north New Georgia and 40 people were arrested. In October 1983, local people on alienated land on Pavuvu in the Russell Islands threatened to take the land by force if it was not returned by the government. Their demands went unheeded. More than a decade later, Mamaloni would send in armed police to quell protests and allowed a Malaysian firm to strip the forest over the impassioned protests of Islanders and environmentalists.³⁶

Attacking his critics—the default defence ³⁷

Always ready to go on the attack to defend himself, Mamaloni outlined three types of critics:

- 1) Provincial politicians who were against landowners negotiating their own agreements.
- 2) 'Lazy, lousy expat businessmen' engaged in running services industries, such as wholesale/retail, transport, and construction—these non-citizens were all warned that service industries were reserved only for Solomon Islanders.
- 3) Big companies supported by the previous government.

In June 1984, after receiving heavy criticism about foreign logging companies, he claimed that the staff of the Foreign Investment Division 'could spot con men from a very far distance and turned down many projects including one by a man called Jesus Christ!'

Mamaloni put a fox in charge of the chicken coop by appointing the maverick Peter Salaka as lands minister. In October 1982, Salaka approved a logging licence for a company called SOLMAC without a forestry office agreement, and against the advice of the attorney-general and senior

³³ *Solomons Toktok*, 19 May 1983.

³⁴ Hyundai, a South Korean firm, sought logging rights over 75% of Guadalcanal. Three other logging companies were operating on Guadalcanal in 1983 with no provision for replanting.

³⁵ Colonial forestry regulations from 1969 and 1976 had not been updated to allow the forestry department to visit logging operations on customary land.

³⁶ See also Chapter 17 for his attacks on critics over the logging of Pavuvu Island.

³⁷ *Solomons Toktok*, 14 June 1984.

public servants. Another Korean company, Eagon, requested concessions to log almost the whole island of Choiseul, amounting to half the total quota for the country. Facing heavy criticism, the government suspended the issue of new overseas licences in June 1983. The previous month, the government had issued revised logging limits to avoid exhaustion of timber and to monitor large international companies such as Hyundai.

Financial scandals

Mamaloni's preference for private business and finance opened the door to impropriety and scandal. In 1982, the *Solomon Star* broke the story of a proposed SBD \$200m loan from Arab sources to Solomon Islands Industrial Holdings, two of whose directors were Mamaloni and Salaka. Finance minister Ulufa'alu and Hughes at the Monetary Authority blocked the deal because the loans exceeded statutory limits. Ulufa'alu said in parliament, 'the PM may have become the unwitting victim of overseas loan salesmen in his efforts to find solutions to Solomon Islands' economic problems'.³⁸ Another scandal in September 1982 involved a potential SBD \$13m loan via a Californian-based company, Solomon Island Development Corporation. The scheme was rejected on the grounds that the company did not have sufficient assets to support the deal. Loans scandals were common in small Pacific Island countries, which were popular targets for con men, tricksters, and carpetbaggers. Mamaloni's government became increasingly vulnerable to corruption. An anonymous poem and a letter in the *Solomons Toktok* described how the political class was corrupt, although excepting Mamaloni:

Alas! Solomons—a poem ³⁹
 Guadalcanal fought its way to history
 The country got back into history
 Now the new tides that flowed across the beautiful country
 Are polluted by few political frogs who jump to eat that dirty prey of
 bribery.
 Oh! Solomons, what a beauty you are
 Oh! Solomons, I pity the future,
 Because thy crafty politicians
 Sell thy country for few favours
 And a few cases of Beer (XXXX or Foster?).

Certain powerful politicians openly sell their dignity and offer their wives' names for projects ... so-called cunning self-centred, selfish powerful men who think of their belly and comfort by even selling their dignity, integrity, and the sovereignty of the country. That is corruption—the Solomon Way. I hope Solomon Mamaloni will nip the political corruption in the bud and not allow it to flower in this beautiful country. We must all be proud of a leader like him for his foresight and forthrightness.⁴⁰

Public respect for politicians declined further in 1984, when MPs voted themselves pay increases and better conditions. Mamaloni's salary as PM increased from \$12,000 to \$20,000 p.a. (plus

³⁸ *Solomon Star*, 17 September 1982.

³⁹ *Solomons Toktok*, 9 June 1983.

⁴⁰ *Solomons Toktok*, 9 June 1983. The letter also contained the memorable howler, 'An alien who forged a passport was fined \$500 and continues to exist happily in the Solomon Islands extending his testicles (sic) to even politics'.

official car, housing, and hospitality allowances). The status and remuneration for the opposition leader were only \$4,000 less than the PM—perks from which Mamaloni would soon benefit.

Foreign affairs

In foreign affairs, Mamaloni sought to assert Solomon Islands sovereignty—‘he had had enough of outsiders telling the people of Solomon Islands what to do’.⁴¹ He was abrasive with donors, diplomatic missions, aid agencies, foreign companies, and banks. His mistrust of foreign governments led him to announce, ‘We are fully aware of foreign secret services employed here to sabotage our political stability’.⁴² Mamaloni disliked overseas conferences and meetings, which was partly due to his fear of flying, as well as his impatience with meetings and protocol. Denis Lulei, who represented him numerous times at overseas meetings, said that not only Mamaloni was afraid of planes crashing, he was also afraid of making errors at official meetings.⁴³

A separate and expanded ministry of foreign affairs and trade, headed by Ezekiel Alebua, signalled a new style and machinery for foreign affairs. At the end of 1982, a permanent diplomatic office opened in New York at the UN, with Francis Bugotu as the first Solomons representative to the UN, US, and Canada.⁴⁴

Mamaloni’s fear of flying

David Sitai accompanied Mamaloni on a visit to Taiwan (Republic of China) in 1983. On their return to the Solomon Islands, a bird flew into an engine and the plane tilted alarmingly. The flight attendants could be heard preparing emergency procedures. Mamaloni was terrified, went completely quiet and did not say another word for the rest of the flight. Archbishop Ellison Pogo also remembered meeting Mamaloni on board a plane returning to the Solomons. Mamaloni offered to change his business class seat at the front of the plane with Pogo’s seat at the back of the plane, which he believed was safer in the event of a crash. Mamaloni even declined to go on a short celebratory flight when the new Solomon Airlines 737 arrived in 1992 and allowed his son to go instead.⁴⁵

The Solomons government adopted a ‘Two China’ policy, recognising both Taiwan (the Republic of China or ROC) and the communist People’s Republic of China (PRC). Taiwan represented China in the UN and held a permanent seat on the Security Council until 1971, when it was replaced on both seats by the PRC. The PRC and Taiwan both courted Pacific Islands countries for recognition as the official UN representative of China. According to Ezekiel Alebua, most of the Cabinet supported diplomatic relations with mainland China. However, Mamaloni defied Cabinet and unilaterally decided to recognise Taiwan.⁴⁶ He thought that Solomon Islands would be best served by relations with this smaller, non-communist country desperate for recognition.⁴⁷

⁴¹ *Solomons Toktok*, 9 June 1982.

⁴² *Solomon Star*, 31 January 1982.

⁴³ Interview with Denis Lulei, 29 December 2010.

⁴⁴ The office at the UN was shared with other Pacific countries and funded by Australia, while the Solomons government paid salaries and accommodation.

⁴⁵ Interviews with David Sitai, 7 December 2010; Archbishop Ellison Pogo, 2 June 2011; and Solomon Mamaloni Jnr, 8 January 2011

⁴⁶ Mamaloni had close connections with Chinese businessmen, particularly James Wang, who left China after the communist takeover in 1949 and came to the Solomons in 1960. Interview with Tony Hughes, 5 December 2013.

⁴⁷ Interview with David Sitai, 7 December 2010.

Moreover, Taiwan had ancient cultural links as the origin of Austronesian peoples and languages. Mamaloni disliked communism and preferred capitalist dictatorships such as Taiwan and South Korea to communist dictatorships such as China. One of the Asian ‘tiger economies’, Taiwan was rapidly industrialising with a command economy, tariff protection, and a military shield provided by USA.

Alebua and Bugotu submitted a cabinet proposal recommending diplomatic relations with Mainland China. They travelled to Beijing to finalise the agreement, but had the rug pulled from under them in a most embarrassing fashion. Unbeknown to them, Mamaloni had sent the police minister, Peter Keyaumi, and officials to Taiwan to discuss diplomatic relations and assistance for a defence force. A headline appeared in a Taiwanese newspaper and Alebua and Bugotu were asked by the Chinese to explain. Neither man could explain it, and both were embarrassed, as Alebua recalled:

When I came back, I reported to Mamaloni that he had made us look stupid. Mamaloni used his favourite catchphrase, ‘Tumi Joe ia’ [we can do (this) meaning and ‘Tumi traim evriwan’ [we try everyone]. I told him he couldn’t do that and resigned immediately. Later I moved a no confidence motion and called him a dictator and said this was not cabinet government.⁴⁸

Alebua was the first casualty after little more than six months in Cabinet.⁴⁹ He was replaced as foreign minister by Denis Lulei, who agreed not to establish relations with any communist power, including Cuba. In July 1982, a Taiwanese trade show opened in Honiara and, in August, Mamaloni presented a cabinet paper on establishing relations with Taiwan. In September 1982, Lulei warned that Solomon Islands should be cautious about relations with either China—something that might have repercussions in 20 to 30 years’ time. He advised Mamaloni not to play games with big powers like China, the sleeping giant of Asia, and warned him that Taiwan also had a very poor human rights record.

Mamaloni travelled to Taiwan in March 1983 for a five-day official visit and again in October, en route to New York to open the UN office. Ulufa’alu and other cabinet members were not with Mamaloni. In April 1983, Ulufa’alu led a three-man delegation to China, Japan, and the US. He believed that his government could have both consular relations with Taiwan and diplomatic relations with mainland China.⁵⁰ According to journalist Alfred Sasako, Ulufa’alu also had the rug pulled from under him when the delegation arrived to meet with Chinese officials on day two of their visit. The head of the Chinese delegation stormed into the office, waving a sheet of paper with the announcement (carried by the wire service overnight) that Solomon Islands and Taiwan had established consular relations. The atmosphere in the room was charged and all Ulufa’alu could do was to stammer that it must be a mistake. ‘What mistake? There’s no mistake’, the Chinese official yelled back. ‘Look at this!’, the official said, and stormed out of the room.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Interview with Ezekiel Alebua, 15 December 2010. *Uimi traim evriwan* is slightly ambiguous; it can mean ‘we try—or try it on—with everyone or anyone’.

⁴⁹ Waeta Ben and Ezekiel Alebua, both Independents from Guadalcanal, resigned in May 1982.

⁵⁰ *Solomons Toktok*, 7 April 1983.

⁵¹ *Islands Business*, May 2008. It is possible that Sasako’s account published 25 years later conflated the incident with

Mamaloni's anti-communist views were reinforced by the downing of a South Korean civilian airliner by Soviet jets in September 1983. Rivalries playing out in the Pacific between the American and Soviet empires, and between China and Taiwan, added to his desire for a 'baby navy' to protect the Solomons against outside forces, and the deal with Taiwan included the promise of a warship.⁵² Diplomatic relations with Taiwan were to prove highly significant in the coming decades. In 1985, the Kenilorea government upgraded consular relations with Taiwan to embassy level. Kenilorea also did not have the support of his cabinet, including Alebua, but he did not allow a cabinet vote on the matter; he even wrote his own cabinet paper because his cabinet secretary, Daniel Buto, refused to do so.⁵³ From 1992 until 2019—when to the surprise of many observers, Solomon Islands switched recognition to mainland China (PRC)—Taiwan (ROC) received unstinting support in the UN in return for development aid and emergency funding with few strings attached. Taiwan support to Solomon governments included constituency funds accessible by MPs without conditions or reporting requirements that were readily ignored. Boosted by government funds, constituency funds grew to become substantial slush funds, which created a handout mentality among politicians and constituents. Meanwhile, Taiwanese logging and fishing companies accessed fishing and timber resources at minimal cost.

Foreign policy included establishing diplomatic relations with Indonesia and Malaysia. Like the Australian government, the Mamaloni government overlooked atrocities in East Timor (and PAP's own policy position) to vote with Indonesia to remove the unlawful acquisition of East Timor from the UN agenda. Solomon Islands also did not support independence for West Papua, an odd position given Mamaloni's staunch anti-colonialism and the absence of any reciprocal favours from Indonesia. However, Mamaloni did support the cause of the Indigenous (Kanak) people of New Caledonia and vehemently opposed French colonialism and nuclear testing in the Pacific.

In October 1982, Mamaloni attended the regional Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Suva and the Pacific Forum in Canberra in September 1983. Mamaloni found formal regional meetings boring and said, 'I don't think it's right to go there for the mere sake of talking, without anything concrete done'.⁵⁴ They were dominated by Australia and New Zealand, countries that, apart from proximity, had little in common with Pacific Island countries. His dislike and mistrust of Australia were further aroused when the Pacific Island countries were unable to get a resolution on a nuclear-free Pacific due to the Australia-New Zealand-United States Security Treaty (ANZUS), which permitted passage of US nuclear powered or nuclear armed submarines and ships in the region.⁵⁵

the earlier one of Alebua having the rug pulled from under his feet in Beijing by Mamaloni's decision.

⁵² This was cancelled in 1986 when Ezekiel Alebua was PM. Instead, a new National Referral Hospital was built in Honiara and funded by Taiwan.

⁵³ Kenilorea 2008, 287.

⁵⁴ Larmour and Tarua 1983, 274.

⁵⁵ In 1986, a New Zealand Labour government under David Lange banned US warships in its territorial waters which led to new Zealand's suspension from ANZUS until 2012 when it lifted the ban.



Figures 13.2 and 13.3: Mamaloni and Australian PM, Bob Hawke, smiling for the cameras during the 1983 South Pacific Forum in Canberra. Source: *Solomon Star* and Mamaloni family.

Try as he might, Mamaloni could not avoid red carpet protocol as head of government and had to endure a second royal visit by Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in October 1982. During the Queen's previous visit in 1974, he had shown his disdain for protocol by introducing Patosha manager, Matthias Sitana to the Queen as an Apostolic Church minister. According to Sitana, Mamaloni also missed the Queen's birthday celebrations one year, saying (in Pijin), 'What has the Queen brought for us? She hasn't brought money and food for us'.⁵⁶

A royal command performance

During the 1982 royal visit, PM Mamaloni had no choice but to attend official functions. At one buffet lunch, he piled his plate with food in typical Solomons fashion. The Queen, a stickler for protocol, told him humorously, 'Prime Minister, you shall have no pudding'.⁵⁷ He dined with Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip aboard the royal yacht *Britannia*. During pre-dinner drinks and canapés, guests were carefully organised for the royal couple to meet and circulate amongst. Panelled doors then unfolded to reveal the banqueting tables laden with the finest cutlery and glassware. The Queen beckoned Mamaloni to follow her as she led the guests through, and, as she turned left to her assigned place, he went to turn right—no doubt seeking more comfortable company. In regal fashion, she corrected him *sotto voce*, 'This way, Mr Mamaloni'.⁵⁸



Figure 13.4: With Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Phillip, and the Devesis, aboard the *Britannia*, October 1982. Source: *Solomon Star*.

⁵⁶ Interview with Matthias Sitana, 28 December 2012.

⁵⁷ Interview with Ashley Wickham, 5 January 2010.

⁵⁸ Tony Hughes, personal communication. Hughes also dined on board and witnessed the elaborate arrangements.

The Jeanette Diana affair

The *Jeanette Diana* affair was a significant test of Solomon Islands' nerve and independence and soured relations with the USA—the 'Big Daddy' in foreign affairs. On 26 June 1984, the US purse seine fishing vessel *Jeanette Diana* was spotted fishing illegally north of Isabel.⁵⁹ Its skipper tried to run for the PNG border, pursued by the P-150 *Pioneer*—a patrol boat that had arrived on loan just a few months before. When the *Pioneer* fired shots across its bows, the *Jeanette Diana* surrendered just inside the international border with PNG.



Figure 13.5: The American purse seiner *Jeanette Diana* captured in 1984. Source: Paul Nichols.

Mamaloni's version of events (see below)—'Netting a big 'un'—was written several years later and reminiscent of the war movies that Mamaloni loved so much.⁶⁰ He cast himself in a more decisive and heroic role that does not match Sir Baddeley Devesi's memory of events. Devesi claimed that he provided advice and close support to Mamaloni who was very worried about taking on the mighty US, saying, 'they might bomb us' (*nogud olgeta bomem iumi*). In Devesi's view, the boat was clearly contravening Solomon Islands' sovereignty, and the Americans would look like fools for using force against a small island nation.⁶¹

The fishing vessel, its catch, and spotter helicopter were confiscated and the captain was arrested. He and the ship's owners were fined and the *Jeanette Diana* put up for tender. A diplomatic row ensued, compounded by the fact that the boat owners were from US president Reagan's home state of California. The American Tuna Boat Association lobbied the White House, and the US government embargoed Solomon Islands products after the courts had forfeited the boat and handed the frozen catch to the government. While USA had been held in the highest regard by Solomon Islanders following the Pacific War, the US embargo and diplomatic pressure revealed a bully which did not deal fairly with other countries, especially small ones.

⁵⁹ Purse seine fishing uses large nets to haul in shoals of fish (and other marine species), as opposed to the pole and line fishing used by the domestic Solomon Taiyo fleets that employ fishing rods and bait to catch the fish.

⁶⁰ Kengalu 1988, 42–47.

⁶¹ Interview with Sir Baddeley Devesi, 4 December 2010.

Netting a big 'un

In Embargo: The Jeanette Diana Affair, Mamaloni wrote, 'I was just leaving the Prime Minister's residence when the telephone began ringing. *"Boss, we've got the intruder but she wouldn't stop after being ordered to. What do we do from here?"* I asked the caller whether there were ammos on P-150 to which he answered that there were. Discovering the types and sizes of the ammos carried, I instantly issued the following order. "Fire three shots before the ship's bow and, if she still does not heave to, shoot to damage the helicopter!" That was the last resort. I had no time to consider the consequences. "This is the biggest mistake in my political leadership!" I thought to myself. It took me quite a good part of the day before I was brave enough to advise the head of state [Devesi]. Out in the ocean, the chase continued until my order finally reached P-150. The order was executed and immediately had effect. The Jeanette Diana was stopped and was boarded by members of the police force and fisheries.

I recalled my army cadet training sessions long ago at school. My platoon commander noticed that I was the smallest in stature and, suspecting my inferior attainments when it came to strenuous battle exercise, said to me, "In the military, the size of your force is not a determining factor in winning battles; it is what you stand for and the application of human will, stamina and faith that achieves your final goal".

I never dreamt that with the arrest of the *Jeanette Diana* I should need to call upon the will, stamina and faith of my small nation to determine the outcome of future events but the nation did not fail and, finally, achieved a goal'.

The Mamaloni government and various authorities handled the matter with considerable courage. The *Jeanette Diana* affair showed that Solomon Islands leaders and its judiciary could be level-headed and decisive. The government also 'rattled the diplomatic cage' by talking publicly and in diplomatic circles about allowing Russian trawlers to fish in Solomon waters. The incident was also significant for the Pacific region because tuna was a vital resource and source of income that was being plundered with impunity. Despite a common interest in controlling valuable fish resources, Solomon Islands found less support than it expected from the region. Other South Pacific Forum countries failed to support a resolution by the Solomons government to ban US tuna boats from their ports. Nor could Australia be relied upon in matters of principle or where it conflicted with its relationship with the US. However, the New Zealand prime minister, David Lange, did show the courage of his convictions by campaigning against nuclear testing and nuclear-fuelled ships.⁶²

The *Jeanette Diana* was eventually sold back to its owners and the proceeds were used by the Kenilorea government in 1985 to buy the P-150 *Pioneer* (renamed the SIPV *Savo*). The Kenilorea government repaired relations with the US government and the embargo was lifted. The stand by successive Solomon Islands governments paid dividends later, when Pacific countries convinced the American Tuna Agency and Americans to agree on a treaty. In 1986, the Americans agreed to pay USD \$60m in licensing fees over a five-year period to Pacific islands governments for their tuna, and the treaty has been renewed since.

⁶² David Lange was the New Zealand prime minister from 1984 to 1989. American nuclear-armed ships were banned from New Zealand waters in 1985.

The *Jeanette Diana* affair enhanced Mamaloni's reputation as a leader who was willing and able to stand up to larger countries. Defending the nation's borders was advantageous politically but also reinforced his mistrust of foreign powers and his resolve to build more adequate security forces. In October 1984, conveniently close to the elections, he announced that he had received a letter from the Central Intelligence Agency threatening him and Solomon Islands with a Grenada-style invasion. The letter, undoubtedly a hoax, was posted from Perth but Mamaloni took the threat seriously and organised extra security for himself.

Political 'funs' and games

Mamaloni's first parliamentary challenge as prime minister came in July 1982 when Ezekiel Alebua—having resigned over the diplomatic recognition of Taiwan—brought on a no-confidence motion, which Mamaloni survived. Alebua criticised the government over a range of issues: its lack of priorities; the provincial super-ministries ('a waste of public money'), establishing a paramilitary Field Force, and losing the confidence of traditional allies when courting the Chinese. He also warned of future political violence created by disunity among political parties.

Mamaloni's administration was dogged by ministerial misconduct and resignations, forcing cabinet reshuffles in August 1983 and March 1984. Mamaloni dismissed Peter Salaka and John Ngina in April 1983 after transport minister Ngina was sentenced to three months for actual bodily harm and Salaka was accused of corruptly approving licences for timber, gold, and fishing. Two months later, Mamaloni dismissed police minister Paul Kayaumi over Chinese passport abuses and for arranging a questionable fishing joint venture with a Taiwanese company. By 1983, six of his original 14 ministers had left due to resignations, dismissals, and jail sentences. In Mamaloni's second reshuffle in August 1983, Andrew Mamau, Douglas Hiva, Ataban Tropa, and Alan Qurusu joined the cabinet.⁶³ The reshuffle in March 1984 sought to address the lack of performance by the provincial affairs ministries. Mamaloni defended his changes in a long letter to the press.⁶⁴

Mamaloni defends his Cabinet reshuffle, March 1984

'In all my 13 years of political life I sort [sic] political support only once, i.e., the request for the Makira people to vote me into the national legislature in May/June 1970. Thereafter, my people's support just came naturally if you care to study election statistics in my area. No other candidates, except a few, ever won their votes without campaigns and on three occasions except me'.

'... I NEVER SEEK POLITICAL SUPPORT FROM ANYONE, including any ministers. The truth however is that people seek my advice and help every time they end up in political entanglement ... everything I tried to do is for the nation and Solomon Islands people. Unlike others I do not enjoy being a Prime Minister because there are no funs [sic] in being one. If you need to be told, I am a harmless individual always ending up in the wrong place at the wrong time to carry out services I am required to do under the constitution. And being in this place twice to clean up someone else's droppings is not my idea of "a good time". ... I wish to categorically state that the reshuffle is not a "pre-campaign election move" ... please be rest assured that I am no political plotter. This government has had more than its fair share of destructive criticisms ... There is nothing to stop you to call at my office to advise me further on "HOW TO RUN A GOVERNMENT".'

⁶³ Hiva was later jailed in 1984 for three years for fraud and automatically lost his parliamentary seat.

⁶⁴ Solomons Toktok and Solomon Star, 15 March 1984.

The Ministry of Home Affairs became the Ministry of National Development, headed by Denis Lulei. Six other ministers were shuffled, including deputy PM Kamilo Teke, who became Minister for Guadalcanal Provincial Affairs.

Mamaloni was clearly not having fun(s) in the top job. He flew to Australia in November 1983 for surgery on an injured knee without explaining where and why he was going. He was away for five weeks and missed most of the next parliamentary sitting and CHOGM.⁶⁵ While in Sydney, he arranged a meeting with the Israeli ambassador, but forgot to inform his aide, Andrew Nemaia. One morning, the house was surrounded and the street locked down by secret service men. Mamaloni had completely forgotten the meeting and there was a mad scramble to prepare for the ambassador; Nemaia was furious that he had not been told of the visit. The purpose of the meeting was never made known but Mamaloni was pro-Israel in his political affiliations.

The final sitting of Parliament in September 1984 was a lacklustre anti-climax to the ‘ostentatious, bombastic and bragging of the Mamaloni government’:⁶⁶ The *Solomon Star* editorialised:

[T]he house had lost its sense of purpose and direction, the result of frequent changes of ministries and movements of permanent secretaries and administrative staff, premature promotions of inexperienced and untrained personnel. No wonder Solomon Mamaloni was ill advised ... running the country is a complex business. There is more to it than just sweet talk.

Womanising and drinking did little to add to his own reputation. In June 1984, he crashed and overturned a car on Vavaya Ridge, very likely under the influence of alcohol, although the police laid no charges because there were no witnesses. The photograph was kept out of the newspapers until six weeks later. He often drove himself in a Mini-Moke, an open-air runabout; in one incident, an expatriate tried to stop him driving while drunk, much to Mamaloni’s annoyance.⁶⁷ However, his popularity as a man of the people was hardly diminished, as the *Solomon Toktok* wrote in an editorial titled, ‘Solo rules with wisdom’:

Mamaloni has dealt with the problems that have beset him during his four years as leader of his government with exceptional wisdom and energy. At times he has been very badly, even disloyally, treated by members of his cabinet – not all of them still members – but by taking the tough line of facing facts and dealing honestly regardless of the consequences he has kept the country moving forward peacefully ... Surely, he has made mistakes, we all would in such a position, he probably knows that better than we, but he has always had a vision of the Solomon Islands being just that, a country that Solomon Islanders recognise as their own place and expressing their vision.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Mamaloni returned from Australia one day after the final game of the Australia-West Indies series, unsurprising given his love of cricket and the opportunity to watch the West Indies side dominate Australia.

⁶⁶ *Solomon Star*, 7 September 1984.

⁶⁷ Typical of Mamaloni’s informal style but hardly appropriate or secure transport for a prime minister.

⁶⁸ *Solomons Toktok*, 20 July 1984.

In a 1983 book on Solomon Islands politics, Larmour and Tarua presented an astute verdict on the Mamaloni government, 'The government's diagnosis of Solomon Islands problems was more radical than the cures proposed or available to it'.⁶⁹ In foreign affairs, where words often count for more than deeds, the Mamaloni government was relatively successful. But domestically, governing a country and implementing change were more complex and required more than 'sweet talk', meetings, and policy papers. Governing a country was not meant to be easy.

⁶⁹ Larmour and Tarua 1983, 277; interview with Peter Larmour, 16 August 2010.

Chapter 14. Back in Opposition, 1984 to 1989

The 1984 elections

The 1984 election was another success for Mamaloni in the seat of West Makira. He increased his vote from 1980 by 151 and romped home with 78% of the vote, while each of his opponents won no more than 11% of the vote.⁷⁰ In Parliament, half of the sitting MPs (19/38) lost their seats and slightly over half of the Cabinet (8/14) lost their seats, while overall the PAP party increased their seats by two from the 1980 elections.⁷¹ Significant losers included Bart Ulufa'alu in Honiara—always a difficult constituency to win and hold—Ben Kinika, Francis Billy Hilly, and Waeta Ben.⁷² Mamaloni's PAP co-leader David Kausimae won the seat of West `Are`Are, but lost it after a legal petition, ending Kausimae's parliamentary career, although he continued as chairman of the PAP. Before he lost the petition, Kausimae voted for Kenilorea rather than Mamaloni as PM, revealing their personal differences, which only grew during the rest of the decade.

Results of the 1984 elections by party	
United Party (UP)	13 seats (down three from 1980)
People's Alliance Party (PAP)	12 seats (up two from 1980)
Independents (Ind)	7 seats (down two from 1980)
Solomone Agu Sagufenua (SAS)	4 seats (new party)
National Democratic Party (NADEPA)	2 seats (down one from 1980)

A new political party, Solomone Agu Sagufenua (SAS) joined the three main parties (UP, PAP, and NADEPA). Most SAS candidates were former PAP supporters, mainly university graduates and current and former public servants, demonstrating that Mamaloni had lost some support among these groups, if not on the street. He spoke out against new political parties:

[T]he new parties have been started by educated people. Most of these who are failures in one way or another in other institutions ... established by people who have failed in the public service and have resigned ... it really hurts me because that kind of manpower which the community has paid so much for its training should continue in career in public service to replace expatriate manpower.⁷³

With so many inexperienced MPs, the *Solomon Star* opined, 'The job of PM requires experience, integrity and discernment and is not a position to be filled by amateurs ... it also has the capacity to suffer and therefore it is a lonely job'.⁷⁴ As in 1976, scandals and cabinet reshuffles had cost Mamaloni key supporters and crucial votes in the leadership ballot to form government. He lost again to Kenilorea in the ballot for PM. Only three Independents were willing to support Mamaloni, who wanted to avoid dealing with small factions. He refused to accommodate the four SAS

⁷⁰ His opponents in the 1984 elections were Matthias Taro, John Marahora and Gad Hagasuro.

⁷¹ This 50% turnover became the norm in Solomon Islands elections for the next three decades.

⁷² Other significant losers were Independents.

⁷³ *Solomons Toktok*, 27 September 1984. The SAS lasted only one term, partly because of their unreasonable demands and Mamaloni's refusal to negotiate with them as a group.

⁷⁴ *Solomon Star*, 30 November 1984.

members who were demanding cabinet positions. After three turbulent years at the helm, Mamaloni was weary and relieved to let others carry the burdens of government.



Figure 14.1 and 14.2: Mamaloni in 1982 and showing the burdens of office in 1984. Source: Solomon Islands Government Communication Unit and *Solomon Star*.

A *Solomons Toktok* editorial, ‘honoured Mamaloni for the contribution he had made’ and ‘hope[d] that he will feel less burdened by the weight of national responsibility’.⁷⁵ Mamaloni was prepared, even relieved, to spend time in opposition where his salary as leader was close to that of the PM and the position came with an office, staff, and car. As Opposition leader, he included 10 PAP MPs and 15 ministries in his shadow ministry.⁷⁶ Five were provincial super-ministries because he was not prepared to abandon decentralisation or super-ministries. Now the most experienced politician in the country, Mamaloni described the role of the opposition as:

...not solely geared to destroying a national government or scoring points and to become extremely inconsistent and vicious to the government... this kind of politics belongs to the past because it usually stirs up nerves and causes personal conflict if not hatred.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, the Opposition kept the government on the back foot, forcing Kenilorea to step down as prime minister in November 1986 over alleged impropriety with donor funds. His deputy, Ezekiel Alebua, took over as prime minister and Kenilorea became deputy prime minister. As we shall see, the government narrowly survived to complete its term, with Mamaloni biding his time until the next elections, which were due in 1988.

The Kenilorea government, 1984 to 1986

A coalition government was inevitable given the split of seats between parties. Kenilorea’s cabinet comprised eight of his UP members (including Alebua as deputy prime minister), four Independents, and three of the four SAS members. Only three of the 11 Malaitan MPs made the cut and there was no room for Makiran MPs—‘the wise men from the east’.⁷⁸ Kenilorea replaced

⁷⁵ *Solomons Toktok*, 7 December 1984.

