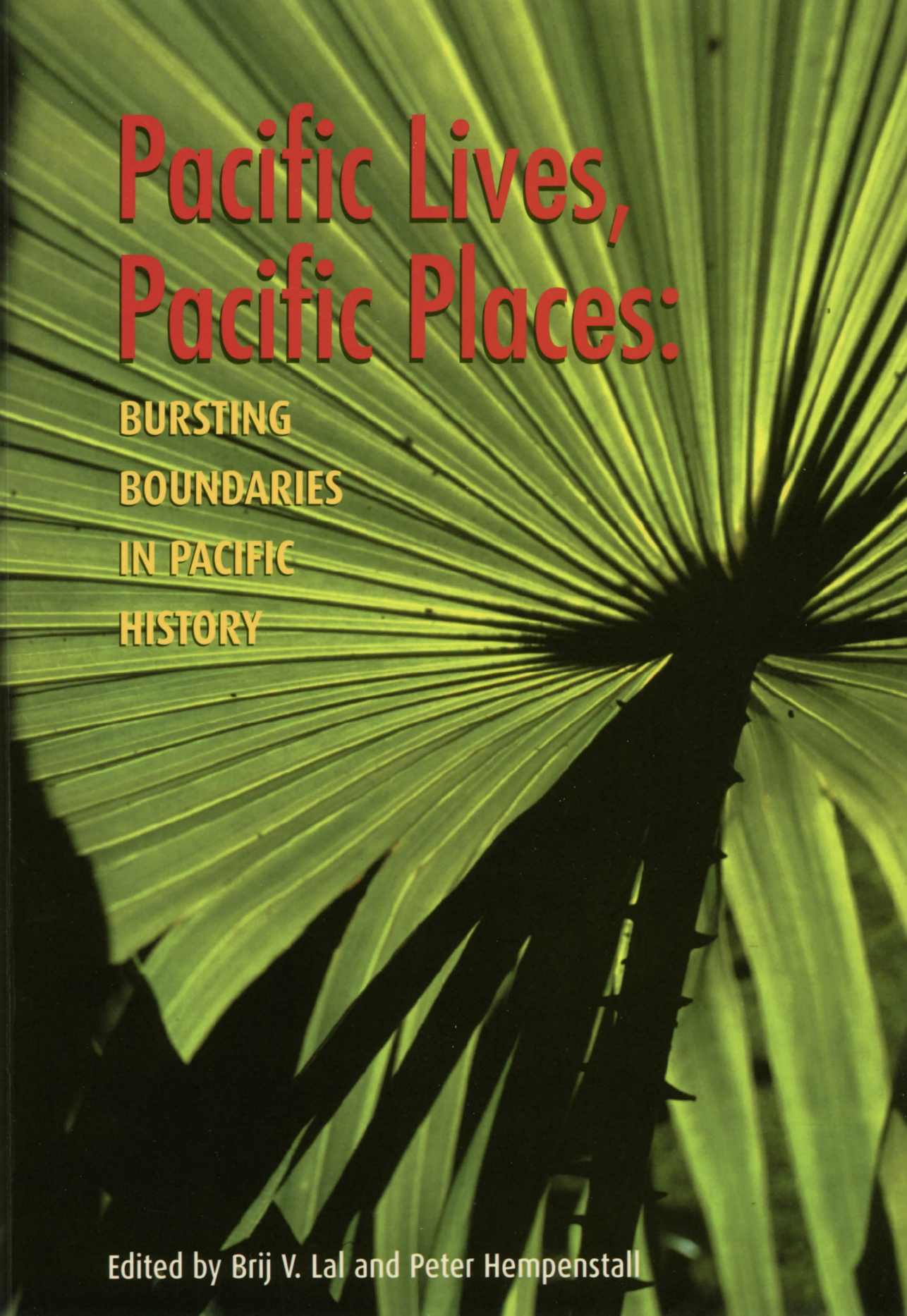




Pacific Lives, Pacific Places:

BURSTING
BOUNDARIES
IN PACIFIC
HISTORY

Edited by Brij V. Lal and Peter Hempenstall

Pacific Lives, Pacific Places

Bursting Boundaries in Pacific History

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BRIJ V. LAL and PETER HEMPENSTALL



THE JOURNAL OF PACIFIC HISTORY

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Preface

The Pacific History Association held its millennial conference in Canberra from 26-30 June, 2000. It was a memorable occasion for several reasons. In the depth of Canberra's winter, it was the coldest PHA conference ever. But that did not deter participants, who converged on Australia's capital city in unprecedented numbers. Equally impressive was the range of papers presented under the conference's overarching theme of 'Bursting Boundaries: Places, Persons, Gender and Disciplines'. Gender and Identity, Globalism and Regionalism, History Beyond the Bounds, Outside the (Photo) Frame, Beyond Missionaries, Participants as Historians, Burdens of Citizenship, Multimedia and the Net, Unsettled Communities, all had their share of time and space. Those who could not be accommodated in any of the above sessions were put in one simply called 'Beyond the Program'. And Greg Denning and Marshall Sahlins entertained and enlightened us with their wit and wisdom. We could be forgiven for saying, after Olympics President Juan Antonio Samaranch, that this was the best gathering of Pacific historians ever. Until the next one in Apia in December 2002!

This collection brings together a selection of papers presented at the Canberra gathering. Peter Hempenstall in the introduction explains admirably the volume's structure and themes. Regular conference attenders and others familiar with the development of our field will note a connecting thread between the reflective and autobiographical approach adopted here and the essays in *Pacific Islands History: Journeys and transformations* published in 1992, which also resulted from a Canberra gathering (although a very warm one in December). We regret that the constraints of time and space did not allow us to cast the net for contributors more widely, but some of the papers have happily found independent scholarly outlets while the conveners of some of the specialist sessions have their own publication plans. We wish them well. The Division of Pacific and Asian History at The Australian National University, which co-sponsored the conference with the university's Centre for the Contemporary Pacific and the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project, has helped us with administrative support for which we are grateful. The manuscript was prepared for publication by Jenny Terrell with her characteristic efficiency and charm, and the cover was designed by Pandanus Books of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. We are grateful to *The Journal of Pacific History* Monograph Series for publishing the volume in conjunction with the History Department of the University of Canterbury, and for making it both attractive as well as accessible.

Brij V. Lal
Canberra

Introduction

PETER HEMPENSTALL

We live in a constantly dissolving moment as the world leaps boundaries of technological and cultural change which appeared uncrossable just a few years ago. Our certainties crack open, our confidence about our history is undermined. We have no 'History' any more, just discourses about complex groups and communities, whose foundations are re-drawn with every twist in intellectual fashion in the West, or around militant senses of ethnicity and cultural uniqueness in the Islands.

This could be a summary of the route Pacific history has travelled in the last 50 years: from a small and cosy field of Western academics plying their trade in 'Island oriented history' out of a finite number of scholarly institutions, to a vast and complex field of multi-disciplinary analysis practised by historians, anthropologists, linguists, prehistorians, literary and cultural studies critics, even the many different branches represented by natural scientists. The benchmark books are getting harder to isolate. The Denings and Sahlinses have taken us into realms where cultural meaning is the key sign of conversation; the Obeyesekeres have attempted to pull us back to look at ourselves and the exotic myths we have spawned about 'other' cultures. The Thomases have alerted us to lateral ways of thinking about the plural structures and stories that make up the history 'project'. Inside the islands themselves the Lals and Alis have been inserting the immigrant experience with its problematic historical tensions into a field preoccupied with indigenous voices and the Teaiwas have been lyrically expressing their sense of being born in between cultures. The islander Waikos and Meleiseas, the Diazes and Māhinas and Wendts have been showing us their ways of encoding history as well in word and art and film and song and dance. Most 'historians' have soldiered on with their own narrations about the Pacific Islands, pushing outwards the boundaries of old fields of endeavour, adding to the plural ways of 'doing' Pacific history at the beginning of the 21st century.

PHA 2000 gathered to rethink some of these boundaries, under the banner 'Bursting Boundaries: Places, Persons, Gender and Disciplines'. It is not the first occasion such a catholic assortment of topics has been brought to the conference table. In previous conference proceedings, in debates in journals, and in several volumes of reflections by writers on the Pacific about the meaning of what they were

doing, a tide has been swelling with growing force.¹ Part of that has been a generational shift from the founding generation of Pacific historians via the baby boomers who built on those foundations, to the 'Generation Xers' who are taking Pacific history into the new millenium. Unlike the baby boomers who were unleashed upon the cathedrals of learning expecting fulfilment and to make a difference, this new cohort is uncertain and flexible about ways of doing Pacific history into the future, based on the histories they have lived with.²

PHA 2000 also met in the shadow of the armed coup of 19 May in Fiji, when a band of indigenous Fijian militants, led by the curious businessman manqué George Speight, invaded parliament and held the elected government of Mahendra Chaudhry hostage for nearly two months. The crisis was still in full flight as the conference convened in Canberra. So too was the trouble in the Solomon Islands, as militant fighters of the Isatambu Freedom Fighters of Guadalcanal and those of the Malaita Eagle Force threatened the 25-year-old nation state with civil chaos born of land and ethnic disputes dating back to the colonial period under Britain.³ These practical consequences of living in the Pacific are now a discomfiting feature of doing Pacific history in the region. They have forced scholars to think actively about their understandings of the past, and about questions of political and moral judgement that go beyond the usual armchair debates. They also inevitably raise questions about one's own involvement in research and teaching in the area.

These were the multiple contexts in which PHA 2000 met, which gave a sharp currency to discussions about the meltdown of borders, lives and disciplines. This volume is designed to mark a moment of recognition and personal re-examination by individuals about the boundaries that have dominated their scholarly lives.

PLACES have always been the object of ambiguous definition in the Pacific. Colonial boundaries have for a hundred years separated off, one from another, island places of natural 'belonging together'. Bill Gammage surveyed some even older lines in his keynote address on boundaries. The line around the globe marked by the 15th century Treaty of Tordesillas not only demarcated spheres of legally constituted activity for the European nations of Spain and Portugal, it took on a life of its own in creating boundaries with powerful historical meaning for people on either side of it. It helped decide how people saw themselves centuries later – East Timorese versus Indonesians; convict New South Welshmen versus free settler South Australians.

1 Conference proceedings: Donald H. Rubinstein (ed.), *Pacific History: Papers from the 8th PHA conference* (Guam 1980); M. Quanchi & A. Talu (eds), *Messy Entanglements: Papers from the 10th PHA conference Tarawa* (Brisbane 1995); Journal articles: K.R. Howe, 'Pacific Islands history in the 1980s: new directions or monograph myopia', *Pacific Studies*, 3:1 (1979); D. Routledge, 'Pacific history as seen from the Pacific Islands', *Pacific Studies*, 8:2 (1985); N. Thomas, 'Partial texts: representation, colonialism and agency in Pacific history', *Journal of Pacific History*, 25:2 (1990). Self reflections: B. Lal (ed.), *Pacific Islands History: Journeys and transformations* (Canberra 1992); D. Munro (ed.), *Reflections on Pacific Historiography*, Special Issue of *The Journal of Pacific Studies*, 20 (1996); R. Borofsky (ed.), *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts* (Honolulu 2000).

2 Munro's collection, op.cit., is a good example.

3 See T. Kabutaulaka, 'Beyond ethnicity: understanding the crisis in the Solomon Islands', *Pacific News Bulletin*, 15:5 (2000), 5-7

Artificial lines drawn by outsiders, like those defining so-called culture areas of the Pacific, determine how outsiders see them ('primitive' Melanesians versus 'noble' Polynesians); they create states of mind which even the 'insiders' subscribe to.

But neither lines nor the states of mind they create remain fixed and unchanging. Donald Denoon reminded us how territories marked out by the lines drawn on European maps could evolve into states (Papua New Guinea) or stay frozen as someone else's 'territory' (Bougainville within Papua New Guinea). It was the dream of decolonisers in setting up their Pacific nation states that their lines would create new identities for new citizens; a coherence imposed from outside or one that would slowly coagulate as development and civic education did their work. But solid lines are breaking down as independence settlements disintegrate. Indeed in places they never much materialised, or were already dissolving before independence, as a result of irrelevant or corrosive colonial 'native' policies (for example, Britain's indifference to the New Hebrides condominium, or its racial compartmentalisation policies in Fiji). Nonetheless, it was believed for a long time that such lines, once drawn, could not easily be redrawn; this was the considered opinion of Pacific historians meeting in conference as late as 1995.⁴

The situation a mere five years later, in the year 2000, makes a mockery of that. From East Timor and West Papua, through Bougainville, Guadalcanal and Malaita within the Solomons, to New Caledonia and Fiji in the south – the new so-called 'arc of instability' of the Pacific – crises within invented nation states reveal that artificial boundaries do not create identities, rather language, culture and histories do. New regions, such as the western province of Fiji, are created by a growing consensus within them about kinship and focus and direction. Or old regions see a shift in control from one group to another. Hank Nelson marks this shift in his contemplation of the Port Moresby where he used to live. When he arrived in 1966, Nelson could continue to move within an Australian envelope – Port Moresby was like a Queensland country town thrown across the Torres Strait, as Denoon reminds us. He returned in the year 2000 to a city where Melanesian gardeners now replaced the expatriate bungalow dwellers and power was in very different hands and violence broke in upon the unwary. His musing intersects with Donald Denoon's confessions on the traps in biography 'hunting' among the élite in Port Moresby in the 1960s. Both document an extraordinary moment in a place where the arid conservatism of the Australian colonial system lay uneasily beside the fitful but growing expressions of political organisation, personal creativity and institutional development that were speeding the country towards independence. So great are the transformations that have occurred in this one place, to how people live and the extent to which the terms of power have changed that, Nelson suggests, historians' questions must grapple with a new order of explanations.

Such a shift offers lessons for Pacific historians generally. It makes us alert to the inventing nature of our craft, as we tell stories of nation states and local places, of intellectual or religious traditions, stories that converge with or bypass stories that

4 Brij Lal, in B. Lal & H. Nelson (eds), *Lines Across the Sea: Colonial inheritance in the post colonial Pacific* (Brisbane 1995), xi.

local citizens tell about themselves. And they remind us that, in our systematising of ideas, we must remain alert to continuing changes in the lines that previous generations of interpreters and storytellers have drawn. We must be able to see with new eyes and critique the new histories that are being fashioned according to new boundaries that are drawn between the present and the past. There are new places of 'disputed attachment'⁵ where conflictual stories of the past in the islands collide in the present, such as in Fiji among non-indigenous Fijian-born citizens whose anger and sorrow express themselves in a fresh sense of outrage at lost places.⁶ Pacific history needs more explorations of how attachment to place has changed, not in a spirit of new intellectual imperialism but because lines drawn on maps, even when not solid, create attachments that leave a signature on peoples' lives as citizens and teachers and writers and travellers.

One sense of place in the Pacific is absent from these papers. They do not allow us to grope towards the attachments which islanders have to their islands. That is best apprehended by 'being there' and sharing the experience - a theme that *did* emerge at the conference in the context of exploring Pacific art developments. Or through the writings of Albert Wendt about the petty terrors and larger glories of village life in Samoa, and Subramani's account of growing up as an observer on the fringes of Indian life in Fiji, and Epeli Hau'ofa's celebration of the aquatic continent that is the Pacific.⁷ Our hope is that this volume will provoke stories and arguments from Pacific Islanders about their layers of feeling towards the places they call home.

LINEs that create Lives formed the theme for the second major group of papers exploring boundaries at PHA 2000. Long running fears about entitlement and exclusion underlie the study of the Pacific: who speaks? Who has the right to be heard? Whose view of the world is the correct one? This is a shifting battleground which manifests itself in skirmishes in academic journal and at conferences and may never be resolved. A decade ago Nicholas Thomas pleaded that we stop arguing about what History ought to be and focus instead on the 'sense and salience of particular accounts'.⁸ Life writing is the genre where these questions bite most hard for, as Hempenstall shows, it has to reach across cultures and deal with multi-ethnic senses of the self and the person in the Pacific. The biography pedigree in Pacific history is long and honourable, as Doug Munro's little coda to Hempenstall demonstrates. Though experiments in biographical form are not much attempted and considerations of theory and practice are few and far between, Pacific historians have begun to develop a self-reflective quality in their writings about others. 'Confessional self

5 Peter Read, *Belonging. Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Cambridge 2000), 1.

6 See for example Sandra Tarte's essay, among others, in Arlene Griffen (comp. and ed.), *With Heart and Nerve and Sinew: Post coup writing from Fiji* (Suva 1997).

7 In Wendt's extensive oeuvre one need identify only his novella of village life, *Pouliuli* (Longman Paul, New Zealand 1977), and his short stories *The Birth and Death of the Miracle Man* (New York 1986). Subramani's account 'Childhood as fiction' is in Subramani (ed.), *After Narrative: The pursuit of reality in fiction* (Suva 1990); and Hau'ofa's 'Our sea of islands' is in *The contemporary Pacific*, 6:1 (1994).

8 N. Thomas, 'Partial text: representation, colonialism and agency in Pacific History', *Journal of Pacific History*, 25:2 (1990), 146.

location', as Gene Ogan termed it during the conference, is an outgrowth of postmodern influences on the field and challenges from post-colonial literary practices. Lal led the way with a volume of 'family snap shots' by historians who were prepared to seek the roots of their own intellectual choices; Doug Munro followed up with a quite explicit successor volume more focused on the thoughts and practices of three generations of Pacific historian practitioners.⁹ Creative writing has also been an increasingly popular outlet for those willing to bring their personal life stories into engagement with the history they write.¹⁰ Pacific Islanders first led converts down this track, conveying biographical accounts through satire and subtle insinuation, as in Hau'ofa's *Tales of the Tikongs* and his *Kisses in the Nederends*.¹¹

In this volume the essays range from an exhortation by Donald Denoon about how *not* to write the biography of a European in Papua New Guinea to the leaps and bounds that *must* be made to approach the task of writing about Islander lives. The founding figures of the field of Pacific history as it developed in the southwest Pacific are, quite uniquely, all present together in this volume, as subjects or authors. Doug Munro traces the genealogy of James Wightman Davidson and deconstructs the formulaic myth about his 'school' and its revolutionary quality. For all his energy and generosity, there were limitations to the attachments entered into with Davidson's 'participant history', which his premature death perhaps prevented him from overcoming. Hempenstall touches briefly on Gavan Daws's intellectual and personal approach to writing lives, while Donald Denoon writes richly about the shooting star that was Ulli Beier as he flashed across the firmament of Papua New Guinea. There are tantalising glimpses of autobiography on offer as well. Hank Nelson talks of his solution to the problem of how to address the worlds of Melanesia and Australia in which he works – by taking a position metaphorically somewhere in the Coral Sea, which frees him to speak to and about Papua New Guinea and Australia without speaking for either. Denoon hints at his personal discomfort in tackling such an elusive character as Ulli Beier – the cultural 'fixer' with the reputation for releasing the creative talents of a generation of Africans and Papua New Guineans – and reveals his own struggle to climb out from under the captivating variety of Beier's life. Denoon's paper raises one of the fundamental problems for all writers of lives: how to cope with the 'life myth' that may surround one's subject like a penumbra. David Chappell's own background as a dissident American baby boomer impels his journey into the past. Chappell is working on a new frontier of engagement as he travels backwards to the 1970s to explore the *lived* pasts of the Kanak revolutionaries then known as the *Foulards Rouges*. The task of creating a new 'common' historical mythology for New Caledonia as it struggles to heal the wounds of decades-long

9 See Note 1. These personal stories have not been allowed to occupy a space in the field unchallenged. Some would say they are a diversion from the task in hand, self-indulgent 'ego' history and abstract theorising about the 'Other' by outsiders, which fails to get to grips with the banalities of power and corruption operating on the Pacific frontier. For example, Alan Ward's book review in *Journal of Pacific History*, 31:2 (1996).

10 For instance, the new journal of writing from the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at The Australian National University, Canberra, *Conversations*; see also Teresia Teaiwa, *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* (Suva 1995) and her CD of poems with Sia Figiel, *Terenesia* (Honolulu 2000).

11 *Tales of the Tikongs*, first published by Longman Paul, New Zealand, in 1983. *Kisses in the Nederends* (Honolulu 1995).

political violence and separatism is an intensely personal journey for those activists who have to redefine their own youth spent in radical dissent from the French state. It is a boundary of memory that, like those of place, is being refashioned around new requirements of inclusion rather than the old simple exclusions of Kanak versus French.

These essays show self-reflecting historians in a variety of biographical guises, which demonstrate how catholic the field is in its approaches to broaching personal boundaries. Hank Nelson is perhaps the most pragmatic, always preferring the personally unromantic, but sharply etched perspective on the changes he has observed in the lives and places of Papua New Guinea between 1966 and the year 2000 (rather than the changes in himself). Clive Moore makes a more personal explanation about his place in the scheme of other people's lives. His essay begins as an affirmation of his gratitude to the family of Fataleka speakers in north Malaita among whom he has worked. But, drawn into membership of the Rakwane descent group as partner in their renderings of their own history, Moore shows how in his case an agenda of service to this family produces texts with very different meanings for different audiences. Moore's commitment to Western, professional canons of historical scholarship cannot control the use made of these texts within the clusters of interested parties contesting their meaning. Rod Lacey is in the end relaxed about this aspect of the inheritance left by Western scholars. In his return to the eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea more than a decade after studying Enga transmissions of knowledge and power through oral traditions, Lacey discovered that despite troubling doubts about colonial complicity, he had been engaging in an exchange which enabled two generations of Enga to draw on local wisdom to create a new society in the post-colonial nation.

Perhaps Brij Lal *feels* the membrane between history and autobiography more tangibly than most writers in this volume. He has lived at the centre of Fiji's lurching multiracial history over the past decade. Not for Lal the silent footsteps of the modern Pacific historian pronouncing judgement from the protected centre. His recounting of his part in the politics of coup and post-coup Fiji during the 1980s and 1990s expresses the force of the tension he feels in his own life, between writing the history of Fiji and political engagement in its recent past.

But the looming question that shadows all these personal excursions into Pacific pasts is how to deal with the lives and personhoods of Pacific Islanders: how, in the words of Hempenstall, 'to lay bare the stranger who must always remain stranger'? Western biography has tended to focus historically on the great personality whose acts are archived in public and private written documentation. And historical biography has specialised in chronicling the Life in its Times, creating 'sociographies' that skate over the hard questions of identity and self formation. Pacific Islander lives have tended to be written as ethnographies, or in the shadow of ethnographies. A cultural template is allowed to stand for the model of personhood that a Pacific Islander is supposed to inhabit. And Pacific Islanders, if they report upon their lives at all, eschew the blunt argumentative style of Western scholarship and do not like the ego centred tradition of life writing. The effect, seen from outside, is of surface reflections from Western derived models of memoir and biography, with

little revelation concerning the person of a kind that biographers wish for. Nelson demonstrates the problem well in excavating the books that were the tools for educating the first generation of Papua New Guinean university students. They opened up usefully comparative arguments about Africa and Asia but had nothing, or very little, in them about New Guinean individual lives and histories. Nelson's paper, and Denoon's and Hempenstall's too, show how it is difficult to portray more than a temper, an atmosphere surrounding the lives of this seminal generation. Marshall Sahlins during PHA 2000 applied a thick coating of Thucydides to a sophisticated reading of the wars of the 1840s between Bau and Rewa in eastern Fiji. If he is right that sex, gain and power are the three drives at the heart of human lives and their history, then perhaps we have found our perfect all-purpose model and need go no further than to study its variations across all cultures. But many of these papers testify to a need, not yet definitively satisfied in Pacific history, to find a way of crossing over into the 'territories of the self'¹² inhabited by Islanders.

One of those contexts for reaching out to the self, as David Hanlon and Christine Weir lucidly demonstrate, is an appreciation of the Christian Pacific Islander. Their papers are at opposite ends of the spectrum from one another in offering navigable pathways into this crucial domain of past and present Pacific Island lives. David Hanlon's paper sombrely questions how we might move beyond histories of missionaries that dominate the explanation of religious change in Pacific lives. Too often the missionary remains a larger-than-life figure strutting about on a stage filled with shadowy Islanders, so that the complexities of the witnessing he or she is living out remains out of focus; his reflection intersects with Hempenstall's argument that most of church-inspired biography and autobiography of pastors is superficial in simply tracing their exemplary Christian witness.¹³ Hanlon believes also that the process of 'conversion' has been treated too crudely in the past, as one of submission, rather than appreciating the tensions, ambiguities and negotiations inherent in communities' and individuals' personal responses to Christianity. In the end, Hanlon is pessimistic about new historiographical possibilities in this area of Pacific Island life, wondering aloud, as did other speakers at the conference, whether it is possible to describe encounters with the sacred in local terms.¹⁴

Weir confronts this question – and several others like it – head on. She is much more optimistic about bursting through this particular boundary in her survey of the tradition of historical writing about missionaries and their impact, from the 'Davidson school', through the social science analyses by anthropologists, to Pacific Islander accounts of the power of Christianity in their lives. No simple answer presents itself to the problem of making this connection, or of whether the *self* can be discovered underneath the conversion experience, but Hanlon and Weir take not dissimilar

12 M. Sobel, 'The revolution in selves: black and white inner aliens', in R. Hoffman et al. (eds), *Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on personal identity in early America* (Chapel Hill 1997), 165.

13 There are, of course, good exceptions to this rule outside church biographies: Judith Binney's *Legacy of Guilt: A life of Thomas Kendall* (Auckland 1968), and James L. Clifford's *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian world* (Durham 1992).

14 This is an area where Pacific history is disadvantaged by not connecting more regularly with New Zealand history, where a strong historiographical tradition of dealing sensitively with these issues has existed for decades.

trajectories finally. Hanlon urges a new insurgent rereading of the histories of Christian missions and the lives of Pacific evangelists, while Weir asserts the value of a return to intellectual and social biography of missionaries: if you will, an agenda for re-writing *Lives* that avoid standard Christian paradigms of explanation as well as postmodern pathologies of construction.