⁷⁶ One of his shadow ministers and a former Mamaloni minister, Ataban Tropa from Temotu, was jailed for assault in May 1985. Several of Mamaloni’s ministers were jailed over the years.

⁷⁷ *Solomon Star*, 7 February 1985.

⁷⁸ ‘The wise men from the east’ was a popular reference to the three MPs from Makira, including Mamaloni.

the five provincial super-ministries of the previous Mamaloni administration with a single ministry for home affairs and provincial government. However, he could not afford to reduce the number of ministries because he needed to be able to offer ministerial portfolios to secure his majority.

Kenilorea moved quickly to resolve conflicts that he had inherited from the previous Mamaloni administration. In February 1985, he met with President Reagan at a breakfast prayer meeting. The following month, the US embargo on Solomons exports imposed in the wake of the Jeanette Diana affair was lifted and the issue of fishing rights was managed quickly and without grandstanding. The new government also settled the threat of a Solomon Islands Public Employees Unions (SIPEU) strike by granting an 8% wage increase.

An issue that took longer to solve but had significant consequence, was the Kwaio Fadanga boycott of the East Kwaio election, relating to compensation for the massacre of the Kwaio as a reprisal for the Bell Massacre in 1927. Three polling stations were closed by the boycott, leading to a successful High Court challenge and the election result being declared void. Kenilorea personally negotiated a breakthrough and compensation of \$1,000 was paid. A by-election was held in 1986 and the original winner, Daniel Fa`asifobae, won again; his vote was later crucial to Kenilorea surviving a no-confidence motion in July 1986.⁷⁹

The sale of government houses became a troublesome issue for the Kenilorea government. The policy aimed at increasing home ownership in Honiara and easing the cost of maintenance on government but was controversial because the main beneficiaries of the sales were political supporters and senior public servants. Sethuel Kelly, SAS parliamentary leader and minister for agriculture and lands, appointed a committee to handle sales. He filled the committee with SAS members and friends, who allocated houses to themselves and to others who were ineligible. A Commission of Inquiry confirmed gross irregularities in the allocation process. Bitter allegations of favouritism and unfair dealings led to strike action by the SIPEU and a motion of no-confidence in September 1985. Other SAS and UP members wanted to remove Kelly and he was eventually dismissed by Kenilorea in January 1986 over repeated disagreements.

Meanwhile, Mamaloni was coasting in opposition and being criticised for not attending parliamentary sessions or his office.⁸⁰ In October 1985, he courted scandal again when he was arrested for attempted arson at Henderson Airport. He had threatened to start a fire by smoking a cigarette close to a small plane that was refuelling. He was angry and protesting against the deportation of Caesar Nohay, the Filipino manager of the Makira Economic Development Agency because he did not have a visa. Mamaloni had accompanied Nohay to Henderson Airport when he was deported and had been drinking at the VIP lounge. Asked in court if he was willing to burn the plane and die, Mamaloni replied with familiar hyperbole that he was 'willing to die for the nation'. He was found guilty and escaped with a \$350 fine.⁸¹

National politics was inherently unstable, driven by coalitions of multiple, weakly organised parties, and independent MPs with little or no allegiance to parties.⁸² Kenilorea was constantly threatened

⁷⁹ Kenilorea (2008, 267–271) describes his role in resolving the Kwaio Fadanga issue.

⁸⁰ *Solomon Star*, 7 June 1985.

⁸¹ *Solomon Star*, 4 April 1986.

⁸² Steeves 1976.

by the disloyalty and ambition of his SAS partners. Mamaloni moved a no-confidence motion in September 1985, less than a year into Kenilorea's term of government. He called the government coalition unstable and its leadership weak, accusing Kenilorea of being too fragile to tame his ministers. The government narrowly survived the vote (20 to 16). In January 1986, Mamaloni again called on Kenilorea to step down or dissolve Parliament to allow new elections. Kenilorea refused, saying he was not aware of the incompetency of which he was accused. His government did not fall because the SAS partners wanted to keep their ministerial positions while Mamaloni was not prepared to guarantee them unless they resigned their positions first.⁸³ The opposition was weakened when MP Andrew Nori, the PAP legal adviser and sometimes spokesman, left and formed his own National Front for Progress (NFP), and joined the government; where he was joined by MP John Tapaika, who had resigned from SAS.

In May 1986, the Solomons was struck by Cyclone Namu, one of the worst cyclones in living memory. An estimated one-third of the population lost their homes and 103 people died. The damage was enormous: ships, wharves, bridges, and roads were swept away; schools, houses, and food gardens were destroyed or flood-damaged; agriculture exports (palm oil and copra) and the local rice industry were destroyed.⁸⁴ Central Hospital in Honiara had to be evacuated and Selwyn College was so badly damaged that it later had to be moved to a new site to the west of Honiara. The economic effects of the cyclone were enormous and long term. Donors were generous, and thousands of tons of food aid and millions of dollars arrived for relief and rehabilitation; even the Seabees (US Army engineers) and Slim Dusty, the Australian country and western icon, came to help. The country's dependency on imported materials particularly imported rice and foodstuffs, became more entrenched. Misuse of relief aid and selling of food led to staff of the National Disaster Council being prosecuted and imprisoned.

The disaster did not halt political squabbling. The SAS walked out of the coalition in June 1986 after another motion of no-confidence against Kenilorea. Votes for and against the motion were tied at 18 votes each, which meant that the government survived. An editorial in the *Solomon Star* accused MPs of being chaotically disorganised and a menace to the country's stability. Politicians' self-interest further increased public outrage when in May 1986, they voted themselves a further SBD \$4,000 per annum, plus allowances.

Later that year, Kenilorea was forced to resign due to alleged impropriety over relief funds. Following a visit by the French Polynesian leader, Gaston Flosse, Kenilorea had accepted an offer of assistance to rebuild the school at his home village in Malaita. This appeared to coincide with government approval of the French ambassador, whose credentials Solomon Islands had refused to accept since Independence because of French policies in the Pacific—its colonial territories, oppression of Indigenous Kanak people in New Caledonia, and nuclear tests in Polynesia. It also followed outrage at the sinking of the Greenpeace flagship, the *Rainbow Warrior*, by French secret service agents in July 1985.⁸⁵

⁸³ Alasia 1990, 150.

⁸⁴ In 1985, palm oil had earned the country \$14m, compared with logging (\$25m) and fishing (\$32m).

⁸⁵ Two French agents sank the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbour to prevent it from leading a flotilla of yachts to interrupt French nuclear tests in the *Moruroa* atoll. They were arrested and charged with arson, conspiracy and murder. They served only two years before returning home to France and were decorated by their government.

Kenilorea was naïve rather than corrupt for accepting French aid for his own village. He strenuously denied that he used his official status to accept the offer, but his opponents and rivals smelled blood and attacked relentlessly. Kenilorea was finally forced to resign in November 1986, but without admitting wrongdoing:

I have done my best to fulfil the arduous duty and responsibility placed upon me given the political bickering which unfortunately is the norm of our system and understanding ... my conscience is totally clear before my God and, may I dare to say, the Law.⁸⁶

Mamaloni could have formed a government but he was not interested in being beholden to factions or Independents who had destabilised and weakened successive governments. He was perhaps also reluctant to take responsibility for the government in an unfavourable economic climate made worse by Cyclone Namu. The leadership ballot for prime minister in December 1986 was a strange affair but confirmed Mamaloni as the master tactician of Solomon Islands politics. He did not seek or receive support from his own side—he ran dead—and was eliminated in the first round. He orchestrated the opposition votes to allow Ezekiel Alebua to win the ballot for PM and leave the government in UP hands. Alebua became the country's third prime minister and he immediately appointed Kenilorea as deputy PM. As a letter to the *Solomon Star* wrote, 'the jockey is changing, the horse is the same'.⁸⁷ Alebua's government never had a majority of more than one or two, and the coalition of UP, SAS and NFP barely held together until elections were held in February 1989. In April 1988, he survived another no-confidence motion moved by SAS, a coalition partner, by only one vote (18 to 17). SAS minister Danny Phillip abstained in the no-confidence motion and was sacked by Alebua for not voting for his own side. Phillip became a cabinet minister in Mamaloni's next administration, which suggests that a deal had been made in the no-confidence vote.

The 1987 Constitutional Review Committee

Mamaloni was appointed chair of the 1987 Constitutional Review Committee, which toured the country to gather opinions about the type of government people wanted 10 years after independence. He had long been a critic of centralised government but efforts at devolution, such as provincial super ministries, had not been successful. Fourteen tour reports and 151 submissions were presented in the so-called Mamaloni report in April 1988.⁸⁸ Only one submission came from a political party (PAP)—demonstrating again how weak political parties were outside of election periods. One paper in the review, 'Fundamental Defects of the Present Constitution', rehashed many of Mamaloni's own objections to government regulation of business and joint ventures, bank lending policies, and his support for a federal system.

⁸⁶ The French funding never eventuated and Kenilorea strenuously maintained his innocence. He devoted 15 pages to the issue in his autobiography (Kenilorea 2008, 271–285).

⁸⁷ *Solomon Star*, 5 December 1986.

⁸⁸ Report of the 1987 Constitutional Review Committee, 1988. Mamaloni was disappointed when the report was not distributed to the public; however, at 826 pages long in three volumes, he did not make this easy.

Two models, both republican, were proposed by the Review Committee:

1. Federal Republic—with greater powers for states.
2. Unitary Republic—less radical, with the Queen replaced by an Indigenous, ceremonial president and a senate upper house.

There was only minority support for continuing a constitutional monarchy with links to Britain—even her representative, Governor-General Devesi, was non-committal. The Review Committee recommended that the country should become a ‘Republican Confederation of States’ with an Indigenous elected president and an upper house made up of chiefs. Mamaloni also favoured the second option, which addressed the need for unity and involvement of traditional leaders.

The recommendations of the Constitutional Review were never implemented. Although most provinces wanted more powers, the multiple political and legal authorities required under a federal system were unrealistic and unaffordable for a small country in permanent deficit and dependent on aid. Provincial dysfunction and dissatisfaction continued to fester over the next decade. Tensions between Guadalcanal and Malaita mounted as Malaitan migration to Guadalcanal and Honiara grew rapidly. To the west, Levers Plantations Ltd grew tired of disagreements with landowners and sought to sell its assets in Western Province and Russell Islands in Central Province. Dissatisfied landowners on Anuta Island wanted to take back land, and burned down a tourist resort in 1988. Land disputes were exacerbated by local and foreign ‘con men’ claiming ownership of or seeking access to customary land. The fate of the Constitutional Review recommendations, and the persistence of provincial tensions, reflected the political challenge facing Solomon Islands—that of achieving a workable level of political unity in a geographically scattered archipelago and in a culturally and ethnically diverse population with more than 60 languages.

Mamaloni realised that Solomon Islands had no tradition as a nation and writing about the 10th anniversary of Independence, he provocatively declared Solomon Islands, ‘a nation conceived but never born’.⁸⁹

All these small ‘island nations’ were independent entities long before the northern explorers found them. Their cultures differed from each other ... The merging of these ‘island nations’ into one ‘Sovereign Authority’ (constitutional terms) was by human design, and said to be by necessity. Unfortunately, for all practical purposes it was the greatest error of the British administration in this region Solomon Islands or the Solomon Islands community has never been a nation, will never be a nation, and will never become one.⁹⁰

A lack of agreement about changing constitutional arrangements and failure to deal with island differences were to lead to the Tension and armed conflict that began a decade later.

⁸⁹ Solomon Mamaloni, ‘The Road to Independence’, 1992, 14

⁹⁰ Mamaloni, 1992, 10.

The economy

Successive governments after Independence consistently ran budget and trade deficits. Like many small developing countries, Solomon Islands was disadvantaged by its small population and market size, and high dependency on imports, especially fuel and manufactured goods, making foreign aid crucial for its economic survival. Figures released for the 10-year Independence anniversary in 1988 calculated the total aid received since Independence at more than \$250m, with the biggest donors being (in order) Britain, the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and USA.

The economy faltered after 1985 due to government overspending, made worse by Cyclone Namu and strong external pressures. Fluctuating commodity prices made economic management very difficult.⁹¹ Stabex funds from the European Community (now European Union)⁹² compensated somewhat for low commodity prices, but the benefits were smaller than the losses in income and did not solve price instability. The value of the Solomon dollar declined, the price of imports rose, inflation increased, and economic growth slowed. Higher prices for tropical hardwoods, combined with the government's need for currency, fuelled a logging boom by Asian logging companies eagerly seeking new forests and few restrictions. Government revenue fell after Cyclone Namu while the cost of services and recovery increased. Deficits of around SBD \$20–\$25m per annum before the disaster rose to around \$30–\$35m in 1987 to 1988. With no room for election sweeteners, the Alebua government introduced a tight budget in 1988.

A structural problem underpinning the deficits was government spending on salaries and wages, vehicles, and overseas trips. The public service made up 34% of all formal employment and salaries had risen to comprise over 60% of government expenditure.⁹³ The Public Employers Union (SIPEU) was powerful and the Alebua government in its final months was confronted with separate strikes by public servants and teachers. The strikes were eventually resolved after the 1989 election, with SIPEU winning a hefty 17.5% pay increase, thereby increasing inflation and the budget deficit. Some aspects of the government's performance could be blamed on events beyond its control, such as Cyclone Namu and commodity prices. Nevertheless, there was no denying poor performance in services for which government were responsible. Health services deteriorated and schools were poorly equipped. Every year, thousands of school leavers added to unemployment, contributing to urban drift and problems in villages. In June 1988, Sir Baddeley Devesi stood down after 10 years as governor-general to contest the approaching elections.⁹⁴ He summarised the looming problems facing the country.

⁹¹ The terms of trade worsened from 1980 to 1983, improved in 1984, and then worsened again until 1988—the final year of the Alebua government.

⁹² Stabex was a stabilisation mechanism for former European colonies to compensate them for export earnings lost due to lower agricultural export prices. The Solomons received USD \$33m in Stabex funds from 1985 to 1987 but lost approximately USD \$100m in export earnings (Thirlwall, 1991, 15).

⁹³ Steeves 1996, 124; Greenwood 2010, 23.

⁹⁴ Devesi felt that ten years was long enough as governor-general and that having a prime minister (Alebua) from the same province (Guadalcanal) was not good for national harmony. He was confident of being returned to high office. Interview with Sir Baddeley Devesi, 12 December 2010.

Looming problems for Solomon Islands in 1989 ⁹⁵

- A very young population—the 1986 census revealed that 48% of the population was under 15 years old, and the growth rate was 3.5% per annum (doubling the population every 20 years).
- An education system that pushed out the majority of young people.
- Inadequate health and medical services, with a lack of health workers, beds, and clinics.
- The role of women and their contribution not being recognised.
- Housing shortages for the working class, and unhealthy settlements in Honiara.
- Police terms and conditions very poor, leading to falling standards.
- Lack of dedication, and slackness in the public service.

Mamaloni held the Kenilorea–Alebu government responsible for the country's economic woes, comparing their record of accomplishment to his government from 1981 to 1984, when economic circumstances had been more favourable, but for which he claimed credit. During a budget speech reply in December 1986, he came close to enunciating social credit theory, arguing that the shortage of money was a fallacy peddled by foreign advisers who were liars:

Currencies are man-made and their values are determined by human labour and other natural resources. Hard cash is created and generated by virtue of its value. Solomon Islands could have enough money if people were given the right to generate the exploitation of the country's natural resources.⁹⁶

Mamaloni accused the Central Bank of refusing to issue more currency, which he said would solve the problem. In fact, the bank was cashing government cheques and debiting their advance account, which effectively amounted to printing money.⁹⁷ The CBSI was continually pointing out the effects of budget deficits on inflation and the value of the Solomon Islands dollar. It seems ironic in retrospect that Mamaloni could ever have promoted himself as a better economic manager than his UP opponents, given how badly the economy fared under him in the 1990s.

The 1980s demonstrated that big-man politicians and unstable coalition politics could not deal with the newly independent country's problems. The standard of public services was declining, due in part to a rapidly growing population. Efficient administration unwound as government regulation slackened, and corruption—minimal at first—grew with the influence of logging companies and con men. The economic headwinds and problems facing the country undoubtedly worsened after Independence. In retrospect, the second half of the 1980s can be viewed as a transition period between the optimism at Independence and the pessimism of the 1990s, a decade when Mamaloni was in charge for much of the period and became responsible for both dealing with and creating the country's worsening economic difficulties.

⁹⁵ *Solomon Star*, 27 June 1988.

⁹⁶ Mamaloni, 3rd Parliament, 9 December 1986.

⁹⁷ Disagreements with the CBSI became a regular feature of the Mamaloni governments in the 1990s.

Part Six. Hubris and Nemesis, 1989 to 1999

The 1989 elections provided Mamaloni with the most secure position of any leader in the post-independence era. But after 18 months of chaotic government, he faced a revolt by his own party and the wily political veteran orchestrated a lightning political coup. He dismissed five ministers and replaced them with members of the opposition. He held power until the 1993 election, when he lost the ballot for PM to a reform coalition led by Francis Billy Hilly. He returned as PM only 18 months later, using political manoeuvres and logging money to engineer the downfall of the Hilly government.

The country repeatedly came close to insolvency during the 1990s due to undisciplined public administration and uncontrolled government expenditure. Government spending and foreign reserves were kept afloat by a logging boom that corrupted the country and damaged the environment. The public service became increasingly politicised and demoralised, while the political system was compromised by bribery, corrupt deals, and scandals. In foreign affairs, a bloody civil war to the north in Bougainville from 1989 to 1998 created serious domestic and foreign problems for Solomon Islands, and led to diplomatic tensions with PNG and militarisation of the police force.

Seven years of Mamaloni-led governments from 1989 to 1997 brought the country to the point where better government was desperately needed and wanted. A reformist government led by his old rival, Bart Ulufa'alu, attempted to correct the economy, yet failed to deal with resurgent tensions between the peoples of Guadalcanal and Malaita. Mamaloni, who understood better than anyone the dangers tearing the country apart, was now powerless to prevent them. His desperate pleas to use compensation and cultural politics to resolve these tensions were ignored. Although re-elected as opposition leader in late 1998, Mamaloni was yesterday's man, suffering from end-stage kidney disease, his health irreversibly damaged by decades of stress and consumption of alcohol, smoking, and betelnut.

* * *

Chapter 15. Peaks and Troughs, 1989 to 1993

The 1989 elections were a triumph for Mamaloni. He was the PAP campaign manager, a role he could perform without distraction because he was unopposed in the West Makira seat. The PAP claimed 20 seats, including Independents who came on board after the election, and the first time a political party in the Solomons had won an absolute majority of seats. Twenty-three MPs voted for Mamaloni in the ballot for PM, and he did not need to make any deals in exchange for support. But he was not enthusiastic about becoming leader again, saying soon after his election: ‘I want to retire. Jesus Christ, so much work. I just want a rest. I would have been happy with just a ministry. I am tired, 16 years in politics is enough. It’s going to be 20 years now’.¹

Mamaloni asked Kenilorea to lead the country, preferring to take the position of Finance Minister or Deputy PM. Kenilorea consulted with his other United Solomon Islands Party colleagues, who said such an arrangement would not work with Mamaloni behind the throne.²

Results of the 1989 elections by political party	
People’s Alliance Party	12 seats (same as 1984)
Independents	11 seats (up four from 1984 but eight switched to or claimed by PAP after the election)
United S.I. Party	4 seats (down nine from 1984)
Liberal Party	4 seats (none in 1984)
National Front for Progress	4 seats (none in 1984)
Labour Party	2 seats (none in 1984)

Back at the helm

Malaita had the most to lose under a federal system and because the PAP election manifesto had advocated state governments, Mamaloni moved quickly to reassure Malaitan leaders that his government was one of national unity.³ In his first speech as PM, he pointedly addressed ‘the Malaitan premier, MPs, chiefs, ‘Arahas, Arais, and community leaders’, and assured them of fairness in his government’s dealings. He also announced that the introduction of state governments would be delayed for several years. Instead, symbolic gestures of national unity, such as daily flag raising and singing the national anthem, would be introduced in schools ‘to remind children that they belong to one country’ and ‘revive in us the confidence that ours is a sovereign nation in its own right’.⁴

Mamaloni announced a five-year programme of action built around economic renewal and decentralisation, including devolution of government functions. The PAP election manifesto had promised radical reform: a republican constitution, decentralisation of the public service, no personal income tax, free education up to full secondary level (Year 5), encouraging business,

¹ *Islands Business*, June 1989.

² Kenilorea 2008, 300.

³ Under a federal system, states would have legal authority to control residence and land ownership by outsiders, which threatened Malaitans, who made up one-third of the population and were resident throughout the provinces.

⁴ *Solomon Star*, 31 March 1989.

easing procedures for local and foreign investment, and reducing dependence on foreign aid. A proposed People's Bank would provide loans to local businesses and reduce the power of foreign banks. Another promised reform was ending round-log exports and allowing the export of only processed timber. In the event, however, round-log exports and clear-fell logging all increased far beyond sustainable limits due to growing collusion and corruption between foreign logging companies and governments (provincial and national), bureaucratic mismanagement, and lack of enforcement of regulations.⁵ Most of PAP's electoral promises were unrealistic, unachievable, unaffordable, or all three, and never eventuated.

Cuts to the public service were needed to reduce the government budget deficit but government decisions moved in the opposite direction. Public servants were awarded a 17.5% pay rise to bring the powerful Public Employees Union onside and prevent strike action, a decision which further increased the deficit while also driving up private sector wages. Decentralisation also required more officers to be seconded to the provinces, 'to ensure government machinery is productive and falls in line with sovereign principles of the constitution'.⁶ A separate ministry for provincial government was formed and a new ministry of housing and services created to address the sale of government houses, an issue that had bedevilled previous governments.

Mamaloni was as determined as ever to assert political control over the public service and bureaucrats. Permanent secretaries resisted his attempts at control and rewriting of public service general orders. A frustrated Mamaloni dismissed all the permanent secretaries and appointed new ones on four-year contracts, effectively making them political appointments. This move was challenged in the High Court but was endorsed a year later. Eventually, seven of the 15 previous permanent secretaries were reappointed on more than double their previous salaries—from SBD \$27,000 to \$57,000 per annum, greater than the PM's salary and double the deputy PM's salary—without guaranteeing any improvement in the quality of government administration. Nearly every senior administrator and politician interviewed for this book regarded the politicisation of the public service as one of Mamaloni's most damaging legacies.

Meanwhile, government revenue was squandered. Government spending was out of control on salaries, rental of houses and offices, and government vehicles. The budget deficit grew to twice its highest level seen under the Alebua government. By the end of 1991, external reserves had dropped to two weeks' worth of imports.⁷ To keep expenditure and reserves under control, a three-man 'junta' was appointed to scrutinise and approve local purchase orders from government departments. The junta was headed by an expatriate government printer—a man guaranteed to read the small print—but this only gave the impression of a government living hand to mouth.

Gathering storms

Two storms, not of the government's making, created major problems for the country over the next decade. The first appeared at the end of 1988 from Bougainville in the North Solomons Province of PNG, just over the border with Solomon Islands. Sabotage at the Panguna copper

⁵ Allen 2011, 278–301. His chapter on the political economy of logging also draws on 'high quality research' by Duncan 1995; Frazer 1997, Dauvergne 1997, Bennett 2000, and Kabutaulaka 2001.

⁶ *Islands Business*, May 1989.

⁷ *Solomon Star*, 9 November 1991.

mine by the fledgling Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) began a 10-year civil war in which possibly 20,000 people died, directly or indirectly from the fighting. From early 1989, expatriate workers and then refugees crossed the border into the Solomons to escape fighting between the BRA and the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) and their local militias. The Bougainville Crisis (covered in more detail later in this chapter) had a significant impact on Solomon Islands due to its close geographical and cultural ties to Bougainville. There was a steady flow of people, medicines, food supplies, and materials across the border between Bougainville and the Solomons. The BRA and PNGDF also moved with relative ease across the narrow distance between southern Bougainville and the westernmost islands of the Solomons. Despite repeated protests by the PNG government, a BRA coordination office was allowed to operate from Honiara, leading to serious rows with successive PNG administrations. The Solomon Islands government was in an awkward position because it did not want to interfere in the domestic affairs of a neighbouring sovereign state but also did not want to refuse help to people from part of the Solomons archipelago.

The second storm was rioting by youths in Honiara. These reflected the growing dissatisfaction of young unemployed men (*masta lius*) with no power and few prospects of jobs or earning money legally. The first riot, in November 1989, was triggered by a ‘swear’ or insult against Malaitans—a deliberately serious offence mentioning *tabu* substances, such as blood or faeces—written on the door of a store at the Central Market. This insult, allegedly by a person from Bellona—one of the two Polynesian islands south of Guadalcanal—provided Malaitan youths with an excuse to run amok, seeking to attack people from Rennell and Bellona, and do some ‘free shopping’ at predominantly Chinese-owned stores. It later emerged that the ‘swear’ had been written by a Malaitan intent on causing mischief.

Mamaloni quickly ordered the police to use tear gas to disperse the mob and to block roads into Chinatown and the road to White River, where many people from Rennell and Bellona lived.⁸ A few hours after the riot, he made a national address on SIBC radio.⁹ He ordered the police minister, Victor Ngele, to attain an agreement between leaders from both provinces within 24 hours. By 3.00 am the next morning, he had arranged an SBD \$200,000 compensation package to repair the ‘swear’, which was paid to Malaita Province. Two more youth riots took place in Honiara under Mamaloni in the 1990s, in response to which he again authorised compensation payments both times to settle matters.¹⁰

The riots revealed inter-provincial tensions and the vulnerability to violence in the national capital with a 70% Malaitan population, half of whom were under 18 years old. Although Mamaloni dealt swiftly and effectively with the immediate situation, his government did not follow up with actions or policies to effectively address the underlying youth issues. Rather, it closed youth employment schemes in Honiara for fear of attracting more youth, while not increasing opportunities for

⁸ The 1989 Honiara riot resulted in little damage. In stark contrast, the 2006 riot saw Chinatown and the Honiara Casino Hotel almost destroyed. Mamaloni and the local police command handled affairs far more quickly and effectively than a far better equipped Australian-led police force.

⁹ Mamaloni, 9 November 1989, SIBC recording No. 1425.

¹⁰ There were also youth riots in Honiara in 1989, 1992, and 1994, plus soccer riots in 1993, 1996, and 1998 when Malaitan supporters clashed with other supporters in Solomons Cup finals.

provincial employment and vocational education. Crime rates for theft and burglary continued to increase.

The riots strengthened arguments against state governments in a federal system, which Malaitans feared would allow state governments to restrict their freedom of movement and employment. Instead, devolution was expanded through extra powers and budgets for provincial governments. The number of provinces was increased to nine with the creation of Choiseul Province, which separated from Western Province in 1992, and Rennell and Bellona Province, with a population of only 2,500, established in 1993. Creating smaller provinces, with few resources and revenue sources, made a federal system even less feasible or likely.

The government sold its shares in government-owned enterprises, including Solomon Rice, the Philatelic Bureau, and Mendana Hotel. While the sales temporarily boosted revenue, the tenders and conditions of sale were poorly handled and unnecessarily generous to the buyers. Privatised government enterprises proved to be plagued by the same weaknesses that afflicted government run ones—incompetent management (especially financial), nepotism (*wantokism*) and lack of experienced or quality advisers.

Sovereignty trumped privatisation policy when the government-owned Solomon Airlines began its own international service, becoming another ‘vanity airline’.¹¹ In August 1990, it took delivery of a Boeing 727, handsomely draped in the colours of the national flag. It was leased at exorbitant expense, as well as costing USD \$4m a year for servicing, crews, and overseas offices. Solomon Airlines lost SBD \$8.5m in 1991 and needed capital injections of \$16m from 1991 to 1992. By 1993, it was haemorrhaging \$400,000 per month. The government desperately wanted to privatise the airline but was unable to do so because of pressure from unions and opposition to foreign control of the country’s international service rights.

The government looked for urgently needed revenue from foreign-financed projects, mainly in logging and fishing. New applications from overseas investors were rapidly approved, including \$38m for logging, largely on customary land. Most landowners were only interested in receiving royalties and did not, or could not, ensure that logging companies replanted their land. Logging rapidly expanded in Choiseul, Western, Isabel, Guadalcanal, and Makira provinces, causing extensive damage to forests, rivers, reefs, food and water supplies. Ordinary villagers, especially women, saw little if any of the proceeds, yet suffered directly from environmental destruction and social damage.¹² Logging proceeds financed corruption at local, provincial, and national levels. The beneficiaries were leaders and middlemen, including politicians and public servants, who deceived relatives and villagers into signing agreements. Extraordinary amounts of revenue were lost through poorly designed contracts, export duty exemptions, and fraud due to transfer pricing, under-reporting of species and sizes, and harvesting of undersized trees. For example, in the period

¹¹ A term for national carriers run by countries that can ill afford them. This was ‘an era of automatic nationally ruinous losses’ for Pacific Island airlines. *Islands Business*, March 1995.

¹² Domestic violence, pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and malnutrition increased as a result of logging, which I monitored while working for the provincial health services from 1994 to 1996 and living opposite the Eagon logging camp in Choiseul.

1993–94, an estimated SBD \$130m was lost in potential logging revenue, equivalent to 35% of GDP and 53% of government revenue.¹³

Less visibly, the country's rich tuna waters were exploited unsustainably and often illegally. Foreign fishing fleets operated legally as joint ventures with provincial governments but, as with logging, licensing agreements were not honoured or policed. One example was the Makira-Belle Ltd company, formed in 1990 as a joint venture between Makira Province and a Philippines company, Frabelle Fishing Corporation. Makira-Belle was granted a 30,000-tonne quota, export tax concessions, a tax holiday on profits, while work permits for foreign workers were waived. In the three years before the company left, fish worth an estimated USD \$30m were caught and transhipped, without any onshore processing.¹⁴ Royalties were a small fraction of the real value, and the government received minimal returns in taxes. The commons—the country's natural resources—were being exploited and often stolen by unscrupulous foreigners and local brokers.

Trench warfare with the Central Bank

Mamaloni was determined to bring the Central Bank under political control. He demanded that the CBSI and the Development Bank of Solomon Islands (DBSI) support the government's spending requirements. He accused the CBSI governor and its board of disobedience, disloyalty and, with typical hyperbole, treason. The opening salvo in his attack came early during a Central Bank briefing on the economic situation for the incoming Cabinet. CBSI governor Hughes had barely started his presentation when Mamaloni ended the meeting, saying, 'We don't want any more of this'.¹⁵

Consistent with social credit philosophy, Mamaloni blamed foreigners at the Ministry of Finance and the CBSI for the country's woes and manipulating the national economy for their own ends and mates. In December 1989, he wrote a lacerating 26-point letter in which he accused Hughes and the CBSI of being under the influence of the IMF and intruding on government sovereignty. He blamed the CBSI and the previous Kenilorea-Alebuva government for the poor economic performance of the previous four years:

There is no secret anymore that the CBSI has been dominating the economic programmes and strategies of this country for the last 10 years. Government after government have been easily manoeuvred to adopt your economic thoughts or those of foreign institutions who advised the CBSI. This is clearly manifested by all the speeches made by previous Ministers of Finance, except the Hon. CC Abe. Incidentally, we have also discovered that you [Hughes] are titled the 'King of Solomons' by internationally renowned institutions and dignatories [sic]—quite an achievement but somewhat amusing because everyone was bluffed that you were the sole representative of SIG [Solomon Islands government] and people.¹⁶

¹³ Duncan 1995, xvi–xvii; Allen 2011, 278.

¹⁴ Other provincial joint ventures with foreign companies were Malaita-Oriental Services Transport Company. (Thailand), Malaita Russell Fishing Co. (the Philippines) and Lauru-Mariscoco (Singapore).

¹⁵ Interview with Tony Hughes, 2 October 2014.

¹⁶ PM to Governor of the Central Bank, 5 January 1990.

This letter explicitly rehearsed social credit philosophy— ‘we need constantly to remind ourselves that the most important resources of all are the Indigenous people of this country’. Mamaloni reiterated his government’s commitment to privatisation and made the bizarre claim that the Central Bank was advocating a ‘British type of socialism’. In an annotated commentary to the equally bizarre accusation that he was ‘King of Solomons’, Hughes wrote: ‘Messrs Kinika, Mamaloni, Ulufa’alu, Kejoa, Kenilorea and colleagues have ably represented all over the world. I have worked under them in several capacities, but there has never been any doubt who were the national leaders.’

Minister of Finance Christopher Columbus Abe was one of few ministers to stand up to Mamaloni. Abe wrote to him in March 1991 expressing his ‘total disgust’ with the PM’s office negotiating another public service salary increase and threatened to cut all grants and other expenditures.¹⁷ Abe agreed with the Central Bank that public service salary increases were unaffordable, drove up private sector wages, raised prices for the majority of people, increased the budget deficit, and decreased foreign reserves. In March 1991, Mamaloni sent Abe an incendiary six-page memorandum, copied to the entire Cabinet and even Andrew Nori, the new Opposition leader, who responded with free advice to Mamaloni about cabinet disunity and belittling his own ministers.¹⁸ Mamaloni accused Abe of failing to perform his job properly, poor diplomacy, and uncooperative relationships with his staff and other ministers. He warned him, not too subtly, ‘pride comes before a fall’.¹⁹ Abe wrote a grovelling reply and began to sing from the anti-CBSI hymn sheet.

Blaming the IMF, the international economic order, foreign advisers, and CBSI blinded Mamaloni to his own government’s mismanagement and ill-discipline. In 1991, he and Abe attempted to bring in legislation that would enable the Minister of Finance and Cabinet to remove the bank’s governor and deputy governor for any reason.²⁰ The attempt failed because according to its charter and international convention, the Central Bank was legally authorised to provide objective technical advice. As another governor had written, ‘The job of a Central Bank is to take the government by the feet and plant them firmly on the ground’.²¹

Financial scandals

As in his 1981–1984 administration, Mamaloni was involved in two loan scandals in the search for alternative sources of government funds. In May 1990, without Cabinet approval, he authorised two of his ministers, Christopher Abe and Alex Bartlett, to negotiate a loan worth SBD \$250m. Bartlett had spent four years trying to put the deal together and persuaded Mamaloni and Minister of Finance Abe that it was bona fide. The source of the loan was ESCA—a Rome-based finance group claiming to have connections to the Vatican Bank. The intermediary, Roberto Coppola—allegedly associated with the Vatican Bank—would receive an eye-watering 10% commission. The arrangement should have immediately raised red flags, as should any connection to the Vatican Bank, which had been embroiled in scandals during the 1980s. Bartlett had presented himself with

¹⁷ Memorandum from Minister of Finance to PM, 13 March 1991.

¹⁸ Letter from Leader of the Opposition to PM, March 1991.

¹⁹ Memorandum from PM to Hon. C.C. Abe, 22 March 1991.

²⁰ CBSI Amendment Bill, 1991.

²¹ Blackman 1998, 200.

CBSI credentials, although the Central Bank was not aware of the deal until the documents were leaked.

When the proposed loan became public, it was criticised as illegal, unprocedural, and without Cabinet or parliamentary approval. Opposition leader Nori tabled a no-confidence motion over the matter in May 1990, but Mamaloni had the numbers to defeat the motion. Three months later, the government decided to proceed with the loan, and a delegation was arranged to sign the documents and collect the funds. Just before the delegation was due to travel, Italian police arrested Coppola in relation to a drug-trafficking investigation. Fake passports—including a Solomon Islands diplomatic passport—false papers, and a large amount of cash were found in his possession. It transpired that ESCA was not connected to the Vatican Bank, and Coppola was not even a Catholic.

A second scandal took the country into even riskier territory. Details about negotiations for an even bigger loan, of SBD \$1 billion, emerged at the same time. The intermediary in this case was Dr Haddas Hasiyama, posing as a member of the Saudi royal family, who negotiated an immediate fee of \$1.8m. The government spent \$84,000 on overseas trips by a three-person delegation.²² In September 1990, Nori again attacked the government over the costs of the trips and loan, which were far in excess of legal limits. The Central Bank described the scheme as having all the hallmarks of being fraudulent. A simple enquiry by the Central Bank to its international contacts uncovered that none of the so-called brokers were known to the Saudi authorities in their Washington embassy. The scheme was dropped only after heated debate in Parliament and newspapers berated the government.

The Bougainville Crisis, 1990 to 1993

The civil war in Bougainville became known as ‘the Crisis’ and affected both domestic and foreign affairs. The border between North Solomons Province of PNG and the Solomon Islands, only 30 km apart in the Bougainville Strait, had been inherited from an imperial agreement between Germany and Britain in 1899 and 1900, when the imperial powers decided to exchange claims in Samoa and the western islands in the Solomons.²³ Germany kept its claim to Bougainville as part of its New Guinea territories.

Bougainville is the largest island in the Solomon archipelago by a considerable margin.²⁴ It has extensive deposits of copper as well as traces of gold and silver. The Panguna mine was launched in the 1960s in central Bougainville by CRA—a subsidiary of the global giant, Rio Tinto Zinc—and became the largest copper mine in the world and a vital part of the PNG economy. Mining revenues and infrastructure made North Solomons Province the most developed province in the country, with the area around Arawa in central Bougainville operating and looking like a mining town in tropical Australia.

²² *Islands Business*, November 1990; Moore 2004, 55; Steeves 1996, 128.

²³ The border was adopted by Solomon Islands and PNG after independence. The two countries signed a maritime border agreement in 1989 and another in 1994 recognising border crossing privileges for traditional inhabitants on both sides.

²⁴ Bougainville occupies 9,300 km², almost equal to Guadalcanal (5,300 km²) and Malaita (4,300 km²) combined.



Map 15.1: Map of Bougainville, Buka, and the border with Solomon Islands. Source: CartoGis, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

In 1969, a Bougainville separatist movement emerged due to dissatisfaction with royalties and benefits provided by PNG and CRA. The movement, called Napidakoe Navitu,²⁵ demanded autonomy for the province, greater royalties, and compensation for landowners for environmental damage. Fifteen days before PNG's independence in 1975, a Special Committee established by the province's premier, Leo Hamnett, unilaterally declared independence, renaming the province the 'Republic of North Solomons', but which had no legal effect. Dissatisfaction over compensation for the impact of Panguna mine festered over the next decade, fuelled by cultural enmity between 'red skins' from mainland PNG and 'black skins' from Bougainville.²⁶ Armed insurgents, calling themselves the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and led by Francis Ona, fought and defeated the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) and its associated militia in a 10-year civil war. Systematic sabotage at Panguna began in 1988, leading to the closure of the mine early the following year. The PNGDF launched counter-insurgency operations, including extra-judicial killings and brutal internment camps. They used patrol boats to blockade the Bougainville-Solomons border and high-powered canoes to pursue the BRA. PNG army and militia forces made repeated incursions into the Solomons, targeting fuel stores and canoes carrying supplies, as well as attacking Solomon Islanders engaged in lucrative trade with Bougainvilleans. Initially, Mamaloni wanted to close the border with Bougainville, especially after BRA soldiers walked around armed in public on Solomon Islands territory. In practice, the border was too close and stopping the flow of people and supplies across the border too difficult, especially at night.

²⁵ *Napidakoe* was an anagram of the names of ethnic groups in the Kieta sub-district and *Navitu* means 'united people' (Griggin 1982, 113).

²⁶ Fugui 1994; Regan 1998.

While the Mamaloni government did not formally recognise the BRA or support independence for Bougainville, Mamaloni profoundly disagreed with PNG's attempts at military solutions, arguing strenuously for dialogue and consensus— 'the Melanesian way'. Bougainville is geographically and ethnically close to Solomon Islands and only became part of PNG by imperial fiat. Bougainvilleans had legitimate grounds as refugees, with a well-founded fear of persecution if they returned, which Mamaloni's government accepted. The government allowed humanitarian supplies to flow through the Solomons and a BRA coordination office to operate in Honiara, headed by spokesman Martin Miriori. Aiding and allowing free passage to refugees created deep stresses in the normally cordial relationship between the two Melanesian countries.

Talks between PNG and Bougainville delegations in May 1990 failed to resolve the crisis. In October 1990, PNG reignited armed conflict by landing at Buka, the provincial capital, and taking control of the northern part of Bougainville. Fighting and atrocities committed by both sides had resulted in perhaps 200 deaths by the end of 1990. In January 1991, Solomon Islands brokered talks in Honiara between PNG and Bougainville representatives, leading to the Honiara Declaration of Peace, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation.²⁷

Mamaloni responded to repeated PNGDF incursions into Solomons territory by boosting the 60-strong paramilitary Police Field Force at the border and strengthening its firepower. In 1992, the government ordered two containers of high-powered weapons and ammunition through Mamaloni's close friend, Japanese businessman Yukio Sato. The deal came to light after the 1993 election, when Sato presented a bill to the government for a 10% commission agreed to by Mamaloni.²⁸ The militarisation of the police force was later to have unforeseen and tragic repercussions when, during the Tension, high-powered weapons were stolen from police armouries.

The Bougainville Crisis also created political tensions with cabinet members from Western and Choiseul provinces who publicly supported the Bougainville cause. Not for the first time, Mamaloni was at odds with Sir Baddeley Devesi, now foreign minister and deputy PM. Devesi was willing to meet his PNG counterpart, Michael Somare, and tried to arrange meetings between Mamaloni and PNG PM Rabbie Namaliu. Mamaloni cancelled all meetings as he saw no point in negotiating with a lame duck government, pending the PNG elections scheduled for June 1992. He refused to accept phone calls from PM Namaliu when the latter tried to apologise for border incursions. Relations thawed temporarily after the elections and Paius Wingti became prime minister, but the PNGDF continued to commit more atrocities and border violations.²⁹ When Mamaloni finally met with PM Wingti in September 1992, he promised to close the BRA coordination office in Honiara, expel BRA spokesman Martin Miriori, and control border crossings. But again, no action was taken.

²⁷ Signed by PNG Foreign Minister Michael Somare and Joseph Kabui, premier of Bougainville (North Solomons Province) on 23 January 1991.

²⁸ Interview with Yukio Sato, Honiara, 23 April 2010.

²⁹ PNG PM Wingti engineered a political coup in September 1993 that surpassed even Mamaloni for speed and cunning. Hoping to gain a new 18-month period of grace from no-confidence motions, he resigned and was re-elected within the space of four minutes. The manoeuvre failed when a new grace period was denied in the courts.

Matters came to a head in September 1992, when the PNGDF attacked Kamaleai village in the Shortland Islands, abducted a man, murdered his wife and brother-in-law, and wounded their child. Although apologies were made and compensation eventually paid by PNG, the Kamaleai incident strengthened Solomon Islands' resolve to assist Bougainville and resist PNG. Mamaloni wrote to the Australian PM Paul Keating to say that he wanted help to establish a base on the border with Bougainville. There was considerable anger towards Australia over its role in training and arming the PNGDF, particularly for supplying Iroquois helicopters that were used as gunships and to throw captives to their deaths in the sea.

In October 1992, the PNGDF landed and attacked the former mining township of Arawa in Bougainville, with reports of rape and payback for deaths of comrades. However, the operation floundered against a well-armed and organised guerrilla force fighting for liberation on home ground. PNG's continued pursuit of a military solution angered and frustrated Mamaloni, who wrote directly to Sir Julius Chan, the PNG Foreign Minister and Deputy PM. In a 12-page letter in February 1993 he was incandescent, accusing the PNG government of complicity in and complacency about atrocities:

[T]he behaviour of your government is well below expectations—too many broken promises, inconsistent policy statements, diplomatic blunders and speculation uncontrolled and random media opinions, non-cooperation, disrespect to your own Indigenous population, extreme violations of government principles and international laws and norms, etc, etc. ... The truth is you have deviated very dramatically from your election statements to deal with Bougainville.

... The crisis is indeed your 'internal problem', hence pertinent that you take more positive steps to resolving it ... The Solomon Islands is not a party to the Bougainville conflict, hence, you should not continue to throw dirty mud on us for own failings. If you require our help still to assist with your 'internal problem' then it will be on our terms.³⁰

Sovereignty trumped all other considerations for Mamaloni and he refused to stand in the shadow of another country. His undiplomatic letter, however, did nothing to improve relations with PNG or make the work of diplomats any easier. The militarisation of the police and border made armed conflict within Solomon Islands more likely and more lethal. As we shall see in Chapter 17, it would take another five years to achieve a peace agreement in Bougainville, during which time the 'spillover effects' on the Solomons were a major concern and expense.

A lightning coup: Mamaloni ditches his own party

PAP leaders Kingmele and Kausimae thought that the loans scandal had irreparably damaged the party's reputation, bringing 'not only shame but humiliation'.³¹ Moves had already begun in February 1990 to depose Mamaloni for tarnishing the PAP image with his leadership. Kausimae authorised a review of the Mamaloni government since coming to power, including its failure to implement the PAP manifesto. Mamaloni was accused of being dictatorial, interfering in

³⁰ PM Mamaloni to Deputy PM Julius Chan, 22 February 1993. The letter was highly undiplomatic—unsurprising given Mamaloni's disregard for protocol. His accusations of violating principles and deviating from election statements could equally have applied to him.

³¹ *Solomon Star*, 14 June 1990.

departments, and overly listening to Chinese interests and advisers. Mamaloni counter-attacked, blaming his detractors for being half-hearted and opposing reform measures, such as privatisation and creating new overseas missions. He also made the extraordinary assertion that short-term fiscal measures were not the answer to the country's economic problems, which demonstrated how unrealistic his economic ideas were proving in practice. In October 1990, the PAP executive announced that it no longer wanted Mamaloni as leader and would introduce a motion of no-confidence at the upcoming national conference. Mamaloni moved with speed to ditch his own party and stay in power. He told Job Dudley Tausinga that the PAP wanted to pull the carpet out from under him, saying 'they take one step and I must take two steps'.³²



Figure 15.1: The lightning coup, October 1990. Source: *Pacific Islands Monthly*.

Mamaloni resigned as PAP parliamentary leader on 9 October 1990 and the next day formed a Government for National Unity and Reconciliation. He lured five opposition MPs, to join him³³ and dismissed five ministers without warning. A very upset Danny Philip asked Mamaloni why he was sacked, to be told, 'Because you are my friend ('baerae' in Roviana)'.³⁴ After his sacking, Philip joined the opposition. The nine remaining members of Cabinet were summoned individually and agreed to serve under Mamaloni, thereby effectively ending their allegiance to the PAP. Mamaloni claimed that forming a new government was necessary for the unity of the nation. With only one MP from Malaita in his cabinet, he was afraid of ethnic violence if more Malaitans were not brought into the government. According to one of his ministers, Michael Maina, there were intelligence reports of an assassination threat against Mamaloni and possible actions by senior Malaitan police officers. Whether or not this was a credible threat or a convenient excuse is

³² Interview with Job Dudley Tausinga, 10 December 2011.

³³ Four Malaitans—George Luilamo, Sir Peter Kenilorea (in London at the time), Alfred Maetia and Sam Alasia—plus Ezekiel Alebua, who initially agreed but then pulled out and was replaced by Job Dudley Tausinga. The sacked ministers were Abraham Kapei, Alan Paul, Danny Philip, Nathaniel Waena, and Edmund Andresen.

³⁴ Implying that it was safer to sack a friend than an opponent. Interview with Danny Philip, 6 January 2011.

uncertain, but Mamaloni was always wary of Malaitan dominance and prepared to assuage their demands.³⁵

‘This superb political trickster’

In his autobiography, Sir Peter Kenilorea wrote: ‘Mamaloni rang me in London [and] with his own humorous political tinge said that the nation I had birthed in peace and plenty no longer had a government. He went on to say that the only way he could salvage the situation for our dear country and people’s sake was for me to cross the floor and join him to form the government. I knew in my heart that Solo meant every word that he said. It was the first time that this superb political trickster ever admitted to me that he had no more cards to play. The only way out he could see was for me to join him to strengthen his government’.³⁶

Over a 48-hour period, Mamaloni engineered a political coup that neutralised his competitors and outmanoeuvred his opponents. The coup cemented his reputation as ‘one of the most rugged, skilful and astute politicians in Solomon Islands parliamentary history’, as one letter to the *Solomon Star* described him.³⁷ Mamaloni then managed to persuade Bart Ulufa’alu, who had financial difficulties, to resign the seat for East Honiara to take up a post as a highly paid economic adviser to the government. In return for resigning from Parliament and opposition, he was given a salary and an office but no work, and Mamaloni had sidelined another of his most trenchant critics.³⁸



Figure 15.2: The political grandmaster at work, Mamaloni with John Maetia Kaliuae, 1990. Source: *Solomon Star*.

When Danny Philip and Nori moved a no-confidence motion in November 1990, Mamaloni was saved by none other than Sir Peter Kenilorea, his new foreign minister, who spuriously but successfully persuaded the Speaker, Waeta Ben, that the no-confidence motion was a repeat of an earlier one within the life of the current Parliament, and thus should be ruled out of order. Philip

³⁵ Interview with Michael Maina, 14 December 2010, and confirmed by Paul Daokalia, interview, 26 November 2013.

³⁶ Kenilorea 2008, 300.

³⁷ *Solomon Star*, 26 October 1990. However, the letter writer, John Asipara, continued: ‘The PM is nothing more than a political fossil, a disaster event of yesterday ... he stands on nothing more than his reputation and political astuteness’.

³⁸ Hughes 2001, 5.

and Nori challenged the Speaker's ruling in the High Court, but its judges are reluctant to overrule or challenge Parliament on procedural decisions. The decision was allowed to stand on the grounds that the Speaker was not acting beyond his power in disallowing the motion. Nori resigned as leader of the opposition, which was left in disarray. Mamaloni emerged with his reputation for cunning and chutzpah enhanced. He was rejuvenated and able to stay in power until the next election in 1993. A *Solomon Star* editorial was less positive.

Politicians and political parties

'Political parties come and go like clouds blown in all directions across the sky. ... Politicians know only one thing, to get into any party that is likely to win and form a government. Once they get into power and rule, the politicians want to stay there at all costs. Whether they do well or worse for this nation, they wish to remain there as long as they like, pretending as though they know how to rule. In fact they make a total mess of things.'³⁹

From peak to troughs, 1991 to 1993

Mamaloni's coup kept him in power but his government was as chaotic as before. A decision to reduce the number of public service positions by 17% in 1992 and a further 7% in 1993 did nothing to reduce the government's wages bill or improve efficiency, because most of the positions were unfilled anyway. The *Solomon Star* editorial described the public service as:

Full of sweet talkers, betel nut chewers, daily late comers, those who damage government properties, help themselves to government funds. There are not enough trained administrators, they are not acting on general orders, and have no clear directives of how to do the job.⁴⁰

The Central Bank warned repeatedly of the dangers of government overspending and uncontrolled borrowing. The public sector was using 60% of the total credit facility, leaving only 40% for the private sector. Private sector-led growth was stymied by high wage costs and interest rates reaching 16 to 20%. The government reached its credit ceiling with the Central Bank and was unable to service its overdrafts. Foreign reserves plunged to SBD \$23m, compared with \$88m before the Mamaloni government came to power. Playing the sovereignty card again, he blamed the commercial banks and warned that 'any move by any of the existing foreign owned banks will be severely counteracted even to the extent of closing the bank involved and deporting the management'.⁴¹ Mamaloni's personal finances were not faring well either—he was summonsed to a Brisbane court in January 1992 over a \$30,000 debt from Hemisphere Securities for his fibreglass business, Prime Products.⁴²

The Opposition was also in disarray. Former trade union and now Labour Party leader, Josep Tuhanuku, took over as opposition leader in 1991. He criticised Mamaloni for the economic mess and for failing to represent the country at CHOGM and the South Pacific Forum, preferring to

³⁹ *Solomon Star*, 19 October 1990.

⁴⁰ *Solomon Star*, 19 October 1990.

⁴¹ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, December 1991.

⁴² Prime Products made fibreglass products and was one of Mamaloni's longest lasting business ventures and supplied many constituency projects, which he did not regard as a conflict of interest (Leonard Paia 2003).

stay at home playing cricket and darts. Mamaloni only went to the PM's office occasionally and instead worked out of the new PM's residence at Lengakiki, renovated at a cost of \$1m despite the government's cash flow problems. The previous PM's residence was occupied by the governor-general because the State House official residence had been sold to a Japanese hotel developer, allegedly on Mamaloni's orders. Government House was sold to a joint-venture company, South Pacific Development Company, for SBD \$6.5m—40% less than its valuation. Its proposed replacement above the Lawson Tama national stadium would have cost SBD \$10m, which the country could ill afford, but it was never built.

Other dubious land sales were approved, including the area in front of the PM's offices which was sold to former Patosha manager, Francis Chow. An adjoining plot was sold to become a nightclub despite the obvious risks to security and image of the government. Prime real estate opposite the Guadalcanal provincial headquarters was sold by the Guadalcanal premier for \$50,000 without consulting his executive. After the land was sold to ITA Hardware, shade trees for pedestrians were cut down to make way for an oversized warehouse on the main street of the capital. Gradually, valuable plots of land were sold off to developers who bought them corruptly.

Mamaloni appeared unconcerned by outsiders' perceptions of himself and his government. He was unpunctual and unreliable, often cancelling meetings or failing to show up at the last moment. He managed to offend most foreign donors on whom the country relied for development funds. He refused to meet with foreign ministers of Australia and New Zealand, Gareth Evans, and Don McKinnon, arguing that he was prime minister and they should talk to their counterparts. This was an extraordinary slight by the leader of a small country highly dependent on foreign aid. Mamaloni disliked Australian diplomats, and disrespected successive high commissioners John Starey (1988 to 1992) and Ruth Pearce (1993 to 1994). According to one source, Mamaloni said, 'first they send me a drunk and then they send me a child'.⁴³



Figure 15.3: PM Mamaloni with his counterpart Australian PM Paul Keating (R), and Governor-General George Lepping (L), South Pacific Forum meeting, Honiara, July 1992. Source: Mamaloni family.

Nor was he fond of the British. He refused to meet, and then cancelled a dinner, with Lord Simon Glenarthur, minister of state for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the Thatcher government.

⁴³ Interview with Sir Trevor Garland, 13 July 2013.

Glenarthur was an aristocrat, educated at Eton and a former major in the Royal Hussars—all of which would have galled Mamaloni. On the flight out of Honiara, Glenarthur found out that Mamaloni's antipathy lay behind the cancellation and he said that he would make Solomon Islands was the lowest priority.⁴⁴

In June 1992, Mamaloni led a nine-member delegation to the UN Environmental Conference ('Earth Summit') at Rio de Janeiro. Overcoming his fear of flying, he openly admitted that his motive for going was to meet Pele, the great Brazilian soccer player. Mamaloni had no credibility in environmental conservation given his governments' logging and fishing policies. However, he said with considerable justification in his speech at Rio: 'Environment is becoming an integral part of the existence of islands people, but this is threatened by problems instituted from outside these islands'. He added that he wanted aid to be 'uncumbersome to development, with easy access to developing countries'.⁴⁵ Although the Earth Summit proved to make little or no difference to the world's environment or Solomon Islands in particular, Mamaloni did manage to meet Pele and get his autograph.



Figure 15.4: Mamaloni and the Solomon Islands delegation signing the Rio Declaration on the environment and development, June 1992. Source: Mamaloni family.

By the time the 1993 elections arrived, many MPs and the public were sick and tired of Mamaloni's maverick politics and economics. His absences and disrespect towards high office and foreign leaders left many dismayed and his own reputation in disrepute. His government had become mired in corruption and synonymous with deteriorating services, leaving the public desperate for economic improvement and reliable government.

⁴⁴ Interview with Sir Trevor Garland, former honorary consul to Solomon Islands from 1994 to 2017.

⁴⁵ Mamaloni, June 1992. The Earth Summit speech was written by Dr Transform Aqorau (son of Francis Talasasa Aqorau) who travelled to the conference and can be seen standing on the far right in Figure 15.4.

Chapter 16. Hunting Down the Hilly Government, 1993 to 1994

By 1993, the country was deep in debt, and the government was at loggerheads with the public service, the financial sector, and foreign donors. Still, it seemed likely that Mamaloni—‘the wizard politician and master magician in politics and numbers game’⁴⁶— would again form the government. But for a fourth time following an election, he lost the leadership ballot—this time to Francis Billy Hilly from Western Province heading a coalition of six parties. This defeat reflected discontent with Mamaloni and his style of government. However, Mamaloni was able to use his political dark arts and funding from the logging industry to undermine Hilly’s coalition in Parliament. Hilly resigned in October 1994 and Mamaloni returned for his third and final term as prime minister.



Figure 16.1: ‘Mamaloni magic: Will he be able to conjure up another win?’ Source: *Pacific Islands Monthly*.

Two new parties contested the elections in late May 1993: Francis Saemala’s National Action Party and Job Dudley Tausinga’s Christian Fellowship Action Party. Both performed respectably, but Mamaloni’s Solomon Islands Government of National Unity and Reconciliation (SIGNUR) easily won the most seats. The Special Discretionary Funds for MPs, funded by Taiwan and introduced in the months before the election, appeared to have significantly affected the election results with 30 out of 37 (82%) MPs re-elected, far higher than the normal 50% turnover.

Mamaloni’s SIGNUR claimed 20 seats in the wheeling and dealing to form government after the election, four short of the number needed for a majority in the newly expanded 47-seat Parliament. MPs and party groups offered the usual inducements (cash, ministerial posts and positions on SOEs) to lure them to the winning side. To entice more MPs to his side, Mamaloni proposed expanding the number of ministries and thus the size of the Cabinet from 15 to 18, as well as increasing Special Discretionary Funds from \$100,000 to \$400,000.

⁴⁶ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, May 1993.

To the surprise of many, Mamaloni and his National Unity Group failed to secure a majority in the vote for PM. In June 1993, they lost by one vote (24 to 23) to the National Coalition Partnership (NCP), comprising six different parties, plus Independents. Francis Billy Hilly—a compromise candidate from Western Province—won the vote to lead the NCP (with Francis Saemala as deputy) and defeated Mamaloni by one vote in the contest for PM. A crucial vote belonged to Sir Baddeley Devesi to whom Mamaloni had agreed to handover at the next election after 1989. As often happens between rival leaders, Mamaloni did not keep his word and Devesi joined the coalition.⁴⁷

Results of the 1993 elections by political party and leader ⁴⁸	
National Unity Group (SIGNUR)—Solomon Mamaloni (Ind)	20 seats
People's Alliance Party (PAP)—Denis Lulei	9 seats
Independents (Ind)—Francis Billy Hilly	4 seats
Christian Fellowship Action Party—Job Dudley Tausinga	4 seats
National Action Party (NAPSI)—Francis Saemala	3 seats
National Front for Progress (NFP)—Andrew Nori	3 seats
United Party (UP)—Ezekiel Alebua	3 seats
Labour Party—Josés Tuhanuku	1 seat
Liberal Party—Bart Ulufa`alu (lost his seat to Saemala)	0 seats
Total	47 seats

With leadership rivals Kenilorea and Ulufa`alu now both out of Parliament, Mamaloni was the country's most experienced politician and an obvious choice as leader after 20 years. Considering how weary Mamaloni was of leadership, it is unclear why he continued to seek high office. But logging interests and money were to prove decisive in bringing down the Hilly government. A serious threat was posed by an incoming reformist government to many former cabinet ministers who were directors or beneficiaries of logging companies. Indeed, Mamaloni had recently started one of his own in West Makira—Somma Ltd—with a Malaysian-Chinese logging contractor. Mamaloni was further motivated to regain power when the Hilly government announced a Commission of Inquiry into his previous government's corrupt deals, abuse of vehicles, and a review of diplomatic policy.⁴⁹

The Hilly government, June 1993 to October 1994

The Hilly coalition government was described as having 'the most able politicians to lead a Solomon Islands government since Independence'.⁵⁰ However, a parliamentary majority of only one in a coalition of six parties, plus Independents, was inherently unstable, especially against the cunning of Mamaloni, who used his knowledge of individual politicians to get back into power. Mamaloni fully expected to be back before long in the PM's office and refused to leave the PM's

⁴⁷ Recent examples of leaders breaking promises to handover include Bob Hawke (to Paul Keating), and John Howard (to Peter Costello) in Australia, and Tony Blair (to Gordon Brown) in Britain.

⁴⁸ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1993; Steeves 1996, 130. Some candidates had more than one party against their name or switched parties during negotiations for forming government.

⁴⁹ Corrupt deals included the contract awarded to a Japanese contractor firm, Kumagai Gumi, to build a four-lane highway without a public tender. The company had not built roads before, which became evident with the rapid deterioration and flooding of the highway after completion.

⁵⁰ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, November 1993.

residence. Hilly's fragile coalition was weakened by *big-man* rivalries between ambitious Finance Minister Andrew Nori and Deputy PM Francis Saemala. Another weak link in the coalition was Denis Lulei, a proud man of chiefly descent from Isabel and leader of the PAP, which had won the most seats within the coalition. Passed over for senior ministerial positions—he was appointed Minister of Education and Training—Lulei was easily wooed by Mamaloni and left the coalition in November 1993. Six more MPs defected over the next 12 months, giving Mamaloni the numbers over PM Hilly.⁵¹

Leader of the Opposition Mamaloni tried various strategies to unseat the Hilly government. Eight election petitions were mounted by the opposition against NCP MPs but all failed, leaving the coalition's bare majority intact. He used the courts to challenge the government through an ambitious young Fiji-born lawyer, Julian Moti, who presented the argument that an absolute majority to form government should be 25, not 24—equal to half the votes (23½), plus one vote—a poor argument and even worse arithmetic. The government survived the legal challenge, but the court case kept the government on the defensive. Hilly responded by declaring Julian Moti *persona non grata* and sent him packing.⁵²

The Hilly government made much needed efforts to bring the nation's finances under control. Finance minister Nori repaired relations with the Central Bank and took IMF advice on structural adjustment of the economy, including how to end round-log exports and manage the consequences. Tackling unsustainable logging and corruption meant taking on the powerful logging lobby. Logging contracts and work permits were cancelled, the combined duty on logs was increased, and 20% of all timber duties were to go to landowners.⁵³ Logging companies responded by stockpiling logs and depriving the government of revenue from logging, which accounted for 56% of export revenue and 31% of all government revenues in 1994.⁵⁴

The new Minister for Forestry and Conservation was former trade union leader and Labour Party leader, Joses Tuhanuku. An honest politician, he was a threat to the logging industry and practices. He refused a SBD \$10,000 bribe from Tony Yeong, a director of Berjaya Group—one of Malaysia's biggest companies. Tuhanuku said that 'the problem of endemic corruption has got out of control in the past five to six years which coincides with the influx of foreign timber companies into Solomon Islands'.⁵⁵ Outsiders were critical of logging practices and corruption, including Gordon Bilney, the Australian minister for Pacific Island Affairs:

⁵¹ Denis Lulei, Eric Seri, Alan Paul, Oliver Zapo, John Musuota, Alfred Maetia and Edmund Andresen; except for Alan Paul, all were given ministerial posts when Mamaloni took over in November 1994. Lulei became Deputy PM and Minister for Home Affairs.