Of course, at bottom there remains the prosaic problem of what historians can get out of missionary materials that is useful to the tasks at hand. John Spurway highlights this as a dilemma in his account of the difficulties in writing the life of Ma'afu, the Tongan 'royal' chief who became master of Fiji's eastern Lau archipelago and direct competitor to Fiji's most powerful chief, Cakobau. Spurway cannot escape the narrow dimensions imposed on Ma'afu's early life by missionary writings; they dominate the scant record with all their highly coloured moral tones. For Ma'afu's later life the task is complicated by adding the complex oral traditions that became the charters to justify one Fijian group's position in relation to their neighbours. Spurway attests to the frailty of all historical materials when it comes to writing across cultural boundaries. Lal expresses the same frustration in his account of the way current political contests in post-1987 coup Fiji distorted any attempts to provide a conservative historical record of what happened. 'Public memory is racially archived', writes Lal. As a member of the 1990s Constitution Review Commission any question posed by Lal that disrupted set accounts was met by malicious fictions and personal attacks that in their turn dominated the public record, indeed *became* the public record.

Pacific Lives, Pacific Places breaks into the comfort zone in which much of the work in the field has been written over the years. By challenging authors to reflect on the lines that have circumscribed their own activities – be they lines around places or around historical biography – and to move beyond them, the 'Bursting Boundaries' conference widened the horizons of problems to be dealt with by participants as participants in their own Pacific histories. There remains a gap between these academic reflections and vernacular understandings of history in the diverse places of the Pacific region – Thornley's reminder that our Western texts are not yet being 'taken across' into Pacific Island cultures, not yet meeting minds, not yet making the translation that we assume, is a pertinent warning here. And for many Island scholars the greater urgency is to engage with the present and the *making* of history in their homelands, which gives the pursuit of the past a more interactive role to play. We offer this volume as a building block in the future we all are building in this increasingly interactive corner of our globe.

How Not to Write Biography

DONALD DENOON

My attempt on the Life of Ulli Beier began propitiously. A notable teacher, editor and promoter of cultural performance in Africa, Papua New Guinea, Australia and Germany, he is a most attractive subject for biography. He was willing to reminisce at length and cooperated fully. I am (for an academic) reasonably literate; I admire his work and have lived in several places where he has lived. May I recall the inception of the project before trying to explain why it stalled?

I WAS not really looking for him until we met: he was merely a name at the edge of my consciousness. In 1970, soon after the Nigerian civil war, my wife and I were relishing the zestful life of Ibadan University, shielded by invisible barriers from the boisterous city. Sometimes the city broke in – police killed a student; cholera lapped the ivory tower; Wole Soyinka imported controversy to the stage – but rarely did academics break *out*. Rumour had it that someone called Beier had ‘gone bush’, maybe even ‘gone native’. Who was he? Older academics were sure he had been a colleague (in Adult Education, perhaps?); and hadn’t he lived like a chief in Oshogbo town, among creative people? A foreigner of some kind – well not *exactly* a foreigner. Anyway he had gone to the end of the world – New Guinea perhaps.

We arrived in Papua New Guinea in 1972. By then he had returned to Nigeria, but only recently, and impressions were sharper. Even so, people found it difficult to summarise his work in and around the University. Ulli and Georgina had flouted the conventions of white society, and cut through academic regulations. Out of the arid landscape of Port Moresby they conjured writers, painters, sculptors and actors. Once the Beiers departed, these precocious performers dispersed. There were fewer poems, plays, painting and sculpture now. Perhaps that was just as well: instead, students were acquiring the sober skills they would need for Independence, Bureaucracy and Development.

A friend asked us to dinner. That afternoon he dropped in, almost casually; then explained that we were going to meet unusual people, and we should be forbearing because they were rather unconventional. He did not say if their oddity was table manners or verbal violence, so we were anxious but outwardly calm as we arrived to meet Ulli and Georgina Beier. We proceeded with care through a couple of courses. As tensions dissolved in the rituals of dining, I would glance sidelong at Georgina as

she pounced on a topic, worried it and discarded it. Her red hair almost under control, wide eyes ready to transfix the next speaker, she was confident of her good looks and dressed arrestingly. She had a disconcerting way of pursuing a subject from quite the wrong angle and with rare seriousness.

An unruly mane of greying hair and a fringe of beard framed her husband's wide, calm face, his eyes timid behind dense glasses: a sturdy and handsome man approaching 50, more conspicuous for the West African clothes she made for him than for his conversation. He addressed one person at a time, more often listening than speaking. If Georgina drew people out of their depth, Ulli would find ground beneath our anxious feet. It was not at all apparent how he mobilised talents. His conversation was interesting, and his manner encouraging: but what was it that provoked people to write, paint, sculpt and make music?

We were surprised to meet them at a dinner party. By some accounts they were rabid anti-colonialists, who scorned bourgeois society and championed cultural insurgents. Yet their manners were impeccable, their tastes cosmopolitan, and their conversation eclectic – apart from a rare and sustained seriousness.

Uncomfortable in my own situation, I was curious about Ulli's: was he an exile or an expatriate? Exile might be involuntary and permanent, while an expatriate might simply choose to live abroad for a while: in either case, how should we relate to the host society? Ulli had been an exile for 40 years, but also an expatriate. He had fled Germany as a child and Palestine as a young man: he left England as an adult and now he had left Nigeria which was more like home than anywhere else. After all that I expected a crisp statement on the subject – but neither he nor Georgina formulated problems in abstract terms. As a matter of fact they proved vague on every political issue. They knew the leading politicians and had no doubt who was good and who was bad: but if I asked what was *correct*, discussion faltered.

It amazed and delighted me that we became friends – perhaps because our children did. Ulli answered all my questions seriously – politely dismantling my theories as he did so. We agreed on a series of interviews to set out in narrative form the life of Horst Ulrich Beier. If the interviews went well, the tapes could be re-cast as autobiography – a technique Ulli had used recently and successfully in presenting the life of his good friend Albert Maori Kiki.

THE INTERVIEWS went well and the tapes were reduced to typescript, but the text was flaccid, accurate but never capturing the narrator. One problem is age. Ulli was in his 50s, I was in my 30s when we met, and I have never been able to close the gap. I have a better sense now of what life is like for people in their 50s and beyond, but he has pressed on to his 70s. He is not willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for his biographer, and I brood upon the disconcerting knowledge that many of his family have survived into their 90s.

The critical problem however was what I did not bring to bear, namely an independent view, or alternative values, and have therefore been captivated by my subject. He has friends and enemies, but no acquaintances. In conversation his

concentration is absolute: he excludes everything – and everyone – outside his field of vision. Those who have entered the magic circle revere his magic. Because I fell under Ulli's spell, this is the analysis of a failed biography. But the most persistent problem has been the imbalance between Ulli's experience and my own. His life spans continents, and cultures – and categories of activity. Scholars will write theses on many aspects of his work: yet he is much more than the sum of his adventures. *Who's Who in African Literature*, for example, contains this entry:

Obotunde Ijimere: ... the pseudonym for Ulli Beier, a German-born writer, who is currently director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ife, Nigeria.

That led me to his friend Wole Soyinka, whose *Myth, Literature and the African World* treats Ijimere's play *The Imprisonment of Obatala* as a representative work of African literature. That reflects Nigerian generosity, but it told me little except that Ulli enjoys using pen-names. (Another is M. Livori whose two plays emerged from creative writing classes in the University of Papua New Guinea.)

The variety of activity is daunting. When he and Georgina moved to Papua New Guinea in 1967 (reported the *Times Literary Supplement* in June 1971),

those familiar with the stimulating work of the anthropologist-poet-art historian-impresario at once began wondering what kind of new artistic energies he would find in that distant part of the world.

Is there a hint of desperation in this listing and linking of personae? A full list would add translation, teaching and editing; but he cannot be cornered in these disciplines. He is a participant who sometimes reports, an enthusiast who seldom analyses.

Taban lo Liyong groped for the coherence within this variety:

there is Ulli Beier the playwright, the fiction writer; there is the critic of art, literature, architecture, culture; there is the translator from five languages; there is the editor of books and magazines; and then, there is the collaborator. Ulli Beier is a cultural collaborator, in the widest sense ...

Ulli does usually work with someone else, but does 'collaboration' imply something else?

The West Indian poet, Andrew Salkey, makes a similar point:

whenever I think of his extraordinary cultural contributions and his exceptional moral stamina, I am reminded ... of a man who has become 'an exemplary traitor' to his own class and educational orientation and rewards, and a man who has found great happiness by doing so.

I am not alone in floundering for an organising principle for this life!

Ulli is impatient with cultures and disciplines – and people – whose traditions are firm, whose limits are set. He is drawn to artists marginal between cultures or striving for new forms. In poetry he seeks the spark thrown out by words and phrases joined for the first time. His translations explore what happens to an idea transposed from one language to another.

Andrew Salkey calls him a traitor: he is disloyal to institutions and to abstract principle. As he professed disinterest in every ideology I offered, I wondered if loyalty to his friends might be his only principle – and his only working method. A close friend in Nigeria, Ezekiel Mphahlele, an exile from South Africa, wrote this affectionate account. Ulli (thinly disguised as Emil in the novel *The Wanderers*)

had become part of the [Yoruba] setting in a way only few expatriates did ... He simply made friendships among those of his class both black and white without imposing himself on the indigenous people like one who might think he was doing them a favour. He was also studying the lore and history of the people ... For this he needed to be humble; and he was basically that. Emil... never rushed into things. But he always knew where to come in, and then he threw himself into the work with resolve, while some of the expatriates jeered and scoffed on the sidelines.

Many of his friends were then living in exile – Taban lo Liyong a Sudanese in Papua New Guinea, Ezekiel Mphahlele a South African in Nigeria, Andrew Salkey a West Indian in London, not to mention exiles of other kinds. His friends are selected by personal chemistry: some competent writers cannot strike up the personal relations which precede collaboration. A few friendships have shattered. One way out is to exercise arbitrary power – a fact which made me nervous to be managing an academic department while we were doing interviews.

By the time he came to Papua New Guinea, Ulli's reputation was well and truly established, making him unusually eminent among his colleagues at the University of Papua New Guinea. In a convoluted sense he and Georgina were in flight from their reputations. When civil war convulsed Nigeria, many circumstances suggested a break, not least the risk of becoming an Expert, reading people's theses on Culture and Modernisation, becoming a cultural Institution. The new journals *Odu* and *Black Orpheus* were flourishing under Nigerian editors; it was time for the Oshogbo artists to learn to find their own commissions, organise exhibitions, negotiate sales, crate their paintings. It was also time to find a place where Ulli and Georgina would not be Legends.

Coming to Papua New Guinea also required a remarkable reversal of roles. Ulli's feats in Nigeria were accomplished despite the opposition of the host university: here he had to get accustomed to overwhelming institutional support. They were on leave in England when they were astonished to see an advertisement for a lectureship in Third World Literature in such wide terms that Ulli could teach exactly how he wished. 'African Literature' was now an established discipline, a regular feature of the smorgasbord of North American college courses and taught in East and West Africa too – although its centrality was not yet acknowledged. To have bypassed this tortuous process, the University of Papua New Guinea must be a remarkably innovative place. Ulli's application was accepted almost by return of mail, yet the country was sufficiently remote that he must surely be unknown.

Papua New Guinea was indeed 'the last unknown' for Europeans and Africans. Most accounts were written by anthropologists and missionaries. (J.H. Holmes's account of his mission among the Oroko, *In Primitive New Guinea*, was the only book in Ibadan's excellent university library.) In London Ulli and Georgina met the

anthropologist Anthony Forge newly returned from New Guinea; and in Ted Wolfers's United Nations newsletters they read the first political commentary. This was an Australian dependency, separated from the rest of Australia only by the narrow Torres Strait. Australians did not call the Territory a colony, nor did they think of themselves as colonists, and most assumed that independence was a remote possibility, at least a generation away.

THEIR ROUTE to Port Moresby took them through Brisbane airport, where Ulli's creative work began as it would continue. There was one striking-looking passenger:

A short, stocky man with a powerful face. He stood out from the crowd, not just because he was the only black person there, but because he moved with the relaxed self-assurance of a man who has a purpose in life. ... [M]y wife and I were independently reminded of Ezekiel Mphahlele. Was it merely an outward resemblance, the short, muscular figure, the serious, almost grave expression? ... We later found that he had in fact the same passion and warmth, the same capacity for anger, the same outspokenness as our South African friend ... Everyone else was busy with his own affairs, but the Papuan came up and said simply: 'You seem to have rather a lot to carry, let me help you.' Albert Maori Kiki was the first Papuan we ever met.

There were other elements in the personal chemistry. Albert had grown up partly with his father in the lower ranks of the colonial administration and partly with his mother in one of the few societies which still hunted and gathered. A fragmented childhood which had made Ulli morbidly insecure had given Albert an easy self-assurance.

Port Moresby in the 1960s was partly a Queensland country town, thrown by accident across Torres Strait. The white town overlooked a cluster of stilted Motu villages built out from the beaches of the harbour; and migrant workers formed a penumbra of hot and dusty shanty settlements. Motu villages, Australian suburbs, and migrant settlements were physically distinct, each little valley separated from the others by bleak hills, the grass and scrubby gum trees grey in the wet season and burnt in the dry. In a country of tropical forest, Port Moresby parched in the only rain shadow.

Until the 1950s, racial segregation had prevailed. Only in the early 1960s were people allowed to drink alcohol, wear shirts, commit adultery, play rugby, or watch uncensored films – on equal terms with Australians. Although these barriers had fallen, there was only a shallow tradition of socialising between black and white. Port Moresby was not a place where Papua New Guineans felt at home.

By the time they met, Albert was organising his Kerema kin in Port Moresby in the new trade union movement. His ideas were humanist, populist and anti-colonial, and he was also secretary of the fledgling nationalist organisation, Pangu Pati. The leader of Pangu Pati was Michael Somare, a low-key and reassuring personality with a talent for attracting allies and disarming opponents. He learned his letters in a school run by the Japanese army: after the war he trained as a teacher before he joined the public service and was sent to a course at the Administrative College. There he

met almost all the other educated Papua New Guineans, and enlisted their support for Pangu.

One product of the partnership between Ulli and Albert was *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime* – the first Papua New Guinean autobiography – produced by editing and transcribing taped interviews. By a quaint coincidence, Holmes's *In Primitive New Guinea* – the only book on Melanesia in Ibadan library – was set among the Orokelo, Albert Maori Kiki's father's people. While they were preparing *Ten Thousand Years*, they visited Orokelo. There they found a cultural revival focused on the carving of Hohao boards, and wrote a book – *Hohao* – describing and illustrating the revival and its course.

Albert's cultural concerns were not accidental: many educated Papua New Guineans felt a loss of identity. Small-scale Melanesian traditions seemed threatened by the massive cultural impact of Europe and Australia. Decolonisation actually made the threat more acute, by removing the culturally conservative Australian administration, and opening a range of choices. One of Somare's most satisfying jobs was to chair the parliamentary Museum Committee, invigorating its program of artifact collection and recording.

Somare was also anxious to cement his position in his ancestral culture. Encouraged by the success of Albert's autobiography, he and Ulli worked together on *Sana: an Autobiography of Michael Somare*, recounting his youthful adventures, explaining his cultural anxieties, and expounding Pangu's program. The book was published only in 1975, on the eve of the country's independence under Somare's leadership; but as they prepared the book the two men grew to understand each other, and the Beiers' house became a meeting place for the nationalist politicians and the first generation of students.

Cultural anxiety was not, of course, the monopoly of politicians. Two of Georgina's friends and collaborators were racked by the same conflicts. One was an imposing young highlander who worked as a cleaner in Port Moresby government offices. Kauage was sure he wanted to draw, and a friend brought his drawings – imitations of school-book illustrations – for Georgina to see. Georgina disliked the drawings but arranged to meet Kauage:

On this first occasion ... he sat on a chair in my house, cradling his head in his arms, twisting his body nervously, bending his toes. His discomfort was enormous. Yet there was a soft desperation ... and his smile was beautiful, but it ended in a sigh. In spite of his nervousness this man was impressive. I could not believe that the awful drawings matched the man he ought to be. Then, in a corner of one sheet of paper, I noticed a minute scribble. He said it was a spider. That scribble was the only drawing he hadn't copied. I asked him if he couldn't draw some more spiders ...

Kauage was illiterate and had no English: he spoke to Georgina in Pidgin, although his shyness made even that difficult. She offered to buy drawings of spiders; then they progressed through larger insects to creatures from his imagination; next she taught him to beat relief designs on copper and aluminium. She found his drawings shallow, in part because he liked to draw rapidly and for hours on end. Metal work proved a better medium, absorbing more of his physical energy and slowing him down to

concentrate on a single enterprise. By early 1969 he was ready to mount his first exhibition, which launched his career. At last he gained self-confidence and money (although he failed to learn to write) and his personality could express itself. The awkward and sullen-looking labourer blossomed into a cheerful artist whose arresting exhibits always sold out.

There was no accepted style for living in urban Port Moresby – Kauage, for example, had to wear expensive and ill-fitting trade-store clothes. The dignity of villagers at home dwindled to humiliation in town: wearing mission styles or trade-store clothes, living in barracks or squatter settlements, relying on broken English or Pidgin which few power-holders spoke fluently, most Papua New Guineans endured a myriad frustrations.

Georgina met Marie Aihi during a visit to Yule Island mission, on the Papuan coast. At 18 she was working in the mission clinic as a nursing assistant, among her own people but isolated by growing up in the mission. Georgina brought her to Port Moresby and encouraged her to channel her strong sense of design into screen-printing. As she became successful, however, her kin increased their demands for money and cloth; and Marie lacked the villagers' skills in dealing with these demands. Georgina recorded the climax of this dilemma:

In July 1970 a festival was held in Marie's village, Waima. The occasion for the *singsing* was the acquisition of a new tractor. ... In spite of the secular, contemporary occasion, the dance was traditional in many ways. The visitors arrived in the night and the dance began in the light of burning grass. The dancers were magnificently decorated, some with enormous feather head-dresses and all with superb face paintings in yellow, red and black lines. They danced throughout the night and the next day and another night. ... But while this was going on, the village teenagers [organised] an electric guitar band to which they danced Westernised dances - well within hearing distance of the *singsing*. Marie, significantly, divided her attention between the two, though she felt ill at ease in both camps. On the morning after the first night she made a very serious attempt to join the traditional group. She allowed her face to be painted in yellows and reds and wore a traditional grass skirt, but compromised by tying her hair with a red chiffon scarf and wearing plastic earrings. She appeared like a stranger in her own village— one who had strayed into the serious and still powerful ceremony of the Roro people.

After the festival she travelled back to Bereina to catch the plane to Moresby. She was riding in an open truck through a coconut plantation. A coconut suddenly fell on the truck and grazed Marie's head. She was not really badly hurt but became convinced that sorcerers had made the coconut fall on her head and that they probably meant to kill her.

Preyed upon by fear, she withdrew from screen-printing, abruptly gave away her possessions, and eventually returned to a life of village obscurity. She had, however, launched a small revolution in urban styles. Georgina's other protégés went further, through Harahara Prints, a commercial company marketing the new textile designs. Harahara did not flourish for long, but it did arouse an appetite for traditional designs adapted to new circumstances.

Each of these intensely personal struggles was part of a wider pattern of predicaments. Australian colonialism had been paternalist and stifling; its imminent demise left many people adrift, in an affluent setting which they had not the money to enjoy, grasping a heritage which was difficult to adapt but impossible to escape.

Ulli and Georgina developed creative *individual* relationships, directing people towards the medium which best suited them. More important for the country's political life, they brought these isolated people together so that each one reached out to the others – in textiles, or poetry, or books, or paint, or copper. In the Beiers' home they could meet comfortably, safe from the anxiety and humiliation of daily life in a strange town, unobserved by intrusive officials, free to express themselves however they wished. Each worked alone, but each was strengthened by the others, and the Beiers' home was the lens through which separate talents focused into a blaze of creativity.

ONE OF MY most arresting discoveries in conversations with Ulli was an appreciation of the quite extraordinary qualities of the early University of Papua New Guinea. In February 1966 students attended their first classes in converted offices and an abandoned showground. Dr John Gunther, a diminutive Australian of alarming temper and surprising breadth of interests, had created the Public Health Department out of the rubble of the Pacific War. After 10 years as Director and eight as Deputy Administrator, he was attracted to his last great enterprise: 'I have always had a job where the task was to build: I am a builder.' He was determined to make everyone feel at home. Social distinctions were slow to crystallise: from the outset, students and staff addressed each other by their first names. Ulli and Georgina were startled to see Kauage – a labourer not yet revealed as an artist – drop in for a beer with Gunther on his way home to the barracks. The Beiers' house was soon full of students and people learning sculpture or painting with Georgina and Albert's political friends. Short-term visitors lived in a garden outhouse. It was in this lively context that Ulli grasped his first opportunity to develop a complete literature program.

The first professors – Ken Inglis the historian, Ralph Bulmer the anthropologist, and Charles Rowley the political scientist – were scholars of vision who attracted keen young lecturers. The University was free of tutelary links like those which had shackled Ibadan to London University, liberating youthful staff to devise imaginative programs of courses.

For the first student intake, the University had combed the public service, seminaries, schools in Australia, and the new high schools in Papua New Guinea. Vincent Eri was a public servant; Leo Hannet had been expelled from a seminary; John Waiko flew in from Popondetta bringing nothing but his axe and a spare shirt. The variety increased again when John Kasaipwalova arrived from school in Australia and radical politics at Queensland University. They had few preconceptions about university life, they could expect glittering opportunities in government when they graduated: meanwhile they animated an effervescent community.

Frank Johnson was Professor of Language and Literature, two disciplines which he was determined to yoke together in every course. Thus a first-year course offered 'four approaches to the grammatical analysis of English sentences' using R.L. Allen's *English Grammars and English Grammar*, combined with 'the literature of

developing countries in English' which included Tutuola's linguistically anarchic *Palmwine Drinkard*.

As to the content of the Literature segments, Ulli had an entirely free hand.

In most African universities the teaching of literature had become an instrument of colonialism. 'English literature' imposed a set of foreign aesthetic and moral values onto students who came from ancient cultures...

The University of Papua New Guinea offered me the opportunity to develop an entirely new approach to the teaching of literature... I started from two basic assumptions. First, to make students understand what literature is all about ... it is best to start by analysing a text from their own tradition. Students come out of mission schools with the notion that poetry is an English invention. 'Civilised' countries produce master-works called 'literature' while 'primitive' peoples produce 'folklore' which has curiosity value but no literary merit. To counteract these prejudices we started the sequence with a compulsory course called 'Oral Tradition'. Each student had to spend the Christmas vacation... collecting material which was then translated and analysed....

My second assumption was that English was no longer the language only of the English people. [It had been] imposed on Nigerians, Jamaicans, Kenyans or New Guineans by facts of history. They have to live with it and use it, whether they like it or not. Their success in using this language depends on their ability to twist and modify and adapt the language to their own needs, until it is no longer a foreign tongue.

The course on 'New English Writing from Africa' demonstrated... how African writers treated the language with a healthy disrespect, broke its back and welded it into a useful tool for themselves. Courses on new writing from Africa and India were also valuable because the themes corresponded to issues which preoccupied our students: colonialism, conflict between generations, the search for traditional values, the problems of identity, the struggle for independence and post-independence disillusion. New Guineans could readily identify with this literature, and they were encouraged to write themselves.

Later courses analysed the images of Aboriginal Australians and Melanesians in Australian literature. Only late in the sequence were students exposed to 'Modern World Literature' – Sartre, Brecht, Ionesco – and only in the final year could they opt to study Shakespeare.

The innovation which attracted most attention was a course in creative writing. This evolved to meet the unique problems of the Language/Literature coupling:

I was forced into this adventure because my best students couldn't stand the Language segment of the course, and I was afraid I might lose them. To solve this problem, I proposed to Frank Johnson that exceptional students should be given an opportunity to take Creative Writing instead of Linguistics. Frank agreed readily, and fought the issue through the boards and committees.

I realised that Creative Writing must be done very well or not at all; so I attached conditions. Only a small number of students could be accepted. They could be invited to join the course in their second year, if they had shown serious interest in writing during the first year. The conditions were necessary because no teacher can help every student. You must be able to tell a student 'You may be a genius, but someone else will have to talk to you about your writing, because it does not evoke a response in me'.

Students engaged in a different relationship than in other courses – more like the Oshogbo artists' workshop than a conventional university program. Not only were they treated individually, but often the teacher had to refrain from teaching:

There is always a danger of spoiling a student's talent, particularly early on. If one has more facility with words, it is easy to make the student's work slick, to make it look better and sound better and read better, with more form and shape. But that is precisely what one should *not* do, because it does not help the student at all...

Most young writers responded well to the discipline of having to present a piece of writing every Wednesday, for discussion in a Thursday tutorial. Vincent Eri had written the first chapter of a novel some years earlier. He had re-written it three times and chewed it over without getting any further. The discipline of the class made him write *The Crocodile*, Papua New Guinea's first novel.

While the students obviously did not produce literary masterpieces for eternity, they did write works that were fresh and highly relevant. A creative writing class is not an effective way to produce professional writers; but it is a wonderful device to build a student's personality.

Ulli's experience as editor and dramatist influenced his teaching style: he had in view the published piece of writing, and the play in performance. This implied a more equal relationship than students experienced elsewhere. Students would be judged not only by formal examiners, but also by an audience.

John Waiko remembers his expectations when he arrived from an Anglican school. His traditional education had been interrupted when his parents sent him to boarding school. He learned to doubt the value of the folk-knowledge which he acquired as a child, and was sadly persuaded that the purpose of education was to learn only the lore of the Europeans. That judgement was shaken by Hank Nelson and Ken Inglis in History courses, then the study of Literature with Ulli rebuilt his confidence in the wisdom of his own Binandere people and he resolved to explore it through Creative Writing.

He always met Ulli individually – and never knew who the other students were until results were published. He found that he could develop his ideas in Binandere but needed advice on stating them effectively in English; then he sought techniques for staging a play in an urban setting. His most powerful device was to incorporate passages of Binandere dance to uncover the tension between village values and the colonial establishment. *The Unexpected Hawk* was one of several plays emerging from the program and successfully staged on the campus.