⁵² Julian Moti moved to Vanuatu after his deportation but maintained a legal practice in Honiara. He came to prominence again in 2006, when he was controversially appointed as attorney-general by the Sogavare government and challenged the legal basis of the RAMSI intervention. He was arrested by RAMSI officers, illegally deported to Australia, and charged with historical claims of child sexual abuse in Vanuatu. The charges were not proved and Moti was awarded undisclosed damages for unlawful arrest and reputational damage.

⁵³ The combined duty was 35% on the first SBD\$ 250 per cubic metre and 65% on the balance above \$250.

⁵⁴ CBSI 1996, 16.

⁵⁵ *Islands Business*, November 1993.

How can any elected leader simply stand by and watch forests being ripped out and fisheries collapsing? This seems to me to be a dereliction of their primary duty of elected representatives to care for the interests of their people and future generations.⁵⁶

At a 1994 South Pacific Forum meeting, themed 'Managing our Resources', Australian PM Paul Keating criticised Malaysian logging companies and unsustainable logging. He offered Australian assistance to design new legislation on ownership and use of Solomon Island resources. This provided a perfect opening for Mamaloni to attack foreign interference and the Hilly government's attempts to control the logging industry. Mamaloni went in hard in supporting foreign and local logging companies, including his own in Makira. He accused the Australian-funded forestry project of lying about over-exploitation of Solomon Islands' natural resources. He tore into the Australian government for being 'imperialist and paternalistic' and told Keating to 'shut up and stop interfering with the domestic affairs of Solomon Islands'.⁵⁷ Playing David to Goliath, he also attacked Australia over its shameful treatment of Aboriginal people.

In its effort to restore finances, the Hilly government cancelled the proposed new State House, estimated to cost SBD \$12m. However, the cancellation was hardly a saving because the old State House was re-purchased from the Japanese purchaser for SBD \$7m, and compensation also had to be paid to the construction company. The new government also wanted to proceed with privatisation of government-owned enterprises. Other cost-saving measures included orders to end abuse of government vehicles and fuel, cancelling the lucrative contracts of permanent secretaries, and settling a doctors' strike that Mamaloni had been unwilling or unable to do.

A major issue was repairing relations with PNG. Mamaloni had refused to cooperate while PNG armed forces were blockading Bougainville. The civilian population was suffering badly from the conflict, with atrocities committed by the BRA, PNGDF and its proxy resistance forces, including rape, torture, and executions. Outside Buka in the north, Bougainvilleans had virtually no access to goods and services, including healthcare and schools. The southern route across the border with Solomon Islands became essential for survival and sanctuary for many. In a population of 150,000, 44,000 were corralled in PNG-controlled centres while another 40,000 struggled to survive in the bush. Deputy PM Francis Saemala worked Augustine Manakako, Secretary to the PM and UPNG graduate with many contacts in PNG, to negotiate a border agreement, including payment of compensation for deaths and incursions into Solomon Islands. Saemala initiated a ceasefire with a six-point plan for peace in Bougainville. The BRA office in Honiara was closed down, although Martin Miriori was allowed to stay.⁵⁸

The Hilly government's reform agenda promised much but created unrealistic expectations. Slow assessment of local and foreign investment proposals led to criticisms of paralysis by analysis. Although government borrowing was restrained, the pruning of the public service could not be addressed and would have to wait another four years until the Ulufa'alu government was elected in 1997. The Hilly government was perceived as arrogant and not free from corruption. Andrew

⁵⁶ Address to the Foreign Correspondents Association, 15 June 1994.

⁵⁷ *Solomon Star*, 10 August 1994; Bennett, *Pacific Forest*, 2000, 344–45.

⁵⁸ Martin Miriori continued to coordinate BRA activities and information campaigns. After his rented house on East Kola Ridge was burned down in 1996, he and his family were granted refugee status in Holland.

Nori was forced to resign from Cabinet when it was alleged that AUD \$70,000 had been deposited in his firm's bank account from the repurchase of the State House.

There was intense lobbying by both sides in Parliament, backed by offers of large sums of money to secure support. The Hilly government used inducements to keep its coalition together and tried to lure opposition members to the government side. The Special Discretionary Fund, which had made such a difference to the election results, was doubled to SBD \$200,000 and its name changed to the Constituency Development Fund to make it appear less like a slush fund for MPs. Meanwhile, the opposition used the promise of cabinet positions and logging money to entice MPs away from the Hilly coalition. Cash, hire cars, and free accommodation were given to defectors by Robert Goh, a Malaysian Chinese accountant close to Mamaloni. It was widely rumoured that MPs switching support received SBD \$50,000 via Goh, acting as bagman for the logging industry.

PM Hilly refused to recall parliament while members of his coalition were being picked off, in order to avoid a no-confidence motion. The crisis climaxed in October 1994 when defections left the NCP coalition with only 18 MPs.⁵⁹ The end of the Hilly government was effectively a constitutional coup engineered by Mamaloni. He convinced the Governor-General Sir Moses Pitakaka to order parliament to meet to vote on a motion of no-confidence and elect the next PM. The Governor-General ignored a convention that prime ministers, not opposition leaders, advise governors-generals when to recall Parliament.⁶⁰ Nominations for the prime ministerial ballot were called and parliament summoned on 31 October 1994. When Hilly refused to comply, Pitakaka dismissed him and installed Mamaloni as caretaker PM.⁶¹ Hilly took the governor-general to the High Court, seeking a ruling that the PM could only be deposed on the floor of Parliament. High Court judge, Albert Palmer ruled against the governor-general on the grounds that only a parliamentary motion of no-confidence could remove a PM. Pitakaka appealed the decision by the High Court; however, Hilly, realising the numbers game was up, resigned before the court gave its decision. Mamaloni convincingly won the subsequent ballot for PM (29 to 18) against Sir Baddeley Devesi (Hilly had refused to stand). There was widespread disappointment that corruption had won the day and government. After only 17 months in opposition, the political grand master was back in control of the chess board and business as usual resumed. All but one of the NCP defectors were rewarded with ministerial positions in an expanded cabinet which, with a few notable exceptions, was a rogues' gallery.⁶² Collusion between government ministers, public servants, and logging companies only helped the country slide further into troubled waters and onto the rocks in Mamaloni's final administration from 1994 to 1997.

⁵⁹ The resignations were Edmund Andresen, Alfred Maetia, John Musuota, and Oliver Zapo.

⁶⁰ Sir Peter Kenilorea devotes a chapter called 'Constitutional Coup, 1994' to Mamaloni's approach to Governor-General Pitakaka and what he describes as illegal moves to dismiss the PM in 1994 (Kenilorea 2008, 325–332).

⁶¹ Sir Moses Puibangara Pitakaka GCMG from Choiseul was the country's third governor-general from July 1994 to July 1999. He was nominated by Mamaloni and elected by a vote of MPs in May 1994 during the term of the Hilly government. He had been appointed to head the Commission of Inquiry into corruption and, according to suspicious minds, was voted governor-general as an inducement to drop his investigations into prominent politicians and government officials (*Islands Business*, February 1995).

⁶² Several cabinet ministers (Andresen, Maetia, Orodani, Seri, and Zapo) were charged in 1996 with accepting bribes to switch to SINURP. In 1997, Andresen, Musuota, and Luilamo were found guilty of corruption for accepting the use of hire cars (Bennett 2000, 465). Minister of Finance Christopher Abe was also described in one interview as 'a greedy little b.....'.

Chapter 17. Decline and Fall, 1994 to 1997

Mamaloni's third and final term as PM lasted from November 1994 until August 1997. Having taken the helm again, he moved to consolidate his position and hobble the Opposition, led by Sir Baddeley Devesi. The Opposition offices were stripped and the building re-assigned to a new ministry of police and national security. Former roommate, friend and colleague Devesi was left with virtually nothing to work with—not even filing cabinets.⁶³ There were bitter exchanges with the previous government: Mamaloni even reported the Hilly government for attempting to bribe Danny Philip to cross over to the NCP—particularly hypocritical in view of the inducements that brought NCP members to his side.⁶⁴ Mamaloni tried unsuccessfully to extend the term of parliament from four to five years. He also unsuccessfully proposed a political stability bill that would force independent MPs to belong to a party and allow the party winning the most votes to form government, which would make it easier to win government and hold onto power without unstable coalitions.

Initially, Mamaloni appeared energised, sporting a neater appearance and working at his office every day. He led a business delegation to Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, and Taiwan. He busied himself writing a new 'Pink Book' of government orders, policies, and strategies. He authorised a programme of action to increase employment, investment and savings, and to return to financial stability. He emphasised the need to maximise use of the country's natural resources, ending any prospect of more sustainable harvesting of timber and fish. Approvals for a variety of investment proposals were rushed through for Malaysian business firms, which liked to invest in Melanesian countries with minimal controls, where 'the trick of making a lot of money is to pay the natives as little as possible'.⁶⁵

Logging companies enjoyed a quick return to business as usual as the government quickly dismantled the reforms of the Hilly administration. The tax on logging exports was cut from 65% to 35%, and a newly introduced timber levy of 20% to landowners was reduced to 7.5% and any extra payments were refunded. Logging companies were given a 5% remission of export duties in return for community projects, which were rarely completed or continued.⁶⁶ Tax exemptions were expanded for local landowner companies—essentially fronts for the foreign loggers which did the logging and shipping. The logging companies released the log piles which they had been holding back during the Hilly govt. In 1995 log export earnings fell from 51% to 46% despite a 12% increase in logs, and the income lost to the country amounted to SBD 24m.⁶⁷ The Central Bank estimated that tax exemptions led to one out of every three logging shipments leaving the Solomons tax free.⁶⁸ An Australian-funded Timber Control Unit was dismantled, leaving the

⁶³ Taking Devesi's vehicle and reassigning the office to a Ministry of Works shed was vindictive and disrespectful, especially towards a former colleague and the country's first governor-general. Interview with Sir Baddeley Devesi, 4 December 2010.

⁶⁴ Mamaloni had also secured the support of other backbenchers with appointments to official boards, perks, benefits, and allowances.

⁶⁵ *Islands Business*, February 1997.

⁶⁶ Bennett (2000, 406) lists 18 local landowner companies/individuals granted duty remissions (export tax and timber levy exemptions) in 1995, including Somma Ltd, Mamaloni's company. A summary by Paia (2003) of the company's funding of community projects is shown below in 'The PM and the Somma logging company'.

⁶⁷ Bennett 2000, 345.

⁶⁸ Central Bank Annual Report 1995, 41.

forests essentially unmonitored, in response to which Australia cut its aid by AUD \$2m. The government also reneged on a debt-for-nature deal negotiated by the Hilly government to preserve the 100 km-long Marovo lagoon, the longest in the world and worthy of world heritage status.

Other constraints to corruption were removed by the government, including approval of public casinos to begin operations in Honiara. Private casinos were already used, predominantly by the Chinese community, both to gamble (which they could afford to do, and which they did much more successfully than locals) and to launder money. Mamaloni and several other cabinet ministers were avid gamblers and he was part-owner of the Super Club 88, a private gambling club in Chinatown. Yukio Sato reports that both Mamaloni and his finance minister Christopher Abe were not good gamblers and owed him many chips.⁶⁹



Figure 17.1: Dismal black holes—the grim exterior of Solomon Casino and Honiara Casino in the centre of Honiara, 1997. Source: *Solomon Star*.

The Mamaloni government granted licences and tax holidays to the country's first two public casinos, which were supposed to bring a 15% return to the government. Instead, they created untold social damage and dismal black holes on Mendana Avenue in the centre of Honiara, which added to a picture of Honiara as 'a dirty, dusty, depressing place with a miserable hinterland and no real grasp of its own problems'.⁷⁰ The first casino was the Honiara Casino, managed by Andy Ayamiseba, a West Papuan, and later Namson Tran, a Vietnamese businessman with close connections to the infamously corrupt Barak Sopé—a future prime minister of Vanuatu, who was later jailed for forgery in 2002.⁷¹ Soon after, in October 1995, a second licence was granted to the Solomon Casino, part-owned by Patrick Leong, to operate next door to the Honiara Casino. This created a rift in the Cabinet and led to the Deputy PM and Minister for Home Affairs, Denis Lulei, who had issued the licence, being dismissed by Mamaloni, who had interests in the Honiara

⁶⁹ Interview with Yukio Sato, 23 April 2010.

⁷⁰ Letter to *Islands Business*, February 1994

⁷¹ Namson Tran later used his wealth to win the seat of West Honiara three times from 2010 and to develop the luxury Coral Sea Hotel and Casino opposite the former Town Ground.

Casino.⁷² Patrick Leong later received a licence for a more upmarket gambling operation, the Supreme Casino, inside his Pacific Casino Hotel complex along the Kukum shorefront.

Rapid population growth and urbanisation were also bringing growing social problems. Pyramid schemes and scams were allowed to operate unhindered, despite repeated warnings from the Central Bank. These schemes seemed irresistibly popular in Solomon Islands and PNG. Another innovation with ugly social consequences was the Solomon's first brewery, Solomon Breweries Ltd, which added to problems of alcohol and domestic violence. The supply, local production and consumption of marijuana began to increase with supplies from Bougainville following the influx of refugees, causing serious psychiatric problems in some users.

The Somma logging company in Arosi

In 1993, Mamaloni started his own logging company, Somma Ltd, which operated in Arosi in association with Goodwill Industries, a Chinese-Malaysian company that did the actual logging. . Somma was a direct beneficiary of his government's generous treatment of logging companies, rewarded with \$4.3m in duty remissions in 1995 alone.⁷³ On Makira, four other logging companies with provincial MPs acting as middlemen between the companies and landowners received 100% duty exemptions.

Projects funded by Somma Ltd, 1995 to 1996	
Type of projects	SBD
Transport (incl. purchase of MV Ufinitasi)	\$565,000
Agriculture development	\$542,000
Schools and transport	\$460,000
Sports, including West Makira Games	\$90,000
Area councils	\$82,000
Retail stores	\$50,000
Health clinics and transport	\$46,000
Other/miscellaneous	\$109,000
Total	\$1,944,000

Source: West Makira Constituency Development Fund Report, 1994 to 1996.

However, Somma was more socially conscious and generous than foreign-owned companies, providing free transport, fuel, projects, and donations to local people worth nearly SBD \$2m from 1995 to 1996. Landowners were also allowed to use the company to log trees for local use and sale. Mamaloni gave away parts of Somma's logging concessions to other Makirans, including his 'milk brother' Alec Dani (South Arosi Holdings), Mike Sacki (Aroba) and Daniel Dautiha. While this perhaps made sense from a cultural (*araba*) perspective, it was not good business sense because the same logging contractor was required to log the now different concessions. Somma operations still averaged one to two log shipments per month until mid-1997, when the Asian financial crisis led to a collapse in the demand for and price of round logs. According to Rachel Aromae, who worked

⁷² *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1998; interview with Denis Lulei, 29 December 2010.

⁷³ Bennett 2000, 346.

for Somma in 1999, the company invested at least \$3.5m in properties in Honiara, but most were purchased without properly secured titles and were lost during the Tension after 2000. Mamaloni also developed his own property, the *Waet Hans* at Mbokonavera 4, and purchased land near the airport that he named Arosi 3 through a joint-venture company, Pacific SEG.

Logging was central to Mamaloni's ambitious development plans for Arosi. Clear-felled forest and logging roads would allow settlement and projects on the inland plateau, which could include timber processing, oil palm, copra, fish and crocodile farming, and hotels. An airport strip cleared in 1964 at Bwauraha, located above Rumahui and close to Mamaloni's maternal residence, could serve as a hub for development and tourism. He believed that gold deposits in Guadalcanal also ran under the western end of Makira, and that mining would provide long-term development. His advice was to not encourage mining unless there was state government or changes to legislation so that the people of Makira could benefit properly from the returns.⁷⁴

Foreign affairs

Relations with PNG worsened as successive PNG governments under PMs Namaliu, Wingti, and Chan oscillated between negotiated ceasefires and military offensives in Bougainville, which all failed. In November 1994, PM Sir Julius Chan pulled out of talks with the BRA in Arawa and promised to hunt down BRA leaders. Chan briefly patched up relations with Mamaloni, but repeated border incursions by the PNGDF convinced Mamaloni to ramp up the military capacity of the Solomon Islands paramilitary forces to patrol the volatile Bougainville-Solomons border.⁷⁵



Figures 17.2 and 17.3: Mamaloni with Sir Julius Chan, Honiara, May 1995. The two veteran politicians had a fractious relationship over the Bougainville border tensions. Source: Mamaloni family.

A Solomon Islands National Reconnaissance and Surveillance Force was established in December 1994, combining the resources of the Police Field Force with the Police Maritime and Surveillance Force. The police force became effectively militarised with the purchase of high-powered weapons, accompanied by military training in their use. The PNGDF was ill-disciplined and seemingly out

⁷⁴ Interview with Jacob Masau and Titus Otogari, 26 March 2010 Under Solomon Islands law, which is based on English law, minerals below ground belong to the government, a concept alien to Melanesian land and identity.

⁷⁵ Mamaloni was personally gung-ho about weaponry and warfare, according to family and friends. He was a great fan of war and action films by Audie Murphy and *Rambo* movies.

of control.⁷⁶ Eventually, the fiasco of the Sandline affair in 1997—described in more detail later in this chapter—caused the resignation of PM Chan and his deputy, Chris Haiveta. Common sense and Mamaloni’s pleas for a negotiated settlement eventually prevailed, but not on his watch.

Trouble was brewing elsewhere in the Pacific. France’s resumption of nuclear testing caused outrage throughout the South Pacific. In March 1996, the Treaty of Raratonga with a protocol for a South Pacific nuclear-free zone was signed between France, USA, and UK. However, this only applied after the last tests were conducted. France, typically arrogant and unashamedly colonialist, announced the end of testing in April 1996 after 30 years and 193 nuclear tests in French Polynesia.

Blasting the French blasters

According to David Sitai, then minister for development and planning, ‘In 1995, I tried my very best as a diplomat to get Mamaloni to meet a visiting European Union (EU) Commissioner. This very high-ranking official happened to be a French national in the EU. The compromise that Mamaloni made was, “Tell that Commissioner that I will only see him in my residence on the day he is leaving the country. Drive up to my residence and we will have a short meeting and from there he can go to the airport”. The Commissioner agreed and all the normal greetings took place. Then Mamaloni said, “Commissioner, which country in the EU are you from? Your name sounds to be very French”. The Commissioner said, “Yes, Prime Minister, I am a French national”. Mamaloni replied, “Why are you blasting your bombs here in the Pacific. Why don’t you blast them in France?”. That was the end of the conversation. The EU Commissioner said goodbye politely, “I’m catching my plane, Mr Prime Minister”. Mamaloni said, “On your way, sir, thank you for your visit”.’⁷⁷

Much as he disliked flying and regional meetings, Mamaloni attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Auckland in November 1995. The opportunity to meet Nelson Mandela, the charismatic resistance hero and then president of South Africa, as well as old friends in New Zealand, overcame his reluctance to travel. CHOGM and Solomon Islands would have been better served if Mamaloni had stayed at home. On the first day of the meeting, it was reported that the Nigerian military dictatorship of General Abacha had hanged nine political dissidents, including an internationally renowned author and activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. Every country voted to suspend Nigeria from the organisation, except for Gambia and Solomon Islands, which voted against the suspension. It seems that Mamaloni, who did not attend every session, turned up late to the discussions on the suspension of Nigeria. According to eyewitnesses, he appeared to have been drinking and misunderstood what he was voting for.⁷⁸ The episode was particularly embarrassing in the presence of Nelson Mandela. A Solomon Islands official later clarified that Mamaloni had not heard properly what the vote was for, and the final communiqué was corrected to reflect a change of Solomon Islands’ vote to support the expulsion of Nigeria.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ A prime example of the PNGDF’s lack of control was the assassination of Theodore Miriung in front of his family in October 1996. Miriung was the respected Premier of the Bougainville Transitional Government established by PNG to rival the separatist Bougainville Interim Government.

⁷⁷ Interview with David Sitai, 5 September 2010.

⁷⁸ According to Radio Australia journalist, Bruce Hill (personal communication, 6 February 2016), Mamaloni was clearly drunk when he arrived for an interview at CHOGM 1995 and proceeded to knock over the drinks on a table.

⁷⁹ Another public embarrassment at CHOGM 1995 occurred on Remembrance Day (11 November), when he went ahead of the other leaders to lay his wreath and the UK PM John Major had to hold him back and restrain him.



Figure 17.4: Mamaloni meeting a 20th century hero, Nelson Mandela, at CHOGM, New Zealand, 1995.
Source: Selwyn Suriramo collection.

Mamaloni was ‘a man who hates to hear foreigners giving advice’.⁸⁰ Relations became increasingly strained with Solomon Islands’ major donors, except Taiwan. His long-standing dislike of Australia was exacerbated by its support for the PNG military, including training and equipment. Then in March 1996, a right-wing conservative Australian government under John Howard was elected after 13 years of Labor governments. While Bob Hawke and Paul Keating had given unwavering support for the Pacific Islands Forum and countries, PM Howard showed little interest in the Pacific or cross-cultural sensitivity towards its leaders. The Australian minister for Pacific affairs position was abolished and the aid budget was slashed following a review of foreign aid policy in the Simons Report.⁸¹ It would take another six years, armed conflict in the Solomons, and the context of terrorism following the 9/11 attacks to persuade Howard and the Australian government to take Solomon Islands’ problems and the Pacific Island countries seriously.

Domestic political economy

Mamaloni was a reckless economic manager of private and public assets, according to most interviewees and commentators. His long-time friend and private banker, Yukio Sato, said, ‘he could not control money—money comes in—is never calculated’.⁸² In September 1995, the government securities market collapsed and commercial banks took legal action over SBD \$3m in unpaid interest on treasury bills. The government stopped paying interest on domestic debts to commercial banks, Telekom, the National Bank of Solomon Islands, and overseas lenders. By the end of 1995, the cost of servicing debt was almost equal to foreign reserves. The CBSI called for proper fiscal management and abolition of logging tax exemptions. When it refused to service Treasury bills issued beyond the statutory limit, the government threatened amendments to the Central Bank Act and investigated Governor Ric Houenipwela, as it had done with Tony Hughes in 1991–92. Fortunately, CBSI’s independent status and leadership saved the government from

⁸⁰ *Islands Business*, July 1996.

⁸¹ The 1997 Simons Report argued for Australian aid to have one clear objective—poverty reduction through sustainable development aid—and be concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region.

⁸² Interview with Yukio Sato, 23 April 2010.

financial collapse. Manassah Sogavare, dismissed by Mamaloni as permanent secretary at the Ministry of Finance in 1996, succinctly diagnosed the government's problems as total disregard for accountability, absence of proper monitoring or mechanisms to control expenditures, and a public service that had become heavily politicised and subservient to the dominant power group.

There was widespread and growing public anger about corruption and chaotic management. A series of desperate measures and get-rich-quick schemes added farce to chaos. One hundred days after resuming power, Mamaloni's National Unity and Reconciliation Party (SINURP) published a 'mandate' that included the idea of bottling oxygen and water from green forests. Bottled water was reasonable, as the worldwide success of *Fiji Water* had proved, but bottled oxygen was a simply bizarre and embarrassing idea. Then, in April 1996, Mamaloni ordered police to search for gold allegedly left by the Japanese at Tulagi in 1942. Ignoring ridicule, the search continued for months until it was quietly abandoned.

Desperate for funds, the government announced plans in June 1996 to sell passports to 5,000 Chinese from Hong Kong prior to it being handed back to China by Britain in 1997. This idea was shelved after public protests. It then tried to introduce a debit tax on all bank withdrawals and a tax on foreign currency transactions. These proposals too had to be ditched. One desperate measure that did proceed was a 'beer for prison' deal. With no foreign donors willing to fund a prison project, businessman Yukio Sato proposed increasing import duties on beer and cigarettes to raise the funds required, ending after the prison had been built. Instead, Minister of Finance Christopher Abe came up with an extraordinary deal with businessman Tommy Chan to halve the duty on beer and to give Chan an exemption in return for building a new prison. Abe had already taken money from Chan, some of which was used to keep MPs silent. Sato wanted nothing to do with Abe and resigned as an economic adviser to the government and from the Investment Corporation. The prison was never built but Chan continued to receive the duty exemption for several years.

Meanwhile, real gold was ready to be commercially produced 40 km south-east of Honiara at the Gold Ridge mine. Trade unions and the Australian legal firm, Slater & Gordon, made legal challenges on behalf of disgruntled landowners, whom Mamaloni did not side with but rather complained of 'undesirable foreign elements ... who create stories and fears about the effects of the project on people'.⁸³ Gold Ridge also fed long-standing jealousies by the 'have-nots' of Guadalcanal people about their island's resources being appropriated by outsiders, which fed into the Tension two years later.

In July 1996, the Ministry of Finance had become so dysfunctional that Mamaloni stepped in. He took over from the venal Abe, who was terminally ill with diabetes and kidney disease.⁸⁴ More than 30 public servants were suspended for a variety of rorts worth an estimated SBD \$35m.⁸⁵

⁸³ *Solomon Star*, 16 July 1996.

⁸⁴ Christopher Abe, who had a degree in Commerce and Economics, was said to have a master's degree in duty exemptions. One foreign businessman, who negotiated a remission in import duties of \$250,000 for logging equipment in return for a \$25,000 payment to Abe, called him a 'greedy little b.....'. Abe's reputation was so tarnished that no government ministers or officials attended his funeral in July 1998.

⁸⁵ Thirteen senior officers were suspended on half pay from the ministry of finance, and another six from the ministry of forests and conservation, plus another 12 public officers, including the Accountant-General. *Islands Business*, June 1996.

Suspending or dismissing public servants distracted attention from corrupt politicians whose support he needed to stay in power. Before leaving, staff trashed computers to cover their tracks, and any hope of following the money was lost when the building was later razed in an arson attack. ‘Good old Solo’ appeared to take action—he temporarily froze constituency development funds payments, ordered the suspension of non-essential spending, and ordered a review of tax exemptions for casino operators and logging companies costing the country an estimated SBD \$20m per year. However, government business continued as usual and continued to lose revenue that the country could ill afford.

The logging of Pavuvu Island in the Russell Islands group revealed Mamaloni’s desperation for revenue and the extent to which he was prepared to go to ‘put the rights of the near-bankrupt state before those of the landowners’.⁸⁶ Plans for logging on former Levers’ land on Pavuvu were announced by Allan Kemakeza, the local MP and Minister for Forests, Environment and Conservation.⁸⁷ Landowners vowed to use force to protect their customary land rights. A Police Field Force contingent was sent to protect equipment and allow logging to begin by Maving Brothers, a Malaysian company.⁸⁸ In April 1995, a large group of landowners disrupted the movement of logging machinery and some arrests were made. When Martin Apa, a Russell Islands anti-logging leader, was murdered by pro-logging locals on Yandina wharf at the end of October 1995, the Mamaloni government took a month to send a crime investigation team to investigate and locate his killers. When three bulldozers were burned in July 1995, the government sent additional police, who used more violence against protesters. Despite the protests, logging went ahead beyond the gaze of the media, and two shipments of logs soon left for Japan. Within six months, half of the island’s forests and all 2,000 hectares on alienated lands had been logged, after earlier claims that this would take one and a half years. Mamaloni played hardball and ordered a news blackout. He attacked non-government organisations (NGOs) for turning Pavuvu into a political issue. He warned them not to interfere in internal government matters and to refrain from feeding the media with false information and propaganda. The *Solomon Star* was pressured to dismiss a senior journalist, Duran Angiki, for reporting on bribery to government ministers, whose names had become bywords for systemic corruption. The Mamaloni government was justifiably called a dictatorship.⁸⁹

At the end of 1995, seven cabinet ministers were charged in the Honiara Magistrates Court with logging-related corruption.⁹⁰ Three ministers—George Luilamo, Christopher Abe, and Nathaniel Supa—were charged with accepting bribes and later found guilty in November 1997. Further proof of high-level corruption was the disappearance of SBD \$1.3m from a fine paid by a fishing operator and deposited temporarily into an account at the ministry of foreign affairs in 1997. As usual, Mamaloni reshuffled the Cabinet to deflect responsibility and preserve his majority. He

⁸⁶ Bennett 2000, 315.

⁸⁷ Gordon Darcy Lilo, later PM from 2011 to 2014, wrote the Pavuvu Resettlement Plan with Mamaloni for Levers workers. Traditional landowners believed they had permanent ownership of the land, regardless of legal arrangements by governments. Lilo argues that, like Australia, Solomon Islands has always depended on natural resources for revenue. Interview with Gordon Darcy Lilo, 17 June 2016.

⁸⁸ Maving Brothers had pulled out of east Fataleka in Malaita, leaving a trail of environmental damage and multiple breaches of conditions.

⁸⁹ Press release, dse@pactok.peg.apc.org, 18 June 1995.

⁹⁰ Bennett 2000, 465.

dismissed five ministers in 1996: Columbus Abe, Brown Beu, George Luilamo, Francis Orodani and James Musuota. In February 1997, he brought in former adversary and critic, Francis Saemala, as deputy PM and minister of planning; Danny Philip was once again demoted without warning; and Michael Maina replaced Edmund Andresen as finance minister. These measures could not disguise or prevent a sinking ship with Mamaloni at the helm.

Devolution of power had been a longstanding article of faith for Mamaloni. He made a final attempt at reform with the passing of a *Provincial Government Act 1996*, which was later ruled unconstitutional. This proposed introducing ten Area Assemblies in each province, with half the members elected by voters and half appointed from chiefs and elders, and with the chairs of the Area Assemblies forming Provincial Councils. The concept was introduced without adequate consultation and was ill conceived, not least because chiefs and traditional leaders with direct political roles could lead to even more exploitation, corruption, and *big-man* struggles. The legislation was contested by provinces for different reasons—Guadalcanal and Western Provinces because it fell far short of state government, Malaita and Choiseul because it reduced provincial government powers. Three smaller provinces—Isabel, Central and Temotu—accepted the new legislation and went ahead with elections and nominations. Challenged by the Guadalcanal provincial government in the High Court, Justice Sir Albert Palmer ruled the Act unconstitutional because it lacked accountability and representativeness, and would allow undemocratically elected members to be appointed with virtually no responsibility to an elected assembly.⁹¹ A subsequent Act—the *Provincial Government Act 1997*—was supposed to restore the system to its earlier settings, but area councils were never re-established. Ironically, the attempt to decentralise power to local and traditional leadership had the effect of abolishing local council government.

The Sandline Affair

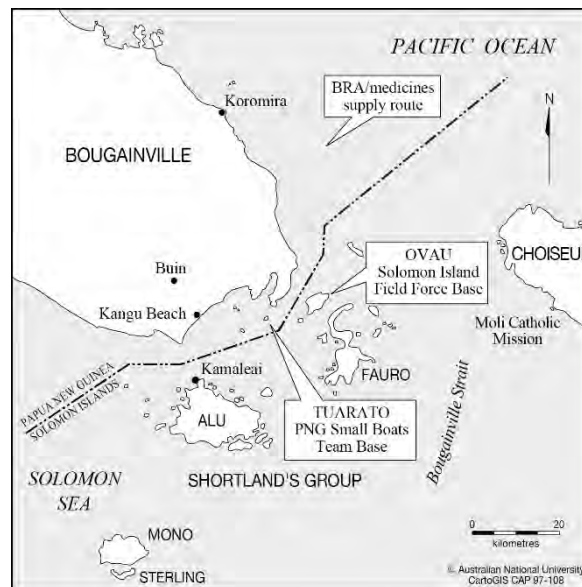
PNG PM Sir Julius Chan wanted to resolve the Bougainville crisis before elections due in June 1997. Doubling down on a military solution rather than a negotiated peace, he turned to a private military consultancy firm, Sandline International, which employed South African and British mercenaries. Sandline's sub-contractor, Executive Outcomes, had a dubious record of dealing with insurgencies in Africa. A plan, codenamed 'Project Contravene', was developed by April 1996 that proposed to kill or capture key BRA and Bougainville interim commanders and regain control of the Panguna copper mine. Once control of the island was re-established, the cost of the operation would be recovered from mineral concessions and reopening Panguna mine as a joint mining venture.

In June 1996, Chan approved a fresh PNGDF military offensive against the BRA, named 'Operation High Speed II'.⁹² This ended in failure due to poor logistic support, lack of intelligence regarding BRA locations, mounting PNGDF casualties, and the ill-discipline of PNGDF troops, which then withdrew from south and central Bougainville in August 1996. Further humiliation followed in September 1996 with a massacre of PNG soldiers at Kangu beach on the southern tip of Bougainville (see Map 17.1 below). This was triggered by outrage at the sexual abuse of women

⁹¹ *Guadalcanal Provincial Assembly v The Speaker of National Parliament and the Minister for Provincial Government*. 309/96, 26 February 1997.

⁹² Australian Parliamentary Committee report 1999, 29.

by PNG soldiers at a so-called care centre near Buin. The BRA and other resistance forces combined to massacre a dozen members of the security forces, taking five hostages and all the weapons. These events made it more evident than ever that the BRA had the upper hand fighting in and for their own land against conventional troops.



Map 17.1: Bougainville–Solomon Islands border tension points. Source: CartoGIS, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

The decision to employ Sandline mercenaries ignored history, geography, and common sense. It was a massive miscalculation by PM Chan that cost him office. A secret agreement with Sandline International was signed in January 1997 and the following month, details emerged of what was described as a ‘training exercise’ for the PNGDF. But it soon became clear that the intention was a final military solution to destroy the BRA. This decision was greeted with dismay in PNG, Australia and not least in Solomon Islands. Mamaloni was furious with Chan for hiring foreign mercenaries and threatened to take PNG to the International Court of Justice.

Australia used the leverage of its AUD \$320m aid budget to persuade the PNG government to cancel the deal. The head of the PNGDF, General Jerry Singarok, who had initially approved the plan, now baulked at its cost and the consequences of PNG citizens being killed by hired mercenaries. He ordered the arrest of the leaders of the mercenaries, and the rest were deported in short order. Singarok was dismissed by PM Chan and the country came perilously close to a military coup. Fortunately, a coup was averted when the Sandline deal was cancelled, the mercenary leaders deported, and weapons shipments halted. PM Chan and Deputy PM Chris Haiveta were forced to resign in March 1997 following a Commission of Inquiry and Chan lost his parliamentary seat in the general election a few months later. The Sandline Affair ended the futile attempt at a military solution after almost 10 years of war. The issue of independence was deferred until 2017, in a similar arrangement to the 1988 Matignon Agreements that ended civil war in New Caledonia.⁹³

⁹³ The 1988 Matignon Agreements approved a referendum on self-determination in 1998, followed by the Noumea Accord, which scheduled a 20-year transition until a vote on the transfer of sovereignty in 2018.

As well as infringing Solomon Islands sovereignty, PNGDF border incursions—more than 40 forty in 1996 alone—imposed significant costs on Solomon Islands. Despite the desperate state of the economy, funds were found to pay for allowances and weapons for the Police Field Force on the border. Before any peace agreements had been signed between PNG and Bougainville authorities, the Mamaloni government signed arms deals in June 1997 worth USD \$4m. Mamaloni denied accusations that the government was buying sophisticated equipment or that the police were equipped with high-powered military equipment. Unsurprisingly when amateurs deal in the arms trade, the weapons purchased were worth only one-third to one-quarter of the price paid.⁹⁴ The incoming Ulufa'alu government cancelled the delivery in August 1997. After most of the weapons had already been paid for, the new government publicly disclosed the deal, describing it as 'warmongering'—much to the annoyance of Mamaloni, who described the cancellation and disclosure as 'treason'.⁹⁵ Some weapons reached the Solomons despite the Ulufa'alu government taking urgent action to stop the deal. The introduction of high-powered weapons and military training for the Police Field Force had unintended consequences with the weaponization of both sides in the Tension from 1998 to 1993. In 1998, the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army broke into and stole weapons from the police armoury in the Russell Islands. Then in 2000, military-trained police officers and the Malaita Eagle Force raided the police armouries in Honiara and Auki, which allowed armed militia and factional leaders to control the government, business, and public.

A sinking boat with the compass thrown overboard

An advertisement promoting business in the Solomons in the *Pacific Islands Monthly* in August 1996 featured a genial 1982 photograph of Mamaloni with the caption: 'Mamaloni ... ushering in the next millennium with peace and harmony'.⁹⁶ This could hardly have been further from the truth. He had become an absentee PM due to worsening gout and kidney disease. Andrew Nori called for his resignation in September 1996:

You are ill and have been absent for a period of nine weeks out of 23 months of your administration. Your illness has prevented you from realising the full impact of the financial hardship and your resignation should allow in new blood to take over new leadership.⁹⁷

A *Solomon Star* editorial declared, 'Political instability, financial chaos, increasing criminal activity and vandalism, tax avoidance, corruption, etc are linked to political instability... The PM has shifted and isolated himself from the problems he has created'.⁹⁸ Opposition leader Edward Hunuehu accused Mamaloni of having no plans, solutions, or saleable restoration packages to salvage the chaotic economic conditions. Manasseh Sogavare, whom Mamaloni had sacked as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, described him as, 'the captain on a sinking boat on some

⁹⁴ The deal was brokered through an American friend of Mamaloni, Patrick Murphy, who like Yukio Sato earlier, was unfamiliar with arms dealing.

⁹⁵ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, March 1998, written by Mary-Louise O'Callaghan who also wrote one of two books on the Sandline affair (1999); the other is by Sean Dorney (1998).

⁹⁶ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, August 1996.

⁹⁷ Herlihy 2003, 16.

⁹⁸ *Solomon Star*, 21 February 1997.

fantasy cruise who has thrown the compass overboard'.⁹⁹ One month later, in April 1997, Sogavare claimed that the country was close to collapse: 'Money is not the problem political leaders would like us to believe, rather it is the proper management of and use of money and the mentality that money is synonymous with development'.¹⁰⁰ A poem published in the *Solomon Star* was damning of the country's plight and a lament for honest government.

Gone were the days

When Solomon Islands was discovered and named Solomon Islands,
 When Solomon Islands had but honest and dedicated politicians,
 When acts of parliament were laws of the nation,
 And where expatriates and nationals alike paid respect to sovereignty.
 Gone were the days,
 When civil servants were advisors to politicians,
 Gave orders to civilians by virtue of laws/regulations,
 And appointments were honoured,
 When civilians knock as courtesy to enter,
 And where passports, permits, work residence were legal documents.
 Gone were the days,
 When legal documents had only one fee,
 And judiciary had legal value,
 Where written correspondences were mode of communication,
 And lawmen trusted by the public,
 And freedom and security enjoyed by all.
 Gone were the days,
 When Solomon Islands was home of Indigenous,
 And when natural resources belonged to Indigenous,
 And Christianity ruled,
 When education was a right of all children,
 The days of Nadepa, Alliance, United Party,
 When leaders of Solomons were statesmen.
 Gone were the days,
 But you, Mr Prime Minister, remain ungone,
 Where have they gone, Olo?
 Why have they gone, Olo?¹⁰¹
 Mr Do Little, Honiara

Earlier in February 1997, Mamaloni went on a two-week state visit to Taiwan, where he could enjoy copious praise, whiskey, and betel nut from congenial hosts grateful for the years of diplomatic recognition by Solomon Islands. He was awarded Taiwan's highest medal, the Order of the Brilliant Seal with Special Grand Cordon. Part of the citation read:

⁹⁹ *Solomon Star*, 12 March 1997.

¹⁰⁰ In the run up to the 1997 elections, Manasseh Sogavare spruiked his economic and political credentials in a series of *Solomon Star* articles in March and April 1997. He was elected to and has represented NE Choiseul since 1997.

¹⁰¹ *Solomon Star*, 20 January 1997. The line, 'Where have they gone, Olo?' came from 'This Man', the play in which Mamaloni had played the leading role in 1970.

... an outstanding political leader of profound erudition and vision. He has devoted himself unceasingly to the improvement of the security and well-being of the people of Solomon Islands. He has also worked to strengthen the friendly relations and cooperation between the Republic of China and the Solomon Islands. His contributions are highly valued by the government and people of the Republic of China.



Figures 17.5 and 17.6: Mamaloni's state visit to Taiwan, 1997. A jovial Mamaloni, perhaps symbolising his political fate awaiting him at home. Source: Mamaloni family.

Other countries were much less complimentary. An Australian 'eyes-only' dossier was found by a journalist at a Pacific Forum meeting in Honiara in July 1997. The dossier made unflattering and undiplomatic assessments of most of the Pacific Island leaders, easy-money schemes, and corruption by Malaysian loggers—'Prime Ministers, presidents and cabinet ministers, senior bureaucrats, and get-rich senior politicians collude with get-rich quick crooks'. Mamaloni was described as, 'an obstacle to responsible government for as long as he is in power ... even in opposition he will pose a threat which will make ministers wary of change'.¹⁰² The Solomons economy was kept afloat by unsustainable logging, while tax and duty exemptions were granted to people with influence in high places. The dossier summarised the political economy succinctly:

While the economy has been growing strongly, the Solomon Islands government has no policies to support sustainable economic development. Forestry resources have been overexploited, agriculture and infrastructure largely neglected and government administration corrupted for the personal gain of ministers and bureaucrats.¹⁰³

Outside the Ministry of Finance building in Honiara, members of the public and public servants queued for government payments, which were often refused because of lack of funds. There was insufficient revenue to pay police and teachers. KGV School, once the jewel in the educational crown, was run down and a sad shadow of its former self. The country's debt had risen to nearly 100% of national income and the government was regularly defaulting on repayments. It started selling government houses again, despite the discontent this had created in the past. Despite the economic shambles, Mamaloni proposed to reward public servants for working more than 10 years with three years of full pay and bonuses of \$50,000, completely unaffordable but aimed at garnering support from public servants. Discontent with his government and the country's

¹⁰² *Pacific Islands Monthly*, September 1997.

¹⁰³ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, September 1997.

situation became 'palpable'.¹⁰⁴ Mamaloni was the focus of the discontent, summarised in a poem, 'The Ruler' published in early 1997.¹⁰⁵

'The Ruler'

The country is found by Solomon,
It is named the 'Happy Isles',
It is ruled by Solomon,
This Solomon is not wise,
But he is vice.
For he accepts politicians,
With no political objectives,
To the rich country,
But the country is rich of Asians,
And poor are the natives,
No business to own and run,
But the foreigners run us,
For we are the labourers,
We are the shoppers.
The people own the land,
The Asians own the trees,
Spoil the clean rivers,
And fly away they go,
When the trees are finished.
The elections are near,
For the nation is praying,
That the Lord will not let
A vice Solomon rule into the 2000.

The lavish wedding for Mamaloni's eldest son Audie Murphy in October 1996 revealed a lack of common touch and perhaps common sense. The white wedding included a 10-tier wedding cake flown in from Australia along with two chefs to assemble it (see Figures 17.7 and 17.8).



Figures 17.7 and 17.8: The lavish wedding of his son Audie Murphy to Verma in October 1996. The 10-tier wedding cake was flown in from Australia. The speaker is Victor Ngele. Source: Mamaloni family.

¹⁰⁴ Moore 2004, 61.

¹⁰⁵ By W.D. Stalin (a pseudonym), *Solomon Star*, 12 February 1997

The Member for West Makira

Until special discretionary funds were introduced in 1992, Mamaloni had few means of funding projects without using his own income or squeezing his business contacts.¹⁰⁶ The intention of the funds, initiated with Taiwanese funding, was to provide support for the people living in rural areas and stimulate the rural economy. In West Makira, SBD \$1.4m of constituency funding was available from 1992 to 2000, which Mamaloni augmented with \$2m from Somma (his logging company) from 1995 to 1997.¹⁰⁷

Projects were selected by a West Makira Community Development Fund (CDF) committee, formed and chaired by Mamaloni. Cash was provided for transport, medical and school expenses, as well as supplies for village stores, piggery projects and chicken projects. There was little screening of the projects, or assessment of how well they were likely to be managed. Canoes and engines were the most commonly funded projects funded by CDF and Somma but many engines had a short life and canoes then lay hardly used on the beach. Mamaloni accused funding recipients of carelessness, improper planning, and poor management. He argued that it was not his responsibility as an MP to identify and evaluate projects, and that this needed to be done professionally by national and provincial government officers.¹⁰⁸ Unlike many MPs, Mamaloni also distributed constituency funds to villages that had not voted for him in the past. He was also a significant funder of prizes and teams at the West Makira games, a sport carnival, and with CDF was able to increase funding for transport, food, and prizes (the main soccer prize was called the Mamaloni Cup) and include teams from outside the constituency.

Distribution of CDF projects, 1992 to 1996. Source: Paia 2003.

	No. of projects	% of projects	SBD (\$)value	% of total
Transport	32	25.8%	349,345	51.0%
Small business	26	21.0%	110,654	16.1%
Education	15	12.1%	59,514	8.6%
Social/community service	15	12.1%	55,834	8.2%
Sports	16	9.4%	45,583	6.6%
Forestry	7	5.6%	34,102	5.0%
Health/sanitation	2	1.6%	17,063	2.3%
Agriculture	10	8.1%	14,000	2.0%
Fishery	1	0.8%	> 2,607	0.01%
Total	124	100%	\$688,701	100%

Somma funding made it possible to create larger and more ambitious projects for local logging, agriculture projects, and a community school at Omanihero on the south coast. But like so many development projects, these ventures promised far more than was delivered and many quickly collapsed after the initial assets were depleted, poorly maintained, or sold.

¹⁰⁶ Special Discretionary Funds were renamed Rural Constituency Development Funds by the Hilly government and the word rural was later dropped since the funds were also available for use in urban areas.

¹⁰⁷ Paia, 2003.

¹⁰⁸ West Makira CDF Report 1997, xx.

In his 2003 master's thesis, Leonard Paia followed up CDF and Somma projects in West Makira and found evidence of unfair distribution of projects, which led to jealousy and disunity within and between families and communities.¹⁰⁹ The projects were not used to support the poorest and most disadvantaged. Instead, beneficiaries were a function of 'who you know' and 'where votes count'. Paia concluded that CDF was a 'constituency political fund'—a tool for buying votes that served the interests of politicians, business contacts and kinship networks. Paia provides examples of how the CDF was used for both political and personal advantage. Although 95% of \$750,000 was accounted for, many receipts were not available or confirmed by Mamaloni's constituents, and \$28,000 was still unaccounted for in 1992 to 1993. Almost half (\$317,000 or 46%) of CDF funds were for the purchase of canoes and outboard motors, of which the majority was supplied by Prime Products and Yukio Sato or owned by close Asian business colleagues and friends. Sixty percent of projects were for individual projects and only 40% for community projects. Individuals were typically community leaders, already well off and who, according to Paia, had strong influence over communities and voters—some supporters gained quick access, while others waited for years.

The distribution of projects also raised questions of bias, according to Paia. Mamaloni's own area of Arosi 2, comprising Arosi West and South wards, received 53% of the funds, although they were better off in terms of access and infrastructure than the three other wards in the constituency. His matrilineal area of Bwauraha/Rumahui was the highest in terms of funding (SBD \$56,000), almost \$20,000 more than another village, including the only funded water supply. Nearly \$57,000 was spent on projects in the West Bauro area, although this was not part of the constituency. The area included his family's settlement at Masidonia and Pamua School where Mamaloni's brother, Meadows Sunaone, was the principal. The school truck was later removed from the school when one of Mamaloni's brothers lost his bid for a provincial seat.

Despite 25 years representing West Makira as an MP and almost 10 years as prime minister, his constituency had seen very little lasting development. Even with CDF and Somma funding, a common complaint from Makiran informants was that he had done little or nothing for his own constituency or the island, compared with other provinces and the nation overall. There were still no roads in Arosi 2, except for logging roads that soon deteriorated. When Alec Dani asked Mamaloni why Makira was not developed, he said 'our time will come—you help people outside the house before you help people inside'.¹¹⁰ A former supporter and Makira councillor, Kenez Hoda from Anuta, said that Mamaloni treated his people like chickens, feeding them little bits of rice to win elections. On another occasion, he accused Mamaloni of lying to his people and playing with them, like teasing a cat with a husk of coconut tied to a string; when the cat jumps at the coconut, the string is pulled up, leaving the cat clawing at thin air.¹¹¹

* * *

¹⁰⁹ Leonard Paia, 2003, *The politics of rural development in Solomon Islands: a case study of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in West Makira Constituency*, MA thesis, Suva, University of the South Pacific.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Alec Dani, 25 April 2010.

¹¹¹ Interview with Ben Hoda, 4 April 2010.

Despite poor health and his family urging him to retire, Mamaloni stood for re-election in 1997. Unlike 1989 and 1993 when he was unopposed, two candidates stood against him. He was not well enough, nor did he need to campaign personally; his reputation, prestige, CDF and Somma funds still provided him with an unassailable position in West Makira. Elsewhere, public opinion was certainly against him. An SIDT survey reported widespread dissatisfaction with political leaders due to corruption, public service fraud, gross mismanagement of government services, and wild overspending. A *Solomon Star* editorial in March 1997, ‘The fall of “King Solomon”’, argued that ‘the foods, the money, the strength, the ideas and the manpower have all run out. The country has plunged into a pit, thousands of feet deep’.¹¹² A *SIDT Link* cartoon showed a ship nearing the rocks and vultures circling overhead, representing carpetbaggers, logging and fishing companies. The country’s situation became even worse when the Asian financial markets crashed in July 1997. Demand for timber from Asian countries collapsed and with it government revenue. This worsened an economic crisis that the Mamaloni government’s successors had to deal with—recalling the words of the French King, Louis XV, ‘*Après moi, le deluge*’.¹¹³

¹¹² *Solomon Star*, 19 March 1997.

¹¹³ The phrase can mean both ‘after me, the flood will come’ and ‘after me, let the flood come’—i.e., it makes no difference to me. Louis XV of France (1710–1774), dubbed ‘Louis the Well-Beloved’ when young, grew to be hated due to his stubborn personality, damage to national prestige, and the huge financial problems he created. Some critics would draw parallels with Mamaloni.

Chapter 18. Till Death Us Do Part, 1997 to 2000

Elected for a record eighth time in West Makira in August 1997, Mamaloni did not contest the PM leadership ballot. He was not only physically and psychologically spent but had also used up a great deal of political capital at the national level. According to Denis Lulei, Mamaloni wanted to step aside to make way for a younger man, but felt he was owed respect after so many years as leader. He wanted his successors to do the right thing by *kastom* and recognise his stepping down with traditional gifts of shell money, pigs, and food. Another version of events is that Mamaloni wanted others to nominate him and was too proud to nominate himself.¹¹⁴

As in 1993, an alliance of Opposition and Independent MPs formed a coalition—the Solomon Islands Alliance for Change (SIAC), led by Ulufa'alu as the reform candidate for PM, with Sir Baddeley Devesi as deputy PM. SIAC was opposed by former SIGNUR government MPs, led by Danny Philip with Charles Dausabea as his deputy. Mamaloni again proved himself a master of the numbers game. The evening before the ballot, he promised Philip his vote but changed his support during the ballot because he thought it was not Philip's time to become PM, particularly with Charles Dausabea as deputy. He told an old friend that Ulufa'alu had earned his turn. In the second round, Mamaloni voted for Ulufa'alu who narrowly won the ballot for PM 26 to 24.

The Ulufa'alu government, 1997 to 2000

The new government had a clear mandate for reform and there was widespread support and relief at the SIAC win. Ulufa'alu described the task as having 'to dig the latrine for the comfort of others'.¹¹⁵ His government faced more serious problems than the Hilly coalition government in 1993-1994, and a far worse economic situation.

Problems facing the country and the incoming Ulufa'alu government ¹¹⁶

- An ever-widening deficit between government revenue and expenditure
- Continuing erosion of the country's external reserves
- The effect of government insolvency on business and the financial system
- General loss of business confidence and absence of new private investment
- Financial weakness and service failures of State (Government) Owned Enterprises (SOEs)
- Official corruption at national and provincial levels
- The cost, morale, organisation, and productivity of the public service
- Poor discipline, loyalty, ethics, and effectiveness of the police force
- The long-term effects of poor health and education services
- Damaged relations with donor countries.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Denis Lulei, 29 December 2010.

¹¹⁵ *Islands Business*, July 1998.

¹¹⁶ Hughes 2001, *Lessons from a false dawn*, 17–18.

Repayments on local and foreign government debt had reached SBD \$1,200m—three times the annual government revenue, with repayments made worse by a steadily declining SBD exchange rate. Arrears on loan repayments had reached \$110m, short-term borrowing from the Central Bank was \$70m, and the government owed the National Provident Fund \$33m for pension contributions. The SIAC government had to deal immediately with the fallout from the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which caused sales of timber to collapse. Round-log prices fell, blowing a hole in revenue and foreign exchange earnings. International institutions and aid agencies were willing to assist, particularly with a new straight-talking finance minister, newly-elected Manasseh Sogavare (the former permanent secretary dismissed by Mamaloni in 1996), who was regarded as honest and well qualified with degrees in accounting and economics.

Structural reform was urgently needed. Like Mamaloni, Ulufa'alu believed in the private sector, small business, and decentralised economic development. His government's Policy and Structural Reform Programme was ambitious (indeed, over-ambitious) with four pillars:¹¹⁷

1. Downsizing the size and cost of the public service by about 2,000 jobs
2. Restoring good governance
3. Reform of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and promotion of private business
4. Reintroducing fishing and forestry conservation quotas.

Reforms were quickly introduced, including increased taxes and devaluation of the Solomon dollar (SBD)—the usual bitter prescriptions that the IMF and ADB demanded in return for relief on interest repayments. Macroeconomic stabilisation required controlling government expenditure and revenue, scrapping extraordinary tax exemptions, and repaying interest on debt. The 20% SBD devaluation in December 1997 increased inflation and the cost of living. Tax exemptions for logging companies were cancelled, including for Mamaloni's company, Somma Ltd. Some loggers mothballed their operations and stockpiled logs, using the same tactics that had brought the Hilly government undone in 1993–94.¹¹⁸ Casinos were also engaged in political intrigue and lobbying to bring down the government, which wanted to close casinos because of their corrupting effect on politicians, public servants, and families. Bishop Leslie Boseto, newly elected in south Choiseul and appointed Minister of Home Affairs, vowed not to renew licences, but was unable to deliver on this promise due to pressure on the government from casino owners and influential patrons.¹¹⁹ Reform of the public service and SOEs fell far behind schedule due to resistance from staff and vested interests. Resistance extended to burning down the finance ministry building in November 1997, destroying computers and incriminating evidence from previous administrations.

Reforms were hampered by the instability of a seven-party coalition and continual attempts by the Opposition to overturn the razor-thin majority to protect their interests and avoid prosecution for corruption. Two ministers were appointed to each ministry to maintain a parliamentary majority—

¹¹⁷ Hughes (2001) has a detailed critique of the Ulufa'alu reform agenda and lessons learned.

¹¹⁸ Even with the collapse of log prices from the Asian crisis in 1997, improved revenue collection and cancellation of exemptions allowed the government to collect more revenue in the first five months of 1998 than in the whole of 1997 (*Islands Business*, July 1998).

¹¹⁹ Including Patrick Leong, who opened the Club Supreme in 1997 in the Pacific Casino Hotel complex on the shorefront at Kukum, another example of public land— 'the commons'—being sold in Honiara.

a clumsy but necessary manoeuvre to hold the coalition together. Ulufa'alu used familiar horse trading with offers of ministerial office and board positions on SOEs to increase his parliamentary support.

In a familiar pattern since Independence, the government spent much of its first year clinging to power. Ulufa'alu faced three no-confidence motions in 13 months; the first less than 100 days after SIAC came to power. Fortunately for him, the Opposition had problems of its own with its leader, Danny Philip, resigning in March 1998 after evidence emerged of his hand in the till when fines that had been levied by the Forum Fisheries Agency on an illegal fishing vessel and deposited in a ministry of foreign affairs bank account in the previous year were emptied in a matter of weeks by Philip and senior colleagues in the ministry. Job Dudley Tausinga took over as Opposition leader, and another no-confidence motion was attempted in April 1998, but this was withdrawn after only a day owing to lack of numbers. Mamaloni kept a low public profile but was still being consulted and advising on tactics. He did not contend for the leadership of the Opposition until October 1998, when Tausinga stood aside for personal reasons.

Bowing to pressure from the logging lobby and need for revenue, the government reintroduced duty exemptions for 14 logging companies, including Somma Ltd, allowing them to export stockpiled logs profitably despite reduced prices. Duty remissions on several containers of imported beer were restored for Tommy Chan. His 'prison for beer' deal had been cancelled and left him with a large import duty bill but as he had been elected to Parliament and was about to become leader of the Independents, his support was needed for the SIAC coalition to survive

Finance minister Sogavare increasingly disagreed with Ulufa'alu over several issues.¹²⁰ He accused the government of corruption and cronyism, and Ulufa'alu of being authoritarian. He criticised SIAC MPs, describing as religious fanatics those who claimed that SIAC had a God-given mandate to govern and criticised their SIGNUR opponents as evil and corrupt. In July 1998, Ulufa'alu dismissed Sogavare, who was then taken under the wing of Mamaloni, whom he had known since Sogavare was a young orderly in the ministry of finance. He became Mamaloni's protégé and successor, eventually becoming prime minister for short terms in 2000–2001 and 2006–2007 and longer terms in 2014–2017 and since 2019. In an anonymised interview with an American researcher, Sogavare described Mamaloni's influence, 'He was like a father to me, I was like his son and he taught me many things'.¹²¹ Mamaloni introduced Sogavare to 'what was really going on' in terms of the World Bank, IMF, ADB, and European Union donors and 'what they were doing to the country'. He also taught Sogavare about the Solomons' colonial history with Britain. Sogavare stressed that Mamaloni had a 'love for the country' and adopted 'his aggressive nationalist agenda'. 'That was the philosophy [he] drove into me...He converted me overnight'.

By August 1998, the government had lost six members of its coalition to the Opposition, including MP for Ulawa, Nathaniel Waena. He met with Mamaloni around this time, who told him, 'We voted for the wrong man' (meaning Ulufa'alu).¹²² To shore up his numbers, Ulufa'alu had to make

¹²⁰ There had been friction between Sogavare and Ulufa'alu for months. Sogavare was preparing to move a motion of no-confidence against Ulufa'alu. His replacement as Minister of Finance, Alpha Kimata, quickly cancelled duty and tax remissions that Sogavare—for all his strong statements—had refused to touch (Hughes 2001, 14).

¹²¹ The interview is undoubtedly with Sogavare, 'a former prime minister' (Sade PhD thesis, 2017, 3–4).

¹²² Interview with Sir Nathaniel Waena, 12 November 2010.

deals with Opposition MPs who had never supported SIAC's reform programme. Two Opposition MPs, Edmund Andresen and Gordon Mara, were appointed as cabinet ministers and received promises that airstrips in their constituencies would be created or upgraded. Albert Laore from the Shortland Islands next to Bougainville also resigned from the Opposition and became an Independent following pressure by his constituents, who feared that a change of government might lose them compensation grants from PNG over the Kamaleai incursions and deaths in 1992.¹²³

While both sides were locked in a desperate political numbers game, there was little public appetite for changing government. According to a 1998 survey conducted by SIDT, 92% of those surveyed were against the latest motion of no-confidence and wanted the Ulufa'alu government to implement its reform programme. The Opposition had no agenda except to get back into power. Mamaloni blamed the government for problems that his own administrations had largely created or overseen. He bizarrely claimed that Ulufa'alu, a Catholic, and his government were making deals with the Vatican and that Ulufa'alu was taking bribes from a foreign businessman, oblivious to or conveniently ignoring his own dealings with Asian businessmen over decades.

In a re-run of 1994, Mamaloni persuaded Governor-General Sir Moses Pitakaka that the Opposition had the numbers to form government. Pitakaka called a special sitting of Parliament in September 1998 so that a no-confidence motion could be introduced. The government challenged the governor-general's decision in the High Court, which ruled that it had no power to rule against the special sitting. The sitting went ahead and Opposition leader Tausinga duly introduced a no-confidence motion; the vote was tied at 24 votes apiece; Ulufa'alu survived thanks to the convention that the Speaker rules with the government in the event of a tied vote. The *Solomon Star* had earlier published a photograph of the Opposition with 25 MPs, including Mamaloni and Lester Samaosi, MP for West Honiara. However, Samaosi refused (or was leaned on not) to come for the vote in Parliament and went to ground in Bellona, despite a helicopter being sent to bring him to Honiara for the vote. After the no-confidence motion failed, several defectors or 'grasshoppers' returned to the government fold. SIAC regained its parliamentary majority and Ulufa'alu was not seriously threatened again until he was forced to resign at gunpoint in June 2000.¹²⁴

After Tausinga stood aside in October 1998, Mamaloni was elected Opposition leader, with Sogavare as his deputy, despite the fact that he now spent most of his time at home and rarely attended parliamentary meetings.¹²⁵ In his first media statement, Mamaloni returned to familiar themes, attacking Ulufa'alu's reform measures for surrendering national sovereignty to aid donors. The government's reforms were similar to conventional IMF and ADB structural reform

¹²³ In September 1992, the PNGDF attacked Kamaleai village in the Shortland Islands, abducted a man who was trading with the BRA, murdered his wife and brother-in-law, and wounded their child (see Chapter 15).