We might notice three features of Waiko's experience. One was his individual relationship with Ulli. Second, the relationship was not bounded by the classroom: when John brought his father to Port Moresby, it was in the Beiers' outhouse that they stayed. Third, having presented his ideas, he felt no need to continue writing: he moved confidently to a doctorate, and eventually succeeded to Ken Inglis's chair of History.

John Waiko was typical of his peers, in needing advice on English expression. Only John Kasaipwalova and Leo Hannet were entirely fluent. Others were frustrated by having to use English – their second or third language – among each other and with authorities. They were mortified when officious public servants and shop-keepers criticised their use of language; yet they had to master English if only to vent that anger. It was a relief to describe their particular experience, and a revelation to discover that plain prose could excite readers and generate power.

Self-doubt was perhaps their largest handicap. Well-wishers assured them that Papua New Guinea would soon be independent, that other black people were taking

control of their destinies, or that black was beautiful. Until each felt confident among other students and with Australians, these assurances rang hollow.

This was a moment in Papua New Guinea's history when a man had to be highly articulate and capable of formulating ideas, if he was to play a part in shaping the destiny of his country.

By evoking a confident voice, Creative Writing enabled many Papua New Guineans to grasp that opportunity.

To understand the response to the New Guinea Writing of the late 1960s and early 1970s, we must hear the silence which preceded it. Melanesians did not perform dances and drama for outside audiences, so each community knew very little of the cultural richness of its neighbours. Most Australian residents met black people only as domestic servants, police, or village headmen. Melanesians had almost no voice: they were an amorphous problem, to be doctored, instructed, converted, disciplined or civilised – but not heard. Missionaries and administrators spoke on their behalf. That Papua New Guineans had a voice at all, was the most startling revelation.

By the end of 1968 there was a flourishing series of anthologies. *Papuan Pocket Poets*, at 60 cents an issue, included poems from the Pacific, Malay folk poetry, Yoruba hunters' poems, Igbo and Indonesian poetry, and children's poems from around the world. Alan Nattachee's *Aia* was the first local collection. As in *Black Orpheus*, a locally-centred internationalism presented Papua New Guinean writers on equal terms with everyone else. *Kovave: a Journal of New Guinea Literature* published stories, poems and plays. These serials, together with Albert Maori Kiki's *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*, Vincent Eri's *Crocodile*, Michael Somare's *Sana*, and Ulli's joint work with Albert – *Hohao* – suddenly comprised a substantial body of literature.

The books addressed mainly English-speaking readers (though there were some publications in local languages), but the plays spoke directly to wider audiences. Leo Hanne's *The Ungrateful Daughter* makes an anti-colonial parable of the dilemma of a Melanesian girl adopted by an Australian family and promised in marriage to a prospector. John Waiko's *Unexpected Hawk* deploys traditional imagery to portray the turmoil provoked by colonialism in a village society. Kasaipwalova's *Reluctant Flame* uses some of the rhetoric of negritude to dissect racial tension in Port Moresby. Their audience did not need to be fluent in English: however specific their milieu, they deal with issues common to the whole country. Plays were staged in an amphitheatre where gardeners and cleaners mingled with academics and students; whole families came, and the plays exploited slap-stick satire and solemn dance-drama, blending styles and rivetting their diverse audience.

The writers enjoyed even wider influence when Al Butovicius's Prompt Theatre Company took three of their short plays to Canberra in 1970. The bucolic Minister for Territories was absent: but he sent some officers to explain (to anyone who would listen) that Papua New Guineans were really grateful to a paternal administration, contrary to what the playwrights were saying. Their leaflets simply publicised the

message of the plays, which enjoyed good reviews and enthusiastic audiences. The effect, like that of the literature, was to jolt Australian perceptions.

New Guinea Writing was the literary dimension of a wider cultural revival. The writers gave Papua New Guinea a voice, just as screen-printers gave people a style and painters and sculptors focused their vision. Traditions (or sometimes imagination) were adapted to new circumstances, and parochial experience set in a broader context. As in Nigeria a generation earlier, the end of colonialism forced old traditions to adapt or be submerged in a bland 'modernity'.

Some art and literature might have emerged in any event, but Ulli and Georgina helped individuals to find their most congenial medium, brought them together to reinforce each other's influence, and assisted their production and distribution. This was not the creation of professional artists: much of the literary output was so topical that changing political conditions have reduced its impact. Most writers went on to careers in politics, or government, or business; yet a generation who had something urgent to say was empowered to say it trenchantly when it was most needed.

As in Nigeria, so in Waigani, they saw any creative performance as essentially an expression of moral character: 'venturing into new artistic territory, an artist has only his character for a guide' as Muraina put it. This belief in the primacy of character buttressed Georgina's confidence in Kauage before he had drawn his first spider. It explains Ulli's enthusiasm for creative writing classes as a device 'to build a student's personality'. The writer – like the painter – can only express what is already within. Sensing that potential is a matter of intuition. Once the creative impulse has been identified – and only then – questions of technique and medium can be addressed. Friendship first, creativity second, and technique last – though certainly not least. Confident that the essential first and second steps had been taken, they could safely propose a Nigerian medium or a German literary device without imposing Nigerian (or any other) values.

That approach begs a host of questions. What about someone who has moral character without creativity? Georgina and Ulli would dismiss that hypothesis. They would argue that most people – certainly all their friends – do have creativity, so we should assume it is universal and innate. A sterling character who has not (yet) created anything merely lacks desire or opportunity. But what do we make of artists who are creative without character? or someone with creativity and an *abrasive* character? Ulli would tell them: 'You may be a genius, but someone else will have to talk to you about your writing, because it evokes no response in me'.

To my pedestrian mind these answers raise more questions than they resolve – about the arbitrary selection of protégés, the dubious equation of creativity with character, or the exaltation of creativity as the measure of character. However, if Ulli had paused to brood over these anomalies, he might not have been so successful and Papua New Guinea would be the poorer for it. The only defence of Ulli's approach is that it worked.

SO NOT ALL is wasted. I have acquired information, and met an amazing variety of people who would not otherwise cross my path. The tapes and a chronology of Ulli's life are a resource. There are even insights which may merit attention.

One concerns the nature of some 'cross-cultural' interaction. The British scholars who created Ibadan University in the 1950s were self-consciously civilised, wedded to the rituals of Cambridge in which they had (or wished they had) been formed. Pierre van den Berghe's sparkling analysis of the university observes how the gorgeous academic robes of Oxbridge were embraced and relished by clothes-conscious Yoruba. At deeper levels the harmony was less convincing. In the view of the University, Africa had no literature, serious music, or art (as opposed to artefacts). In the epic years when Ulli moved off campus and wrestled to remove these blinkers, what skills did he deploy?

I believe they can be reduced to two. He knew almost nothing of African culture – and he acknowledged his ignorance. And on the other hand he was saturated in European culture. In Berlin, Tel Aviv and London he had grasped every opportunity to hear symphonic music, contemporary as well as classical. Through his translations in and out of German, English, Hebrew and Yiddish, he knew Western European literature (literally) inside out. Many hours in galleries and museums had given him a rare familiarity with European painting and sculpture. His exploration and appreciation of African music and performance did not displace his delight in European cultural forms. This complementary relationship is so rare that it took me a long time to recognise it: to embrace African or Melanesian forms is not to reject those of Europe.

Observing The Present: Writing The Past

HANK NELSON

On Monday 27 March 2000 I landed at Jackson's Airport, Port Moresby. I shuffled off Qantas flight QF95 through the covered tunnel, into the new airconditioned airport, and went by airconditioned car to the Airways Hotel with its grand entrance, polished wood floors, silent lift and blocks of airconditioned rooms clinging to the slope.

It was almost exactly 34 years since I had first landed at Jackson's. I had then flown all night on the TAA Bird of Paradise Electra ('Big. Powerful. Fast. Smooth. Slice two hours from the Territory/Australia trip'), arrived just after dawn, walked across the tarmac through air so dense it was like wading through a cappuccino, presented my entry permit to the Australian official, waited in the open-sided shed that catered for all passengers from Kieta or Lae or Sydney, and went by car, windows down, shirt sticking to the seat, past Four Mile and down the dusty, gravel road to the isolated Administrative College housing in Waigani.¹

The change in the speed and ease of travel, and the fact that it is possible now to move within a protective cocoon, is significant. But other changes are obviously more important. TAA (The Friendly Way) was an Australian domestic airline. In 1966 the customs officers and airport officials were all Australians. Banks were branches of Australian banks – the Commonwealth, the Bank of New South Wales – the currency was Australian, and the tellers and customers were all Australians – except perhaps for a nervous group of Papua New Guineans hesitating until the most literate among them joined the queue and waited for a turn to enter an alien world of commerce. In 1966 all members of the First Division of the Public Service were white, and in the Second Division (where the minimum entry was three years of secondary schooling) Papua New Guineans were outnumbered 20 to one. The senior police were all white, but in 1964 the first two Papua New Guineans were appointed as sub-inspectors, so the old barrier that had stopped Papua New Guineans rising above the ranks of sergeant and warrant officer had ended. Even so, a newly arrived Australian going into the Port Moresby police station to change a State to a Territory driving licence was more likely to be served by a white woman office worker than a Papua New Guinean policeman. The Pacific Islands Regiment was a unit of the Australian army, controlled by the Australian Defence Act, and over 600 of the 3,000 personnel were white. All senior officers and technical staff were Australian. As in the police, the

¹ The words of the TAA advertisement are from *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Mar. 1966, inside cover.

first officers had recently been appointed: Second Lieutenants Ted Diro and Patterson Lowa had been commissioned in 1963.

At the top of Hunter Street, the House of Assembly, the archives and the museum shared the modest building that had once been the European hospital. In the Assembly the debates, both for and against, were dominated by Europeans. The radio station, 9PA, was run by the ABC, and most of its announcers were on careers that considered a shift to Port Moresby as not much different from one to Launceston or Townsville. The news services in Motu and Pidgin and the broadcasts to schools presented by Papua New Guineans did at least give the ABC a local distinction to balance its familiar Australian accents and 'Blue Hills' with its evocation of a past Australia. The daily newspaper, the *South Pacific Post*, had just come under the control of the Herald and Weekly Times of Melbourne and was later to become part of the growing empire of Rupert Murdoch.² It was written by and for Australians, the advertisements were directed at Australians, the sporting teams most reported were dominated by Australians and a few were exclusively white.

In 1966 an Australian travelled in an Australian Territory and was carried, directed, serviced, protected, punished and entertained by Australian institutions. It was not even clear if or when Papua and New Guinea was going to end its constitutional association with Australia. The Minister, Charles Barnes, had been to Port Moresby in January and declared that when the time came, the people of Papua and New Guinea could choose for themselves what they wanted. In February *Pacific Islands Monthly* said that if the 'the majority of Papua-New Guinea's moderate, not very ambitious leaders' then had to choose they would opt for close ties with Australia.³ But among general uncertainty it did seem that Mr Barnes had made it clear that there was no chance of the Territory becoming a seventh state of Australia. A report, just made public, reminded Australians that there were still parts of the Territory where government, exploration and adventure were one. Assistant District Officer R.I. Barclay and Cadet Patrol Officer K. Taylor had walked for 80 days through the headwaters of the April and Leonard Schultz Rivers where they were the first government officers to contact several hundred people. Simply the appearance of the people with their bark topknots and cane waistbands – not their aspirations for statehood – was news. Barclay, Taylor, five policemen and over 50 carriers had crossed a river 42 times in one day and gone without food for four days as they penetrated the deep gorges at the divide between the Sepik and Western Districts to meet timid, suspicious peoples.⁴ The Territory was still an Australian frontier, and the land recently described by McCarthy and Souter (and about to be described by Sinclair) was still out there.⁵ In 1966 Australians were discovering Papua New Guinea

² *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Feb. 1966, p.14.

³ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp81-4.

⁵ Keith McCarthy, *Patrol into Yesterday: My New Guinea years* (Melbourne 1963, repr. 1964 and 1965); Gavin Souter, *New Guinea: The last unknown* (Sydney 1963, repr. 1964); James Sinclair, *Behind the Ranges: Patrolling in New Guinea* (Melbourne 1966). Colin Simpson's *Plumes and Arrows* could be added to the list. First published in separate volumes in 1953, 1954 and 1955, it had been published in the combined edition in 1962, and reprinted in 1963 and 1965. These were the books Australians in Papua and New Guinea were buying for themselves and their friends and relatives. The books said where they hoped they were.

as they were trying to change it more rapidly than ever before; but the extent to which they were preparing for complete separation was unclear.

When I arrived at Jackson's Airport in 2000 I joined the queue for foreigners entering the country. I presented my Australian passport and visa which allowed me a single entry, prohibited work and required me to have a return ticket. It was checked by a Papua New Guinean immigration officer and my luggage was inspected by Papua New Guinean customs officers. A young Papuan woman asked me, 'Have you been to our country before?' I thought about explaining that I had been many times before, and that the first time I came it was my country, but that at some time it had become hers. The formal date of transfer was 16 September 1975, but in fact over time I had observed the country going from 'ours' to 'theirs'. Perhaps I should have said that the country had always been hers, but when I first came to Papua New Guinea Australian institutions had been imposed across the surface of a small part of the country and this had made it possible to travel from Brisbane to Boroko within a familiar Australianness. I simply said, 'Yes'.

Historians write from a particular present. For historians of Papua New Guinea that present has changed radically. The visible changes are most obvious to me as I drive through the suburb of Boroko – from the Hubert Murray Highway, down Boroko Drive and then back along Vaivai Avenue. In 1966 Port Moresby had a population of just over 40,000 and 10,000 were expatriates. About one third of the expatriates lived in Boroko. All those louvre-windowed bungalows, on high concrete posts, all those cars parked underneath and in the driveways, all those neat Sogeri grass lawns, all the bauhinia, allamanda, ixora, bougainvillea, hibiscus, tanket and travellers palms bought from Sheedy's at Six Mile, all the blue-lined Clark swimming pools – all were possessed by Australians and reflected Australian aspirations for the good suburban life. The Papua New Guineans who washed, cooked, cleaned and gardened in many of the Boroko houses were scarcely visible, although they numbered just a few less than the Australians.

In 2000 Port Moresby has a population of about 400,000 and in that city 10 times greater what were once called 'expats' and are now 'non-citizens' are fewer, and the Australians are a tiny minority – perhaps 3,000. In Port Moresby less than one in 100 is an Australian. Boroko and Korobosea, so obviously white suburbia in 1966, are now home to over 25,000 Papua New Guineans.

Suburbs in other cities change their ethnicity. Parts of New York went from being Irish to east and southern European to African American. Richmond in Melbourne changed from Tigerland to Little Saigon. But what happened in Boroko is more significant. The Australians have not moved to another more spacious, leafier suburb with higher real estate values and lower crime rates – they have gone altogether. Boroko was the leafy suburb. It did not compete with Airvos Avenue and other streets on Touaguba with their views of the harbour or reef and Coral Sea; but it was a suburb of privilege and power. This has been a shift of people in terms of power as well as a shift in space, and it has been almost complete.

The change in the present is also apparent in the extent to which people feel at ease. Questions of 'law and order' constantly intrude on all peoples' daily activities:

much ordinary activity is curtailed or conducted at risk. Crimes of outrageous bravado capture headlines. On 17 December 1999 a gang hijacked a helicopter and tried to rob the Port Moresby headquarters of the Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation. Intercepted by the police, four were shot dead and a fifth died on the way to hospital.⁶ Using a Toyota landcruiser stolen in Lae, five men drove into Ialibu in the Southern Highlands, held up the bank, and left with K22,000.⁷ In November 2,000 hijackers armed with rifles and hand grenades ordered a light aircraft on a regular run between Morobe goldfields and Lae to divert to Garaina. There they unloaded \$262,000 worth of gold and disappeared into the bush.⁸ Equally audacious, but more profitable and less dangerous, have been the misappropriations of funds. The assets of the Motor Vehicle Insurance Trust, Post PNG, the National Provident Fund, and the Investment Corporation of PNG had, the Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta said, been 'raped and plundered'.⁹ The Motor Vehicle Insurance Trust had shrunk from a value of K150 million to K3.89 million. Monies have moved through accounts in Australia, Hong Kong, Switzerland and the Cayman Islands and individuals have – sometimes deviously but legally – rewarded themselves with payments in the millions. People die in acts of careless and wanton violence. A six year old girl was shot dead while travelling with her parents on the Magi Highway just outside Port Moresby.¹⁰ An Enga man in the suburb of Morata was blown to pieces by a hand grenade and in revenge three men were chopped to death.¹¹ In March 2000 I was parked outside the National Archives, just off Independence Drive. The archives close at lunch time, and as I waited a few minutes for the reading room to reopen I sat in my car reading the *Post-Courier*. A member of staff immediately came out and told me to come inside and wait. To sit in a car with the door open, I was told, was to invite someone to steal it, and I might be injured in the process.

When I returned to the archives and began reading the District Commissioners' annual reports the present dominated. I could not stop thinking about questions of law and order: they arise from immediate conversations, and from ordinary and extraordinary events. Were the crimes related to particular values and ways of behaving in Melanesian cultures? What had happened to those opposing forces in Melanesian cultures, those that restrained the hot heads and ensured peace and harmony? To what extent had Australian institutions been inefficient or inappropriate? Why had the values proclaimed by governments and missions had so little apparent impact? What was the relationship between the resurgent tribal fighting, armed robbery and fraud and corruption? Where should the Papua New Guinea government and foreign aid agencies direct their aid to obtain immediate and long-term benefits? How should we interpret those post-war years of apparent peace, low levels of crime, and the dominance of Australians and Australian institutions?

⁶ *National*, 21 June 2000 (on inquest report).

⁷ *National*, 8 Nov. 2000.

⁸ *Australian*, 3 Nov. 2000.

⁹ *National*, 6 Nov. 2000.

¹⁰ *Independent*, 9 Nov. 2000.

¹¹ *National*, 9 Oct. 2000.

Were these superficial and ephemeral impositions, coming under increasing strain even before the Australians handed over power?

The District Commissioner for Kieta District reported in 1948 from Sohano that as a result of recent patrolling the estimated decline in population on Bougainville during the Second World War was between 20 and 25 per cent. Losses had been heaviest in the Kieta and Buin areas.¹² Patrol officers listed the losses from the direct and indirect results of war – people shot for presumed aid to the enemy, killed by strafing aircraft, deaths from deprivation, and attacks by other New Guineans who took advantage of the turmoil of war to attack old enemies. Particular cases were referred to crown law officers to see whether war damage compensation should be paid. Korovei, a man aged about 22 from the Reboine area south of Kieta, had taken refuge with the inland Nasioi when air strikes increased against the Japanese occupying his village. He had died of exposure and malnutrition. Onaba Bora of Keveri was in Abau in 1944 to give evidence in a court case. Two Americans had asked him to provide a woman who would have sexual intercourse with them. Onaba had refused and they had bashed him with pistol butts, leaving him paralysed. He got around the village in a sitting position, lifting himself with his hands. Both cases merited compensation.¹³

When I first read post-war patrol reports I had sat in a room at Konedobu at the headquarters of DDA – the Department of District Administration – at the very source of Australian imposed peace. From that place at that time, the violence of war seemed a terrible aberration: the violence of a world war had fallen on a people who had both accepted and appreciated peace. In 2000 I was entering the archives to escape a dangerous world. It was then possible to see some parts of Papua New Guinea as being engaged in persistent tribal warfare, the Australian rule having been imposed with force and the threat of force, the war suddenly introducing vastly greater and less predictable violence, and by the early 1970s these areas being again places where armed men solved disputes and redistributed wealth. In March 2000 peace could be seen as an aberration. Of course the present influences all historians, but in one generation in Papua New Guinea the transformation has been so great in where people live, who they are, what wealth and power they have, and how they behave, that the questions historians might ask and the answers they suggest have taken an equally sharp turn.

Soon after first arriving in Papua New Guinea I began to write about it. The immediate social and physical landscape was so dominant it was impossible to write about anything else. It was presumptive of me to comment so soon on a place that I knew little about, but I was writing from and on those dominant Australian institutions. To write critically about policies in education, economic development or constitutional change was in most cases to pass judgement on fellow Australians. The easy targets were those in high office who were blind to impending change, the planters who sat in exclusive clubs and railed against lazy and unreliable workers, missionaries insensitive to local cultures, businessmen determined to take large

¹² Department of District Services, District Annual Reports, bound volumes, National Archives of Papua New Guinea.

¹³ War Damage Pension, AN 78, Box 523, National Archives of Papua New Guinea.

profits before the good times ended, government officers reluctant to hand power to local councils, and those Australians whose only topics of conversation were about where they would go on their next long leave, what sacrifices they made to work among the ungrateful *oli* who would stuff the country once they got control of it, and the amusing behaviour of their domestic servants.¹⁴ As an Australian I had a right – perhaps an obligation – to try and make Australian policies as effective as I could.¹⁵

Thirty years later when I write on current events in Port Moresby I am assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Papua New Guinean institutions and individual Papua New Guineans. To comment on current politicians, to assess changes in public morality and to look for reasons for the breakdown in law and order is to pass judgement on a foreign country and its institutions and citizens. I am the periodic visitor who arrives, stays for a week or a fortnight and then makes a public statement about successes and failures.¹⁶ That consciousness of being an outsider and a visitor enjoins restraint; and there are other considerations. Like most people who have worked in, and long researched, a particular country or community, I have an affection for place and people. Also I am conscious that aggressive condemnation of Papua New Guineans may be used by those who want to cut Australian aid to Papua New Guinea or impose harsh conditions that would almost certainly be counterproductive in Port Moresby.¹⁷ At times I describe behaviour by Papua New Guineans that would obviously be condemned in Australia, and in my attempts to explain it I am tempted to apply one standard at home and another when away. That may be appropriate, but it also leads to rationalising, excusing, explaining away rather than analysing and judging. I am still more confident and forthright when writing about Australian policies towards Papua New Guinea. One of the strengths of Sean Dorney's reporting has been his capacity to expose and analyse the moral and legal failings of Papua New Guineans, and at the same time demonstrate a sympathy, even affection, for the people.¹⁸

Personal factors have a greater influence on analysis than an awareness of national interests or of being an outsider. On 28 March 2000 the first meeting in the new millennium of the sixth national parliament opened with the firing of a 21 gun salute; the police band, defence force troops, provincial groups in traditional dress, children and others marching in parade; and the Governor-General Sir Silas Atopare outlining the government's program for the next year. Three days later I made the short journey down Independence Drive from the archives to the new national parliament and took

14 *Oli*, from the Pidgin for 'they', was used in the 1960s for 'Papua New Guineans'.

15 I accept that in fact I probably had no impact. Some of the articles were rewritten to appear in *Papua New Guinea: Black unity or black chaos?* (Melbourne 1972 and 1974).

16 E.g. 'Crises of god and man: Papua New Guinea political chronicle 1997-99', *Journal of Pacific History*, 34 (1999), 259-64; 'Perspectives on crime and blame', in Beno Boeha and John McFarlane (eds), *Australia and Papua New Guinea: Crime and the bilateral relationship* (Canberra 2000), 280-9.

17 The constraints are apparent when appearing before, say, the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade – the tension is between being both accurate and ensuring continuing generous aid to Papua New Guinea.

18 Sean Dorney, *Papua New Guinea: People politics and history since 1975* (Sydney 1990, rev. edn 2000); and *The Sandline Affair: Politics and mercenaries and the Bougainville crisis* (Sydney 1998).

a seat in the public gallery.¹⁹ The government faced significant issues: an agreement with the International Monetary Fund for emergency funding to rescue the economy had just been announced, half the K267 million contributions to the National Provident Fund were found to be missing, in the Eastern Highlands fighting in the Kofena and Kainantu areas had resulted in 18 deaths and there were reports of high-powered rifles being used, and the Loloata agreement had just been signed by central government and Bougainvillean representatives. But my interest was in people as much as the topics exciting debates.

When I began teaching at the Administrative College in 1966 the Australian government had recently accepted that it had to force the pace of Papua New Guinean advancement in the public service. The course in which I was teaching, 'Stage 2', was designed to take Papua New Guinean public servants and increase the standard of their general education to the level of fifth year in an Australian high school. It attracted some of the most able of the young Papua New Guineans then working for the government. At the same time I was assisting with the teaching of the 58 students enrolled in the University of Papua New Guinea's first preliminary year.²⁰ Gathered from the few students who had completed four years of secondary education in the Territory, or been to teachers college or Australian schools, six of the students were 25 or more, six were 17 or less, and six were women. In a country in which there had been almost no secondary education in government schools before 1957, and where in 1966 only 500 were reaching the fourth year in all schools, the students reaching the administrative college and the university in those early years were exceptional either by ability, chance or family background. As they were graduating from the university from 1970 right when rapid localisation was taking place many were soon in positions of power in the public service. Less predictable was the fact that nearly all chose to stand for election to parliament – even those who were heads of government departments.²¹

As I listened to question time and the debates in Parliament I took particular notice of the Prime Minister, Sir Mekere Morauta, the ex-Prime Minister, Sir Rabbie Namaliu, and the Minister for Transport, Bart Philemon. All were from the first preliminary year of the University of Papua New Guinea. Dr John Waiko spoke, and he had arrived in 1967 to join the second intake. Paul Pora, formerly Minister for Finance, was there, and he was in Stage 2 at the Administrative College in 1967, and later transferred to the University. There were others whom I had known as young men around the campus or Port Moresby, but who had not been in my courses. Later I lunched in the members' dining room with two ex-students and Ministers. In the lively conversation the frequent jokes came from reminiscences, many detailing misunderstandings and failings of naïve young teachers fresh from Australia. By the

¹⁹ I think of it as new, but it was opened in 1984.

²⁰ It was the University of Papua and New Guinea when it was established. For convenience I have omitted the 'and'. I have also used 'Papua New Guinea' for the country and 'Papua New Guineans' for the people before the 'and' was dropped in 1971. There are two histories of the University: Ian Howie-Willis, *A Thousand Graduates: Conflict in university development in Papua New Guinea, 1961-1976* (Canberra 1980); and V. Lynn Meek, *The University of Papua New Guinea: A case study in the sociology of higher education* (Brisbane 1982).