¹²⁴ Thus the controversial governor-general twice ordered sittings of Parliaments when Mamaloni as Opposition leader convinced him that he had the numbers to overturn the government, a move that was constitutionally illegitimate, being reserved for a serving PM. Having served one term, Pitakaka was replaced by Fr John Ini Lapli in July 1999 and died, publicly unlamented, on Christmas Day, 2011

¹²⁵ Home was now the *Waet Haus* at Mbokonavera 4. Yukio Sato had bought the land in the 1990s and insisted that Mamaloni build a proper house for himself and his family. Interview with Yukio Sato 23 April 2010.

prescriptions.¹²⁶ He criticised the economic reforms as being driven by external forces and having been designed overseas by expatriates prior to the 1997 election.¹²⁷ Ulufa'alu countered that some reform measures had been designed when he was an economic adviser to Mamaloni in 1991–1993 and had been updated by Solomon Islander consultants, John Rofeta and Tony Hughes.¹²⁸ International donors were willing to support public service redundancies and reschedule debt repayments. The government also passed important legislation, including an Environment Act to protect fisheries and forests, and an Immigration Act to tighten up illegal entries. The tide of public opinion was in favour of a government serious about economic reform rather than the chaotic financial situation during Mamaloni's years in government.

The Tension, 1998 to 2000

In Mamaloni's final years of life, Solomon Islands began to descend into violent insurrection, while at the same time, the Bougainville peace process moved towards a permanent ceasefire.¹²⁹ There were long-standing grievances by Indigenous Guadalcanal people, who felt dominated on their own island by people from other provinces—particularly Malaitans, who were accused of marrying into Guadalcanal and then bringing relatives to live with them and imposing their own customs. Dissatisfied with the returns from national projects on their island, including the capital Honiara, the extensive SIPLS oil palm plantations, and the newly opened mine at Gold Ridge. Most parts of Guadalcanal remained undeveloped, despite the wealth being generated on the island from exploitation of its lands and resources.

Indigenous Guadalcanal people had long held grievances and dissatisfaction with other provinces since Independence in 1978 and there had been street protests in Honiara in 1988. By 1998, these long-standing resentments were being amplified by Guadalcanal big-men and politicians. Prominent among these was Ezekiel Alebua, the former prime minister who had become the Guadalcanal provincial premier in March 1998 after losing his national parliamentary seat in 1997. Along with others like Sethuel Kelly who had lost their seats in Parliament, Alebua began to express demands on behalf of Guadalcanal, inciting people to intimidate and expel workers from other islands, particularly Malaitans.¹³⁰ The brutal murder in Honiara of a south Guadalcanal woman in April 1998 was blamed on Malaitans and compensation demanded from the national government, as well as for an estimated 24 other deaths since independence.

In the second half of 1998, rumours began circulating about a Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) being trained in the bush by former police officers and Bougainvillean refugees.¹³¹ An armed group, led by Harold Keke and Joseph Sangu, who started the GRA, stole weapons from

¹²⁶ It could be hard to distinguish between the origin of the reforms. ADB even used the title 'Public Sector Reform Program' with the same acronym (PSRP) that the SIAC government used.

¹²⁷ *Solomon Star*, 10 July 1999.

¹²⁸ Hughes 2001, 8.

¹²⁹ There is now a large literature on the Tension, for example, Fraenkel 2004, Moore 2004, Allen 2005, 2007. The Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission report released in 2012 has a detailed analysis of the Tension.

¹³⁰ As PM, Alebua had brushed aside demands for compensation in 1988 that had accompanied the protests when he was serving as prime minister.

¹³¹ The GRA had possibly started earlier in 1996 with young men learning military tactics from Bougainville refugees and how to restore WW2 weapons. Harold Keke may have sourced weapons and ammunition from Bougainville where he had family links.

the police station at Yandina in the Russell Islands in December 1998. A few days later, the police confronted the gang on Bungana Island in Central Province, where their canoe had broken down. A member of the gang, Ishmael Panda, was shot dead, and Keke suffered a head wound. The gang members were granted bail in Honiara and disappeared back into Guadalcanal. Attacks began on settlers with Malaitan heritage to expel them from Guadalcanal. Keke's head injury appears to have affected him permanently, and his behaviour became increasingly psychotic. He became a warlord, responsible for a reign of terror, madness, and brutal murders, culminating in 2003 with the execution of seven Melanesian Brothers, or *Tasin*, who had been sent to his headquarters on a peace mission and were accused of spying.

In February 1999, Premier Alebua and his Guadalcanal colleagues ramped up the tensions with a list of 'Bona Fide Demands'.

Summary of the Bona Fide Demands of the Indigenous people of Guadalcanal

1. Introduction of state government.
2. Review of the Constitution.
3. Review of the Lands and Titles Act.
4. Transfer of Perpetual Estates Titles.
5. Return of all alienated land.
6. Rental payments for land in Honiara
7. Increased shares in Solomon Islands Plantation Limited.
8. Review of the formula for revenue sharing: 50% of all revenue collected by the government from investments on Guadalcanal.
9. Proper acquisition of Honiara offshore area.
10. Relocation of the national capital.
11. Control of migration between provinces.
12. Amendment of the Electoral Act.
13. \$2.5 million compensation for 25 Guadalcanal people murdered by non-Indigenous perpetrators.

As possessions were looted and homes torched, thousands of Malaitans and settlers from other islands began to flee from their houses, gardens, and jobs to seek protection in Honiara and their home islands. There was a series of cruel murders and rape became commonplace. Workers were driven out from the Guadalcanal oil palm plantations, which were closed in June 1999, when the government also declared a state of emergency. Tourism virtually shut down, adding to the country's financial woes. Production at the Gold Ridge mine continued until 2000 but required special police protection against attacks by the GRA. Compensation and assistance were demanded for 20,000 Malaitans and non-Guadalcanal people pouring into Honiara and being repatriated. Although most of the issues were concentrated between Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces, resentment towards Malaitans living in Western Province grew and many left. Bigotry and hatred began to tear the country apart.

Two Commonwealth appointed special envoys—former Fijian army general and prime minister Sitiveni Rabuka and Ade Adefuye from Nigeria—arrived in June 1999 to broker a peace agreement. Mamaloni believed that Sir Peter Kenilorea should have been called upon, instead of Rabuka who as a former coup leader was unsuited as a diplomat. Reflecting his Indigenous Fijian (*iTaukei*) heritage, he criticised aggressive police actions for inflaming the situation, leading to a public fall-out with Frank Short, the British-born police commissioner. With Guadalcanal leaders and militants also demanding his removal, Short left when his two-year contract expired in July 1999.¹³² Following Short's departure, vital intelligence gathering stalled and police officers became hopelessly divided by provincial loyalties. The envoys brokered a series of agreements between Guadalcanal, Malaitan, and national government representatives that had had only temporary impact: the Honiara Peace Agreement (June 1999), the Balasuna Agreement (July 1999), and (following a shoot-out at Mount Austin, on the edge of Honiara, in which four militants were shot dead by the police), the Panatina Agreement (August 1999).

Like many other politicians and observers, PM Ulufa'alu underestimated the scale and danger of what was happening in late 1998 and early 1999, when remedial action might have avoided the worst of the later tragedies. Ulufa'alu was 'stubborn and his behaviour was provocative, almost daring his enemies to topple him'.¹³³ He seems to have thought that, as a Malaitan leader, he could deal with Malaitans in ways that others could not. With fellow Malaitan, Minister of State Alfred Sasako, he talked down the disaster unfolding for thousands of Malaitan families and failed to develop or explain a credible government policy for dealing with it.

In the event, 24,000 Malaitans and other Islanders had left Guadalcanal by October 1999. A small international Peace Monitoring Group was established, made up of Vanuatu and Fiji police but it had very limited reach and effectiveness. Guadalcanal was left in the hands of militants who had formed different factions—the GRA, Isatabu Freedom Fighters, and Isatabu Freedom Movement—that threatened to attack Honiara from all sides and sabotage the town water supplies. The Tension had brought the country to the brink of ruin. The Guadalcanal oil palm plantations were closed in June 1999. SIPL, a joint venture between the government and the British Commonwealth Development Corporation, accounting for 20% of exports, closed in June 1999, costing the jobs of 3,000 SIPL workers, and the Gold Ridge mine closed a year later following the June 2000 coup. Many expatriates left, taking their business with them. With the economy in freefall, structural reform had become a side issue.

Malaitan people were sensitive to the rights of Indigenous landowners and at first were mild in response to the evictions and often-cruel treatment. However, as mistreatment grew more egregious, so did their resistance and resentment. Around October 1999, a group led by Jimmy (Rasta) Lusibaea and calling itself the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) started taking matters and weapons into its own hands. The MEF initially borrowed weapons from sympathetic police officers and then broke into armouries to steal weapons. Four days after Mamaloni's funeral in January 2000, the MEF raided the police armoury in Auki with the assistance of senior Malaitan

¹³² Police Commissioner Frank Short was described as 'the pompous, over-bearing, swagger-stick-carrying commissioner', was unpopular in a number of quarters because of his colonial bearing and saturation tactics with the media (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, July 1999).

¹³³ Hughes 2001, 15.

police officers, stealing high-powered weapons and a grenade launcher.¹³⁴ In June 2000, a joint operation of the MEF and police raided the Honiara armoury, held Ulufa'alu and Devesi at gunpoint, and demanded the resignation of the PM and his government. Backed by high-powered weapons and aided by complicit police, the MEF leaders were able to take control of the nation's capital and government. MEF foot soldiers were put on the police payroll as special constables. The treasury coffers were ransacked, with property, vehicles, store goods and cash appropriated at will.¹³⁵ Guns and thugs became the rule of law for the next three years until the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) restored order in June 2003.

Mamaloni and the Tension

Mamaloni's warnings about disunity, repeated over many years, were ignored and his worst fears realised. He was critical of both sides in the conflict, but especially Guadalcanal leaders for inflaming their own people. According to Victor Ngele, Mamaloni was scathing when he met the GRA and Guadalcanal MPs at a meeting at Balasuna, on the Guadalcanal plains east of Honiara:

Whilst many of us went there with fear of the guns, he just went there and talked straight to them. I was there and I remember him very well, pointing his finger and asked Harold Keke, 'Where do you think you are leading Solomon Islands to?' He really shouted out things most of us were fearful of saying. He was furious and talked to them sternly, saying, 'this is not the way to do things'.¹³⁶

According to Mamaloni's brother, Allen Uta, who lived with Mamaloni in the Waet Haus, Malaitans suspected Mamaloni of being close to Guadalcanal interests, which included a timber-cutting business at Mount Austin on the perimeter of Honiara. There were threats to burn down his house and kill Mamaloni, his family members and his friends. Ulufa'alu was convinced that the unrest was part of a plot by former PMs Alebua and Mamaloni to unseat him. In April 1999, Mamaloni broke his press silence over the Tension for the first time, calling the claims childish that the PM's political opponents were behind the ethnic tension. Ulufa'alu counter-attacked, claiming that the denials were:

A classic Mamaloni tactic to obliterate the media with false information so that members of the public believe him ... there has been no input from the leader of opposition. How can leader of the opposition provide anything useful when 98% of his time is spent outside the office? ... he should stop playing politics and use his years of experience to help find a solution.¹³⁷

Mamaloni was highly critical of the Ulufa'alu government for its slow response to the tensions. He believed that the Guadalcanal demands needed to be settled quickly with compensation, as well

¹³⁴ According to documentary evidence provided to me by a confidential source, the raid on the Auki armoury in January 2000 was arranged at the highest level of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.

¹³⁵ One of the people to whom this book is dedicated—the late Joseph Hasiaua from Marau in Guadalcanal—was a finance officer at the time. He and his colleagues avoided the MEF by frequently changing offices. He had a gun pointed at his head; the barrel was moved at the last second as the gun was fired (Joseph Hasiaua, pers.comm. 2008).

¹³⁶ Interviews with Victor Ngele, 22 February 2010 and Joash Konata, 25 April 2010. Mamaloni had similarly urged BRA rebel leader Francis Ona to 'settle your battle around the table without bloodshed'. Interview with Paul Daokalia, 26 November 2013.

¹³⁷ *Solomon Star*, 20 April 1999.

as compensating Malaitans who had been chased out of Guadalcanal. He repeatedly urged Ulufa`alu to use compensation, as he had done several times in conflicts with Malaitans. According to Somma manager, Kaipua Toibanga, Mamaloni told Ulufa`alu to pay half the compensation (\$1.25m) and spread the rest of the payment over five years or 'Ulufa`alu will find himself naked'.<sup>138</sup> When Mamaloni again tried in 1999 to persuade Ulufa`alu to use compensation to solve the problem, Ulufa`alu said, 'No, it's my turn'.¹³⁹ After Taiwan donated SBD \$25m to assist victims, the government belatedly started providing compensation in August 1999 to Malaitan families driven out of Guadalcanal to Honiara. But the conflict had become entrenched and the compensation came too little and too late. Mamaloni questioned how the government was spending this money to assist victims of ethnic cleansing. The government printed a list of payments to displaced families of \$1,000 per person, up to \$8,000 per family, but many families missed out. Compensation payments to the Malaitan government were also diverted by those who now had the power of guns.

Ulufa`alu's slowness to act was in part because he was so focussed on reform of the economy and public sector; but he also disapproved of using public funds for compensation—which Jon Frankel has termed the 'manipulation of custom'.<sup>140</sup> According to Paul Daokalia, Ulufa`alu was unpopular with many Malaitans because he would not talk to their chiefs and thought himself as a superior chief who could deal with the problems. One Malaitan chief told Ulufa`alu prior to the coup in 2000, 'your days are numbered'. Later, after his leg had been amputated, Ulufa`alu met the same chief, who said, 'I told you so'.

In June 1999, Mamaloni denied—'before Almighty God'—any association with the militants.¹⁴¹ There had been reports of arms worth \$10m entering the country, as well as a letter to a former Guadalcanal MP informing a purported 'Solo' that militant operations were in place and advising 'Solo' to act fast. Mamaloni denied that the weapons and letter had anything to do with him. He attributed the rise of the GRA to the government's slowness in dealing with Guadalcanal. In his view, a problem between the Guadalcanal people and the national government had been allowed to become a problem between the people of Malaita and Guadalcanal. He thought it made no sense to give more money or new laws to the police to confront the country's own people.

By September 1999, Mamaloni knew that matters were out of control, according to his old friend and assistant, Selwyn Suriramo. He watched as displaced people were boarding ships to go back to Malaita and said, 'If they come back, there will be a big problem. But I won't be here to see it'.¹⁴² Even on his deathbed in Central Hospital in January 2000, he asked Ulufa`alu to come and see him, and urged Ulufa`alu to pay enough compensation to prevent the conflict from growing.

Despite suspicions, there is no real evidence that Mamaloni stirred up the tensions or undermined efforts by the government to deal with the crisis. He had always understood that island and

¹³⁸ Interview with Kaipua Toibanga, 19 March 2010.

¹³⁹ Interview with Paul Daokalia, 26 November 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Fraenkel 2004. Compensation demands turned to straightforward extortion after 2000, when the MEF diverted funds from Treasury and demanded money at gunpoint.

¹⁴¹ *Solomon Star*, 11 June 1999.

¹⁴² Interview with Selwyn Suriramo, 30 June 2011.

provincial differences could tear the country apart.¹⁴³ The thin veneer of modern nationhood merely papered over traditional cultural differences and enmities.

According to Ben Hoda from Makira, Mamaloni understood the characters of people from different provinces well. He thought there were three ‘hot’ provinces—Malaita, Temotu, and Rennell-Bellona—whose people were more aggressive and needed careful handling in order to keep the peace.¹⁴⁴ He was always wary of inflaming people from these provinces and, if differences arose, the need to settle them quickly with negotiation and compensation, as he had done after several riots in Honiara 1989. The other provinces were cool or not as aggressive—Makirans were ‘lambs’ while Isabel and West were the ‘coolest’ people in the country with whom patient negotiation would work.

It is worth repeating his clearly articulated views in *The Road to Independence*, written in 1992:

All these small ‘island nations’ were independent entities long before the northern explorers found them. Their cultures differed from each other...The merging of these ‘island nations’ into one ‘Sovereign Authority’ (constitutional terms) was by human design, and said to be by necessity. Unfortunately, for all practical purposes it was the greatest error of the British administration in this region...Solomon Islands or the Solomon Islands community has never been a nation and will never be a nation and will never become one.¹⁴⁵

Endgame

Mamaloni became a virtual recluse in his final year of life and as opposition leader. He was rarely seen at official functions and missed the final parliamentary session of the year.¹⁴⁶ Two weeks after a state of emergency had been declared, he also missed signing the Honiara Peace Agreement on 28 June 1999. Decades of being a political workaholic, stress, heavy smoking, drinking spirits, and prodigious betel nut chewing had exacted their toll. A medical check-up in 1994 had revealed signs of kidney disease related to diabetes and hypertension, and complications of gout. He was told to cut down on the drinking sprees with whisky, which left him with painful gout and he treated with massages and *kastom* medicine leaves for his knees.¹⁴⁷ By the middle of 1999, his condition had proceeded to end-stage disease, when the kidneys function barely or not at all.

Mamaloni would have lived longer had he had listened to his personal physician, Dr Eritara Terierue, family and friends who begged him to travel to Australia for treatment. But it would have been completely out of character for him to submit to doctors’ orders and the ordeal of dialysis three times a week. Dr Terierue reportedly said, ‘this bugger wants to die’.¹⁴⁸ Mamaloni repeatedly said that he did not want to be treated differently from ordinary Solomon Islanders or use resources that could save younger people who would be able to do more for the country. According to a younger brother, Johnson Taisaie, he said, ‘If the family spend the money to send

¹⁴³ Interview with Allen Uta, 26–27 July 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Ben Hoda, 4 April 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Mamaloni 1992, 10.

¹⁴⁶ His signature as Opposition leader is missing from the agreement document, which was witnessed and signed by the PM and every provincial premier.

¹⁴⁷ Interviews with Paul Daokalia, 26 November 2013 and Suzi Walekwate, 5 December 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Interviews with Ashley Wickham, 3 November 2010 and Dr Eritara Tekerue, 22 November 2011.

me, then OK, but if the public have to spend one cent on me, I won't go. If we die, we die' (*'iumi Joe, dae—dae nao'*). His refusal to go for overseas medical treatment may also have related to his fear of needles. He hated having blood samples taken and was uncompliant if a painful procedure was involved, perhaps related to treatments for yaws and surgery for his accident at Kerepei as a child.

Mamaloni's old friend and private banker, Yukio Sato, bought tickets for him and his wife Mary to go to Australia for treatment at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, where the Solomon Islands honorary consul in Australia, (later Sir) Trevor Garland, worked as a nurse consultant in the renal unit. According to Somma manager, Kaipua Toibanga, who was also seriously ill with diabetes-related illness, the flights to Australia were re-booked for treatment in January 2000, but Mamaloni was merely fobbing people off by agreeing to go later. Instead of going for treatment in Australia, he went to Makira, where he wanted to end his days. In early December 1999, Mamaloni travelled by ship to Heuru in Arosi 1 to open the West Makira games, which he had sponsored since the early 1980s. The 1999 games at Heuru were Mamaloni's last official performance, but he was in serious discomfort and left early to go home to his birthplace at Rumahui.

Mamaloni stayed next to the house that he had built for his mother, Irageni, at Tarai'anoa, overlooking Na'oni Point on the south-west corner of Arosi. According to his daughter, Polini, he was by then very breathless and unable to sleep lying down. He suffered intense itching—a result of his kidneys no longer being able to process toxins—and had no appetite, even for his beloved *taumwa* or six-month pudding. His condition was deteriorating alarmingly, and his wife Mary arranged for a helicopter to take him back to Honiara. When it landed to pick him up, his fear of flying surfaced again and he refused to board, saying, 'I'm not flying in a coconut shell' (*'Bae mi no flae long sela kokonat'*).

Staying with Irageni was perhaps a surprising choice for Mamaloni, given their past differences. But he was putting affairs in order and confirming where he wanted to be buried. In keeping with Arosi *kastom*, he organised a feast for his mother and paid a cow to be butchered—a large and expensive gesture. He also bought land on the south coast of Makira for his daughter Maria and first-born son Audie. The new millennium was celebrated with Moses Mae and his wife Elizabeth at Rohorua, facing Anuta Island, where the trader Tom Dabelle had been murdered 110 years earlier by Sautahanimae and Suhurahu, Mamaloni's grandfather by adoption. .

Having put some of his affairs in order, Mamaloni reluctantly agreed to his family's requests to return to Honiara for treatment, travelling by canoe to Maro'u Bay to board the *Southern Cross* for the overnight trip to Honiara. He hardly slept on the journey, preferring the fresh air on deck and to look back at his island for the last time. Arriving at Point Cruz on 9 January 2000, he was met by his step-sister Grace and her husband David Fekau, who himself was very sick with cancer of the oesophagus and about to go to Sydney for treatment. Mamaloni said to him, 'We're both sick and going soon' (*'iumi evriwan sik fo gogo nao'*), and, indeed, Fekau died six months later.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Grace Fekau, 8 January 2011.



Figure 18.1: Mamaloni in his final days at Tarai'anoa, Makira, December 1999. Source: Mamaloni family.

Resistant to the very end, Mamaloni went home first instead of going straight to hospital. Next morning, he was admitted at 11 a.m. to the Central Hospital public medical ward, rather than a private ward. Blood tests were taken and an intravenous infusion started. Trevor Garland was notified in Sydney and prepared to come the following day with equipment for temporary dialysis (via the abdomen), which might have stabilised Mamaloni's condition enough to get him to Sydney. A stream of family members, relatives, old friends, and some former adversaries, including Ulufa'alu, came to see him. Noel Mamau presented him with a Real Kakamora (Makira) soccer team shirt and sang him songs from Ulawa. Archbishop Ellison Pogo, who was related to Mamaloni through marriage, sat with him and noticed how much he was struggling for breath and bleeding from his mouth—it was possible that he also had oral cancer. As ever, Mamaloni did not stand on ceremony and called the archbishop by his surname, 'Pogo'. Mamaloni thanked him for coming and they prayed together; his last words to the Archbishop were, 'I'm OK now' (*'Mi oraet nao, tabu'*).¹⁵⁰ He was reconciled with the Anglican Church of Melanesia, now headed by a Solomon Islander of whom he was very proud. He knew he was dying, saying to his old assistant, Selwyn Suriramo, 'After midnight, I'll be gone'. The next morning, he slipped into a coma, and the end came in the early afternoon of 11 January 2000, just days before his 57th birthday. 'Solo' — 'the Boss' — was gone.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Archbishop Ellison Pogo, 15 December 2010.

¹⁵¹ Mamaloni's death was not unusually young for a politician or someone of his generation. In 1999, the life expectancy for Solomon Islander men was only 62 years (Report on the 1999 Population and Housing Census, 2000). Bart Ulufa'alu died in 2007, seven months before his 57th birthday, from complications of diabetes, several years after a below-knee amputation in Australia. Father Walter Lini, former prime minister of Vanuatu and also a political founding father, died aged 56 in February 1999.

Part Seven. Afterlife and Aftermath

The final part of this biography examines Mamaloni's controversial career and the myths that surrounded him after his death. He was remembered by many for his humility, his ability to relate to ordinary people, and fiercely defending the sovereignty of Solomon Islands. In Makira, he passed into local legend. Stories began to circulate that he was living underground at the head of an army that would rescue his island and the country from the Tension.

Opinions remain very divided about Mamaloni. Some informants believe that if the 'father of the nation' had lived, he could or would have prevented the coup that brought down the Ulufa'alu government in June 2000. Others hold him responsible for the political and economic disarray during his governments in the 1990s and for the cronyism, corruption, and political plotting they regard as leading to the coup.

When reviewing Mamaloni's career and legacy, it is simplistic to blame him for so much of what went wrong after Independence. It is important not to ignore or underestimate larger national and international contexts in which he operated. His career highlights some of the difficulties of governing a modern independent state emerging from nine decades of British colonial rule. Some difficulties inescapably arose from the imposition of a foreign political structure on local political cultures. The political structures imposed by Britain do not map easily onto Solomon Island political circumstances. Mamaloni was one of many players learning to operate within a political system superimposed on deeply embedded traditional *big-man* and other practices.

Mamaloni was himself a product of historical and structural forces that shaped his family, island, and country. Through education, ambition, and good timing, he became the first Solomon Islander to lead an ethnically diverse nation in the final quarter of the 20th century. His experiences as a junior public servant shaped his disobedience and resistance towards colonial authority, which continued throughout his political career before and after Independence. He was also a cunning politician who developed a style of oratory and Mamaloni politics that was adopted by some leaders after his death.

Mamaloni's life sheds light on the social, cultural, economic, political, and historical forces that have shaped that country. He was a significant actor in some of the most crucial events leading up to Independence and afterwards. His memory remains deeply cherished by many for whom he was a mercurial yet human leader, with both vices and endearing qualities. He took on the difficult, some would argue impossible, task of attempting to govern a fragmented country brought together by colonial fiat and only lightly touched by the institutions and values of the Westminster tradition. He told colleagues that Solomon Islands was a hard country to run, which he made harder for himself and the country by not playing by the rules of others, whether inherited from former colonial powers or imposed by their international successors.

* * *

Chapter 19. Mamaloni in the Afterlife

Solomon Islanders, and Makirans especially, had lost their most famous leader and he soon became legendary. Rumours of Mamaloni in the afterlife began when people saw his body in the open coffin in Honiara and Makira. Changes in the texture and colour of his skin and hair led to rumours that it was not his body in the coffin.



Figure 19.1: Mamaloni in his open casket, January 2000. Changes in his posthumous appearance fuelled rumours that it was not his body in the coffin. Source: Mamaloni family.

People had seen him shortly before his death looking very pale with short grey hair that had recently been cut.¹ With his head and hand visible in the open coffin, his skin was much darker and felt rubbery. His hair was said to be black and longer, while a sore on his lip (possibly an oral cancer) had vanished. These posthumous physical changes were most probably the result of the embalming process but fuelled rumours that he was alive elsewhere. Dr Tekierue, Mamaloni's physician, treated him before his death and embalmed him shortly afterwards. He explained in an interview that Mamaloni had been anaemic before his death.² In the embalming process, chemical fluids are used to replace the blood in the body and fill the cavities where organs have been removed to slow down putrefaction. Different colour tones can be used by embalmers to achieve a natural colour, which, combined with the removal of anaemic blood, would have changed his skin texture and skin colour to natural darker tones (see Figure 19.2).³ Cosmetics are also used to make the face look presentable in an open coffin. However, the tools and techniques of embalming would not be known to most mourners or the public who noticed or heard about the changes.

Some of Mamaloni's closest colleagues, such as Kaipua Toibanga and Selwyn Suriramo, who were with him when he died, certainly believed that Mamaloni lived on. Kaipua told people that there had been no death rattle from his body, rather it was 'like a computer winding down'.⁴ However,

¹ His skin colour looks darker in photographs taken shortly before his death, for example 18.1 in the previous chapter and 19.1 below.

² Interview with Dr Eritara Tekierue, 22 May 2011.

³ Trevor Clark (2004, 237) made a similar observation of the embalmed body of Bishop John Chisolm lying in state at St Barnabas Cathedral in 1975.

⁴ Interview with Kaipua Toibanga, 16 March 2010.

Mamaloni's family, who were with him when he died and brought him home for burial, have been embarrassed by the rumours. No matter how much they insisted that Mamaloni was dead, their denials were not sufficient to dispel rumours and stories, which continued for years.⁵



Figure 19.2: One of the last public pictures of Mamaloni in 1998. Source: *Solomon Star*.

As the country slid further into armed conflict, rumours soon began to circulate that Mamaloni was living underground at Rohu on the west coast of Arosi, ready to lead a Makiran underground army that combined advanced military technology with the power of *kakamora*—the small original inhabitants of Makira. Also called *pwapwaronga* in Arosi, they are said to live in caves deep inland and speak their own language.⁶ Myths of Mamaloni in the afterlife reflected other deep cultural beliefs about ancestors who keep the power of the deceased close and give hope to the living.⁷ In Arosi, Mamaloni naturally became an ancestor and *adaro*—the part of the spirit of a dead person that remains near the home area. Ancestors are powerful presences in the landscape and are enshrined to protect the land, material goods, privileges, and descendants. Arosi people have access to spirit realms through their dreams and are said to be able to see *adaro*. As Michael Scott, ethnographer of the Arosi, writes:

Most people assume that the spirits of the dead, called *adaro*, are still present and potentially dangerous at several types of sacred sites ... *Adaro* observe everyone in the vicinity and protect those whom they recognise as their own.⁸

In Makira, fears of Malaitan dominance also fuelled more stories of Mamaloni in the afterlife. When Michael Scott conducted follow-up research in Arosi in 2003 and 2006, he heard numerous reports of unidentified aircraft and vessels, which appeared most widely from 1999 to 2003 during the Tension. Unmanned drones and a warship bearing the name *Motherland* appeared and

⁵ When doing field work for this book, I was also frequently asked whether I had heard of or believed the rumours of Mamaloni being alive and the underground army.

⁶ Scott 2007a, 139–141

⁷ Scott 2011, 204.

⁸ Scott 2007a, xxx.

disappeared at speed. Sharks, turtles, and large fish were suspected of being submarines operated by unknown white men. People reported hearing sounds from underground machinery, mysterious lights, and trucks.⁹ Scott found that very few people claimed to have been to the underground or to have seen emissaries from there. Most people did not take the rumours of the underground too seriously but rather, treated them as popular folklore.

Stories of an underground army had previously emerged during Maasina Rule and continued in some areas well into the 1960s.¹⁰ Tales of Mamaloni and an underground army reprised these tales, and speculation increased as the Tension grew, particularly after the coup in June 2000. Scott has summarised the various rumours of Mamaloni and the underground army, shown below.

Mamaloni and the underground army ¹¹

- There is a secret subterranean military–industrial complex underneath Makira that is storing and will one day release prodigious natural and technological bounty.
- The secret military base is accessed through a subterranean door at the Rohu cliffs on the west coast.
- The underground army is equipped with super-normal technology devised by Euro-Americans.
- The army has harnessed the power of the *kakamora* (or *pwapwaronga*), who make the island special and guard the pure language and real *kastom* of Makira.
- The army is policing the integrity of Makira as a motherland, and the rights of true Makirans.
- Makiran *kastom* has become corrupted by ‘mixing’ with outsiders but is preserved underground by the *kakamora*.
- Mamaloni is still alive and in communication with or leading the army. He is said to have smuggled weapons ordered while he was still in government to the underground. He will lead the underground army and bring statehood and political autonomy for Makira.
- Returning to true *kastom* will bring peace, prosperity and power to Makira as the fulfilment of a divine plan.

Mysterious lights and planes over Makira had been reported even before Mamaloni’s death.¹² Mamaloni was said to have told people not to talk about mysterious planes because there were security issues that they would not understand. The area of Rohu midway down the west coast of Makira has long been associated with legend and special power. At the Rohu cliffs, the rock was said to slide back electronically, as in a James Bond film, allowing ships and amphibian planes to move in and out. There were reports of ships capable of moving at great speed, and numerous reports of planes flying at near tree height, usually at night, making no sound or a sound like a rewinding cassette. It was also rumoured that remote-controlled drone planes were being tested and used by the Australian army for intelligence purposes prior to and during the RAMSI

⁹ Underground activities can easily be imagined in Makira, which has many underground limestone caves, and subterranean noises can be heard by placing one’s ear on the ground above.