²¹ H. Nelson, 'The University's first year', *New Guinea*, 1:8 (Dec. 66-Jan. 67), 19-24.

coincidence of finding a job in Port Moresby when the University was starting (a fact scarcely known to me) I had come to know some of the generation that would assume positions of power in Papua New Guinea. I had seen them grow from the tentative young men of 19 who had knocked on my door in Waigani to explain that the bus had not come to take them to their breakfast to confident grey-haired men who direct the affairs of the nation. What they do now was inconceivable to their grandparents, scarcely comprehensible to their parents, and astonishing to me – although I had gone along with all the glib statements made at official ceremonies about the opportunities and responsibilities that were soon to be theirs.

As a student of human behaviour I am conscious of the privilege of having been able to observe those profound changes in lives. I appreciate the fact that the ex-students talk frankly with me and in front of me. And when I come to write about recent events in Papua New Guinea I use insights taken from watching and listening to them, but there are some things that I make oblique or leave out altogether. My advantage can be in generalisation, but not detail. Sentiment does not always lead to moderation. The brutal attack on a friend may result in an immediate desire for a tougher police response. Personal relationships need not lead to favouring one side over another. Ex-students oppose each other in the Parliament. In the civil war on Bougainville they were on both sides and in the middle. Ex-students have turned out to be rogues, likeable, but rogues. Thirty years of living in, visiting and thinking about a nation means accumulated sentiment attaching to people and places, and that has its impact on what can be known, what can be said, and what one wants to say.

At the first meeting of the Interim Council of the University of Papua New Guinea held in Port Moresby in October 1965 it was decided to start teaching in February 1966. As the University had neither teachers nor buildings this was a decision dependent on quick and temporary solutions, and it meant that there was little time to think about the content of courses. The history course had to be one familiar to teachers and with books readily available. Bill Gammage had just a few days in February 1966 to find stocks of text books in Sydney and get them consigned to Port Moresby. Bill had a course in modern European and overseas expansion underway by the time that I joined him at the showgrounds. The foundation professor of History, Ken Inglis, did not begin teaching until the start of the undergraduate courses in 1967, but during 1966 he was planning the new courses. He had no doubt that the history of Papua New Guinea was going to be taught, it was just a matter of when and in what way.²²

At the Administrative College Peter Biskup, Cecil Abel and Brian Jinks were already teaching some Papua New Guinea history. Jinks was using Papua and New Guinea examples in his politics and government courses, Biskup and I had both written about Aboriginal history, and I was teaching the economic geography of Papua New Guinea using the World Bank Report as the class text.²³ Much of Elton

22 K.S. Inglis, *The Study of History in Papua and New Guinea: Inaugural lecture* (Port Moresby 1967), was given in July just before he began teaching the first course in Papua and New Guinea history.

23 Biskup's work resulted in the book, *Not Slaves Not Citizens* (Brisbane 1973). While doing a master's degree I had published 'The missionaries and the Aborigines in the Port Phillip district', *Historical Studies*, 12 (1965), 57-67; *The Economic Development of the Territory of Papua New Guinea* (Baltimore 1965).

Brash's English courses was based on new African writings and one of the books set for Preliminary Year English was *Another Country* by the black American novelist (called a 'Negro writer' on the dust jacket), James Baldwin.²⁴ The visit by Tom Mboya, then Minister for Economic Planning and Development in Kenya, had stimulated interest in the history and current events in the new nations of Africa.²⁵ For me, and I presume others, one compelling factor when thinking about the content of courses was daily being confronted by classes of Papua New Guineans (and one Samoan at the University), and it was obvious that they had to know about their own country as well as the rest of the world. It was in that context of trying to teach Papua New Guineans about Papua New Guinea and often settling for makeshift and parallel texts that Jinks asked Biskup and me to join him in writing a history of Papua and New Guinea suitable for high schools and the Administrative College students. We signed a contract in October 1966. Determined not to begin with European discovery, we were pleased with our first sentence, 'Man has been in New Guinea for a long time'. That sentence was soon to look both mundane and sexist.²⁶

The first *Handbook* of the University of Papua New Guinea was published in October 1966 and Inglis committed the new Department of History to teaching the history of Papua New Guinea in the second semester of 1967. The only reference book listed was Charles Rowley, *The New Guinea Villager*. First published in 1965, it was subtitled *A retrospect from 1964*.²⁷ Significant as Rowley's book was, even more surprising in terms of its date of publication and its emphases was Stephen Reed's *The Making of Modern New Guinea*, with its concern for a 'Kanakan revolution', the emergence of a new society from the meeting of Europeans and New Guineans. But Reed's book had been published in 1943, it was out of print, and he could not, of course, foresee the impact of the war and the direction of post-war policies.²⁸ Other anthropologists had written numerous monographs and several of them contained much history. Margaret Mead's *New Lives for Old* was a study of the war on Manus; Peter Lawrence's *Road Belong Cargo* not only followed cults through time, but included a rare, detailed biography of a New Guinean – Yali; and Richard Salisbury, who had written *From Stone to Steel*, was talking about his coming book

24 James Baldwin, *Another Country* (London 1963).

25 Roland Oliver and J.D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa* (Harmondsworth 1962), has the assertion in the Foreword that Asia has been granted 'a history beyond European intrusion' and now Africa had a history beyond those moments 'lit only by the flashes of foreign penetration'. Other books on Africa on my bookshelves from that period are: Basil Davidson, *Which Way Africa? The search for a new society* (Harmondsworth 1964); and Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London 1962, first pub. 1958). Elton Brash had been reading Achebe, and his writings were prescribed at the university. Another book then being discussed was Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A study in historical methodology* (London 1965).

26 After the first chapter the book became the standard foreign perception of explorers, missionaries, administrators, although we were trying to say what was happening to the peoples of Papua New Guinea. It was Jack Golson who enabled us to say as much as we did about the prehistory – he outlined it in talks and on notes he gave to us.

27 C.D. Rowley, *The New Guinea Villager* (Melbourne 1965).

28 S.W. Reed, *The Making of Modern New Guinea with Special Reference to Culture Contact in the Mandated Territory* (Philadelphia 1943).

which would give both a European and a villager perspective on history.²⁹ On a visit north in 1966, Inglis had brought with him a copy of K.M. Panikkar's *Asia and Western Dominance*. It was, Panikkar had claimed in 1953, the first time an Asian student had attempted to 'see and understand' 450 years of European activities in Europe. Panikkar was set as a text for the first history undergraduate course to be taught at the University of Papua New Guinea.³⁰

As we prepared to teach Papua New Guinea history in the second semester of 1967, then, we were conscious of the way Asians were bringing Asian perspectives to their history, and that Africans were being put into African history; we had several books on white endeavours in Papua New Guinea (such as those by Souter, Mair and Legge); we had the lonely *New Guinea Villager*; and much other material that was fragmented, coming from several disciplines, and varying in its quality and purpose.³¹ The outside men in the government service, the missionaries, and Sir Hubert Murray had written extensively about what they did, and sometimes they were illuminating about those that they wished to govern or convert. Ken Inglis demonstrated what we might do in a lecture on the Russian traveller and scientist, Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay, who had first landed on the Madang Coast (he left his name on the Rai Coast) in the 1870s. In the writings then available Inglis had sufficient information to name individual New Guineans who had met Maclay and say something of their immediate and long-term responses to his visit.³² That set a pattern of not trying to present a Papua New Guinean perspective or a history of Papua New Guineans, but of giving two sides. This also worked effectively where we were dealing with topics other than those that were obviously meetings. For example, it was simple enough for us to look up the labour regulations governing plantation workers and talk about hours of work, rates of pay, ration scales, rules governing recruiting, and changes over time. The Territory annual reports provided generalised information on the numbers of recruits, which districts they came from, which industries they worked in, and how long they signed on for; and there were usually one or two old ex-labourers living in Port Moresby who we could talk to; but in tutorials there were students who had lived

29 M. Mead, *New Lives for Old: Cultural transformation - Manus, 1928-1953* (London 1956); P. Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo: A study of the cargo movement in the southern Madang District New Guinea* (Melbourne 1964); R. Salisbury, *From Stone to Steel* (Melbourne 1962); and Vunamami: *Economic transformation in a traditional society* (Melbourne 1970). These are just indicative. Some other useful books were: C. Belshaw, *The Great Village* (London 1957); I. Hogbin, *Transformation Scene* (London 1951); W. Stanner, *The South Seas in Transition* (Sydney 1953). K.E. Read, 'Effects of the Pacific War in the Markham Valley, New Guinea', *Oceania*, 18:2 (Dec. 1947), 95-116, was a valuable article. The *New Guinea Research Bulletins* had appeared up to about number 15, and many contained relevant material.

30 The first issue of *The Journal of Pacific History* was dated 1966, and it published a revision of Jim Davidson's 1954 inaugural lecture: 'Problems of Pacific History', 1 (1966), 5-21. I cannot remember references to Davidson. That may have been because we did not receive the article until we were thinking about the issues, and Davidson was asking for less than some Africans, Asians and Black Americans.

31 J.D. Legge, *Australian Colonial Policy* (Sydney 1956); and Lucy Mair, *Australia in New Guinea* (London 1948, a revised edition came out from Melbourne University Press in 1970). Something of the variety of people who were contributing to the history of Papua New Guinea can be seen in *Second Waigani Seminar: The history of Melanesia* (Port Moresby and Canberra 1969).

32 He was lecturing before C.L. Sentinella translated *Miklouho-Maclay: New Guinea diaries 1871-1883* (Madang 1975); and E.M. Webster, *The Moon Man: A biography of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay* (Melbourne 1984). The most readily available source was F. Greenop, *Who Travels Alone: The biography of Nicolai Miklouho-Maclay* (Sydney 1944).

alongside plantations and those whose fathers had worked on them. Similarly when teaching about the Second World War, missions, village officials, and patrol officers, the history staff could present the official policy, the legal framework, how the literate claimed they behaved, say something about what was said about Papua New Guineans in the written record, obtain limited testimony from those involved, and then invite discussion in tutorials. Many of those tutorials were rich occasions for me, and I hope of some interest to those Papua New Guineans and Australians who were there as students.

Later when I was writing about Papua New Guineans – such as Papuan medical assistants and those who served in the Pacific Islands Regiment – I was continuing what had seemed effective in teaching. I was certainly concerned about the experience of Papua New Guineans and I talked to them, but the articles were saying at least as much about the policies and prejudices of Australians who managed and commented on Papua New Guineans employed in Australian dominated institutions.³³ The book on gold mining, *Black White & Gold*, was more obviously about meetings: for each goldfield I tried to say something about the peoples whose lands were mined, how the miners behaved, and what happened to the labourers the miners brought with them.³⁴ To my surprise each goldfield had a very different history: white miners with the same inclinations and presumptions simply behaved differently on Misima to what they did on the Yodda or Keveri or the Lakekamu. Bill Gammage, who had not learnt the approach from me because he and others were already talking and writing in a similar way, made this form of history richer in detail and more elegant in presentation in his article on the Rabaul strike and in his recent book *The Sky Travellers*.³⁵

In the early years when we began teaching the history of Papua New Guinea, I would have written about Papua New Guineans, trying to see experiences from their point of view, paraphrasing what they thought about what had happened to them, and assessing the impact on Papua New Guinean communities. But by the time I may have known enough to attempt to do that, circumstances and attitudes had changed, and I was saved from presumption. Australia was handing powers to Papua New Guineans and they were rapidly taking control of institutions – from parliament to the post office – and making them their own. It was reasonable to think that they were about to shift behind the desks once occupied by foreign historians, re-read old sources, exploit new ones, and write their own histories. Also, where in 1966 we had been on the end of the movement that was putting Asians and Africans into their own history, by the time Papua New Guinea was becoming independent, various peoples around the world were saying that they owned their own past and they resented outsiders telling them who they had been, what had happened to them, and why they were who they were. That movement to claim group histories was probably strongest among

33 H. Nelson, 'Brown doctors: white prejudice', *New Guinea*, 5:2 (1970), 21-8; and 'Hold the Good Name of the Soldier: The discipline of Papuan and New Guinean Infantry Battalions, 1940-1946', *Journal of Pacific History*, 15 (1980), 202-16.

34 H. Nelson, *Black, White & Gold: Goldmining in Papua New Guinea 1878-1930* (Canberra 1976).

35 Bill Gammage, 'The Rabaul Strike, 1929', *Journal of Pacific History*, 10 (1975), 3-29; *The Sky Travellers: Journeys in New Guinea 1938-1939* (Melbourne 1998).

minorities crowded out of national histories by those who were more numerous and had greater access to power, education and the media. Aborigines, Afro-Americans, Hawaiians, Maoris and American Indians had all suffered exclusion and made strong claims for both recognition in the national history and for a another history – one that was different from that of the dominant groups. Those arguments were put less frequently and less stridently by Papua New Guineans who had retained languages and land, were numerically dominant, and now had their own nation. For peoples who possessed the present, history was not as important as it was for those who felt dispossessed of both past and present. The fact that there were few Papua New Guineans wanting to lay claim to the past by argument or by putting forward an alternative view, did little to diminish the inhibitions felt by foreigners who may have wanted to present Papua New Guineans with their own history.³⁶

The restraints on writing about current events – sentiment, the sense of being an outsider, personal considerations – were paralleled by the factors that help persuade historians to choose one topic over another. In 2000, based in Canberra, I like to take a perspective from somewhere in the Coral Sea, looking north and south, explaining Papua New Guineans to Australians, Australians to Papua New Guineans, Australians to Australians, but not completing the reflections by trying to tell Papua New Guineans about Papua New Guineans. The young Papuan woman at Jackson's International Airport had indeed asked a complex question, 'Have you been to our country before?' I had, but it had been different then, and it has been different on every arrival since. This time I even got confused trying to drive across Gordons to the University. The new Poreporena Freeway blocked my way; but then visiting historians are likely to find the signs hard to read.

³⁶ Klaus Neumann not only wrote about the Tolai, but about the way they selected from and presented their history. The general Tolai reaction was appreciation for someone who learnt their language, took their perspective seriously and recorded and made known their past: *Not the Way It Really Was: Constructing the Tolai past* (Honolulu 1992).

Sniffing the Person: Writing Lives in Pacific History

PETER HEMPENSTALL

Ian Campbell made a remark in a recent review of Elizabeth Wood Ellem's biography of Queen Sālote which laid the platform for this essay. He opened it by surveying the steadily growing number of biographies in Pacific history since Gavan Daws a quarter of a century ago claimed that biography was a genre not much practised by Pacific historians.¹ Campbell felt that this showed biography was one of the priorities in the Pacific, despite the lip service given to Islander oriented history. I thought he was wrong and I set out to prove him wrong.

In fact I was wrong and Campbell was right. Thomas Carlyle certainly never had the Pacific in mind when he wrote that 'history is the essence of innumerable biographies',² but it supports his case. A concerted effort at searching the field reveals that Pacific history *is* riddled with biographies, and much of the thematic fabric of the field is woven with biographical portraits of one kind or another.

Pacific historians tend to identify the beginnings of Pacific history with James Wightman Davidson, the world's first Professor of Pacific History, appointed to the new Australian National University in 1950. He developed a school of research which set out explicitly to reverse the pattern of pre-war histories about the Pacific region. They tended to be about the colonial policies of European nations and how they were put into effect in the empires; hardly a brown face was ever seen. Davidson preached that Islanders on the receiving end of this colonialism had histories as well. It should be possible to write those histories if researchers did fieldwork in the islands, visited enough archives, sat in enough villages and spoke to the people. The 'new' Pacific history was to be about the impact that European contact had on the island societies and their populations. Many of the 'Davidson school's' early signature publications were biographical in nature, for example, the *Pacific Islands Portraits* series. The editors intended that the first volume should show 'what life in the Pacific Islands meant to a number of people'³ and the succeeding portraits adopted a quite innovative

1 I. Campbell, review of Elizabeth Wood-Ellem, *Queen Salote of Tonga* (Auckland 1999) in *Journal of Pacific History*, 35 (2000), 234-5.

2 Thomas Carlyle, 'On History' (1830), reprinted in F. Stern (ed.), *Varieties of History* (London 1970), 93.

3 J.W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra 1973), v. This essay does not pretend to be a comprehensive coverage of all the biographies produced in the Pacific or about Pacific Islanders. The texts mentioned are examples useful to my arguments and there are many more, often better biographies not used for the essay. Doug Munro's piece in this volume adds considerably to a listing of biographical works and should be read as a coda to this paper.

definition of its 'number of people'. Six of the dozen essays were on individuals; the others covered a father and son, an entire family, two rivals, and three were portraits of groups of people. Some managed studies of character and wit. One – the essay on George Tupou of Tonga – for all its scholarship, barely rises above 'official biography', a kinder name for hagiography. Davidson's essay on Peter Dillon reveals that biography was not just an academic exercise for historians, or at least not for Davidson himself. The readiness for self-involvement in the Pacific, he wrote, 'has always been the surest way by which a European can bridge the cultural gulf between himself and his island hosts'.⁴ He was explicitly referring to Peter Dillon the trader, but also invoking his favoured process of 'participant history', in which the line between functioning as an historian and being an individual searcher after a culturally immersed self was always being crossed. The text could reflect back life, a very modernist position.

Papua New Guinea Portraits of 1978 was one of the spin-offs from this series. It was a book about the expatriate European experience in the old Territory of Papua New Guinea under Australian rule and was no less arbitrary in its choice of subjects. Jim Griffin, its editor, admitted they were dictated by which authors were available to write pieces at the time and by their particular interests. Major figures from the expatriate experience are missing. There are no women, no non-Europeans, though *Portraits* does make a kind of biographical breakthrough in rendering visible people not normally considered biographical material, like W.C. Groves the educationist and Paul Mason the coastwatcher.⁵ Enlivened though it is by Jim Griffin's inimitable introductory style, it remains nonetheless a quirky miscellany of essays on dead white males.

The major themes that Davidson's students focused on during the 1950s and 1960s included the Pacific Islands labour trade, in which the old kidnapping arguments were challenged and revised, the impact of early explorers, beachcombers and traders, the so-called 'fatal impact' that missionaries and disease and Western culture had on island societies, and the 'political' histories of island communities in various (but mainly British) colonial empires. The representation of individual lives was implicit in much of this history, indeed quite explicit in portraits of beachcombers, traders and missionaries that resulted. A number of monumental single life biographies also emerged: Francis West on Hubert Murray, Noel Rutherford on the missionary Shirley Baker, Deryck Scarr on John Thurston, the colonial Governor of Fiji.⁶ Deryck Scarr's *The Majesty of Colour: A life of Sir John Bates Thurston* has Boswellian aspirations. Indeed Scarr proposes to get even closer to Thurston than Boswell achieved in his *Life of Johnson* through the fecundity of Thurston's private as well as official correspondence.⁷ In the event Scarr achieves finely crafted edges to his portrait but he does not approach Boswell's ability to set Samuel Johnson in front of readers in

4 'Peter Dillon: The voyages of the *Calder* and *St Patrick*', *ibid.*, 11.

5 James Griffin (ed.), *Papua New Guinea Portraits* (Canberra 1978), xxvi.

6 Francis West, *Hubert Murray: The Australian pro-consul* (Melbourne 1968); Noel Rutherford, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga* (Melbourne 1971); Deryck Scarr, *The Majesty of Colour: A life of Sir John Bates Thurston*, 2 vols (Canberra 1973 and 1980).

7 D. Scarr, *I, the Very Bayonet*, volume I of *The Majesty of Colour* (Canberra 1973), ix.

his living vitality by living with him 'o'er each scene'⁸ as Johnson advances through life in every stage of dress and undress. Unfortunately the biography also assumes Boswellian proportions in the deluge of overwriting that cascades out of the two volumes. For that reason alone, rather than Scarr's own argument that biographies of colonial governors were a dead genre,⁹ the biography may not have achieved the reputation it deserves.

All these are in the nature of 'sociographies',¹⁰ the setting of lives within a social milieu, a political context and the physical landscapes of the islands. Most Pacific biographies tend to be more about the surfaces attached to the lives of their subjects than the inner curves of those lives themselves. Being pioneering, they had to do the groundwork of exploring the cultural matrix of the contact encounter and this tended to dominate the personal. We have become very good at these explorations of the cultural space. They have reached their highpoint in the 'ethnographic history' of Greg Denning where life stories have become the framework for reflective cultural history.¹¹ But ethnographic history may dampen the biographical impulse by subordinating the force of the individual to the rules of structure, the prescriptions of community, the imperatives of ritualised lives. In lesser hands it can make 'pressed flower arrangements'¹² of Pacific Islanders and non-Islanders alike. The criticism that has been made of Australian biographers – that they have been far too shy to explore theories of the self and of identity formation¹³ – applies equally to Pacific biographers, of an earlier age and of this.

We shall return to this theme, but one, partial exception to this judgement stands out – Gavan Daws's *Dream of Islands* of 1980. This is a quite explicit, extended essay on journeyings into the self, constructed around the Pacific lives of John Williams, Herman Melville, Walter Murray Gibson, R.L. Stevenson and Paul Gauguin. It explores how a state of mind – the Pacific itself – entered into men's souls and took possession of them. Interestingly, Daws quotes Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, famous for the polished irony of its title, which set out to destroy the unctuous, respectable idols of the Victorian age. Daws is aware of Strachey's limitations, though he does not disavow his debunking intentions. He uses approvingly Strachey's technique of fishing up characteristic specimens from the vast ocean of material on each character, to be turned over and over in his hands as objects of biographical curiosity.¹⁴ The book opens though with a very un-Stracheyesque exploration of one of Pacific history's most enduring metaphors of the Pacific self – the Noble Savage – lending it a biographical dimension which, to my knowledge, has never been taken further. Daws demonstrates how Europe's earliest opportunity to engage with the

8 James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Oxford 1980 (c1904; first published 1791), 22.

9 Scarr, *I, the Very Bayonet*, ix.

10 James Walter, 'Biography, psychobiography and cultural space', in Ian Donaldson et al. (eds), *Shaping Lives: Reflections on biography* (Canberra 1992), 262 *passim*

11 For example *Islands and Beaches. Discourse on a silent land, Marquesas 1774-1880* (Melbourne 1980); *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* (Cambridge 1992).

12 Alan Ward, book review in *Journal of Pacific History*, 31 (1996), 241.

13 Walter, 'Biography', 266, 286.

14 Gavan Daws, *A Dream of Islands. Voyages of self-discovery in the South Seas* (Milton 1980), xiii-xiv.

inner life of individual Pacific Islanders was lost when Ahutoru, Tupaia and Mai were treated as specimens in the salons of Europe, exemplary of the Noble Savage, reified in pantomime.¹⁵

His treatment of John Williams returns to Strachey's tactic of showing a glorious destiny subverted by flaws in the self. Williams – the perfect, self-improving, commercially respectable missionary, prepared to invest his life for a commensurate income of the spirit, driven to go one step further, to build his boat, to leave his wife – suddenly loses control of his life. A certain ironic undertow pulls at the clay feet of Williams throughout Daws's essay. 'There was important work to be done, he knew; he was the man to do it; and it was always to be done somewhere else. He had to be away . . . Williams was one of those nineteenth century figures who kept turning up on the edges of the world's maps, compelled to go looking for themselves in one place after another.'¹⁶

All Daws's subjects were looking for themselves – an explicit, if not very original biographical trope. But – and here's another Strachey-Daws irony – none of them wanted in the end to be free of the West. 'The Other' remained on the page or the canvas, outside their real experience, a mere symbol. It is an interesting speculation – and no more than that – how much of the autobiographer lies in Daws the biographer. His frontispiece is a quote from a Paul Theroux character: 'To be born is to be shipwrecked upon an island'. In his ruminations upon men being self-conscious about the meaning in their lives, Daws transcends the biographical drive at the heart of early Pacific history and demonstrates the potential of the genre within the field.¹⁷

Daws was Davidson's successor as Professor of Pacific History in Canberra and never settled to continuing the work of Davidson (who died prematurely) or to recasting its direction in a wholesale manner. Daws was a loner, perceived to be someone self-conscious about the meaning of his own life, as much a film-maker and script writer as he was a brilliant synthesising historian and gifted teacher. He left the Chair after several years to return to Hawaii. His is a life that begs a good biography itself.

But these Western essays into lives are only half the equation, the other half being the Pacific Islanders and their relationship to this writing practice of the West. The 'sociographic' nature of much earlier Pacific history tended to render Pacific Islanders as collectivities behaving according to a cultural template, even when they were being differentiated by name and kin group and place and given historical

15 Ibid., 9-12.

16 Ibid., 45.

17 There is a recent trend towards autobiographical reflection among practising Pacific historians. This proceeds from the field's reaction to the politics of post-colonial critique, with its emphasis on the engagement of scholars in decolonising their fields and the connections between the author and the text. There is also something of a generational quality to the writing, as a new, younger guild of writers re-draws the parameters within which they 'do' Pacific history. See Brij V. Lal (ed.), *Pacific Islands History: Journeys and transformations* (Canberra 1992); D. Munro (ed.), *Reflections on Pacific Historiography*, special issue, *The Journal of Pacific Studies*, 20 (1996); R. Borofsky (ed.), *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An invitation to remake history* (Honolulu 2000); Brij V. Lal, *Chalo Jahaji: On a journey through indenture in Fiji* (Canberra and Suva 2000).

agency.¹⁸ In fact works about 'agency' have been the dominant form of history-writing about Pacific Islanders that could be said to have a 'biographical' slant. Agency has been shown to be a dense field, full of layers and complexities,¹⁹ rather than a simple one-line revisionist formula for how Pacific Islanders acted or reacted. But even the more complex appreciations of agency do not solve the problem of telling the story of Pacific Islander lives in terms which, as individuals, they might use for themselves.