¹⁰ Maasina ideas were still circulating into the 1960s and 1970s in the Wainoni area (Herlihy 2003).

¹¹ Scott 2011, 2012a.

¹² The lights and planes are possibly explained as lights from satellites and night-time cargo flights.

intervention.¹³ Unmanned drones, unidentified aircraft and flying objects (UFOs) were also reported as far as east Malaita and Guadalcanal in the early 2000s. Mamaloni's sister-in-law, Salome Mara, described seeing such a plane at close quarters when she was washing her clothes by the river. One of her sons drew a picture based on her description that is similar to a picture of a US drone (see Figures 19.3 and 19.4).



Figure 19.3 and 19.4: Drawing of a silent plane and picture of a US drone. Source: Salome Mara (sister-in-law of Mamaloni); Massoud Hossaini, AFP Getty Images

Rumours were not confined to Arosi. Supporters of Mamaloni's brothers, Jackson Sunaone and Johnson Taisae, circulated stories of Mamaloni and mysterious armies during election campaigns in Makira in 2006 and 2010.¹⁴ At Star Harbour in east Makira, there were stories of submarines and people in naval uniforms meeting with MP David Sitai, who also recalled being asked if it was true that weapons were being brought in through tunnels being dug from Star Harbour to Arosi. A more prosaic explanation was that holes were being dug for a community sanitation project. Sitai regarded the afterlife rumours of Mamaloni as ways of keeping his fame alive and recreating pride in Maasina Rule, with its connections with USA and freedom from British rule.¹⁵

Belief in Mamaloni's afterlife was not confined to Makira. His protégé and successor as Opposition leader, Manasseh Sogavare, described having a three-hour meeting with him in June 2006 after becoming prime minister.¹⁶ He appeared to Sogavare in the PM's office dressed in a brown safari suit: 'I think he came to me because he was worried about the country'.¹⁷ They discussed politics, leadership, and international relations—Mamaloni singled out Australia as a country not to be trusted. Then he got up and left the room, 'it was then that I realised I had been talking to a dead man'.¹⁸ He even reported that Mamaloni had left cigarette butts in an ashtray. Soon after, Sogavare stopped Mamaloni's son Audie and gave him a lift. He asked Audie, 'Has he really died?' (*Hem i barava dae finis?*). Sogavare also talked to Mamaloni's former colleagues, such as Selwyn Suriramo

¹³ The use of drones was denied by Nicholas Coppel, a former RAMSI Coordinator (Clive Moore, pers. comm. 2019).

¹⁴ According to Michael Scott (2011), one of the candidates, 'J', promoted the 'belief' in a secret provincial army during his provincial campaign in 2006. In 2008, Johnson Taisae, one of Sunaone's sons, forecast that a Rohu army would arrive on the Makira 2nd Appointed Day, when the province celebrates its formation. Again in the lead up to the 2010 elections, Taisae suggested that a secret army was conducting training drills in the bush above Wainoni—an area still prone to cult beliefs

¹⁵ Interview with David Sitai, 6 December 2010. A similar argument can be found in Michael Scott's work, 2011, 2012a, and 2012b.

¹⁶ *Islands Business*, July 2007.

¹⁷ Sade 2017, 6.

¹⁸ Alfred Sasako, *Islands Business*, July 2007.

and Toswell Kaua, about whether he was still alive. Sogavare added credence to rumours when he made a special visit to Mamaloni's gravesite at Tarai`anoa, where he told people that the body in the grave was a dummy (*dole nomoa*).¹⁹ Coming from a prime minister, many local people attached greater credence to such ideas. He also claimed that Mamaloni had advised him to seek the job of PM in June 2000 and again in May 2006. Sogavare also adopted his mentor's approach to national sovereignty—his hostility to Australia and the RAMSI intervention was pure Mamaloni. This came at considerable political cost when in December 2007 Sogavare became the first prime minister to lose a no-confidence motion on the floor of the National Parliament and was forced to resign.

Conspiracies and UFO rumours even entered parliament during a debate in 2010 on the government's response to a plane crash which had been reported going down over Malaita. There was no evidence of the flight, despite an extensive search for debris or records of flights that day. Police minister James Tora, himself from Ugi, reported:

Makira has similar sightings of an aircraft. One example I can cite is that some people in West Makira way back in the [19]80s have seen a same kind of aircraft flying above the trees and then plunging down into the bush. That is one real story coming from there. When that plane disappeared into the bush, they could not see anything and so the people ran to the place they thought they saw it going down and searched the place but they did not find any aircraft. They even saw a speedboat when they went fishing at night but when they went closer it disappeared and they did not see it.²⁰

Rumours about Mamaloni were also influenced by internet videos, books, and fantasy sites. A website and book, *Hidden in Plain Sight* by Richard Sauder, included Solomon Islands as part of a worldwide system of underground military bases, secret tunnels, and aliens.²¹ Another website and book, *Giants in Solomon Islands Mysteries*, written by Australian fantasist Marius Boirayon, also made claims of UFO sightings and launch sites in Guadalcanal and Malaita.²²

Tales of the afterlife and paranormal sightings can be explained by psychic projection, dreaming, and interpretation of dreams. Ideas and beliefs can be symbolised in dreams and provide access to the world of spirits. Dreams are commonly interpreted for signs and actions; they are also used to interpret and cure illness. Dreaming is often very vivid and has greater credibility and significance in Solomons cultures than in western cosmopolitan cultures. Anthropologist Michael Scott argues that tales and stories are connected to Makiran identity, myths, and beliefs. He identifies an essential Makiranness, an inner nature that includes a sense of *kakamorahood*, which Makirans can tap into and cultivate, irrespective of age, experiences, education, marriage or residence.²³ He traces the connections between rumours of the Mamaloni afterlife, Makira legends, Maasina Rule and the Tension, which created a sense of marginality and vulnerability. Makirans transformed *kastom* and the significance of Makira as Hanuato`o ('the strong island') into cargo discourses.²⁴ The

¹⁹ During his visit to Makira in 2007, Sogavare was installed as an honorary paramount chief by the province when he attended the Chiefs Empowerment Day. He also visited Mamaloni's grave at Tarai`anoa again.

²⁰ James Tora, Solomon Islands Parliament, 4 October 2010.

²¹ Sauder 2012. I do not wish to endorse these internet fantasies but rather to highlight their absurdity.

²² Boirayon 2011.

²³ Interview with Michael Scott, 28 September 2013. I am most grateful to Dr Michael Scott for his book (Scott 2007) and articles (2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2016). I can only touch the surface of his detailed and complex work.

²⁴ Scott 2007a, 2008.

stories of an underground army reworked Maasina Rule stories of American armies hiding in the bush and underground into an imaginary technological army base with the special powers of the *kakamora* and Makira. Scott found that tales and stories varied with church denomination.²⁵ For evangelical SSEC followers, the underground army was integrated into beliefs in ‘end times’—the time of tribulation before the second coming of Christ. Anglicans focussed on notions of Makira security, statehood, and independence. Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) informants, who detest the Catholic papacy, associated Mamaloni with being the Black Pope and the underground army as a satanic force; Adventists believe that worship on Sundays is a sign of the devil.

Rumours of Mamaloni and an underground army have been woven into biblical prophecy and what Scott calls ‘sacred geography’—a rich cultural heritage of place names and landmarks. Prophecy involves not just foretelling the future but reinterpreting the past to give significance to place names, stones, caves, and limestone formations. Rohu—the area on the west coast of Arosi from Hada to Maro`u Bay—plays a significant part in Arosi cosmology and origin stories. Jemuel Hagu, a very old man living at Omaahaoru above Hada Bay, interpreted the Arosi coast as the Seven Wonders of the World using evangelical references from Revelations and Acts of the Apostles (Ephesians).²⁶

Seven Wonders of the World (interpreted by Jemuel Hagu)²⁷

1. ROHU—called ‘Rome’ by Mendaña. The Roman Toes in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream were interpreted by Daniel as the ten provinces of Rome (Daniel 2:31-45).²⁸
2. AROSI—the end, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Revelations 22:13).
3. TARIHANA—the point/boundary ‘that ends it’.
4. WAISUHIA—deep place to dive for fresh water; *kastom* magic can cause canoes to sink; must not talk proudly of a canoe or it will sink here.
5. HARI—stingray = the door to shut Rohu door, *kastom* power is there.
6. KURA IRA—a stone that looks like an axe head.
7. AROHAI—a stone turtle (*arohai* = a dog paddle or turtle paddle).

The word ‘Arosi’ means ‘the end of’ and is where the origin snake (Hato`ibwari or Figona) has its tail, while its head is in Bauro. Hagu wrote that the number seven also meant ‘the end’ and was the sign of God’s hand. Reinterpretation of place names such as Rohu as Rome and Eteria (the name of a stream) as Italy are taken to mean that Romans lived in Arosi before New Testament times. The name of the village Hawa`a is interpreted as the place where people from Hawai`i once lived,

²⁵ Scott 2012a.

²⁶ Interview with Jemuel Hagu, 25 March 2010. Born in 1921, he was bedridden and nearly blind when I interviewed him. Michael Scott also interviewed Hagu and confirmed the Seven Wonders of Makira and links with John Araubora and Maasina Rule (Scott 2016).

²⁷ Interview with Jemuel Hagu.

²⁸ Folk etymology links Rohu to Rome through Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, v.21 ‘Paul passed through Macedonia and Archia to go to Jerusalem saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome”. So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus’. Joash Sunaone named his settlement ‘Masidonia’.

and Nuiasia as where people from Asia once lived. Hagu himself followed ideas of the Makiran Maasina leader, John Araubora, who died in 1964 also espoused sacred geography and a Rohu–Rome myth. Other informants claim there are Roman numerals written on stones underwater at Maro`u Bay, and a stone near Tarihana that looks like a picture of a woman.

Oral tradition stories form part of Makiran sacred geography. According to Arosi legend, the giant Waimaihi, who was the chief of the *kakamora*, was fishing with bamboo from the mainland in the Onebia area and pulled up the small island of Anuta. The island of Makira started to sink, so Waimaihi ran over to the end of the island at Rohu and tried to support or prop up the island. He threw his bamboo rod and tried different strong trees, but none worked until he tried using a soft *darau* tree, which turned to stone and became the pillars of Rohu. This is now reinterpreted as Mamaloni holding up Makira and the government.²⁹

Various prophecies and signs said to be of Mamaloni in the afterlife

- The name Mamaloni can be pronounced ‘Mamaruni’ (‘l’ and ‘r’ are often transposed in Arosi), which translates as ‘place of shade’ and is taken to mean that his name signified he would lead and provide shade to his people.
- His middle name Sunaone is interpreted as ‘to dive under Naone’, supporting the theory that Mamaloni went underground at Na’oni Point from the patrol boat *Lata*.
- Tarai`anoa, Mamaloni’s resting place, can be translated in the Arosi language as ‘the road of ghost’ or ‘spirit road’. This is taken to mean that only Mamaloni’s ghost is there and that the real Mamaloni is somewhere else.³⁰
- A boy at Hada answered a mobile telephone call and the name ‘SS Mamaloni’ appeared on his screen; this happened twice. Jemuel Hagu showed me a sign he had written in chalk: ‘SS Mamaloni showed out on mobile in March 2010’ (see Figure 19.5).
- Mamaloni’s son Audie has said that, while Mamaloni was alive, they went for a walk at Tawaraha (close to Rohu) and his father took him to a town underground. However, Mamaloni denied this, saying that Audie had dreamt it.

Prophecies about Mamaloni were said to have been made by John Araubora and Dr Charles Fox. Araubora prophesied that a ruler would come from Hanengae—the area inland from the south coast, where Irageni’s grandfather came from. A hill there is said to cast an early morning shadow over Guadalcanal, which is interpreted to mean that a leader would come from this mountain. Araubora allegedly identified Mamaloni as a future leader during a Maasina Rule meeting. In other versions, he prophesied that a child of Sunaone would become leader of Makira and the Solomon Islands, and identified Mamaloni as that child when he was born. Araubora is said to have written a book on Makira legends, which he gave to Mamaloni on his return from New Zealand. Dr Fox, whom Mamaloni revered, is said to have shaken Mamaloni’s hand before Mamaloni had any proper job and said, ‘Look after your people well’. Another Fox story is that he said to Mamaloni,

²⁹ Intriguingly, this oral tradition may also reference changing in sea levels due to sinking of an undersea ridge following earthquakes and movements of the large tectonic plates, which also caused the island of Teonimenu nearby Ulawa to sink ten metres below the surface and now known as Lark Shoal. (Nunn 2018, 184).

³⁰ Interview with Jemuel Hagu.

‘When I die, I will go to heaven; when you die, you will go down into the ground’. This is now reinterpreted to mean Mamaloni and the underground army.

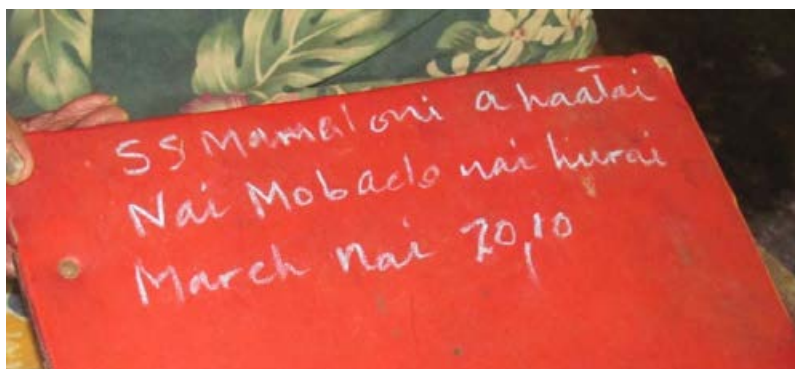


Figure 19.5: Sign written by Jemuel Hagu, ‘SS Mamaloni showed out on mobile [phone] in March 2010’.

Source: author.

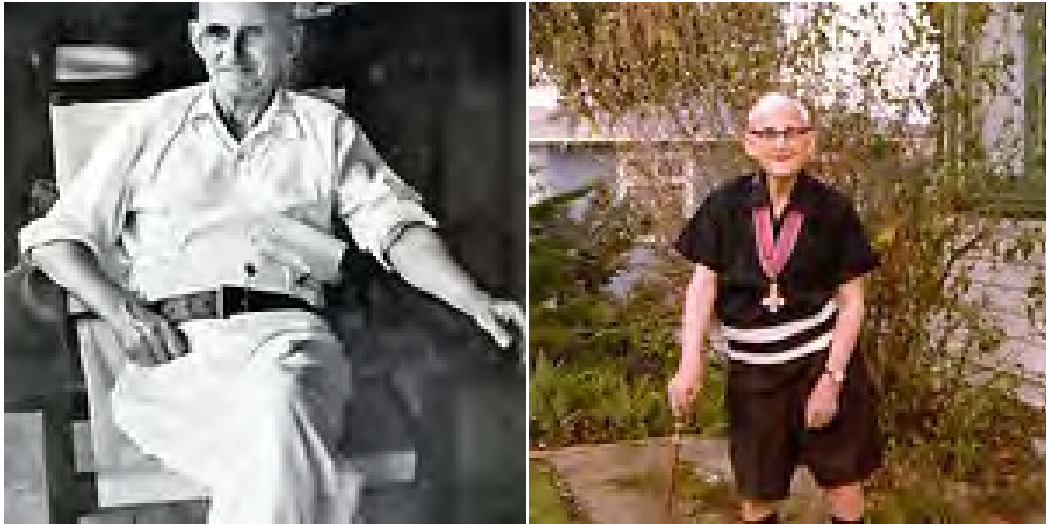
Makirans say that Mamaloni indicated his belief in Makira legends when he said in Parliament that a man from Makira could travel to the US and back in one day by tunnel. He also spoke of the legend of the brother stone Hauhuari'i, who ran away from near Onebia on the south Arosi coast and created Mamarasike passage, splitting Small Malaita from the main island. People believe that Mamaloni was serious when he made these references, rather than making jokes. When conspiracy stories circulated about the death of Princess Diana in 1997, Mamaloni reportedly told people that he too could stage his own disappearance, and this has been interpreted to mean he staged his own death and is still alive.

Mamaloni was said to be able to foresee the future. For example, his sons Audie and Solomon Junior recall the Twin Otter plane returning from Makira that crashed in 1990 in dense cloud and high winds in Guadalcanal. Mamaloni said that he had dreamt the crash the night before and rang to see if his brother Jackson would be on the flight to Makira, which he was, and this also prevented another brother, Johnson, from boarding the fatal flight back to Honiara. His brother Alan Uta said that, during the Tension, Mamaloni would look ahead and know when there were people around with rifles, and whether to stay at the house or not. Another example from Solomon Junior was that, when he had an accident and scratched his father's car, Mamaloni knew what had happened without being told, and was waiting for Junior at the house when he returned home.³¹

Bishop Willie Pwaisio, a ‘reverse missionary’ who lives in England, says that Mamaloni attributed his ability to predict the future to ‘his prophet’, Dr Charles Fox.³² Mamaloni said he could communicate with the spirit of Fox and believed the warnings he gave when he talked to him in meditation.

³¹ A more mundane explanation is that one of Mamaloni's many contacts in town had already informed him about Solomon Junior's accident.

³² Interview with Bishop Willie Pwaisio, 22 August 2011. He played the lead role in the film version of the play *This Man* when he was head boy at Selwyn College.



Figures 19.6 and 19.7: Dr Charles Fox—‘Kakamora’—long serving Anglican missionary and Melanesian brother (*Tasiu*). Source: Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia.³³

Fox was given the nickname *Kakamora* not only due to his small stature but he was also credited with magical powers. He died aged 99 and his body was brought back from New Zealand to be buried at Tabalia, the headquarters of the Melanesian Brothers (*Tasiu*), of which Fox had been a member from 1933 to 1950 and had taken vows again in his last years. Bishop Pwaisio officiated at the burial service and says there were similar rumours that the body in the coffin was not really that of Fox. The coffin was not open like Mamaloni’s but was said by the carriers to be so light that it could be lifted with one finger. Pwaisio’s explanation is that people wish to memorialise heroes such as Fox and Mamaloni, and to keep their spirit alive. As Moore has written in the context of Pacific Islanders living in Australia, Melanesian spirituality continues and operates alongside avowedly Christian beliefs.³⁴

Aftermath—things fall apart³⁵

In secular matters, things fell apart further after Mamaloni’s death—for his country, his family, and his businesses. With the latter, he had already given away millions or sold at low prices assets such as ships belonging to Patosha and Somma licences. He trusted friends and relatives as managers some of whom did not know how to manage business properly. Paperwork had not been systematically filed and property titles were not properly registered. Some of his properties were lost due to lack of proper proof of title. His estate was disputed by various parts of the family, former partners, and other businessmen. Mamaloni’s family was left with the *Waet Haus* and ‘Arosi 3’, a 23-hectare plot at Lungga, near Henderson Airport. The contest over who legally owns Arosi 3 has continued over the years. Two of Qila’s daughters (Aileen and Kate from Mamaloni’s first marriage) and their families live in two very modest houses at Arosi 3, with none of the advantages one might expect of the children of a former PM. This made a striking contrast to the Kenilorea children, photographs of whose graduations and white weddings adorned Sir Peter’s house.

³³Moore 2020, <http://www.solomonencyclopaedia.net/biogs/E000458b.htm>

³⁴ Moore 2019, 20.

³⁵ ‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’. From ‘The Second Coming’—a poem composed by the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, after World War I.

Mamaloni's eldest son, Audie Murphy, was left as the sole director of Somma, and even contested ownership of the *Waet Haus*. He wanted to take his mother, Mary Mamaloni, to court—a move that angered Yukio Sato so much that he punched Audie. Mary Mamaloni was the administrator of his estate but Mamaloni's other 'wives', Qila and Caroline, feared that she would not share the estate fairly between all his children, which led them to take legal action. The High Court ruled that all his children should share in the estate. There were also disputes in court over Mary's removal of properties to her home in Isabel during the Tension. Many of Mamaloni's books and papers were lost in the process.³⁶

Mamaloni's logging business fell apart following the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis. There was feuding over who should control business operations and where the profits should go with Mary Mamaloni and Kaipua Toibanga (Somma general manager) on one side and Audie Mamaloni and Jackson Sunaone on the other side. Somma/Goodwill resumed logging operations in late 1999, and the first logging shipment left the country the week following Mamaloni's death. After two further shipments, Kaipua accused Audie and Jackson of taking the proceeds of the logging shipments (worth SBD \$800,000) to Australia. Although the family reconciled in 2002, it was too late to save Somma logging operations, which were shut down by Kaipua, who held the documents necessary to cancel the licence bond, because of the family internal fighting. He also thought that Goodwill did not allocate machines for the development of roads and an airport, which were part of the development plan.

Mamaloni would have been greatly saddened but not surprised by the chaos that descended on his beloved country after his death. Atrocities and murders by Malaita and Guadalcanal militants were proof of what Mamaloni had repeatedly warned against and tried to prevent for so long. As recounted in the previous chapter, on 17 January 2000—only days after Mamaloni's death—the MEF broke into the police armoury at Auki and captured high-powered weapons to defend Honiara and attack the Guadalcanal militants. The loyalty of the police force was fatally compromised, with Malaitan officers first assisting the MEF in the Auki heist, and then, on 5 June 2000, emptying the police armouries in Honiara in a joint operation with the MEF. Taking PM Ulufa'alu hostage at gunpoint, they forced him and his government to resign. Manasseh Sogavare was elected on 30 June 2000 by 23 votes to 21 in a ballot that several key opponents were prevented from attending by threats of violence.

Supporters of Mamaloni argue that he would have prevented the June 2000 coup had he lived. He could either have brought down Ulufa'alu on the floor of Parliament or worked together with him to form a national unity government. He would have used compensation payments to address Malaitans' losses early, which he always trusted to deal with matters quickly. He deeply respected traditional mechanisms, which, if handed properly, can settle matters completely. However, without compensation that is culturally appropriate, matters can never be properly forgiven or forgotten. Mamaloni knew that compromise was both essential and inevitable. Bougainville had shown how costly and futile were attempts to defeat rebel movements. He understood defence and valued weaponry more than Ulufa'alu and would have known the importance of properly

³⁶ Mamaloni, a voracious reader, would also have been saddened by the loss of his books and papers. His library would have provided much useful information about the sources of his ideas, interests, and influences.

secured armouries. Mamaloni also understood different provincial characteristics and had always been to get along well with people from all over the country. His Makiran *araba* tradition of peacemaker stood in contrast with Ulufa'alu's combative temperament and heritage. His links to Guadalcanal and Malaita gave him access to information and credibility on both sides of the conflict.

Mamaloni's detractors and opponents counter that he was responsible more than anyone for the collapse of good government that allowed the Tension to flourish. But events had spiralled beyond the control of any single individual by 2000. By the time he took over as Opposition leader in October 1998, he simply did not have the energy to do the job or contribute significantly to resolving the Tension. He was largely missing from public view when the country most needed his experience and communication skills.

Over the three years following his death, militants extorted government departments, businesses, private homes, and vehicles in Honiara. The subversion of the police force could have been prevented and the armouries kept secure if Australia—or, rather, the conservative Howard government—had responded to two requests from the Ulufa'alu government for 50 and then 100 Australian police officers in 1999 and 2000. In 2003, after three years of thuggery and extortion by militant groups, PM Allan Kemakeza formally requested support from Australia to re-establish stability and security in the Solomon Islands. This was preceded by lobbying and backgrounding by senior Solomon Islanders and business owners, especially the Chinese, who were being mercilessly fleeced by the MEF.³⁷

Australia's previous refusal to support the Solomons police force changed with the new world order following the 9/11 attacks in USA. Ending the rule by militants in the Solomons could now be framed in the context of the 'War on Terror'.³⁸ The resulting Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)—presented as 'Helpem Fren'—was led and largely funded by Australia. To avoid accusations of re-colonisation, Australia invited member countries of the Pacific Forum to take part. Nearly 2,000 troops and police arrived in July 2003, amid much fanfare and sheer relief from a large majority of the country who were desperate for peace and security. RAMSI provided a much-needed circuit breaker and, with modern disciplined military and police forces, easily restored law and order. A weapons amnesty led to weapons being handed in and destroyed; however, these were often old or handmade weapons, and it is rumoured that many high-powered weapons were hidden and may resurface in the future. Even Harold Keke, the deranged warlord on the Guadalcanal weather coast, was tired of the conflict. He and his henchmen had gone beyond the pale—terrorising and executing innocent villagers, including, the seven Melanesian brothers (*Tasin*) who had travelled as peace envoys to see him.³⁹ Keke agreed to surrender to foreign forces,

³⁷ Laurie Chan, Foreign Minister in the Kemakeza government, took over his father's seat at the 2001 elections. His position, heritage and family business interests were influential in the process of persuading both Solomon Islands and Australian governments of the need for foreign intervention.

³⁸ Kabutaulaka 2005, 283.

³⁹ The execution of seven Church of Melanesia brothers (*Tasin*) in April 2003 by Harold Keke and his men was so shocking that all sides realised the madness must end (Carter 2006).

according to Yukio Sato, who courageously visited Keke a dozen times as a government envoy but his efforts went unrecognised by the government and RAMSI.⁴⁰

Cleaning up the Solomon Islands police force has taken a long time, and even when the end of the RAMSI mission was declared 14 years later, the police force still enjoyed little public confidence, and a continued foreign police presence was still judged necessary. RAMSI had negligible effect in the provinces. Although NZ and Pacific Islander personnel were successful in relating to Solomon Islanders, Australian police performed insensitively and were handicapped by their police culture and lack of cross-cultural skills. Apart from restoring law and order, RAMSI's mandate to restore government services and economic growth has had mixed results. Costing more than AUD \$2.8 billion, RAMSI was a hugely expensive intervention, much of it spent on expatriate salaries, bonuses, and expensive living quarters. Despite protestations and public relations efforts to the contrary, RAMSI operated in a colonial manner, with much better paid expatriate advisers placed inside ministries dominating their counterparts and the administration. Many advisers lived behind razor wire in luxury houses, and viewed the Solomons through the windows of offices, hotels, secure compounds, and four-wheel drive vehicles. RAMSI did little for development outside Honiara and led to resentment at the inequity and lack of value for money.⁴¹

Sovereignty had been a core value for Mamaloni and a trump card that he played whenever he could. Had he lived, he would not have agreed to international intervention, especially led by Australia. Certainly, his protégé and successor, Manasseh Sogavare, was very sensitive and hostile to the loss of sovereignty in Parliament when the RAMSI agreement was accepted in 2003. As prime minister in 2006, he became even more hostile when RAMSI and Australia hounded Julian Moti, whom Sogavare had provocatively chosen as his attorney-general. The public humiliation and deportation of Moti—illegally, as it turned out—demonstrated the power of RAMSI.⁴² To nationalists like Sogavare, the Moti Affair confirmed that Solomon Islands had allowed a Trojan horse to enter its gates. His mentor, Mamaloni, would have turned in his grave—or perhaps did underground.

⁴⁰ For more details of the Tension and the RAMSI intervention, see Moore 2004, 2018; Fraenkel 2004; Fraenkel et al. 2014.

⁴¹ Bishop Terry Brown (2009), the Anglican Bishop of Malaita, criticised RAMSI as having lost its way, and called for an independent review. See also Fraenkel et al. 2014.

⁴² In December 2011, the High Court of Australia ruled that Australian officials' participation in Julien Moti's extradition on underage sex charges had been unlawful under Solomon Islands law, and an abuse of process. Moti successfully sued the Australian government for unlawful arrest and reputational damage and received an undisclosed compensation pay out.

Chapter 20. The Good, the Bad, and the Legacy

Solomon Mamaloni was a highly controversial character and the outstanding politician of his generation. He served as chief minister for nearly two years, 10 years as prime minister, and eight years as opposition leader. Whereas half of all of MPs usually lose their seats at each election, he kept his seat and his Arosi support base for 30 years through a record eight successive elections.⁴³ His character was complex and contradictory. Archbishop Ellison Pogo called him ‘a sinner and a saint’.⁴⁴ In a deeply Christianised country, he was criticised for his personal life and lifestyle which were more aligned with his Makira big-man customs. John Moffat Fugui described him as a ‘nice man, an open house ... he was like a woven rope, a mixture of white power and black power, but you didn’t know where his switch was’.⁴⁵

In three decades of political life, Mamaloni created a political legend and left a very mixed legacy. Many Solomon Islanders regard Mamaloni favourably, even heroically, as a leader who devoted his life to serving the nation. He achieved legendary status in Makira but left behind little in terms of development for his constituency or province. He was admired for his approachability and political skills, but less so for the results of his leadership. Others sought to emulate his political style—the ‘Mamaloni Approach’—which he had described as operating between two invisible parallel lines, so-called legal and illegal lines.⁴⁶ Both opponents and supporters agree that he was careless with both personal and public finances.

Big-man and man of the people

Mamaloni can be understood as a modern *big-man* who used traditional skills and personal charisma to achieve prestige and power. He excelled at oratory and at political intrigue. His leadership personified social and cultural skills of the *araha*, to which he added personal idiosyncrasies and political wiles. He used this combination to out-manoeuvre and prevail in a modern political system designed by the British during the decolonisation process. Archbishop Ellison Pogo said of him:

He was a most generous person and never refused anyone. He was absorbed in other people’s wants ... Melanesian versus Western values cannot be reconciled and he landed himself in financial difficulties. But what else do you expect from a Melanesian big-man? He is expected to and has to draw support from cronies and allies.⁴⁷

Praise and appreciation for Mamaloni was far greater immediately after his death than during his life. He was hailed as ‘a great man’ and ‘a man of the people’ who had led his country for longer than anyone else. An editorial in the *Solomon Star* in the week of his death extolled his attributes.

⁴³ His record as an MP was only surpassed in 2014 by Job Dudley Tausinga, MP for North New Georgia.

⁴⁴ Interview with Archbishop Ellison Pogo, 13 December 2010.

⁴⁵ Interview with John Moffat Fugui, 12 April 2018.

⁴⁶ Interview with David Sitai, 6 December 2010; Manasseh Sogavare, *Island Sun* 15 May 2015

⁴⁷ Interview with Archbishop Ellison Pogo.

Mamaloni—Man of the people ⁴⁸

- One of the greatest politicians and statesman, he was the cementing factor of political parties.
- A charismatic leader, he could command the support of MPs.
- A unique national leader, who was eager and willing to hand over responsibility to anyone in his party, and ready and prepared to lead and serve.
- The formation of the 1990 SIGNUR government as he was about to be axed proved his skill and championship in politics.
- His true popularity among the people was shown by the crowds who flocked to Parliament to view the body, and lined the streets to pay their respects.
- His simplicity, humbleness and kindness will remain in the minds of the people for years to come.
- He was dedicated to maintaining the sovereignty of Solomon Islands and taking a strong stance against foreign pressure.
- He made untiring efforts to serve not just his own people, but the whole nation. His career was one of long and dedicated service.
- He was a ‘friend to all people and enemy to none’.
- He was an example to our national leaders to learn from and excel; if Solomon Islands had leaders with the same calibre, it would unite the nation as one people.
- A patriotic politician with very strong nationalistic views, he was born to serve the country and died serving the country.