One area where many Islander life stories have been assayed, by Islanders and non-Islanders alike, is 'saints' lives', or the work of church and mission personnel. This is the place where the boundary between European and Pacific Islander lives has been most routinely crossed. Religious history lends itself naturally to the standard biographical tropes – birth and death, of a glorious kind; the struggle with human nature; the epiphanal encounter; the personal relationship with creator and cosmos; most especially the centrality of an inner life to understanding what it means to be human. In fact, little of this has been handled very deeply in Pacific church/religious biography over the last 40 years. The human material is present. Munro argues over 1,500 Islander pastors went overseas to serve their churches between 1819 and the 1970s.²⁰ And a rich vein of biographical pen portraits is present in church literature. Overwhelmingly, however, its purpose is edification of the faithful, not the probing of self and identity. Where the archived life stories of evangelists have been disinterred and published (such as in the Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea's collection of autobiographical essays by local Christians),²¹ they exist to testify to the mission of Christ's kingdom and the *exemplary* life of his servant, or they assume the quality of a log book of daily life spent in the service of the church. Occasionally one acquires a glimpse of a more personal sojourn, such as in the story of the Tongan Semisi Nau, whose autobiographical script in the Roviana language of the Solomons shows how he was made over in mind and spirit, finding Jesus in every place he walked.²²

The scholarly tradition of dealing with saints' lives has taken us further into evaluating that mask for the life-as-lived, their 'agency', especially the role evangelists played in the process of conversion and the meanings they gave to the Word as it filtered from them to their Pacific Islander listeners. Though Island pastors were seen to play a role in much early Pacific history, not till the Crocombes'

18 I realised this only lately in respect of Davidson's essay on Lauaki in *Pacific Islands Portraits* – the inspiration for my own thematic interest in the field. It is more an extended essay on the political workings within Samoan culture, using Lauaki as exemplar, than a Life of Lauaki. He remains in shadow, a series of cultural gestures rather than flesh and blood.

19 David Chappell, 'Active agents versus passive victims: decolonized historiography or problematic paradigm', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 7 (1995), 303-26.

20 Doug Munro and Andrew Thornley, 'Pacific Islander pastors and missionaries: some historiographic and analytical issues', unpublished ms, 2000, p.3.

21 Gernot Fugmann (ed.), *The Birth of an Indigenous Church*, Point Series No 10 (Goroka 1986).

22 Allan K. Davidson (ed.), *Semisi Nau: The story of my life. A Tongan missionary at Ontong Java* (Suva 1997).

resurrection of *The Works of Ta'unga* were they given centre stage.²³ From the point of view of biography, the interior life of pastors remains hidden in the record, even where the archives ring with their voices. Pastors wrote what European mission administrators wanted to hear. The *Life* project was not appealing to them unless it signalled a story of redemption. It is difficult enough to create a continuous life-line for individual pastors, let alone explore the meaning they gave to their journey across religious and cultural traditions.²⁴

One of the most adventurous experiments in getting to grips with these problems is Doug Munro and Michael Goldsmith's *Tales of Elekana*,²⁵ an attempt to create a life in writing for the Cook Islands evangelist to Tuvalu who achieved iconic status in the community histories of the atoll chain. Rather than taking refuge in a conventional narrative thread they have formatted the story of Elekana to reflect both the varied nature of the materials and its unevenness. A variety of texts – oral and written – about Elekana's life and its meanings for Tuvaluans is juxtaposed, the authors hovering over them as part of the recovery and enactment of the stories by present day Tuvaluans. They induce the re-birth of Elekana's voice through assorted strategies encompassing editorial interpretation and reflection, and the interleaving of their own stories. The method works as an academic exercise for the reader prepared to wander discursively from story to theorisation to analysis and back, but in the end Elekana remains elusive in all the complexity of his personhood.

A second arena for the *storying* of Pacific Islander lives developed out of the 'springtime of black literature' associated with nation building, especially in Papua New Guinea in the 1970s. Western institutions of learning provided the 'chat room' for much of this and the language and modes of transmission tended to be that of the colonising power. With Islanders separated from one another by differences of language and colonial experience, conversations also tended to be with the former colonial master. This dyad affected the type of literature produced.²⁶ New writing poured out in journals like *Kovave*, *Gigibori*, *Papua New Guinea Writing*, *Bikmaus* and the *Papua New Guinea Pocket Series*. This early writing inserted itself into the decolonising politics of the region; it was deliberately designed to overcome the denigration of Melanesian culture and behaviour that took place during the colonial age. Short stories, poetry and plays often revealed personal anger and emotion in direct and concrete language (written in a second language) though their end point was often a sense of national or cultural identity, not the personal. A trilogy of autobiographies, by Kiki, Matane and Somare, prowled the borders of the genre without ever breaking through into sophisticated musing on personal formation. Mostly they set out to answer 'what it was like' questions: 'what it was like to grow

23 Munro and Thornley, 'Pacific Islander pastors', 9-10. This essay surveys the efflorescence of pastor oriented histories that followed this breakthrough, though the authors point up some continuing omissions, such as the lack of any thematic treatment of missionaries or Pacific Island evangelism in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* (Cambridge 1997).

24 Munro and Thornley, *ibid.*, 23. They point out that the model of life presented has an overwhelmingly Samoan look about it, for Samoans are over-represented in the records of the churches' outreach in the Pacific.

25 *An Exploration in Pacific Mission History* (Christchurch, forthcoming).

26 Morgan Tuimaleali ifano, 'Islanders and island oriented historiography: a literature review', unpublished ms, p.7.

up in a remote and isolated New Guinean forest; what it was like for a ten year old boy to be dragged into a mission school; what it was like to be insulted and bullied by Europeans; what it was like to acquire a strange and alien education; and what it was like to wake up to the modern realities of New Guinea and to take part in the shaping of the country's fate'.²⁷

Albert Maori Kiki's *Kiki. Ten thousand years in a lifetime*²⁸ provoked bemused distrust, even hostility, as the first story of the 'stone age' Papuan straddling wide cultural and technological gaps in a single life. He survives whole and prospers but we only vaguely grasp the contours of his person, perhaps because this is a 'directed autobiography', told into a microphone at convenient intervals and edited by Ulli Beier, the Professor from African literature who set himself to make Papua New Guinean lives and literature known. Somare's *Sana*²⁹ is a memorial text for the new élite leader of the nation. It rehearses his successful negotiation of customary initiation at home and initiation into the mysteries of education and politics on the national stage. As such it never leaves the surface of his public performances. Paulias Matane's *My Childhood in New Guinea*³⁰ gives an inkling of a different sense of person through the language of its telling. Disjunctions, *non sequiturs* and connections that appear alien to a Western voice convey the sense that we are in a different cultural frame.

Fiji and the University of the South Pacific figured in this wave of experiential literature, as did other groups gesturing in other languages and other cultural frameworks in French and American domains of the Pacific.³¹ Very little was written in the vernacular. Most was locked into Western print capitalism which created and sustained certain acceptable forms and images. Biographic and autobiographic probings of the self were a long way from indigenous concerns. In fact, as Hau'ofa said in 1975, it was for Islanders a painful – and embarrassing – experience to do what the auto/biographical tradition required one to do: to sit and listen to someone talking about her or himself.³²

Albert Wendt solved this problem by experimenting with historical writing, through inserting himself into a conversation about its meaning in his Masters thesis about the *mau*.³³ Then he left *palagi* style history altogether to convey its truth value in novels and stories. In doing so he has bequeathed us 'a broader, critical, and more completely affirmative saga of what it means to be a Samoan'³⁴ than any modern work

27 U. Beier (ed.), *Black Writing from New Guinea* (St Lucia 1973), xii.

28 Melbourne 1968.

29 *Sana: An autobiography of Michael Somare* (Port Moresby 1975).

30 London 1972.

31 Tuimaleali' ifano, 'Islanders and island oriented historiography', 8-10. One might also mention the pen portraits of leading élites drawn up by Christian churches as part of their service to constructing a tradition for the new nations of Melanesia. They present selective, uneven mini-essays and rarely stray beyond a surface treatment of background and external life. E.g. F. Steinbauer (ed.), *Shaping the Future* (Madang 1974); Brian Macdonald-Milne (ed.), *Yumi Stanap* (Vila 1981).

32 E. Hau'ofa, 'Anthropology and Pacific Islanders', *Oceania*, 14:4 (1975), 283-9.

33 Albert Wendt, 'Guardians and wards', MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1965.

34 Rob Wilson, 'Introduction: toward imagining a new Pacific', in V. Hereniko and Rob Wilson (eds), *Inside Out: Literature, cultural politics and identity in the new Pacific* (Lanham 1999), 6.

of biography or history. Wendt has reminded us also how Western history-making orders memory and it is re-ordered in derivative ways by Pacific Islanders in their writings from the islands;³⁵ much the same applies to their approaches to biography. To deal with the insides of Pacific Islanders, their senses of *being*, Wendt argues for the novel form as 'the most complex histories that have been written';³⁶ clearly he never did leave History. Hau'ofa's works do the same, probing the insides quite literally in his *Kisses in the Nederends* in which he reveals the deep connection between a pain in the arse and the psyche.³⁷

Off to one side of Pacific history's wrestling with biography lies the New Zealand tradition, with its own internal debates about authority to write lives across cultures and the acceptable forms in which to do it. It is a curious thing, but Pacific history and Aotearoa New Zealand–Maori history have developed side by side over the years with very little interpenetration. New Zealand history has in fact a lot to teach biographers in the Pacific, cutting deeper and more reflectively into the problem of telling lives across racial and cultural divides than Pacific history has yet managed to do. Biography as a genre in New Zealand has wrestled with the same prejudices displayed by conservative historians everywhere, who are tied to 'the hard assurances of carefully sifted documents'³⁸ and avoid straying from the linear narratives they extrude from the archives. Jock Phillips, chief historian of the History group in the Ministry for Culture and Heritage in Wellington, in 1985 saw biography's task as 'focussing upon the simplest and primary task, the study of the individual'. His not-so-subtle implication was that biography was the handmaiden, nothing more, to the 'richer and more complex intellectual achievement' that was Real History.³⁹ Paradoxically his statement came in the introduction to a volume of essays on New Zealand biography which he edited, to mark the opening of the Stout Research Centre at Victoria University, Wellington. The volume asked productive questions about the nature of biographical practice and its ability to frame questions that made sense across cultures. Western biography's cultural pull towards representing the coherent personality marked in the archival record was under interrogation from Maori writers and thinkers, especially in the context of the new *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* project. How to introduce the ancestors who are part of the connective tissue of Maori relations with Aotearoa the land, and with all of eastern Polynesia, into such a *Dictionary* of national identity stories? How to bridge the tension between Pakeha and Maori versions of history and personhood?

These have been continuing tensions in the life of New Zealand biographers and bicultural historians. During the 1970s and 1980s there were attacks on perceived 'gatekeepers' of the Maori past, like Michael King, whose biography of Te Puea was slated as the work of an outsider who bared sensitive personalities and their

35 A. Wendt, 'Novelists and historians and the art of remembering', in Antony Hooper et al. (eds), *Class and Culture* (Suva 1987), 86-7.

36 D. Hanlon and V. Hereniko, 'An interview with Albert Wendt', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 5:1 (1993), 118.

37 Subramani, 'An interview with Epeli Hau'ofa', in Hereniko and Wilson, *Inside Out*, 42-3.

38 J. C. Davis, 'Clio's lost sheep', in Jock Phillips (ed.), *Biography in New Zealand* (Wellington 1985), 12.

39 'Introduction', *ibid.*, 1-2.

difficulties for the world to see.⁴⁰ His photographic and social history of Maori was also caught up in concerns about violating the context in which images were produced and taking away from appropriate elders the recalling of the persons and their culture that were recorded.⁴¹ Out of this ferment arose King's own exploration of the roots of his identity, the equivalent of his *whakapapa*, in *Being Pakeha*.⁴² With the beginnings of government recognition of Maori grievances over land, expressed in the work of the Waitangi Tribunal, a new level of cooperation between Maori and Pakeha was enabled. Judith Binney's *Redemption Songs* is the culmination of this process to this point, though her work antedates the Tribunal and is independent of its effects. *Redemption Songs* is a Life of the Maori leader and church founder Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki.⁴³ Binney introduces it as an 'interpretative biography', but not one that proclaims a single understanding of its subject. Her writing reflects the conflicting traditions around this founder of the oldest, surviving indigenous scripturally based religion in the land. She lays a wealth of texts side by side, gently probing them for interpretation without closing upon any definitive meaning, for they cannot be so reconciled. Like King at a different level, Binney sees all the ancestors of both peoples in Aotearoa entwined and believes historical stories can be told from inside and outside, and at an individual, biographical level. Individuals are important in the Western tradition of biography because they 'break through and defy the structures and received truths of a particular time, place and culture'.⁴⁴ She makes Te Kooti have this effect within his life and afterwards within Aotearoa New Zealand, in a biography that defends some established European forms of interpreting the past while illuminating Te Kooti for Maori by respecting their ways of seeing.

By a long-winded route, this brings us back to the theme of dealing with personhood across cultures. How to lay bare the stranger who must always remain stranger?⁴⁵ If the literary route of a Wendt or of a Sia Figiel is closed to most of us, then, though it pains one to say it, we must look to the social scientists for some answers, or at least to more complex ways of asking the same question. There has been a long history of discourse within anthropology concerning psychological issues, from Rivers's work on perception and Malinowski's on Freud, through Mead's studies on culture and personality to later work on motivation and cognition.⁴⁶ All started from the premise that psychological matters pertain to the single, individual person, and the practice of describing those processes in individuals of other cultures used European language glosses whose meanings were taken to be obvious and equivalent to the subject's terms for them. The West's notion of the 'self', of the

40 Michael King, *Te Puea, a Biography* (Auckland 1977). A critical review by Syd Jackson is in *Mana*, 1:10 (1977), 2, 5.

41 Michael King, *Maori: A photographic and social history* (Auckland 1984). See review by Ash Spice in *The Press*, 24 Dec. 1983.

42 *Being Pakeha: An encounter with New Zealand and the Maori renaissance* (Auckland 1985).

43 Judith Binney, *Redemption Songs: A life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki* (Auckland 1995).

44 *Ibid.*, 524.

45 Davis, 'Clio's lost sheep', 17.

46 This section is based on the survey by John Kirkpatrick and Geoffrey White in their introduction to *Person, Self and Experience: Exploring Pacific ethnopsychologies* (Berkeley 1985), 3-32.

'person' – that 'inner core of thought and emotion that is only partially displayed in behaviour'⁴⁷ – was usually taken as a reference point against which observations of other cultures were compared, measured and confirmed.

Ethnopsychology studies of the last 15 years have moved away from these assumptions, working out from notions of self-understanding in other cultures to seek the cultural codings whereby their sense of personhood might be defined. Kirkpatrick and White's *Person, Self and Experience* documents this shift away from a hard, Western scientific psychology towards more subtle cultural readings of the self. Their mantra might be chanted thus: 'Persons are points of intersection between the subjective and the social'.⁴⁸

What exactly does this mean to biographers struggling to tell their narratives of lives within sensitive cultural boundaries? Kirkpatrick and White provide a range of researchers' answers, from the notion that there is a biological substrate to emotions that underpins cultural systems of accepted behaviour,⁴⁹ to the completely social definition of emotion as relational, as lying between people and triggered in the relationship.⁵⁰ The 'tied' self – tied to structures and relationships – or what another American anthropologist calls the 'consocial' self, assumes a central explanatory importance for biography. The person becomes 'a locus of shared biographies'.⁵¹ No agreement has yet been reached that a set of generalisations can be applied across the Pacific, though various commentators claim that 'a kind of comparability emerges across the grain' of specific Pacific examples.⁵²

One of the most controversial studies leaning in this direction is Marilyn Strathern's *The Gender of the Gift*. Her argument is a very elaborate and complex dismantling of the way we conventionally think about the relationship of the individual person to society in Melanesia. 'Persons' cannot be abstracted, or conceptualised, distinct from the relations that bring them together. 'Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividual as they are individually conceived' is one of Strathern's gnomic pronouncements. 'They contain a generalised sociality within.'⁵³ Social life for this 'person' consists in a constant movement from one state to another, from one type of sociality to another which is manifested through numerous cultural forms, of which gender is one, principal form. 'Being "male" or "female" emerges as a holistic unitary state under particular circumstances.'⁵⁴ Since further paraphrase of this very difficult argument can lead the

47 Ibid., 415.

48 Ibid., 9.

49 Eleanor Ruth Gerber, 'Rage and obligation: Samoan emotion in conflict', *ibid.*, 121-67. See also Jeanette Mageo, *Theorizing Self in Samoa: Emotions, genders and sexualities* (Ann Arbor 1998).

50 See Andrew Strathern's review of this work in *Pacific Studies*, 11:1 (1987), 158.

51 Michael Lieber, quoted in Hereniko and Wilson (eds), *Inside Out*, 150.

52 Strathern, review, 159. See also Pamela Stewart and A. Strathern (eds), *Identity Work: Constructing Pacific lives* (Ithaca 2000). Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia* (Berkeley 1988) also treats Melanesia as a 'single instance' open to comparative analysis of its constructions of personhood.

53 Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, 13.

54 Ibid., 14.

innocent historian-biographer onto very unsteady conceptual ground, it is best to quote Strathern directly:

In so far as people turn one set of relationships into another, they act (as individual subjects) to turn themselves into persons (objects) in the regard of others. They objectify themselves, one might say. And *this* is indeed the point of making themselves active agents; this is their destiny. Life is not imagined to be without supports: one acts to create the supports.⁵⁵

This description of Melanesian personhood and the way it is manifested in action is a long way from the West's central idea of the individual constituting him/herself as a *subject*, as an active agent in his/her own destiny.

The obvious question in the face of all this is: is the biographical enterprise of any use to us, let alone to Pacific Islanders, in trying to understand them(selves) in their alleged 'wholism'? The implications for research alone into this web of acts encompassing interrelated forms of relationship are enormous, and most difficult to conceive for historical Islanders, for whom the remaining evidence of their personal identity consists in discontinuous traces and uncontexted gestures residing in the archival record and the always powerful but shifting sands of community memory.

My optimistic answer to this question is 'yes', despite the difficulties, for the following reasons: firstly, all our analyses of the world are what Strathern, with uncharacteristic transparency, calls 'controlled fictions'⁵⁶ – systematisations and categorisations of the complex meanings we impose upon the world. We have used these fictions to construct our own senses of selfhood in the West, from a process of trial and error in reading other people with whom we share an outward cultural similarity. Our understanding of our own subjectivities, nonetheless, remains imperfect after centuries of such analysis. It should not be a matter, therefore, of completely rejecting any experiment extending these fictions to the task of wrestling with the nature of other cultures' subjectivities (or 'objectivities' in Strathern's model). The analytic process may assist us to redraw the boundaries of our understanding of 'agency' and what 'choices' actually mean in Pacific Island societies. It may also illuminate the gaps in our knowledge of our *own* cultural selves, as the debate between Sahlins and Obeyesekere over 'how "natives" think' evinces.⁵⁷

Secondly, from the historian's point of view biographies of individuals, or groups, offer us an important means to understand how micro-systems work, of giving flesh to world systems or whichever other construct Western analysis might place upon local lived experience; slave stories from the Americas and the recovery of colonised lives among Australian Aboriginals are cases in point.⁵⁸ They also attack the reifications of the Pacific that we continue to express in words like 'Polynesian', 'Melanesian', 'Micronesian', even 'Islander'. Teresia Teaiwa has pointed out how

⁵⁵ Ibid., 313-14.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁷ The terms of the debate are laid out in three main works: Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago 1985); G. Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton 1994); and Marshall Sahlins, *How 'Natives' Think, about Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago 1995).

⁵⁸ See for example Deborah Bird Rose, *Dingo Makes us Human* (Cambridge 1992); Sally Morgan, *My Place* (Fremantle 1987); Jan Critchett, *Untold Stories. Memories and lives of Victorian Kooris* (Melbourne 1998).

tourist images powerfully make 'Polynesian' stand for the whole of the Pacific in an orientalist state of mind that emphasises simplicity, sensuality and nature.⁵⁹ Life stories, subtly contrived, undermine such projections.

'Subtly contrived' is the key phrase in considering how to create such biographies. How does one cross the boundary between the archived life and the 'tied' or performed life of Pacific figures? I have no definitive answer to this question. But skilled biographers are practised at recognising regular patterns of thought and action in tracing a life, and this allows of some intelligent inferencing about personal characteristics. The key is not to draw these from simple cultural models that leave Islanders as empty projections of those models but to give them the flesh of their life within their culture, that readers from all cultures might recognise. The 'partible' self, as Strathern writes of it,⁶⁰ or the notion of a life lived through multiple selves, is not alien to biographers attuned to the postmodern critique of coherent individuality in Life writing. People deal with ambiguity and uncertainty inside themselves every day in using the world. People tolerate dissonances every day in their relationships, without these bringing the world down around their ears. As Alan Ward has pointed out, people from Pacific frontiers 'play fast and loose' with the symbols and rituals of their cultures when it suits, reinventing themselves endlessly.⁶¹

Experimenting with form is another contrivance that may deliver subtle Lives. Historians are notoriously shy of straying from their event centred, chronologically framed, linear narratives, even in historical biography. Perhaps *especially* in historical biography, which, in the hands of scholars, has a reputation for arid monumentalism of content with little attention to form. Yet, because of its cross-cultural aspirations, Pacific history has particular strengths which can help in the task of biography writing, for it is constantly confronted with issues surrounding forms of knowledge and how to communicate the past in other cultures. Why not use that wealth of experience to probe forms of writing biography that tackle questions of appropriate but lively representation? Munro and Goldsmith are onto something here.

There is no promise of an ideal biography in this. All that biographers can do is represent versions of other people's pasts and former versions of their selves. But 'committing biography', in Antony Alpers's phrase, can also be a moral act when it is an act of instruction.⁶² It can help us escape the tyranny of our obsession with culture and ethnicity, with structures and their symbols, by engaging with the humanness of life across 'our sea of faces' and continents, across the contours of human self. In doing so it instructs us about what has bound us together and what has

59 Teresia Teaiwa, 'Reading Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa* with Epeli Hau'ofa's *Kisses in the Nederends*: militourism, feminism, and the "Polynesian" body', in Hereniko and Wilson, *Inside Out*, 250, 253-4.

60 M. Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, 321.

61 Alan Ward, review essay on *Dangerous Liaisons* and *Pacific Islands History* in *Journal of Pacific History*, 31 (1996), 241. To avoid making Pacific Island lives the mere objects of just another Western colonisation it is important to maintain a relationship of respect as author and speaker. Hereniko likens it to the relationship of 'talking chief' to the *tamal'i* – speaking for, elucidating, mediating and criticising constructively when necessary. V. Hereniko and Sig Schwarz, 'Four writers and one critic', in Hereniko and Wilson, *op.cit.*, 58.

62 Alpers's phrase is in his chapter 'Literary biography (in New Zealand)', in Phillips, *Biography in New Zealand*, 24. J.C. Davis talks of biography as a moral act in his chapter 'Clio's lost sheep', *ibid.*, 18.

separated us through the ages. The spate (no pun intended) of post-1987 coup writing that came out of Fiji had something of that effect, in prompting individuals caught up in those events to probe their predicament and articulate their personal philosophy and spirit.⁶³ The current crisis can only add to the force of those reflections. A George Speight, a Filipino Tarakinikini, the faceless mob of ransacking 'Speight supporters' so beloved of media reports have unconsciously delivered to biographers a new commission to reach into their lives and explore who they are and who they think they are. It will be a bitter paradox if biography in the Pacific Islands prospers as a result, but it will nonetheless give texture to the description of lived lives, richness to the meanings they put upon them and weight to historical judgements about the direction in which they have pushed the nation.

63 Arlene Griffen (comp. and ed.), *With Heart and Nerve and Sinew. Post-coup writing from Fiji* (Suva 1997).

Would The Biographers Please Stand up

DOUG MUNRO

Is biography the under-developed area of Pacific Islands historiography? Ian Campbell¹ has suggested as much with the assertion that four such biographies were written in the decade up to 1974 and nine more since then. He made the point that although biographies continue to be written, 'the average output per decade has scarcely changed'. This note emerges from a reading of Campbell's review along with the previous chapter in this volume by Peter Hempenstall, and wrestling with them over the question of what does, and does not, constitute biography. As Ian put it to me during an e-mail exchange, 'Is every petty essay that has a person as its subject to be called "biography"? Or every person whose life touched the Pacific to be called a "Pacific biography"? Clearly not. But before discussing that point, let us do a stock-take. It does not claim to be exhaustive and hopefully will prompt readers to expand the field from their own familiarity with other biographical offerings. The author is happy to enter into correspondence.

By Campbell's reckoning, biography is an under-developed field of Pacific historiography with only 14 biographies since the mid 1960s.

- 1 WEST, Francis, *Hubert Murray: The Australian pro-consul*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- 2 JOYCE, R.B., *Sir William MacGregor*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- 3 RUTHERFORD, Noel, *Shirley Baker and the King of Tonga*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- 4a SCARR, Deryck, *I, the Very Bayonet*, vol. I of *The Majesty of Colour: A life of Sir John Bates Thurston*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973.
- 5 LANGMORE, Diane, *Tamate – a King: James Chalmers in New Guinea, 1877-1901*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- 6 DAVIDSON, J.W., *Peter Dillon of Vanikoro: Chevalier of the South Seas*, edited by O.H.K. Spate. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- 7 SINCLAIR, Marjorie, *Nahi'ena'ena, Sacred Daughter of Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976).
- 4b SCARR, Deryck, *Viceroy of the Pacific*, vol. II of *The Majesty of Colour: A life of Sir John Bates Thurston*. Canberra: Development Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1980.
- 8 SCARR, Deryck, *Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, statesman, man of two world*. (London: Macmillan Education for the Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna Biography Committee, 1980.

1 I.C. Campbell, review of *Queen Salote of Tonga* by Elizabeth Wood Ellem, in *Journal of Pacific History*, 35:2 (2000), 234.

- 9 CUMMINS, G.C., 'Missionary Chieftain: **James Egan Moulton** and Tongan Society, 1865-1909', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1980.
- 10 DIAMOND, Marion, *Creative Meddler: The life and fantasies of Charles St Julian*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990.²
- 11 LUCKCOCK, Janet Louisa, *Thomas of Tonga, 1797-1881: The unlikely pioneer*. Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1990.
- 12 CLIFFORD, James, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian world*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982; paperback edition published by Duke University Press in 1992.
- 13 LAL, Brij V., *A Vision for Change: A.D. Patel and the politics of Fiji*. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, 1997.
- 14 Elizabeth Ellem Wood, *Queen Sālote of Tonga: The story of an era*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999.

The criteria for inclusion, it seems, is authorship by professional historians. But even then, Ian has left out a few:

- 15 CHAPMAN, J.K., *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon, First Lord Stanmore, 1829-1912*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964.
- 16 ANDERSEN, Wayne, *Gauguin's Paradise Lost* (London: Secker and Warberg, (1972).
- 17 DAWS, Gavan, *Holy Man: Father Damien of Molokai*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973; republished 1984 by University of Hawaii Press.
- 18 HEATH, Ian C., 'Woodford of the Solomon Islands: a biographical note, 1852-1927', MA Qualifying thesis, Australian National University, 1974. (See also Ian Heath, 'Charles Morris Woodford: adventurer, naturalist, administrator', in Deryck Scarr (ed.), *More Pacific Islands Portraits*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978, 193-209, 272-75.
- 19 BEAGLEHOLE, J.C., 1975. *The Life of Captain James Cook*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1974)
- 20 HOARE, Michael, *The Tactless Philosopher: Johann Reinhold Forster (1729-98)*. Melbourne: Hawthorn, 1975.
- 21 WETHERELL, David and Charlotte CARR-GREGG, *Camilla: C.H. Wedgwood, 1901-1955, a life* (Sydney: New South University Press, 1990).
- 22 WETHERELL, David, *Charles Abel and the Kwato Mission of Papua New Guinea, 1891-1975* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996).
- 23 THORNLEY, Andrew, *The Inheritance of Hope. John Hunt: Apostle in Fiji*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 2000.

Are we not forgetting that anthropologists also dabble in biography?

- 24 KISTE, Robert C., *He Served: a biography of Maciu Salato*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1998.

Then there are the non-academics, in their infinite variety, who turn their hand to the biographer's art. What they write is of equal variety, ranges widely in quality, and includes (again in order of publication):

² The same author's biography of the adventurer Ben Boyd focuses on his Australia activities but includes a chapter on his death at Guadalcanal. *The Sea Horse and the Wanderer: Ben Boyd in Australia* (Melbourne 1988); 2nd edn under the title *Ben Boyd of Boyd Town* (Melbourne 1995).

- 25 ROBSON, R.W., *Queen Emma: The Samoan girl who founded an empire in 19th century New Guinea*. Sydney: Pacific Publication, 1965; republished 1994 by Robert Brown Associates on Coorparoo, Queensland.³
- 26 KENT, H.W., *Dr Hyde and Mr Stevenson: The life of the Rev. Dr Charles McEwan Hyde including a discussion of the Open Letter of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Rutland and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1973.
- 27 DICKSON, Mora, *The Inseparable Grief: Margaret Cargill of Fiji*. London: Epworth Press, 1976.
- 28 HANCOCK, Kathleen, *Albert Henry: His life and times*. Auckland: Methuen, 1979.
- 29 INGLIS, Amirah, *Karo: The life and fate of a Papuan*. Canberra: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies in association with Australian National University Press, 1982.
- 30 PEACOCK, Daniel J., *Lee Boo of Belau: A prince in London*. Honolulu: Pacific Islands Studies Program, Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii.
- 31 KRAUSS, Bob, *Keneti: South Sea adventures of Kenneth Emory*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.
- 32 GRAY, Laurel, *Sinabada, Woman among Warriors: A biography of the Rev. Sue Rankin*. Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1988.
- 33 DEAN, Eddie, and Stan RITOVA, *Rabuka: No other way*. Sydney: Doubleday, 1988.
- 34 TARTE, Daryl, *Turaga: The life and times and chiefly authority of Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, G.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., K.B.E., D.S.O., K.St.J., E.D.* Suva: Fiji Times, 1993.
- 35 SIDAL, Morven, *Hannah Dudley – Hamari Maa: Honoured mother, educator and missionary to the indentured Indians of Fiji, 1864-1931*. Suva: Pacific Theological College 1997.
- 36 SHARPHAM, John, *Rabuka of Fiji: The authorized biography of Major-General Sītiveni Rabuka*. Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press, 2000.

There are also the sensationalists and their penny dreadfuls:

- 37 CLUNE, Frank, *Bully Hayes: Blackbirder and bigamist*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970.
- 38 HOLTHOUSE, Hector, *White Headhunter* [John Renton] (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1988). [Jack Gagin]

Remembering also that some characters, usually of no great importance, are the subjects of multiple biographies:

- 39 NELSON, Eustis, *Aggie Grey of Samoa*. Adelaide: Hobby Investments, 1979.
- 40 ALAILIMA, Fay, *Aggie Grey: A Samoan saga*. Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 1988.
- 41 CLARK, Blake, *Omai: First Polynesian ambassador to England*. San Francisco: Colt Press, 1940; republished by the University of Hawaii Press, 1969.
- 42 ALEXANDER, Michael, *Omai, Noble Savage*. London: Collins/Harvill Press, 1977.
- 43 McCORMICK, Eric, *Omai: Pacific envoy*. Auckland: Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1977.

Nor should we forget the Cook books, in addition to Beaglehole's:

- 44 KENNEDY, Gavan, *Death of Captain Cook*. London: Dickworth, 1978.
- 45 HOUGH, Richard, *Captain James Cook*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994.

Not to mention Cook's erstwhile colleague Captain Bligh, who is part and parcel of the Bounty/Pitcairn Island literary industry:

³ There is also Geoffrey Dutton, *Queen Emma of the South Seas: A novel* (Melbourne 1976). Another biography presented as a novel is John Charles Orr, *Savage of Bau* (Sydney 1977).

- 46 DARBY, Madge, *Who Caused the Mutiny on the 'Bounty'?* Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965. (see also Rolf Du Rietz, *The Causes of the Bounty Mutiny: Some corrections on a book by Madge Darby*. Uppsala: privately published, 1965, 59pp; Madge Darby, *The Causes of the Mutiny on the Bounty: A short reply to Mr. Rolf Du Reitz's comments (with a few concluding remarks by Rolf Du Reitz)*. Uppsala: Applebergs Boktrycker's AB, 1966, 22pp.
- 47 HOUGH Richard, *Captain Bligh and Mr. Christian: The men and the mutiny*. London: Dutton, 1973, and subsequent editions.
- 48 KENNEDY Gavan, *Bligh*. London: Duckworth, 1978.
- 49 KENNEDY Gavan, *Captain Bligh: The man and his mutinies*. London: Cardinal, 1990.

But where do we draw the limits of Pacific Islands biography, or indeed biography *per se*? The vast Cook industry is an obvious place where a line can be drawn between proper biography, with its primary concern with the person, and the Cook books that deal with cartography, the scientific aspects of his voyages, and the like.⁴ So too is the *Bounty*/Pitcairn industry. It is stretching a point, for example, to include as biography Greg Denning's *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language*.⁵ Even less should we treat the 'group biographies' on missionaries as biography proper, even when they are organised around the reigns of bishops, as is David Hilliard's history of the Melanesian Mission.⁶ But had Roger Keesing and Peter Corris's account of the 1929 Malaita massacre and the events either side been titled something like *Bell versus Basina*, they could probably have passed it off as biography with little fear of contradiction.⁷ After all, the title *Lightning Meets the West Wind* is the personification of a clash of wills: the irresistible force colliding with the immovable object. I am also tempted to include Ian Campbell's book on beachcombers, Part II of which comprises 11 short biographical sketches.⁸

Another grey area is the literary biography. Grove Day's book on the trader-cum-writer Louis Becke, in the Twayne's World Author series, does not count as straight biography because it is largely concerned with criticism and interpretation of Becke's writings.⁹ The same applies to the many full-length biographies of Herman Melville, where he is treated as a man of letters rather than a historical figure.

Can the same be said of Robert Louis Stevenson? He is treated as a historical actor as much as a writer but the Pacific, perforce, occupies a minority of space in the many full scale biographies, so these do not count for the purposes of the present exercise

4 Perhaps the most recent example, soon undoubtedly to be displaced as the new kid on the block, is John Robson, *Captain Cook's World: Maps of the life and voyages of James Cook, R.N.* (Auckland 2000).

5 Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, power and theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge 1992).

6 The books whose titles and/or prefaces indicate that they are group biographies rather than institutional histories include: Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860* (Melbourne 1978); David Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A history of the Melanesian Mission, 1849-1942* (Brisbane 1978); Diane Langmore, *Missionary Lives: Papua, 1874-1914* (Honolulu 1989); Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American missionary wives in nineteenth-century Hawaii* (Honolulu 1989).

7 Oxford University Press, 1980.

8 I.C. Campbell, *'Gone Native' in Polynesia: Captivity narratives and experiences from the South Pacific* (Westport 1998).

9 A. Grove Day, *Louis Becke* (New York 1966).

– otherwise the total becomes misleadingly inflated.¹⁰ Nor should we count Alanna Knight's 'intimate photographic record', where the text is concerned as much with the entourage as with RLS.¹¹ But there are a book and a thesis apiece which deal solely with RLS's final years in the Pacific:

- 50 McKENZIE, Kenneth S., 'Robert Louis Stevenson and Samoa, 1889-1894', PhD dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1974. (See also Kenneth McKenzie, 'The Last Opportunity: RLS and Samoa, 1889-1894', in Deryck Scarr (ed.), *More Pacific Islands Portraits*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978, 155-72, 268-71.)
- 51 BELL, Gavan, *In Search of Tusitala: Travels in the Pacific after Robert Louis Stevenson*. London: Pimlico, 1995.

That takes us to 51 full-scale, or reasonably so, Pacific biographies; and there are undoubtedly more. While concerned to show that more have been written than commonly supposed, I have resisted the temptation to include all comers. The list of possibles is surprisingly large but a certain discrimination has to be exercised. I have cast my net back only to 1950. Nor have I included the pious and self-indulgent tomes about missionaries, written by other missionaries, which is a genre in itself. It would be worthwhile to round up this literature, but this is not the place.¹² Booklets likewise have not been included, however worthy,¹³ and neither have journal articles – even those that specifically touch on problems of biography.¹⁴ Nor have I included collections of biographical essays: the various 'Portraits' books¹⁵ and Gavan Daws's six men bent on self-discovery.¹⁶ These volumes are, or should be, well known to Pacific historians (and they are discussed in the preceding essay by Peter Hempenstall).

But I cannot resist mentioning a collection of essays that is something of a classic but which may well be passing into the semi-oblivion that accompanies advancing years, viz:

Joseph B. Casagrande (ed.), *In the Company of Man: Twenty portraits by anthropologists* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

Raymond Firth, 'A Polynesian Aristocrat' [**Pa Fenuatara**], 1-40.

10 The more recent biographies include: J.C. Furnas, *Voyage to Windward: A life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York 1951); Jenni Calder, *RLS: a life* (London 1980); Ian Bell, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A dream of exile* (Edinburgh 1992); Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A biography* (London 1994); James Pope-Hennessy, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London 1994). Then there are also the biographies of Fanny Stevenson.

11 Alanna Knight (ed.), *R.L.S. in the South Seas: An intimate photographic record* (Edinburgh 1986).

12 Some collections on missionary work include a quota of biographical essays: Ron Crocombe and Marjorie Crocombe (eds), *From Polynesia to Melanesia: From Samoa, Cook Islands and Tonga to Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia* (Suva 1982); Doug Munro and Andrew Thornley (eds), *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific* (Suva 1996); Andrew Thornley and Tauga Vulaono (eds), *Mai Kea Ki Vei? Stories of Methodism in Fiji and Rotuma* (Suva 1996 [bilingual in English and Fijian]).

13 E.g. Marjorie Tuainakore Crocombe, *If I Live: The life of Ta'unga* (Suva 1976), 37pp.

14 David Hanlon, 'Another side of Henry Nanpei', *Journal of Pacific History*, 23:1 (1988), 36-51.

15 J.W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra 1970); revd paperback edn, 1973; Deryck Scarr (ed.), *More Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra 1978); James Griffin (ed.), *Papua New Guinea Portraits: The expatriate experience* (Canberra 1978). Their less reputable precursor was James A. Michener and A. Grove Day, *Rascals in Paradise* (New York 1957).

16 Gavan Daws, *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of self-discovery in the South Seas* (New York, Brisbane 1980).

Thomas Gladwin, 'Petrus Mailo, chief of Moen', 41-626.

James B. Watson, 'A New Guinea "Opening Man"' [Bantao], 127-73.

Margaret Mead, 'Weaver of the Border' [Phoebe Parkinson], 174-210.

While on the subject of essays, it seems necessary to point out that the introductions to edited texts are often in the nature of concealed biography. Some of the Introductions to the defunct Pacific History Series (of edited manuscripts) fall into this category,¹⁷ and occasionally the Introduction of a Pacific Islander's 'self-account' does likewise.¹⁸

Finally, there are the Maori and culture contact aspects of New Zealand history that should be of concern to historians of the Pacific Islands. There are probably more biographies of Maori than of any other Polynesian people. They are generally of high quality and include:

CONDLIFFE, J.B., *Te Rangi Hiroa: The life of Sir Peter Buck*. Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1971.

KING, Michael, *Te Puea: A biography*. Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977; 2nd edition Auckland: Sceptre, 1987.

BINNEY, Judith, Gillian CHAPMAN and Craig WALLACE, *Mihaia: The prophet Rua Kenana and his community at Maungapohatu* (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1979, and subsequent editions, 1986 and 1996).

BURNS, Patricia, *Te Rauparaha, a New Perspective*. Wellington: Reed, 1980.

KING, Michael, *Whina: A biography of Whina Cooper*. Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983.

BINNEY, Judith, and Gillian CHAPMAN, *Nga Morehu: The survivors*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1986.

MIKAERE, Buddy, *Te Maiharoa and the Promised Land*. Auckland: Heinemann, 1988.

BINNEY, Judith, *Redemption Songs: A life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki*. Auckland: Auckland University Press and Bridget Williams Books, 1995.

Biographies of Europeans involved in cross-cultural settings, which are far more varied in quality than Maori biographies, include:

BINNEY, Judith, *The Legacy of Guilt: the life of Thomas Kendall*. Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1968.

HALL, Noeline, *I Have Planted—: A biography of Alfred Nesbit Brown*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1981.

WILLIMENT, T.M.I., *John Hobbs, 1800-1883: Wesleyan missionary to the Ngapuhi tribe of northern New Zealand*. Wellington: Government Printer, 1985.

GALBREATH, Ross, *Walter Buller: The reluctant conservationist*. (Wellington: GP Books, 1989.

GARRETT, Helen, *Te Manihara: The life and times of the pioneer missionary Robert Maunsell*. Auckland: Reed, 1991.

McCAUGHLEY, Angela, *The Interpreter: The biography of 'Dick' Barrett*. Auckland: David Bateman, 1998.

MOON, Paul, *Hobson: Governor of New Zealand, 1840-1842*. Auckland: David Ling, 1998.

17 Dorothy Shineberg, 'Introduction' to Dorothy Shineberg (ed.), *The Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne, 1841-1844* (Canberra 1971), 1-29; Peter Corris, 'Editor's Introduction' to William T. Wawn, *The South Sea Islanders and the Queensland Labour Trade* (Canberra 1973), xix-xlii.

18 Roger Keesing, 'Elota: a personal sketch', in Roger M. Keesing (ed.), *Elota's Story: The life and times of a Solomon Islands big man* (Brisbane 1978), 9-26. This and other 'self-accounts' are discussed in Doug Munro, 'Pacific Islands history in the vernacular: practical and ethical considerations', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 29:1 (1995), 83-96.

What ultimately strikes me, however, is not the paucity of Pacific biography but how few Pacific historians have reflected on the biographer's art. To my knowledge, only two actual biographies contain discussions of the possibilities and limitations of the genre:

WEST, Francis, *Hubert Murray: The Australian pro-consul* [see Entry 1].

SCARR, Deryck, *I, the Very Bayonet*, ix-x [see Entry 4a].

One other, in an interview, explained what he was trying to achieve:

LAL, Brij V. (interviewed by Doug Munro), in *Itinerario: European journal of overseas history*, 21:1 (1997), 25-26.

And only four Pacific historians have written reflectively on the biographer's art:

WEST, F.J., 'Toward a biography of Sir Hubert Murray, Lieutenant Governor of Papua, 1908-1940', *Pacific Historical Review*, 3 (1962), 151-68.

WEST, Francis, *Biography as History*. Sydney: Sydney University Press for the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1973, 19pp.

DAWS, Gavin, "'All the horrors of a half known life": some notes on the writing of biography in the Pacific', in Niel Gunson (ed.), *The Changing Pacific: Essays in honour of H.E. Maude*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978, 297-307.

HEMPENSTALL, Peter, 'Guest editorial', and 'A biographer's checklist', in *Locality* (Sydney), 8 (1997), 3 & 33, 4-8, respectively (Special 'Biography Issue').

HEMPENSTALL, Peter, 'Sniffing the Person: writing lives in Pacific history', in this volume.

To sum up, while more Pacific biographies are out there than is probably realised, certainly no school of Pacific biography exists and very few Pacific historians would describe themselves primarily as biographers. There are no serial biographers, compared, for example, to British political history where John Campbell has written about F.E. Smith, Lloyd George, Aneurin Bevan, Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher, and Kenneth O. Morgan has produced biographies of Lloyd George, Keir Hardy, Viscount Addison and James Callaghan. Moreover, the approaches taken by Pacific biographers are so varied as to defy easy classification; but non-historians and non-academics make up a clear majority of the authors, hence the vast discrepancies in quality. What strikes one when doing such a stock-take is that biography attracts far more so-called amateur historians than probably any other field of history – along with family history and local history, perhaps. Now I see why biography is often held in low esteem by so-called professional historians. Biography gets put into the 'too-easy basket' when in fact it is anything but.

An Indigenous Perspective? Inside the Mind of Ma'afu

JOHN SPURWAY

Ma'afu, sometimes referred to in documented sources as Enele or Henry, was about 21 when he came to Fiji in 1847. His father, Aleamotu'a, held the rank of Tu'i Kanokupolu, one of Tonga's three great offices of state, from 1827 until his death in 1845. Aleamotu'a's successor was Taufa'ahau, known in Tonga to-day as Tupou I, who ruled a united Tonga as king until his own death in 1893. His cousin Ma'afu, a generation younger, left his homeland in search of greener pastures in Fiji. In the culmination of a career unique in Fiji's history, he assumed in 1869 the rank of Tui Lau, hitherto unknown in the islands. That rank was to be transformed into the official status of Roko Tui Lau in 1875, under the new British administration. Ma'afu had become master of Lau, Fiji's eastern archipelago, in a manner fully in accordance with Fijian custom. From the late 1850s, he was able to exert influence in other parts of Fiji to the point where he could challenge the supremacy of Cakobau, Vunivalu of Bau and Fiji's most powerful chief. No adequate assessment of Ma'afu's life during his early years in Fiji has ever been published.

I was led to Ma'afu through my reading of R.A. Derrick's *A History of Fiji*, which covers the period up to Cession to Great Britain in 1874. It struck me at once how great were the achievements, and how lasting the influence, of a non-Fijian who, had it not been for British interest in the islands, would have made himself master of Fiji. The initial impression which a reader new to the history of Fiji might gain is that Ma'afu embodies the concept of the stranger king, an arrival from a far country who, through his own statecraft and the military prowess of his followers, becomes the master of his adopted land. He was described as such by James Goodenough and Leo Layard, the two Commissioners who prepared a report for the British Government recommending the establishment of Fiji as a Crown Colony. The Commissioners wrote: 'It is true that Ma'afu is a Tongan and a stranger'.¹ A Tongan he certainly was; a stranger he could never be, although his fellow chiefs after 1869 quickly came to regard him as an interloper. Tongans had been voyaging to Fiji for centuries, coming in significantly greater numbers from the closing years of the 18th century.² Several islands of Lau, most notably its chiefly island of Lakeba, featured large settlements

¹ *Report of Commodore Goodenough and Mr Consul Layard on the Offer of the Fiji Islands to the British Crown*, London, July 1874, [British] Parliamentary Papers C.1011.

² For a 19th century view of the importance of the visiting Tongans to the Lauan economy, see John Twynning, *The Shipwreck and Adventures of John Twynning* (London c.1850), 117.

of Tongans, whose numbers constantly fluctuated and whose activities were forever the bane of the lives of resident Wesleyan missionaries. Among the more moderate missionary opinions was that of the Reverend Walter Lawry, General Superintendent of the Wesleyan South Sea Mission, who paid a pastoral visit to Lakeba in 1847. 'A colony of godless Tongans is a drag upon our wheels in this place', Lawry lamented;³ his colleagues in Fiji were usually less restrained. Ma'afu was related by blood to the chiefly Vuanirewa clan of Lakeba, the most prominent of whom was the Tui Nayau, Taliai Tupou, paramount chief of Lakeba and its subject islands, and Ma'afu's host. The relationship arose through Ma'afu's descent from Baleisasa, son of an earlier Tui Nayau, who had voyaged to Tonga and spent the rest of his days there. The practice had arisen of young men from the Vuanirewa clan exchanging visits of varying length with their relatives in Tonga. Aleamotu'a himself, as a young man, had lived in Lakeba for a time.⁴ When Aleamotu'a's son came to stay in 1847, the young chief was, in a very real sense, coming home.

The power which Ma'afu acquired in Fiji received an 'official' recognition of sorts when he assumed the title of Tui Lau. Five years later, he played a pivotal role in the negotiations which culminated in the Cession of the islands. Ma'afu's acquiescence was essential for a peaceful transition of power. His former secretary, Robert Sherson Swanston, a firm supporter of Cession, commented on the 'final triumph' of Cession 'through the adhesion of Ma'afu'.⁵ A measure of Ma'afu's standing among Fiji's indigenous chiefs is revealed by a comment of Commodore Goodenough, who remarked, after a meeting on 2 March 1874 to discuss Cession, that the chiefs 'had not gone into [annexation] at all and...had only spit out their venom against Ma'afu'.⁶ Despite the chiefs' hostility, there remained the undeniable fact that Ma'afu had changed the history of eastern Fiji more than any of his contemporaries had done. His life deserves much closer scrutiny than it has so far received.

I review here Ma'afu's life from his earliest years until he became Tui Lau. My work can be described as biography in the sense that it traces Ma'afu's career in both Tonga and Fiji within a chronological framework. Among the many legacies of his rule in Lau is the rank of Tui Lau, currently held by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.⁷ Ma'afu was legendary in his own lifetime; today, legend has passed into myth in much of Lau, nowhere more so than in the Tongan enclave of Sawana, the village contiguous with Lomaloma, the chiefly village of Vanuabalavu. Ma'afu and his wife made their

3 Walter Lawry, Journal, 12 Sept. 1847, quoted in *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, New Series, 6 (1848), 193. See also *Wesleyan Missionary Magazine*, Fourth Series (1848), 1259; Walter Lawry, *Friendly and Feejee Islands: A missionary visit to various stations in the South Seas, in the year MDCCCXLII* (London 1850), 81. For other examples of missionary views of Tongans, see James Calvert to General Secretaries, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (hereinafter WMMS), 14 Nov. 1842, WMMS Letters from Fiji, Mitchell Library, Sydney (hereinafter ML); Richard Lyth to Thomas Williams, 22 Nov. 1849, Letters to the Reverend Thomas Williams, Vol. III, 1846-1850, ML; Lyth, Journal, 24 Jan. and 11 Feb. 1850, ML.

4 John Davies to Foreign Secretaries, London Missionary Society (hereinafter LMS), 7 Sept. 1827, LMS South Seas Letters, Box 6, folder 10; Davies to J. Clayton 24 Dec. 1823, LMS South Seas Letters, Box 8, folder 6, ML.

5 Robert Swanston, undated note, c. 3 Mar. 1874, Journal II, ML.

6 James G. Goodenough, Journal, 2 Mar. 1874, ML.

7 Following Ma'afu's death in 1881, there was no Tui Lau until 1938, when Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna was appointed. Sukuna died in 1958, and five years later Ratu Mara was appointed. He has not been formally invested with the title.

home in Sawana from 1857 until his death in 1881. In modern Sawana, many people believe that their ancestors 'came over with Ma'afu' or were in some other way closely associated with him. Such associations, often erroneous, remain a source of pride and prestige among many Sawanans and other Lauan people of Tongan descent. In a comparable English context, some members of ancient families assert that a forebear accompanied William the Conqueror to England in 1066 and fought at the Battle of Hastings. William the Conqueror has also been called a ~~str~~anger king; in his case, as in Ma'afu's, many people in succeeding generations have been nothing loath to claim an association with power. Ma'afu's power in Lau has today passed into the minds of the Lauan people. For any proper study of the career and legacies of the first Tui Lau, it is necessary for us to learn as much as we can discover concerning the details of his life.

During his first 17 years, Ma'afu made at least three voyages away from Tonga, two to Fiji and one to the New Hebrides. Consideration of his life during that period can best be described as a 'life and times' of Ma'afu, with emphasis on 'times', rather than 'life'. He grew up in Tonga during a period characterised by intermittent civil war and by the social disruption occasioned by the introduction of Christianity. During the years before he reached the age of 16, there are precisely four documented references to Ma'afu, all of them in missionary journals. The first occurs in 1830, when he was about four. On 10 January of that year, Ma'afu, three of his siblings and their father Aleamotu'a were baptised by the Reverend Nathaniel Turner in the Wesleyan chapel at Nuku'alofa.⁷ Ma'afu received in baptism the Christian name of Enele, the Tongan translation of Henry. The second reference occurs just over 10 years later when, at the age of 14 or 15, Ma'afu was married to Elenoa Gataialupe, a sister of Lupepau'u, the wife of Taufahau.⁸ Then, in May 1841, Mrs Sarah Thomas, wife of the Wesleyan missionary John Thomas, recorded the arrival of Ma'afu in a small fleet of canoes following an apparently lengthy stay in Fiji.¹⁰ Finally, some six months later, John Thomas himself noted the return of a 'dissipated' Ma'afu and two young relatives to Tongatapu, following their hasty and unauthorised departure the previous day. The trio, intent on reaching Fiji, had been successfully pursued.¹¹ These meagre sources mean that, for the years of Ma'afu's childhood and early youth, his story cannot escape the dimensions imposed on it by the nature of missionary writings.