One of his staunchest supporters, Job Dudley Tausinga, described Mamaloni as ‘a man of the people, which was his greatest strength and the hallmark of his leadership’. Unlike some leaders, he preferred being among ordinary people and showed his care and concern for them. Mamaloni retained popular affection because of his easy-going manner. He was likeable and accessible, yet respectful of ordinary people’s status and age. A great teller of jokes, he would ‘story’ and chew betel nut with anybody, big and small. His humble and humorous approach to life, with little apparent interest in status and protocol, endeared him to many. As one of the eulogies stated, “Solo” will always be remembered for his very genial and sincere way of reaching down to the men and women on the street and making them feel and be important, regardless of his status as senior politician’.⁴⁹

His personality and common touch stood in contrast to Sir Peter Kenilorea, the upright former teacher, district commissioner, and SSEC preacher. Mamaloni was not monogamous, and enjoyed smoking, drinking, and gambling. His prodigious appetite for betel nut from all parts of the Solomons was part of his common appeal, as was his love of sport. A fine soccer player in his younger days, he contributed to the development of football at national and rural levels, particularly the West Makira Games. He was credited with being ‘the father of Solomon Islands

⁴⁸ *Solomon Star*, 14 January 2000.

⁴⁹ National Fisheries Development condolence message, *Solomon Star*, 14 January 2000.

cricket’ who influenced a generation of cricket players and even led a touring team to Bougainville.⁵⁰

Many of Mamaloni’s colleagues loved and admired him. Tausinga regarded both Kenilorea and Mamaloni as ‘the proud fathers of Solomon Islands and Independence’.⁵¹ Former governor-general Sir Nathaniel Waena described Mamaloni as a composite Solomon Islander—biologically part Makira, Guadalcanal, and Small Malaita—friendly with nearly all ethnic groups.

He was the Solomon of Solomon Islands, like Solomon was the Solomon of Palestine. People went to him for guidance and advice. He was the actual character of the nation and father of the nation, like Michael Somare, Walter Lini, and Kamisese Mara.⁵²

Alfred Sasako called Mamaloni ‘one of the architects of modern Solomon Islands’. He loved his country and was synonymous with it. At the funeral, Bart Ulufa’alu, both friend and foe, described him as., ‘A person who was a great son of the country ... his charisma as a national leader has inspired people from all walks of life to excel in what they do. He was a great leader’.⁵³

The most common phrases used to describe him in the eulogies after his death were ‘great man’, ‘great leader’, ‘founding father’ and ‘father of the nation’. He promoted Solomon Islands and was prepared to do anything for the country and be unpopular if necessary. He spoke on behalf of Indigenous people, particularly rural farmers, and championed rural development and private enterprise, rather than urban, large-scale, government-controlled enterprises. National sovereignty was an article of faith for Mamaloni and a guiding principle in both foreign and domestic policy. He was highly critical of foreign governments, international institutions, and aid donors (including NGOs). He did not flinch from taking tough action against foreign governments and foreign dignitaries, beginning with the *Jeanette Diana* affair and during the Bougainville crisis. He avoided foreign dignitaries who came to his office and disregarded diplomatic niceties, which soured relations with foreign institutions and governments—Australia in particular.⁵⁴ Mamaloni told Australian PM Paul Keating to shut up, mind his own business and not interfere with Solomon Islands affairs. During the Bougainville crisis, he repeatedly antagonised PNG by allowing the BRA humanitarian office to operate in Honiara and Bougainvilleans to move freely across the Solomons border.

Mamaloni hated the pomp and ceremony inherited from colonial days; detested being saluted and called ‘sir’; and delighted in tricking his security guard and police guard—he once ‘moonied’ (bared his buttocks) at the guard detail when they saluted him. He loved playing tricks with official vehicles—getting others to ride in them while he took a taxi or drove himself in another car. He refused the knighthood usually bestowed on former prime ministers and governors-generals but did accept an MBE (‘My Bloody Effort’, as he called it) from Britain and the Order of Brilliant Star from Taiwan.

⁵⁰ Gabriel Talokwai, *Solomon Star*, 14 January 2000

⁵¹ Interview with Job Dudley Tausinga, 24 April 2010.

⁵² Interview with Sir Nathaniel Waena, 17 November 2010.

⁵³ Funeral oration by PM Bart Ulufa’alu, 13 January 2000.

⁵⁴ Interview with Gordon Darcy Lilo, 17 July 2016.

Despite his appealing simplicity, he was ‘paradoxically simple to the point of being complicated’.⁵⁵ Beneath his amiable exterior, Mamaloni could be manipulative, wily, and dictatorial. He enjoyed confounding his opponents and outsiders, keeping them off balance. He was far from popular with many of his peers, as shown by the leadership ballots that he lost each time after being in government. Nor was he universally popular in Makira, where people complained (and still complain) about the lack of development in Makira under his leadership. Kenez Hoda, who advised Mamaloni in the 1970s, later accused him of scattering money to constituents like coconut flakes to scratching chickens. Another critic said, ‘SSM [Mamaloni] didn’t do much good but people think he did because he was seen as a born leader ... He used people’s illiteracy to trick people; they supported him right or wrong’.⁵⁶ According to his critics, Mamaloni’s shortcomings far outweighed his personal charms. He was judged harshly by outsiders and by Western standards, particularly by foreign correspondents and regional magazines.

The case against Mamaloni ⁵⁷

- His leadership was instrumental in allowing rampant corruption and enabling corrupt Asian loggers to ruin rainforests, rivers, and coastal reefs.
- He was responsible for the decay and wreckage of Solomon Islands’ government systems, political instability and bureaucratic incompetence that led aid donors to reduce funding.
- When he left office three years earlier [in 1997], the country was on the verge of breakdown due to ‘the pranks of the little once curly headed man who cussed, spat betel juice at will, was a demon cricketer and cursed the lives of neighbours with the incessant practice of his rock band’.⁵⁸
- When he was opposition leader, he engaged in endless machinations to bring down the government of the day.
- His dislike of foreigners telling him what needed to be done included expatriates who had been instrumental in keeping the machinery of government going.
- As PM, he had no qualms about compromising his reputation. His name popped up in suspect foreign-backed logging, fishing and gambling businesses, which in other countries would have abruptly terminated political careers.

His obituary in the *Islands Business* was damning:

He flaunted his power and his abuse of it. He was very bad for the country ... Mamaloni was an astute politician who knew how to exploit the weaknesses of local politicians who were mostly far less cunning than him. He used that talent to the full and Solomon Islands suffered because of it. His legacy will hold back the country for years.⁵⁹

The Australian eyes-only dossier in 1997 described Mamaloni as ‘wily and an obstacle to responsible government’. Both critics and supporters at home agreed that he was a poor economic manager who by 1997 had left the country in a very deep hole. As Hughes wrote in 2004:

⁵⁵ Interview with Archbishop Ellison Pogo.

⁵⁶ Interview with ‘J’ (a teacher from Wango), 5 July 2009.

⁵⁷ *Islands Business*, February 2000.

⁵⁸ *Islands Business*, February 2000.

⁵⁹ *Islands Business*, February 2000.

‘To go in one generation from being a virtually uncorrupt society to one brought almost to its knees by corruption, extortion and plundering of public funds is a record as remarkable as it is shameful’.⁶⁰

Mamaloni was obsessed with strategies and action plans when the country needed stricter economic management. His relationship with Asian loggers was particularly problematic and gave the green light to other politicians to adopt corrupt practices, including the acceptance of cash payments for favours, granting of licences, and changing allegiances. Logging companies were given *carte blanche* concessions with contracts that gave local landowners very little return for the destruction of their forests. Large amounts of revenue were lost due to tax exemptions, underreporting of log prices, and poor enforcement of logging rules and regulations.

Mamaloni’s collusion and dealings with loggers and businesspeople also allowed him to maintain a lifestyle that he could not otherwise afford. Solomon and Asian business styles had some similarities, using personal payments and rewards to cut corners. Mamaloni and his colleagues used their control of government positions and loggers’ money to buy votes to keep power or undo opposition. Staying in power allowed them to control public assets, licences, and contracts. Mamaloni also ‘knew the dirt’ and used the threat of it to compromise political colleagues and opponents. He used attractive women to spy on colleagues and rivals to find out what they were saying about him.⁶¹

Even loyal supporters criticised his domestic life for his multiple wives and *mere bisnis* (womanising). A jealous man, he spied on his former partners, Qila and Caroline, making it difficult or impossible for them to have new relationships or remarry. None of his children became high achievers; he hardly ever praised them and rarely, if ever, attended prize giving or graduations.⁶² He sacrificed his brother Jackson Sunaone’s education by taking him out of Form 5 at KGVI to work for Patosha. He may have sabotaged, consciously or unconsciously, his family members’ education when it threatened to diminish or exceed his own.

His legacy

Political scholar Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka dedicated a poem to him, called ‘Footprints’ (see next page).⁶³ But like footprints in the sand, Mamaloni left few physical signs behind. Some credit him with initiating the new bridge over the Lungga River, the four-lane highway (poorly constructed) into town, the *Red Haus* on Vavaya ridge, the *Wæet Haus* at Mbokonavera, and a bridge at Kirakira.⁶⁴ Mamaloni is remembered for the part he played in historical events, such as the Letcher Mint affair, the *Jeanette Diana* affair, and the Bougainville crisis and its spillover effects.

Mamaloni’s legacy was perhaps more psychological than material. After decades of colonial rule, he gave people confidence in themselves and an independent Solomon Islands. After he lost the 1984 election, the *Solomon Toktok* gave this opinion of him, which arguably held true for many,

⁶⁰ Interview with Tony Hughes, 14 June 2004.

⁶¹ According to multiple informants who shall remain nameless.

⁶² Only two of his 11 children, Solomon Mamaloni Junior and Anita Buarifi, went to school overseas, and only Faye Siota has a university degree.

⁶³ *Solomon Star*, 14 January 2000.

⁶⁴ A police housing complex outside named ‘Mamaloni town’ outside Kirakira was opened in 2015.

‘[H]e has always had a vision of the Solomon Islands being just that, a country that Solomon Islanders recognise as their own place and expressing their vision’.⁶⁵

‘Footprints’⁶⁶

If I should be gone
by the time you come
then I leave my verses
as the footprints of my thoughts.
If I should be gone
by the time you come
then I leave my words
as the footprints of my wisdom.
If I should be gone
by the time you come
then I leave my grave
as a footprint to say that I was here once.
If you should be gone
by the time I come
then I leave my footprints
for you to continue the journey.
Bye Solo, my dear Big Man.
I lower my head in salute for you.

Politically, Mamaloni is remembered as the wily political operator who brought down the governments of Kenilorea in 1981 and Hilly in 1994, and kept himself in power with the lightning coup in 1990. He knew how to disarm key political opponents and rivals such as Kenilorea and Ulufa`alu. He could be a political enemy and a friend at the same time, which is certainly how Kenilorea regarded Mamaloni. Archbishop Pogo described Mamaloni as ‘the Muhammad Ali of politics’—a joker who made fools of opponents with his oratory, which could be very witty.⁶⁷ Like Ali, Mamaloni rebelled against white colonial oppression, whether from Britain, USA, Australia, or France. Fast on his feet, he could run rings around others, and indeed Kenilorea could be seen as his Joe Frazier. Both Ali and Mamaloni paid the price for not retiring early enough. Ali’s style and ‘rope-a-dope’ strategy saw him take excessive punishment, which ruined his health and led him into sad decline. Both men were fondly remembered by many people for their wit, popular style, and courage in standing up to more powerful opponents.

Mamaloni’s critics, and there are many, argue that he failed to uphold the dignity of his office and created a poor example that others emulated. Augustine Manakako, one of the country’s first university graduates and Indigenous permanent secretaries, believes that the country would not have declined so far if Mamaloni had been more disciplined. The quality of public service and financial discipline declined markedly under his direction and that of unsuitable and unqualified people, some complete rogues, that he appointed and trusted. He undermined public

⁶⁵ *Solomon Toktok*, 20 July 1984.

⁶⁶ The poem was also dedicated to his grandfather, Dominiko Alebua (Kabutaulaka 2002, 108).

⁶⁷ Interview with Archbishop Ellison Pogo.

administration by ignoring and altering general orders. His deep resentment of colonialism disguised dictatorial tendencies:

One of many paradoxes of Solomon Mamaloni's personality was that he professed to be anti-red tape, bureaucracy and so on, but he was personally obsessed with exercising direct and detailed control. He spent much time writing and re-writing detailed operational instructions, including the notorious Pink Book, which was intended to reform the public service but was widely regarded as unworkable, and was never put fully into operation.⁶⁸

In his final months, Mamaloni met with fellow Makiran MP, David Sitai, and explained his approach to government. He drew two parallel lines on paper, representing the legal and illegal, and explained that governments operate between the two lines.⁶⁹ In a May 2015 talk to MPs, Mamaloni's successor Manasseh Sogavare made this approach explicit.

The Mamaloni Approach ⁷⁰

The ideology underlying the 'Mamaloni Approach' was 'to work between two invisible parallel lines – so-called legal and illegal lines. As long as the government operates between the two lines then all is well; it is permissible to deviate slightly from the legal line but within the bounds of legality itself'. Sogavare posed the question to MPs, 'whether or not the Mamaloni Approach was responsible for the nature of the country's development and had led the country to be comfortable only meeting minimum standards when deciding and implementing critical and strategic policy standards. Leaders today ... are prepared to operate through minimum conditions or low standards'. The Mamaloni Approach lends itself to allow complacency and contentment with mediocrity. The nation continues to sell itself short by using the Mamaloni Approach, which has outlived its usefulness.

As a constituency MP, Mamaloni barely needed to campaign in person after 1973, such was his reputation and power base. When he entered politics, he tried to promote development in Makira but without much effect. Later, he used his constituency funds and own wealth, but his gifting and projects were generally unproductive and unsustainable. Former MP for East Makira and staunch admirer, David Sitai, considered the 1981 Provincial Government Act as Mamaloni's principal achievement. This introduced decentralisation and gave provinces greater powers of revenue collection and autonomy. Sitai argues that the provincial government system has stood up well to scrutiny over the years. Others would argue that the provincial system duplicated the weaknesses of the national government with a series of 'mini me' governments, and insufficient resources to be effective. Although Mamaloni believed in a federal or state government, he failed to introduce the changes recommended in the 1988 constitutional review he himself chaired. He was always wary of Malaita, which stood to lose most from state government, including possible restrictions on Malaitan settlers and workers. The June 2000 coup demonstrated the power of Malaitan resistance only too well.

⁶⁸ Hughes 2004, 4.

⁶⁹ Interview with David Sitai.

⁷⁰ *Island Sun*, 15 May 2015

Although Mamaloni famously declared that ‘Solomon Islands has never been a nation and will never be a nation’, and, ‘Solomon Islands, a nation conceived but never born’,⁷¹ he was a staunch nationalist who converted others, such as Manasseh Sogavare, to his point of view through example and persuasion. He had a visceral hostility towards colonialists for personal and political reasons. He was always ready to play the sovereignty card to blame foreigners and maintain popular support at home. Judith Bennett has written succinctly, “‘Solo’ was an astute politician and survivor, a master of the diversionary tactic—particularly blaming foreign intervention or forces. He was preoccupied with colonial paternalism’.”⁷²

In foreign policy, his recognition and support for Taiwan (the Republic of China) in defiance of Cabinet was a legacy with significant consequences. Solomon Islands struck a better bargain with island Taiwan than mainland China. Taiwan provided a great deal of untied aid, including constituency funds since 1992 and compensation payments in 2000. Nevertheless, Taiwan’s chequebook diplomacy has been a double-edged sword, underwriting both local development and inequity in electoral politics. To the surprise and anger of many, it was Mamaloni’s protégé and successor, Manasseh Sogavare, who switched diplomatic recognition in 2019 from Taiwan to the PRC, which has adopted an increasingly aggressive diplomatic approach in the 21st century. What benefits Solomon Islands derive from mainland China remain to be seen but Mamaloni would not have agreed to allying with a communist dictatorship and betraying Taiwanese generosity and historical connections.

Conclusions

Mamaloni was without doubt the outstanding politician of his generation. As Michael Field wrote on his death, ‘Politics was the only game Mamaloni knew ... It was his inability to manage an economy that was the problem—anything else was beyond him. For good or ill, Mamaloni will be remembered as a remarkably different leader’.⁷³ Mamaloni guided the ship of state erratically and onto the rocks, leaving it to successors to find safer waters, which eventually happened with the RAMSI intervention. He died too young to save the country from the violent disunity he had long warned about. Events in 2000 might have unfolded differently had he taken better care with his health, office, and choice of ministers. Addictions to betel nut, cigarettes and whiskey put his health on a slippery slope and significantly affected his performance. By the second half the 1990s, the workaholic had become noted for his absences. Thirty years of political life and a toxic lifestyle corrupted his body and contributed to the corruption of the state.

Former British foreign secretary, Dr David Owen, who was part of Solomon Islands independence negotiations, has argued that ill health and poor decision making are closely related.⁷⁴ Mamaloni also appears to have suffered from another condition that Dr Owen argues increasingly afflicts leaders over time—hubris (excessive pride or self-confidence). The signs of hubris are unbounded confidence, unwillingness to accept ideas and advice from others, and misrepresenting reality. This

⁷¹ Mamaloni 1992, 10, 14. A nationalist is a person who strongly identifies with their own nation and vigorously supports its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations (Oxford English Dictionary).

⁷² Judith Bennett 2000, 357.

⁷³ *Pacific Island Monthly*, February 2000.

⁷⁴ David Owen, *In sickness and power: Illness in heads of government during the last 100 years*, 2008.

may be a hardwired response to having power over others, increasing the longer a leader stays at the top.⁷⁵ Hubris makes leaders aloof and stop listening to others and paying attention to detail, which certainly applies to Mamaloni. Hubris is inescapably followed by nemesis, or downfall. Indeed, each of his four administrations were tainted by scandal, ending in failure and Mamaloni not being chosen to lead the next government.

Because Mamaloni was such a dominant presence in Solomon politics, it is easy to overestimate his personal responsibility for the political and economic failures of post-independence Solomon Islands. Mamaloni was inevitably a product of the same complex social, cultural, historical, and economic forces that were shaping his country as it emerged from the grip of colonialism. He was among a small elite educated in a system that was a mixture of boarding school, boot camp, and prison farm. The strict, often cruel, discipline and racism he and his fellow students experienced created obedience in most, resistance in others, but, above all, strong bonds of friendship and lifelong allegiances. Colonial and foreign governments wanted trained and compliant leaders, such as Kenilorea and Devesi, but others, such as Mamaloni, Aqorau, and Ulufa'alu, resisted and contested colonialism.

Resistance and resentment towards colonialism was understandable and perhaps inevitable in the light of Solomon Islands' history. Although more benign than their French, Spanish, and German counterparts, the British still ruled with a large stick—from the commodore justice that saw Suhurahu, Mamaloni's great-grandfather, executed by marines on the beach at Rumahui, to the slaughter that followed the Bell massacre in 1927, and the mass imprisonment of the leaders and followers of Maasina Rule from 1946 to 1950.

British colonialism was directed to advancing the economic interests of its nationals and consolidating the authority of colonial rule. Countries such as Solomon Islands were externally defined groupings of islands and seas, artificially created by colonial fiat, with little autonomy and limited options for wealth creation. Economic success in the post-colonial era was always going to be difficult (if not impossible) to achieve. After independence arrived, the new states remained in the grip of former colonial powers and economic forces. With only primary products such as copra, timber, and fish to export, the exploitation and despoliation of the country's natural forests and fisheries were predictable—arguably inevitable. Forests and fisheries have been denuded and overfished in former colonies all around the world, and often with even greater impact than in Solomon Islands. Limited tax revenues and permanent budgetary deficits sharply reduced the value of the Solomon dollar (SBD) over the years, making imports far more expensive and exports far more valuable in SBD terms, increasing the pressure to generate revenue from exploitation of natural resources.

Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has become orthodoxy in the Western world, promoting individual entrepreneurs, private enterprise, and minimum taxation as keys to unlocking wealth. While Mamaloni agreed with some aspects of neoliberalism, such as reform of the public service and privatisation of SOEs, he deeply mistrusted foreign interests and institutions. He wanted revenues free from the restrictions of donors and banks, including the bitter prescriptions of the IMF and

⁷⁵ Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, George W. Bush, Donald Trump, and (closer to home) Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott would all fit the diagnosis of hubris.

World Bank. This was consistent with his belief in Social Credit philosophy, which also promoted the value of a nation's natural resources and people. He wanted Solomon Islanders to acquire licences and collaborate with outsiders in order to open customary land and allow landowners to control their own resources. Although in the 1980s he probably did not intend or foresee what would happen, or anticipate the loss of control to outsiders, by the 1990s he knew what was happening. By then, he and his government were desperate for funds free from foreign control but were in thrall to the logging industry.

Competitive global markets are not designed and do not function for the benefit of small, isolated countries.⁷⁶ Blaming the victim and the poor are part and parcel of the neoliberal ideology that disguise the structural sources of inequality. Internal factors such as poor education, a small group of elites, unstable politics, corruption, and cultural values (such as reciprocity and *wantok* obligation), have been used to explain poverty, poor growth, the weak economy, and the weak Solomon Islands state. But far more significant were external economic factors, including declining terms of trade, fluctuating prices of primary products, rising prices of imports and fuel, banking systems, pre- and post-Cold War rivalries, and strategic interests.⁷⁷

By the 1990s, most Pacific Island countries were facing a lack of resources for modern economies, compounded by great geographical isolation. Most economies were in disarray and poorly managed, with corruption, poor performance, and bloated public enterprises. Poorly maintained infrastructure, a lack of private investment, and a very small Indigenous entrepreneurial class increasingly shackled local development efforts after independence. The influence of Asian entrepreneurs and business practices gradually spread through public and private sectors in Solomon Islands. Many Islanders preferred the Asian ways of doing business and favours in cash and were happy to follow suit.

Politicians were keen to reform or discard foreign and neo-colonial economic models. Pacific politics meant cutting deals, extracting maximum rents and benefits from aid, and distributing funds in a manner that enabled re-election. Temptations proved too great and controls too weak for many political and public service leaders, who became tainted by corruption, cronyism, nepotism and hoarding in foreign bank accounts

Mamaloni was foremost among those who wanted to reform the machinery of government that departing colonialists believed they had left in working order. But his efforts only led to further disaffection, disillusion, and loss of capacity with the public service. There were weak controls on leaders and forgiving attitudes to misuse of public money, which did not appear to belong to anyone personally. Except at election times, it was difficult for the public to do anything about the breakdown of accountability and corruption. Slippery paths downhill in the 1980s had become a landslide by 2000.

* * *

⁷⁶ Hughes 1998, 6.

⁷⁷ Bauer 1981, 2.

Opinions about Mamaloni were divided among more than 200 interviewees and informants whose perspectives have helped shape this biography. To return to the metaphor of the 10-cent coin introduced in the Prologue: the Queen's head on one side represents loyalty to British legal and constitutional norms; on the other side, *Tararamanu* the sea spirit, represents loyalty to Makiran and Indigenous values. Mamaloni can be viewed from both sides of this coin. Many would judge him a failure when viewed from the Queen's side of the coin; from the Indigenous perspective, he was fearless, a *man Solomon*, even a hero.

A different view, perhaps more apt, might be captured in the \$30 commemorative coin that was at the centre of the Letcher Mint Affair in 1975 (see Chapter 10). This coin, which he was almost certainly involved in designing, featured "Freedom and Self Government" on one side, which expressed his most fundamental political aspirations. The other side, with the possum (cuscus), expressed his primary loyalty to Solomon Islands and to his Makiran and Solomon Islands identities. Viewed from each side of this coin, he can be seen as a proud and fiercely loyal Solomon Islander.

Mamaloni was a political leader, a *big-man* in modern times, a man of the people. He had multiple influences and identities. He was an Arosi child, a gang leader, a popular schoolmate, an *araba*; a family man, a husband and father; part of an overseas-educated elite group fast-tracked into power; a businessman, a controversial politician, and three-time prime minister. At heart, he was an intensely sociable Solomon Islander, who was always embedded in various groups—family, clan, Arosi, Makira, school, sports teams, and politicians. He liked nothing better than informally sitting round chewing betel nut, telling jokes and stories. He valued and felt far more comfortable with his Indigenous identities and activities rather than being in the limelight and burdened with responsibilities.

Solomon Mamaloni was the outstanding politician of his time and country. He had great confidence in himself, his own ideas, and the country's future. He was instrumental in leading a newly independent country, but his leadership was marked by resistance to colonialism that reached back to his days at school and in the public service. Scandal, disappointment, and failure in his administrations and businesses reflected the complexities both of his character and the contexts—colonial and post-colonial—in which he lived and worked.

As Enoch Powell wrote in his biography of 19th century British politician, Joseph Chamberlain, 'All political lives, unless they are cut off in midstream at a happy juncture, end in failure, because that is the nature of politics and of human affairs'.⁷⁸ Perhaps Mamaloni's words to the Legislative Assembly in 1974 can serve as his epitaph:

The evil that men do lives on after them and the good is often buried with them. So let it be with chief ministers ... If wicked men, especially like myself, fail to do their duty for the destination of this country, I am sure God will guide these islands safely through the journey.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Powell, 1977, 54.

⁷⁹ Mamaloni, Legislative Assembly, 10 October 1974. He was quoting from a speech by Mark Antony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* —"The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones".

‘Solo’ understood his country better than almost anyone else, including the need to accommodate the diversity of its islands and ethnicities. The diversity re-emerged as major differences that ripped apart the country and the rule of law soon after his death. One is left wondering what might have been if ‘Solo’ had been more careful with his health, his family, his island, and the country with which he became synonymous.

Acknowledgments

In researching this biography, I interviewed or spoke to just over 200 interviewees and informants shown in the table below.

Names and location of interviewees and informants (202)

Solomon Islands – Honiara (101) George Akin, Sam Alasia, Ezekiel Alebua, Dr Transform Aqorau, Rachel Aromae, Abraham Baenasia, Waeta Ben, Jino Beraki, Bishop (Dr) Terry Brown, Fr Gerry Bruns S.M., Anita Buarifi, Alan Campbell, Fred Campbell, John Campbell, Mae Campbell, Sir Tommy Chan, Silas Chekana, Claire (Rebito) Chow, Francis Chow, Alec Dani, Stephen Darcy, Paul Daukalia, Charles Dausabea, Sir Baddeley Devesi, Grace Fekau, Leonard Foanaota, John Moffat Fugui, Stephen George, Billy Gina, Lloyd Gina, Stuart Harbison, Joseph Hasiau, Ric Hou, A.V. (Tony Hughes), M. (anon) Karaina, Hilda Kari, Sir Allan Kemakeza, Sir Peter Kenilorea, Sir (Dr) Nathan Kere, Joash Konata, Billy Kwanairara, John Lamani, Dr Judson Leafasaia, Sir George Lepping, Gordon Darcy Lilo, Denis Lulei, Leonard Maenu`u, Michael Maina, Aileen Mamaloni, Audie Murphy Mamaloni, Billy Mamaloni, Kate Mamaloni, Mary Mamaloni, Solomon Mamaloni Jnr, Augustine Manakako, Frida Martin, Jeff Moore, Agrippa Mono, Richard Muaki, Victor Ngele, Andrew Nori, Diana Odata, Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, Hugh Paia, Leonard Paia, Warren Paia, Bro Palmer, Danny Phillip, Archbishop. Ellison Pogo, Zachariah Quaina, Fox Quina, Dr Jimmie Rogers, Dr John Roughan, Paul Roughan, John Saunana, Philimon Riti, Gideon Suhurahu Row, Alfred Sasako, Yukio Sato, Shadrack Sese, George Siapu, Brenda Siota, Carolyn Siota, Fay Siota, David Sitai, Mathias Sitana, Phillip Solodia, Selwyn Suriramo, Job Dudley Tausinga, Kamilo Teki, Dr Eritara Tekierue, Kaipua Toibanga, Julian Treadaway, Sir Nathaniel Waena, Suzie Walekwate, William Warie, Adrian Wickham, Ashley Wickham, Alex Wong.
Solomon Islands – Makira (59) Ben Aharo, George Amo, Hassini Angisa, Michael and Don Ata, Donald Basi, Albert Borisau, Alan Campbell, Don Campbell, Frank Campbell, Ham E`emai, Bethlyn Harebi, Billy Ha`atawa, Daraburu Hadasa, Jemuel Haga, Gabriel Hareni, Ellen Hatani, Wakiu Hazlith, Two Herenegau olos, Ben Hoda, Alfred Hugiarama, Rueben Hunia, Stanley Ia, George Mae, Gabriel Maesie, Maria Mamaloni, Polini Mamaloni, Noel Mamau, John from Wango, Julian Maka`a, John Marahora, Jack Martin, Jacob Masau, Moses Mau, Samson Otogari, Titus Otogari, Barnabas Ringimia, Esau Roasi, Rueben Rohe, Zebulon Rongi, Barnabas Row, Lemuel Row, George Siapu, Edna Sitai (nee Campbell), Eric Sitai, Albert Sunaone, Isa Roy Sunaone, Kidron Sunaone, Jackson Sunaone, Meadows Sunaone, Johnson Sunaone, June Sunaone, Fr Abel Taha`ai, Christopher Tahani, Sam Teweoni Jnr, Samson Teweoni Snr, Fr Francis Tohe, Elizabeth Usura, Allen and Rachel Uta.
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Britain (12)
Fr Norman Arkwright S.M., Dr Ben Burt, Chris Cochrane, John Field, Robin Low, Eddie Nielsen, (Bishop) Willie Pwaisiho, Tom Russell, Michael Scott, Peter and Sarah Siloko, John Smith.
Other locations (4)
Dr David Akin (USA), Rex Horoi (Fiji), Dr Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka (Hawai'i), Dr Makemeone Taumopeau (Tonga).

Interviewees were those people who gave permission for me to take notes and record the interviews digitally. Informants were people with whom I had conversations but it was not appropriate to use a digital recorder because of the setting—for example, a public or noisy place—or because time was too short. I wrote down their responses and stories as soon as possible afterwards.

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I have been deeply influenced by my experiences living in Solomon Islands while working in health services from 1989 to 1999, including the effects of logging which I saw at close quarters in Choiseul and Makira. I was also closely involved with events during and after the Tension in the country from 1999 to 2009 while managing NGO projects and also working as an independent social researcher. These experiences have inevitably influenced my perspectives, ideologies, and blind spots. What we see, understand, and explain depend on our differing experiences and vantage points. Ultimately, each reader will reach their own conclusions about Solomon Mamaloni based on not just what has been presented here but their own experiences and points of view.

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⁸⁰ Copies made by the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau are held in 35mm microform reels at the National Library of Australia. Solomon Islands newspapers and Pacific periodicals provide represent an invaluable record of post-independence political and social history (Frazer 1997 5(5) May, 5).