The fitful light shed by the pens of the missionaries is briefly enhanced in 1842, when Ma'afu joined the notorious sandalwood expedition to the New Hebrides, under the command of the Tahitian-born British subject Samuel Pinder Henry. The young chief acted as Henry's agent in recruiting upwards of 60 other Tongan men and boys to serve as woodcutters. Here, recourse may be had to a variety of sources, of which three might serve as examples. One is a letter written by George McLean, mate on the

7 Nathaniel Turner, *Personal Narrative*, unpub. ms, pp. 301-2, ML; John Thomas, *Journal*, 10 Jan. 1830, ML; Peter Bays, *A Narrative of the Wreck of the Minerva* (Cambridge 1831), 127-9.

8 John Thomas, *Journal*, 29 July 1840; Thomas, *Tongatapu or the Friendly Islands*, unpub. ms, p. 1260, ML.

9 Sarah Thomas, *Journal*, May 1841, ML.

10 John Thomas, *Journal*, 5 Nov. 1841, ML.

Sophia, Henry's own vessel and the flagship of the expedition. The letter, addressed to the Reverend Archibald Murray of the London Missionary Society's mission in Samoa, outlined in some detail atrocities committed by the Tongan woodcutters in the New Hebrides.¹² The second source is the published account by naval commander John Erskine, who visited Fiji in 1849. The following year, Erskine's second in command, Lieutenant Walter Pollard, in command of HMS *Bramble*, sailed to Fiji on Erskine's orders. While there, Pollard spoke to Ma'afu on the subject of the Tongan woodcutters' activities on the New Hebridean islands of Efate and Erromango.¹³ Our knowledge of the expedition, of Ma'afu's motives in joining it, and of his role in the New Hebrides, owes much to the third source, again non-missionary. Tingea, an attendant of Ma'afu, made a lengthy statement to magistrate Charles Swayne in Lomaloma one month after Ma'afu's death in February 1881. The statement is especially valuable in that it permits us to view the expedition from a Tongan perspective.¹⁴ These various accounts, supplemented by the writings of John Thomas and other missionaries, mean that the sandalwood expedition is the best documented period of Ma'afu's youth.

Following Ma'afu's return home to Tonga in October 1842, sources are once again limited to the journals and letters of Wesleyan missionaries working there, most notably those of John Thomas. Reliance on Thomas, who disliked Ma'afu intensely, inevitably leaves us with a jaundiced view of the young chief. Thomas's attitude is exemplified by some of his remarks during the months preceding Ma'afu's departure for Fiji. Shortly before Christmas 1846, Thomas heard that Ma'afu had been drinking kava one Sunday afternoon with friends, instead of attending service. The missionary was appalled: 'I know not where the wickedness of these young men with their companions will end! Oh that they were wise – that they would consider their latter end.'¹⁵ Then, on New Year's Day, Thomas described 'a new evil' which had begun 'in this Christian village: *Foot races* men running etc.'. Ma'afu was stated to be the instigator; having been advised by Tautafa'ahau not to attend races elsewhere, he had apparently organised his own at home. 'He is a fast ignorant vain young man', Thomas deplored, 'yet God can save him'.¹⁶ Thomas became even more explicit in expressing his intolerance only days later when describing his pain on learning that even some class leaders had attended the foot races. 'This they profess to have done, not knowing there was any harm in it. I thought it very strange indeed that they should have had such views – but it shows me...that our people are in a very feeble state.'¹⁷

Such views were nothing new for Thomas. Fifteen years earlier, again at Nuku'alofa, he had expressed his 'astonishment that our people have been allowed to be present at sports..., they looked upon their countrymen, *club fighting, wrestling,*

11 George McLean to Archibald Murray, 27 Dec. 1843, LMS South Seas Letters, Box 16, ML.

12 John Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise Among the Islands of the Western Pacific...* (London 1853), 143-4.

13 Statement of Tingea, Lomaloma, 8 Mar. 1881. Notes [?by C.R. Swayne]... on early Fijian history and Ma'afu, in G.K. Roth, Papers, Cambridge University Library ADD 8780 (AJCP reel 2792, ML).

14 John Thomas, Journal, 21 Dec. 1846.

15 Ibid., 1 Jan. 1847.

16 Ibid., 11 Jan. 1847.

and *punching* each other with their fists...this I consider very bad conduct'.¹⁸ Thomas's words may be taken as examples of the most intolerant missionary opinion. His views are nevertheless essential for any attempt to paint a portrait of the young Ma'afu on the eve of his departure. We know he was a self-indulgent, undisciplined young man who was accorded all the privileges of his rank and whose great intelligence and cunning enabled him always to seize the moment to his own greatest advantage. Thomas's manifest intolerance also enlightens us concerning Ma'afu's state of mind during his final months on Tongatapu. For Ma'afu, living cheek by jowl with Thomas we might almost say, it seemed that whenever he looked over his shoulder, the admonitory, puritanical finger of John Thomas was wagging firmly in his face. This, in a society increasingly disciplined since its reunification under the rule of Taufa'ahau, meant that Ma'afu was restrained by an ever-tightening rein. Gone was the indulgence of his father's time; if he wanted to gratify what some have called his reckless ambition, and others his love of discord and intrigue, he would have to seek more suitable horizons beyond the shores of Tonga.

The missionary writings remain my principal sources until the late 1850s, when the appointment of William Thomas Pritchard as the first British consul to Fiji means that other views of Ma'afu, both official and personal, are encountered, with increasing frequency as the 1860s progress. The years immediately following Ma'afu's arrival in Fiji in 1847 are especially poor in sources, particularly during the 18 months he spent in Cakaudrove in 1849-50, as a guest of the paramount chief, Tuikilakila, Tui Cakau. For that period, only one documented reference exists. The discussion between Ma'afu and Lieutenant Walter Pollard referred to above occurred when the two men were, by coincidence, guests of the Vunivalu at Bau. Pollard witnessed the ceremonial arrival at Bau of several high-ranking Cakaudrove chiefs, bringing tribute to Cakobau. They were accompanied by Ma'afu who, as Pollard was to record, had made the voyage to Bau in a canoe built for him at Somosomo, the centre of chiefly power in Cakaudrove.¹⁹ This reference aside, the period of Ma'afu's stay in Cakaudrove is one where the biographer can know little and infer less. The consequence of such gaps in the record will be considered later.

For the early 1850s, I rely especially on the writings of Dr Richard Lyth, the Wesleyan missionary stationed at Lakeba. Lyth, although frequently exasperated with Ma'afu, displayed much greater tolerance and empathy towards him than his colleague John Thomas had done in Tonga. Lyth was gratified when, less than six months after Ma'afu's return to Lakeba from Cakaudrove, he sought permission to meet in class. Ma'afu 'has been the subject of serious impressions for some months', Lyth enthused.²⁰ When Ma'afu and his wife Elenoa dined with the Lyths a few weeks later, Lyth wrote of his guest 'he is now a steady man and in a hopeful way'.²¹ John Thomas would have been incredulous. Not surprisingly, these and other manifestations of Ma'afu's desire to attain the means of grace inevitably proved

¹⁷ Ibid., 26 July 1832.

¹⁸ Walter Pollard, *Journal on board Her Majesty's Schooner 'Bramble'*, quoted in Erskine, *Journal of a Cruise*, 294.

¹⁹ Richard Lyth, *Journal*, 25 Apr. 1851, ML.

²⁰ Ibid., 9 June 1851.

unsustainable. Following an 'outbreak of temper' by Ma'afu, and an admission by Elenoa that she had 'sinned' with another Tongan chief, Lyth's exasperation could not be contained. 'O these abominable Tonguese', he wailed. '...Ma'afu has quite turned back to the world...the reformation is exploded.'²²

Despite Ma'afu's spiritual shortcomings, Lyth enables us to discern a side to his character which Thomas either could not detect or thought unworthy of comment. It is also largely through Lyth that we know the details of the *valu ni lotu*, or wars of religion, between 1852 and 1854. It was during those years that Ma'afu was able to gain control of Vanuabalavu in the north, as well as the islands of the Moala group, comprising Moala itself, Totoya and Matuku, to the west of Lau proper. Intensive study of Lyth has enabled me to refute the myth that Ma'afu was expelled from Society, meaning the Wesleyan communion, because of his activities on Matuku during the wars. Ma'afu, accompanied by a Matuku chief named Donumailulu and a company of Tongans, Moalans and Totoyans, had sailed to Matuku, where hostilities had arisen following the murder of two Christian men. They were quickly joined by Vuetasau, the nephew and heir of Tui Nayau. The intervention of Ma'afu and his party on the side of the belligerents earned the condemnation of Lyth, who consulted some of his native teachers on the question of punitive action. Several published works have stated that Lyth expelled Vuetasau and Ma'afu from Society in response to their intervention on Matuku. The notion that Ma'afu was expelled first arose from a misinterpretation of Lyth's letter to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society of 3 March 1854, which refers to the expulsion of 'two chiefs' who had 'lent themselves and their people to a bad cause'.²³ Since it was known from different sources²⁴ that Vuetasau was one of the chiefs expelled, some writers have assumed that Ma'afu was the other. The second chief expelled, along with other persons of lesser rank, was in fact Donumailulu, as Lyth made clear in his journal.²⁵ No published work has been completely accurate on this important point.²⁶

The battle of Kaba on 7 April 1855, when a long-standing state of war between Bau and Rewa finally ended, was seen then, as now, as a watershed in the history of Fiji. On the very day of the battle, missionary James Calvert found time to record his opinion that 'this is a day much to be remembered in Feejee'.²⁷ The victory of Cakobau, which ensured the supremacy of Bau over its bitter rival, came about only because of the support he gained from Tupou I and his thousands of warriors. Calvert's writings are among the most important sources we have for Kaba and the implications of the Bauan victory. Calvert was keenly interested in the rapid political

21 Ibid., 28 Feb. 1852.

22 Lyth to Gen. Secs, WMMS, 3 Mar. 1854, WMMS Letters from Fiji.

23 Robert Young, *The Southern World*, 2 vols (London 1850), 284.

24 'The War in Matuku' in Lyth, Journal, 24 Aug. 1852-2 Dec. 1853, pp 117-22.

25 See, for example, A. Harold Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church*, Vol. 2, *Fiji* (Melbourne 1978), 134; George C. Henderson, *Fiji and the Fijians* (Sydney 1931), 157-8, 294. For a brief reference to the expulsions which makes it clear that the second chief was not Ma'afu, see Deryck Scarr, 'Cakobau and Ma'afu: Contenders for pre-eminence in Fiji', in J. W. Davidson and D. Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra 1970), 108.

26 James Calvert, Journal, 7 Apr. 1855, ML.

evolution of Fiji, and recognised the vital role of Christianity in that evolution. It is significant that the missionary makes only one mention of Ma'afu during the entire year. We see him acting in a markedly subordinate capacity on the island of Beqa, where Tupou I's fleet had called during a tour of Fiji in the months following Kaba. Tui Sawau, a Beqa chief, complained to Cakobau, who was accompanying the king, about some villages in isolated parts of the island which had refused to prepare food for the visitors and whose inhabitants 'were only subject to the skies'. When the inhabitants of all but one village, Naceva, placed themselves under the authority of Tui Sawau, Tupou I quickly despatched his son Tevita Unga and Ma'afu to 'fetch the chief and people' still holding out.²⁸

Although Ma'afu had been appointed by Tupou I as one of two governors of the Tongans in Lau in 1853, he is seen, after Kaba, to be acting entirely on the orders of his king. There was, of course, nothing unusual in that; Ma'afu remained a Tongan chief whose first allegiance was to Tautafa'ahau, both as Tu'i Kanokupolu and as king. Nevertheless, his clearly subordinate role during the king's long visit to Fiji in 1855 brings into focus the most important question addressed in my present study: how far, during the late 1850s and throughout the 1860s, Ma'afu was acting on his own initiative, and how far he was following the directions of Tupou I. When he assumed the dignity of Tui Lau in 1869, Ma'afu completed the long process of his transformation from a Tongan chief into a Fijian chief. Correspondence between the acting British Consul of the day and Tupou I reveals much about this fundamental and crucial change. In February 1869, the king formally ceded all Tongan possessions in Fiji, except the island of Rabe, to Ma'afu.²⁹ Two months later, Tupou disclaimed responsibility for Ma'afu's actions, having by his letter of February 'assigned to Ma'afu and his successors all rights sovereign and territorial' pertaining to Tongan lands in Fiji, whose inhabitants were thenceforth to be considered solely as subjects of Ma'afu.³⁰ Ma'afu was now in effect the paramount chief of a new entity within the wider polity of Fiji, on equal footing with the chiefs of other *matanitu*, or confederations, and divorced from any official connection with Tonga. One of my tasks is to determine how far, if at all, during the years before 1869, Tupou I had sought to gain control of all or part of Fiji. If the king indeed harboured such ambitions, I must also determine to what extent Ma'afu acted as his henchman.

The importance of missionary sources such as Thomas, Lyth and Calvert can scarcely be exaggerated. Without them, our knowledge of Fiji during the middle years of the 19th century would be poorer. Yet the writings of these and other missionaries are subject to judgements still essentially alien. The missionary sources, full as they are of the minutiae of daily life, and of what the writers considered to be the important issues of the day, are inevitably influenced by the bourgeois, Christian and conservative values in which the missionaries themselves were nurtured. Chiefs and other persons of note were often assessed, at least on first meeting, according to their

27 Ibid., 22 Jun. 1855. See also Calvert to Elijah Hoole, 24 July 1855, WMMS Letters from Fiji, ML.

28 Tupou Ha'apai [David Jebson Moss] to John Bates Thurston, HBM Acting Consul, 4 Feb. 1869. National Archives of Fiji (hereinafter NAF). Rabe had been given to Tupou I by Tui Cakau in 1855. In 1869, the island was being offered for sale in Sydney.

29 Tupou Ha'apai to Thurston, 2 Apr. 1869, NAF.

personal appearance and habits. On further acquaintance, they were judged on the basis of their response to the Christian message and, in the case of the highest-ranking chiefs, to the perceived nature of their authority. Wars and political manoeuvres are considered above all in the light of their assistance to or hindrance of the Christian cause. Yet, for the earlier years of Ma'afu's life in Fiji, among the remote islands of Lau and eastern Cakaudrove, missionary writings are almost all we have. Visiting naval commanders such as Erskine and Pollard, or Commodore Charles Wilkes of the United States Exploring Expedition, can provide us, in the published accounts of their voyages, with impressions usually informative and often incisive. Such impressions are, however, suspended in time and place. Our knowledge of the cast of characters, and of the ebb and flow of events, must emanate from the pens of the missionaries. We can know very little of the minds of their Fijian and Tongan hosts, except when their words are reported in a journal or letter. Often, such reporting is doubly filtered: people were inclined to circumspection in their discourse with missionaries, while the missionaries in turn were wont to exercise discretion in recording the words of others. Our pleasure in the richness and magnitude of the missionary sources must ever be tempered by frustration at our inability to gain an indigenous perspective of people and events.

The correspondence between the acting British Consul and Tupou I referred to above illustrates the value of consular records in gaining a new perspective on Ma'afu. There are others: on 8 May 1865, following pressure from the then Consul Henry M. Jones, Ma'afu and several other paramount chiefs, including Cakobau and Tui Cakau, formed a Confederation, with Cakobau as President. Jones had earlier written to Ma'afu 'Governor of the Tongans', urging on him 'the absolute necessity of proving your superiority in civilized ideas to the Fijians around you'. Jones went on to offer Ma'afu gratuitous advice on the proper control of his people, suitable crops to plant for food, the desirability of cotton cultivation and the efficient distribution of profits. 'I have not written this letter in order that you should read it and then throw it aside', Jones concluded,³¹ little aware that one of Ma'afu's many talents, which came especially to the fore in later years, was the distribution of profits to himself. Jones also wrote to Cakobau, saying 'you must not think that your situation [as President of the Confederation] is simply one where you can enjoy your ease and be supported by the other chiefs in lazy idleness...if you are too old or indolent for the duties of your office, you had better retire from your position...'³² These admonitions are among the more blatant examples of how consular officials, both British and American, attempted to manipulate people and events in Fiji throughout the 1860s. Apparently satisfied with his efforts, Jones wrote to his masters in the Foreign Office in November 1865 advising them that the new arrangement was 'the nearest approach to a centralised Government that can be made in Fiji for some time'.³³ Owing to old rivalries, mutual jealousies, and a perceived lack of common

30 Henry M. Jones to Ma'afu Governor of the Tongans, 12 Apr. 1865, Great Britain, Foreign Office (hereinafter FO), HBM Consul Fiji and Tonga, 12 Apr. 1865, ML.

31 Jones to Vunivalu, 7 June 1865, FO, HBM Consul Fiji and Tonga, ML.

32 Jones to FO, 24 Nov. 1865, FO, HBM Consul Fiji and Tonga, ML.

cause, the Confederation did not last. In February 1867 a new alliance, the Lau Confederation or *Tovata ko Lau*, was formed by Ma'afu, his northern allies Tui Cakau and Tui Bua, as well as Tui Nayau in Lakeba. Like its predecessor, it was shortlived; after Lau withdrew in May, Ma'afu's secretary Robert Swanston wrote to Jones explaining that Tui Nayau had been unable to reconcile Lakeba's place in the Confederation with its close links to Tonga. 'Lau is Tongan', Tui Nayau had reiterated to Swanston, '...we are one with Ma'afu and Tupou, and I will do nothing that will separate Lau from Tonga'. Swanston believed that 'one of the objects of the Confederation [was] to thwart...the direct political connection of Lau with Tonga'. He advised Jones that, though he continued to admire Ma'afu, he could no longer act for him as secretary in a political capacity: 'I cannot act officially with a man who, however much I may value him as an agent for good in Fiji, from the force of circumstances must now represent Tongan interests solely'.³⁴

Ma'afu, seeming to throw up his hands in horror, himself wrote to Jones. 'Because of the... outcry raised...by many of the foreigners resident in Fiji that I am the root of all evil in Fiji...I intend never again to meddle in the management of the territory of any Chieftain to the westward in any matter connected with his sovereignty'.³⁵ He might have added, 'for the moment'. All of this correspondence from the British Consulate archives, much of it duplicated in other Foreign Office records, throws into high relief the personalities and the drama of Fijian political life. We see Consul Henry Jones, seemingly always bent on pulling the strings; Ma'afu, inscrutable, sometimes aggressive, sometimes aloof, occasionally withdrawn in high dudgeon and feigning to nurse a wounded pride; and Cakobau, never able to grasp the political nettle when dealing with the wily Tongan or the representatives of foreign powers. Swanston's letter to Jones in particular articulates a dilemma facing both Cakobau and the British in 1867: was Ma'afu indeed representing 'Tongan interests solely', and if he was, what were the implications for Fiji?

Consular and other records generated by the British government and its representatives are further supplemented by voluminous official records from Fiji itself, during the brief mandate of the so-called Cakobau Government and especially following Cession. One of the terms of Cession was that all Fijian lands were transferred to the Crown, which possessed sole power of disposing of them. Any European claims were to be rigorously investigated before title could be granted. With these requirements in mind, a Lands Claims Commission was established in 1879, with a brief to examine land title for the whole of Fiji. The Commission was to report to the Governor in Council, with whom, in the case of all disputed lands, a final decision lay, subject to provisions of appeal. While contention over land was endemic in Fiji, the Commission was especially concerned with disputes arising from 'purchases' made by Europeans from chiefs who did not intend the permanent alienation of the land they 'sold'. Such a dispute was resolved in 1865, when Consul Jones presided over a Court of Arbitration established following an objection by Ma'afu to the 'purchase' of Vanuabalavu by a European. In this court, as at the later

33 Robert Sherson Swanston to Jones, 25 Sept. 1866, FO, HBM Consul Fiji and Tonga, ML.

34 Ma'afu to HBM Consul, 15 Sept. 1867, FO, HBM Consul Fiji and Tonga, ML.

Lands Claims Commission, evidence from Ma'afu enlarges our understanding, not only of the disputed sale, but also, and more importantly, the means by which he acquired legitimate sovereignty over the island. At the Commission, Ma'afu related a detailed version of the events which led to his assumption of sovereign rights over Vanuabalavu and the islands within its fringing reef. He recalled that, not long after he 'had...come down from Tonga', Tuikilakila, within whose suzerainty Vanuabalavu then lay, had arrived at Lakeba for a visit. Tuikilakila admired Ma'afu's canoe, which the young Tongan promptly presented to him. The pair sailed in the canoe to Somosomo, and during a stop at Lomaloma, Tuikilakila granted to Ma'afu 'the island of Vanuabalavu, from which to levy pigs and sinnet'.³⁶ The right to levy pigs and sinnet appears in retrospect to be a dubious foundation for sovereignty. More than 15 years earlier, Ma'afu had addressed the question of sovereignty at the Court of Arbitration in a statement 'regarding the Tongan claim to Vanuabalavu and adjoining islands'. Here, his claim was more expansive. His sworn statement asserted that Tuikilakila had

begged from Ma'afu a large canoe named the 'Falike', and desired Ma'afu to accompany him to his home. In sailing down from Lakeba to Somosomo, Tuikilakila pointed [out] all his islands between Lakeba and Taveuni, and said that Ma'afu was to rule over them all, and at all times to send for and take whatever he required; he kept Ma'afu with him on that visit for one year.³⁷

Ma'afu's grievance arose from a dispute with Golea, a son of Tuikilakila and an eventual successor as Tui Cakau. In 1863 Golea had sold Vanuabalavu to George Matthew Henry, a half-brother of Samuel Pinder Henry. Ma'afu brought an action against George Henry, in which he claimed that Golea had no right to sell the island. Consul Jones was able to convene the court by virtue of his magisterial powers, which permitted him to adjudicate disputes involving British subjects. Ma'afu said in evidence that he had remained 'for a year and a half' at Lomaloma, and during the years following returned to Vanuabalavu 'to lay the country under contribution for sinnet, yams etc'.³⁸

The court admitted a petition from 34 Vanuabalavu chiefs, who acknowledged that their island, as a consequence of a gift from Tuikilakila, rightly belonged to Ma'afu, and that only he had the right to dispose of it. The chiefs further acknowledged that the island had never reverted to Cakaudrove since its possession by Ma'afu and that, as a consequence, they considered themselves to be Tongan subjects. They declared that Vanuabalavu and 12 nearby islands

have for a long time past belonged to the Tongan government and that we have never sold any of the said islands, or consented to the same, we knowing well that Ma'afu, as representative of the Tongan government was the only party who had the right to do so...we again state that we wish to belong to no other power except Tonga, we also desire Tongan laws to be promulgated in our country...³⁹

36 Evidence by Ma'afu before the Lands Claims Commission (hereinafter LCC), 1880, R930, NAF.

37 Statement of Ma'afu regarding the Tongan claim to Vanua Balavu and adjoining islands, 1865, FO, HBM Consul Fiji and Tonga, ML.

38 Report of a Court of Arbitration, 1 and 2 Feb. 1865, Register No. 381, Register of Deeds 1858-1873, NAF.

39 Register No. 380, Register of Deeds 1858-1873, NAF.

The views of the chiefs coincided with those of Ma'afu to such a degree that we are entitled to suspect that Consul Jones was not alone in his attempts to manipulate both people and events. If Ma'afu's had been the guiding hand behind the chiefs' declaration, the expressed desire for the promulgation of Tongan laws brings to the fore yet again the question of Tupou I's ambitions for the Tongan lands in Fiji. For our present purposes, it suffices to bear in mind that the Vanuabalavu chiefs believed that Ma'afu's legitimate rights derived from sources other than Tui Cakau's gift, whatever the precise terms of the gift had been. Evidence was heard concerning Ma'afu's intervention on the side of the Christian people of Lomaloma against the heathen chiefs of Yaro, the northern district of the island, in 1854, during a prolonged conflict between Christian and 'heathen' forces. Following their defeat, the chiefs of Yaro presented *tabua* and baskets of earth to Ma'afu 'expressly stating that they gave themselves and their district, and during the same week the chiefs of the Lomaloma district did the same for the second time they having presented earth to Ma'afu on his first arrival'.⁴⁰

Ma'afu's ownership of Vanuabalavu was clearly thought to be legitimate by the island's chiefs, principally as a consequence of the gifts of *tabua* and baskets of earth. In his judgement, Consul Jones found that Vanuabalavu and some of the principal islands nearby, namely Namalata, Susui, Munia, Avea and Cikobia, were lawfully in Ma'afu's possession, having been granted to him by Tui Cakau in 1855, during the prolonged visit of Tupou I to Fiji. Jones also found that Golea's sales to George Matthew Henry and other Europeans were invalid, because the islands were not Golea's to sell. While the judgement, some 16 years after Tui Cakau's original gift, endorsed Ma'afu's authority in the islands, it did not resolve the question of the terms of that gift. Ma'afu's rights were shown to owe much to his successful intervention in an island long divided against itself, on his occupation of the island thereafter, and on the accession of sovereignty to him in the customary Fijian manner. It is also highly probable that pressure which Ma'afu had brought to bear on the lesser chiefs of the island did nothing to harm his chances in court.

More pertinent to a resolution of the question of Tui Cakau's original gift to Ma'afu was the evidence at the Lands Claims Commission of Samate, a *matanivanua*, or herald, who had attended both Tuikilakila and Golea. Samate was explicit:

I do remember that [Tuikilakila] gave the *magiti* of Vanua Balavu and the adjacent islands to Ma'afu. That did not give him any title to the soil, but only to the produce of it. The rights of the soil still remained with us – the Cakaudrove people.

According to Samate, Ma'afu, after the judgement in his favour, had sought further acknowledgement of his rights from Golea:

After the enquiry [of 1865], Ma'afu came to Tui Cakau and said, 'Be good natured, and give me Vanua Balavu to live on; if you refuse I will either go to Wea [Uea, the Tongan settlement on Lakeba] or Rotumah, as I cannot return to Tonga. If you give me this land, and I do not return permanently to Tonga, it reverts to you, and does not come to [my son] Charlie'. Tui Cakau assented

and said, 'Vanua Balavu and the islands inside its reef belong to you, but all outside still belongs to me'.⁴¹

On the basis of this evidence, the Lands Claims Commissioner, Victor A. Williamson, reported:

From his evidence it clearly appears that the rights conferred on Ma'afu were merely those of *lala* (chiefly requisition) and of levying *magiti* (feasts).⁴²

Samate's evidence, made as it was at the request of Ma'afu, appears to confirm that Tui Cakau's gift involved levying rights only and not absolute possession.

Fijian oral traditions, of which more will be said below, possess an importance equal to that of official records in determining questions such as the nature of Ma'afu's sovereignty in Vanuabalavu. Many of them have been collected by the Native Lands Commission, a statutory body, which required each *yavusa*, or district, to nominate a spokesman who would narrate the stories of how his people had come into possession of the lands which they claimed as their own. These narrations, collectively known as the *Tukutuku Raraba*, are to-day in the care of the Native Lands Trust Board in Suva. In the case of the village of Sawana, within the *yavusa ko Toga* on Vanuabalavu, the spokesman was one Viliame Makasiale, an elderly Tongan who narrated his people's traditions in 1923.⁴³ His knowledge of Tui Cakau's gift supports the 1880 evidence of Samate:

While Ma'afu was with Tui Nayau, Tui Cakau (Tuikilakila) came and visited them to request Tui Nayau to build a *takia* [canoe] for him. Tui Nayau mentioned that he had no *takia*, but Tuikilakila asked him about the *takia* he saw at anchor. Tui Nayau said that it belonged to Ma'afu. Tuikilakila was surprised when he heard the name of Ma'afu. He asked why Ma'afu was there and why he had not been presented to him on his (Tuikilakila's) arrival. Ma'afu was duly presented, and Tuikilakila asked him about the *takia*. Ma'afu told Tuikilakila that he could have the *takia*. The two of them voyaged in it to Vanuabalavu. When they arrived there, Tuikilakila gave Vanuabalavu to Ma'afu, including the right to levy pigs and sinnet (*magimagi*).

From Vanuabalavu, they continued to Laucala, where for the second time Tuikilakila gave Vanuabalavu to Ma'afu. If Ma'afu were to run short of pigs, he should go to Laucala to renew his supplies. After Tuikilakila's death, Raivalita succeeded as Tui Cakau. He gave Vanuabalavu to Ma'afu for the third time.

Vanuabalavu was later bought by Mr Henry from Ratu Golea. This was done after the war at Wairiki.⁴⁴

The final word on the question of the gift to Ma'afu comes from the *Report on the Proceedings of the Native Lands Commission in the Province of Lau*, published at Suva in 1913. After confirming the gift of levying rights, the report dealt with the question of Ma'afu's sovereignty over the land:

41 Evidence of Samate, 20 Nov. 1880, LCC 960, NAF.

42 LCC 960, Supplement, NAF. See also Victor A. Williamson to John B. Thurston, 9 Dec. 1880, *ibid*.

43 For a discussion of the purpose, nature and limitations of the *Tukutuku Raraba*, see Peter France, *The Charter of the Land* (Melbourne 1969), 10 et seq. See also A.C. Reid, *Tovata I and II* (Suva 1990), Introduction.

44 Viliame Makasiale, informant, *Tukutuku Raraba*, koro ko Sawana, tikina ko Lomaloma, yavusa ko Toga, Native Lands Trust Board, Suva. The 'war at Wairiki' took place in 1862.

Later on, when on a visit to Taveuni, Ma'afu called on his way at Lomaloma, but after remaining a short time only, passed on towards the Qilaqila passage [part of Vanuabalavu's reef]. Whilst sailing along the coast, his canoe grounded on the Cakaunivula reef. It was seen by a chief named Koli, who went out and brought Ma'afu to the island of Adavaci [off Vanuabalavu's western side]. After remaining there some time, Ma'afu continued his journey to Taveuni, where he was the guest of Tuikilakila the Tui Cakau. During this visit it is said that Tui Cakau made over to Ma'afu the sovereignty of all his windward islands from Tuvuca to Laucala, and that this gift was subsequently confirmed by Raivalita and Golea, the brother and son of Tuikilakila.⁴⁵

If we accept this account, it is evident that Ma'afu's acquisition of the sovereignty of Vanuabalavu and its adjacent islands was subsequent to, and separate from, the 1849 gift from Tui Cakau. It is significant that in a matter of controversy which began with Tui Cakau's gift in 1849 and ended only in 1913 with the publication of the *Report of the Native Lands Commission*, conclusions can be drawn without recourse to any missionary writings. There is no better example of the value of legal and other official records in illuminating a crucial aspect of Ma'afu's career in Fiji: the basis, in both Fijian custom and English law, of his authority in Lau.

The question of Ma'afu's sovereignty in Vanuabalavu is one of several concerning Ma'afu's career in Fiji which have never received adequate treatment in print. Another concerns the reasons why Ma'afu left Tonga to make his home in Fiji. Many scholars have asserted that he was banished from Tonga by Tupou I as a dangerous rival, around whom dissenting chiefs might rally.⁴⁶ He was alleged to have incurred the king's displeasure through breach of trust and bold rebellion,⁴⁷ and it was even stated that if he had remained in Tonga he would have been put to death 'as there was not room in Tonga for two such important persons as himself and the King'.⁴⁸ Tupou I's supposed removal order was sometimes allied with a mission to govern or otherwise control the unruly Tongans, many of them exiles, who lived in eastern Fiji and were represented as a potential threat to the king's authority.⁴⁹

Space does not permit consideration of this question in any detail here. Suffice to say that there is no evidence that, in 1847, anyone in Tonga considered Ma'afu as a threat to Tupou I. Two years earlier, he had been asked to join an apparent conspiracy against the new Tu'i Kanokupolu, but had declined to do so.⁵⁰ Reference has already been made to missionary Thomas's antipathy towards Ma'afu, while the attractions

46 G.V. Maxwell, *Report on the Proceedings of the Native Lands Commission in the Lau Province* (Suva 1913), 5-6. Raivalita was a son, not a brother, of Tuikilakila.

47 See, for example, Basil Thomson, *Fijians: A study in the decay of custom* (London 1908), 52-3; Julian Thomas, *Cannibals and Convicts* (London 1886), 24; Berthold Seemann, *Viti: An Account of a government mission to the Vitian or Fijian Islands* (London 1862), 240-2; William Thomson, 'Fiji: Past and Present' in *Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia*, 17 (1899), 43; J.H. de Ricci, *Fiji: Our new province in the South Seas* (London 1875), 225; R.A. Derrick, *A History of Fiji* (Suva 1950), 128; A. Harold Wood, *History and Geography of Tonga* (Nuku'alofa 1932), 54; Sione Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga* (Honolulu 1974), 94-5.

48 C.S. Ross, *Fiji and the Western Pacific* (Geelong 1909), 107.

49 Adolph Brewster, *King of the Cannibal Isles* (London 1937), 266.

50 See, for example, Derrick, *A History of Fiji*, 128; R.A. Derrick, 'Ma'afu', in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Fiji Society for Science and Industry*, 2 (Dec. 1953), 108; John D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji 1858-1870* (London 1958), 5; Wood, *History and Geography*, 98; Laura Thomson, *Fijian Frontier* (San Francisco 1940), 24-5; Alexander and Phyllis Lessin: *Village of the Conquerors: Sawana, a Tongan village in Fiji* (Eugene, Or. 1970), 10-11; Basil Thomson, *Fijians*, 53.

51 Peter Turner, *Journal*, 26 Dec. 1845, ML.

of Fiji itself, free from harsh authority both spiritual and temporal, were undeniable. Ma'afu left Tonga in July 1847 in the company of Tevita Unga and another son of Tupou I, as well as Lausi'i, the king's brother. They were part of a group of high chiefs accompanying Ratu Mara, a classificatory brother of Cakobau, who was returning to Fiji after taking refuge in Tonga for 18 months. The writings of three missionaries, Thomas in Tonga and Calvert and Lyth in Fiji, enable us both to date the voyage and to understand something of the reasons for it. Mention of the voyage is also made in the statement by Tingea referred to above. While no contemporary official records exist concerning Ma'afu's departure from Tonga, the missionary sources suffice, if not to put in place all pieces of the jigsaw, at least to enable the broad outlines of the picture, with considerable detail here and there, to emerge.

The same sources can be used to highlight a final example of scholarly neglect of Ma'afu's early years: the apparent confusion over the time of his voyage to Fiji. While estimates ranging between 1840 and 1850 have appeared in published works, consideration of the evidence will demonstrate that the voyage can be dated to within three weeks. On 28 June 1847, John Thomas in Nuku'alofa noted preparations being made for a voyage to Fiji. 'Two of the king's brothers and nearly all his sons, with many others, are going to Fejees'.⁵¹ Then, on 20 July, Richard Lyth, stationed at Somosomo, recorded in his journal: 'Tidings have arrived of Ratu Mara's arrival in Feejee from Tonga, accompanied by King George's two sons – in order to offer a *soro* to Cakobau for Ratu Mara's restoration of power at Bau'.⁵² Three days later, Calvert, then in charge of the Wesleyan mission in Lakeba, wrote to a fellow missionary on the subject of the new arrivals:

Here Mara is with six canoes given to him in Tonga and his own *tabilai* [a type of canoe end]. Ma'afu, Uga and Vugakoto – Laujii – all here – to accompany Mara to Bau – and to build canoes here. In a month or two they talk of going. On these Toga and Feejeean affairs I might write several sheets – but refrain...⁵³

Calvert's words hint at other aspects of Ma'afu's participation in what modern diplomacy would call a high-level delegation from Tupou I to the ruling chiefs of Bau. These particular missionary sources, among many others, have never received proper attention from scholars.

Mention has already been made of the most important indigenous sources in Fiji, the *Tukutuku Raraba*. It was in some ways a refreshing change to have the opportunity to examine these unique records, which provide much information absent from documented sources. Makasiale's account of Ma'afu's actions in placing his Fijian lands at the disposal of Tupou I corroborates Ma'afu's own sworn statement of 4 February 1865, in which he stated that he 'gave [his] Lands to George Tubou and the Government of Tonga'.⁵⁴ No European had been on hand to document this crucial event. Other oral traditions have survived: I have come across an account, now

⁵² John Thomas, Journal, 28 June 1847, ML.

⁵³ Richard Lyth, Journal, 20 July 1847, ML.

⁵⁴ James Calvert to Thomas Williams, 23 July 1847, Personal Papers of James Calvert, ML.

⁵⁵ Register No. 379, Register of Deeds 1858-1873, FO, HBM Consul Fiji and Tonga, ML.

published, of Ma'afu's visit to Fiji in 1841, when he supposedly formed a liaison with a woman on Nayau, an island near Lakeba, and fathered a son named Kateni.⁵⁵ Sources such as these are free of the obsession of Western historians with knowing *when* something happened; the events which they record, not always in correct order (another Western obsession?) provide an often astonishing wealth of detail. They can illuminate people, places and events about which little or no information is found in archival sources.

There is always a serpent in Eden. In the case of traditional Fijian history, that serpent has become a two-headed monster. Oral traditions, whether now documented or not, are the product of someone's memory. They represent the sum of personal experiences, overlaid by stories told to the narrator, often long in the past. In both cases, the frailties of human memory are brought to bear on the latest version. Old stories, whether of one's own life or of the lives of those long dead, are likely to change every time they are told. Viliame Makasiale, narrator of the Sawanan traditions, could remember Ma'afu and had heard as a young man the stories of Ma'afu's campaigns during the 1850s and 1860s from those who participated in them. There is no question that we are fortunate to have Makasiale's narration in writing, even though the *Tukutuku Raraba* are very difficult of access for scholars. It is equally certain that the detailed accounts he provides are not always accurate. In fairness, it should not be forgotten that the *Tukutuku Raraba* were never intended to be entirely historical in content. In the words of Peter France, 'the *Tukutuku Raraba* were presented as charters to justify the tribe's position in relation to its neighbours, both in social prestige and in the ownership of land'.⁵⁶ Their inevitable weaknesses as historical documents do nothing to impair their original purposes, which they continue to serve.

Oral traditions are of course not alone in possessing inherent weaknesses; written sources too are subject to similar frailties of the human mind and spirit. In the case of Fiji, our appreciation of the rich mosaic of oral history brings into focus the second head of the monster. Once an oral tradition becomes accepted in the fullness of time, it has *become* history, so far as its hearers are concerned. The bearers of these traditions today would have no truck with a meddling foreign scholar who comes along waving a document purporting to show that an event enshrined in oral tradition did not happen in the manner described. Traditions which have become history, remain history, in the minds of many Fijians.

All biographers carry with them their personal demons, which must be, if not exorcised, at least tamed, before the pen may finally be laid down. In the case of Ma'afu, my particular demon is cynicism. How often do we read in some missionary journal of Ma'afu's attentiveness to the means of grace, or of his devotion to Bible study or good works, only to come rapidly upon remarks such as Lyth's 'the reformation is exploded'? How often do we see Ma'afu promising not to interfere in the affairs of his neighbours or, when his interference cannot be gainsaid, his seeking to shift as much blame as possible to others, while assuming a mien of repentance and

⁵⁵ Noqu Yavutu, *Nayau* (Suva 1994), 94.

⁵⁶ France, *The Charter*, 11.

acceptance of the consequences of his misdeeds. It is my task, before my own pen can be laid down, to lift the veil imposed by my cynicism so that I may look into the heart and mind of the man Ma'afu. The nature of the sources will prevent that task being carried to completion, although it will not prevent conclusions being drawn.

Ma'afu gave no interviews, kept no journal and, in the late 1860s, wrote letters only in an official capacity, through the agency of his secretary Swanston. His story cannot be considered a biography in the way that modern studies of other prominent Fijians can. I can mention, for example, the biographies of Ratu Sukuna and A.D. Patel, as well as the recent memoir by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.⁵⁷ By way of contrast with our knowledge of the lives of these men, we can know so little of the workings of Ma'afu's mind, or of the motives which drove his restless ambition. My years of research into Ma'afu's life have nevertheless confirmed my view that an essentially biographical approach is by far the best way to unravel some of the mysteries of this enigmatic man and to attempt an evaluation of his contribution to the evolution of contemporary Fiji.

58 Deryck Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, statesman, man of two worlds* (London 1980); Brij V. Lal, *A Vision for Change: AD Patel and the politics of Fiji* (Canberra 1997); Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, *The Pacific Way: A memoir* (Honolulu 1997).

*While The Gun is Still Smoking: Witnessing Participant History**

BRIJ V. LAL

A lot of history is concealed autobiography',¹ the distinguished Australian historian A.K.S. Inglis once wrote. That observation rings true to me. So, too, does E.H. Carr's contention that every historian is in some sense 'a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious and unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs'.² And Jim Davidson seems right as well when he says that the 'initial impetus towards the study of modern history not infrequently derives from the student's own sense of involvement in his own society'.³ The nature and quality of that engagement, I would argue, shape our understandings and assumptions about the world we live in, and frame the identity, orientation and style of our work. I do not wish to suggest a simple mechanistic correlation between class, ideology and intellectual work. History is a liberal, broad minded discipline of multiple, overlapping identities, which admits a variety of approaches, techniques and sources. Its boundaries are porous and flexible. What I do suggest is a dynamic and dialectical relationship between social and historical experience and intellectual endeavour, underlining the fundamental truth that we live in our own histories.

The subject of this paper is contemporary history, in particular, eyewitness and participant history. It is necessarily autobiographical, as these projects usually are,⁴ but I use my experience to raise issues about the limitations, attractions and opportunities that present themselves to historians who live at the interface of history and practical action. What forces and impulses pull them in that direction of practical engagement? Does participation or engagement hinder or help one's understanding of the society's history? How does it affect the analysis and interpretation of the event in which one is a participant? Does engagement provide new insights into the dynamics of the practical affairs of state, or does it simply reinforce existing

* I am grateful to Doug Munro, Clive Moore and Hank Nelson for giving a draft of this paper the treatment it so richly deserved. Their intervention has led to improvement, but for all the remaining errors, I hold the copyright.

1 K.S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1983* (Melbourne 1983), 1.

2 E.H. Carr, *What is History* (Harmondsworth 1964), 35.

3 In his 'Understanding Pacific History: The participant as a historian', in Peter Munz (ed.), *The Feel of Truth: Essays in New Zealand and Pacific history* (Wellington 1969), 34.

4 See, for a typical example, David Butler, 'Instant history', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 2:2 (1968), 107-14.

prejudices? There is, in my particular case, the added complication of being a historian participating in the affairs of my own country.⁵

Participant and eye witness history of the type I discuss here, without drawing a sharp distinction between them, are decidedly out of fashion even, or especially, among historians. The conventional, not to say unconvincing, objections are well known. Participant and eye witness accounts are partial and biased; they distort; they lack perspective; they are unable to separate matters of residual from matters of cardinal importance; they are, at best, the first primitive draft, a small building block, nothing more, in the larger edifice of later historiography produced in the course of time by detachment and objectivity. Attachment, it is argued, constricts accuracy, and advocacy, of whatever kind, is the stuff of propaganda. History should be objective, not reductionist or directly utilitarian in intent, and the historian should try to tell 'how it actually happened'. Disapproval also comes from cultural relativists and the new social historians who decry the narratives of 'total' history and the search for complete explanation, wary of creating structures and imposing interpretations which suffocate variety and deny diversity. Scepticism, doubt, ambiguity, tentativeness and partiality of knowledge, a firm belief in the impotence of human reason and the injustice of universal moral judgements, are markers of this discourse. These words and concepts would seem incongruous to most participant historians. And *their* organising concepts – political power, the nation state, democracy, human rights, for example – and *their* efforts to search for patterns and meanings, to create structures which unite and enlarge the common space, are dismissed as hopelessly obsolete, relics of a past long gone and mercifully forgotten. I exaggerate slightly, but the suspicions and the tensions are real.

In the Pacific Islands many scholars, including historians, have been active participants in the affairs of their societies. Nowhere in the region has this been more marked than in my own country of Fiji, where the list of academic departees is impressively long. The drift began with Rusiate Nayacakalou, trained in anthropology at the London School of Economics by Raymond Firth and tenured at Sydney, who gave up a promising academic career to return to Fiji to head the Native Land Trust Board.⁶ Isireli Lasaga, with a doctorate in geography, left an academic position at the University of the South Pacific for a senior position in the Fiji public service.⁷ Ahmed Ali gave up academia for national politics, followed by Satendra Nandan, Tupeni Baba, Jo Nacola and Meli Waqa, Ganesh Chand, Isimeli Cokanisiga and, for a while, Wadan Narsey. I mention only the names of those who took the direct plunge from university teaching into parliamentary politics, but many Fiji staff, both Fijian and

5 As opposed to, say, Jim Davidson, O.H.K. Spate, Harry Maude, Ron Crocombe, David Stone, who were all expatriate advisors and experts. Alan Ward, who is engaged as a consultant to the Waitangi Tribunal in his native New Zealand, has also worked as an advisor and consultant on land issues in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.

6 Rusiate Nayacakalou, *Leadership in Fiji* (Melbourne 1975), v.

7 Lasaga wrote a book, *The Fijian People: Before and after independence, 1959-1977* (Canberra 1984). Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, in the preface, writes: 'Dr Lasaga is an academic who has the sobering experience of finding himself being translated into the field of administration and he has distinguished himself in both. But this means that he has been able to bring to his writing of his book both intellectual and practical disciplines, and his academic studies have been tried and tempered in the field.' Lasaga himself does not reflect on this beyond saying that he is attempting to represent the Fijian point of view.

Indo-Fijian, have long been politically active in a variety of capacities. One hopes that in due course some of them will reflect on their transition and transformations and tell us how their training and experience as academics has tempered their practical work.

Participation came naturally to the generation of students attending the University of the South Pacific in its salad days of the 1970s. The regional university, which opened in 1968, was required by its founding mission to train manpower to meet the anticipated development needs of a rapidly decolonising region. A Programme Planning Seminar at the Laucala Bay campus in May 1968 took its cue from the charter of the university which provided that the 'objects of the University shall be the maintenance, advancement and dissemination of knowledge by teaching, consultancy and research and otherwise and the provision at appropriate levels of education and training responsive to the well-being and needs of the communities of the South Pacific'.⁸ At the seminar, 'the decision was taken to adopt the general organisation of groups of disciplines located within Schools of broad developmental rather than the more common departmental and faculty structure'. The initial schools, two of which have been re-named since, were Education, Natural Resources and Social and Economic Development.⁹ The developmental intellectual climate set the framework of learning in practical ways. Specialisation was discouraged, a broad-based education deemed the best preparation for training future administrators and teachers. The political environment of decolonisation provided an affirming context for the intellectual course charted by the new university. My own evolution as a historian engaged in practical issues derives largely from that experience.

Like other Pacific Island historians – Sione Lātūkefu, Malama Meleisea, John Waiko – I focused on the history of my own people for my first piece of sustained graduate research, writing my dissertation on the social and cultural background of the Indian indentured migrants to Fiji. At the same time, I expanded my research to include the workings of contemporary politics, which began through a series of election studies and commentaries. Living in Fiji, and called upon to comment on the political campaigns, I could not, nor did I want to, escape the challenge and opportunity to participate, albeit as an interested bystander, in contemporary debates in my own country; and what could be more interesting than covering a heated political campaign? With time, an incidental interest evolved into a major professional preoccupation, resulting in a series of detailed political studies, and culminating in my appointment to the Fiji Constitution Review Commission in 1995. That appointment itself was preceded by several years of active opposition to the coups of 1987 and the divisive public culture of governance they spawned. From the very beginning I was opposed to the overthrow of the Labour Coalition government. I felt then, as I feel now, that there was something profoundly wrong about overturning the verdict of the ballot box by the bayonet.

The coups presented, for me, a deep political as well as moral crisis. One either supported the coups or opposed them: there could be no middle ground. I lost patience

⁸ University of the South Pacific *Calendar* 1983, 315.

⁹ School of Education has been re-named School of Humanities, and Natural Resources has become School of Pure and Applied Sciences.

with those who treated the coups as a 'on the one hand and on the other' kind of discourse. Perhaps I spoke too firmly, but at least there was no doubt in anyone's mind about where I stood. Taking a stand: those words have a familiar ring to those caught in the middle of a fray, both participants and historians. My opposition intensified with time. I intervened through radio and television interviews, mostly unsuccessfully, to correct what I construed to be misrepresentations and misconceptions. I learnt the rude lesson that in the public domain facts, when they come in the way of a dramatic story, are not welcome. Complex facts do not engage the public imagination, which wants simple, vivid, preferably provocative answers to quotable 'newsworthy' questions, delivered in attractive sound bites. By intervening the way I did, I may have compromised my objectivity, but I remained staunch in my support for liberal, representative democracy while emphasising the need to acknowledge and celebrate and constitutionally recognise sacred and important institutions of Fijian society. In this respect, I share Oskar Spate's wise advice to declare one's hand to the readers:

The impartiality which evades responsibility by saying nothing, the partiality which masks its bias by presenting slanted facts with an air of cold objectivity – these are a thousand times more dangerous than an open declaration of where one stands; then at least those who disagree can take one's measure with confidence: 'that is why he said thus,'....The important points are that inference must be based on evidence, as carefully verified as possible; and that the choice shall be made from the evidence, and not from pre-conceived ideas.¹⁰

This is the approach I used in my *Power and Prejudice: The making of the Fiji crisis* (1988). I was a target of the coup perpetrators because of my ethnicity and political stance: the book was written while the gun was still smoking. Nonetheless, I brought to my analysis the training and approach of the historian. I gathered all the available evidence as assiduously as I could against which I tested a number of prevailing hypotheses, many of which failed to measure up. One such, which had reached melodramatic proportions soon after the coups, saw the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as the principal instigator of the overthrow of a left-leaning government supposedly hostile to American strategic interests in the Pacific. The presence in Fiji around the time of the coups of some senior American officials alleged to be veterans of coups in other parts of the world added fuel to the fire.¹¹ Nothing that I saw convinced me that the hypothesis was tenable. Americans may have known, perhaps given a knowing wink or looked the other way when they knew that something was afoot, but they did not mastermind the coups. The search for the extent of foreign involvement, I argued, should not be allowed to distort the larger picture. Often those who pursue the theory of external causation pay insufficient attention to the role of local forces and local leaders in the making of their own history.¹²

10 O.H.K. Spate, 'Thirty years ago: a view of the Fiji political scene. Confidential Report to the British Colonial Office', *Journal of Pacific History*, 25 (1990), 103.

11 Dr James Anthony, Fiji exile living in Honolulu, was the principal proponent of this theory.

12 Brij V. Lal, *Power and Prejudice: The making of the Fiji crisis* (Wellington 1988), 36.

A decade later, I have no reason to change my view, but at the time I was accused of being a puppet of the State Department for not holding America responsible for the Fiji crisis. Another hypothesis portrayed the coup as a simple racial conflict, between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, an assertion of indigenous power against an economically powerful and demographically preponderant immigrant-derived community. On the surface the hypothesis sounded convincing, but was superficial upon closer analysis. Ethnicity was both a cause as well as a scapegoat of the crisis. I saw the coups as flowing from a complex interplay of a range of factors, none of which by themselves could be sufficient. I argued:

Fiji coups were more about frustrated politicians bent upon recapturing power lost at the polls than they were about ethnic prejudice, the importance of the latter cannot be – and here it is not – lightly dismissed. I argue further that the basic reasons for the coups will be found not so much in the machinations of outside agencies – which no doubt played a role in aiding and abetting forces opposed to the Coalition government – as within the dynamics of local history and politics, and in the actions and machinations of specific individuals within Fiji without active participation nothing could have been accomplished. It is possible to discern the premonitions of the present crisis in the silent footsteps of modern Fijian history; but to argue that the coups were historically predetermined is to falsify a very complicated story and misjudge its essence. There was nothing really inevitable about the Fiji coups. In the ultimate analysis, the Fiji crisis was caused by a complex combination of incipient class conflicts, provincial tensions among the indigenous Fijians and deep-seated racial antagonisms long embedded in the very structure of Fiji's society and politics.¹³

Over a decade since this analysis was written, many books, some by participants, have been published and some new information has come to light, but my fundamental thesis stands. At least, I stand by it. Indeed, I am tempted to say that it grows stronger as new information comes to light. An important reason is that I wrote the account as a trained historian. We do not deal with certainties but with probabilities. We try to draw conclusions from the facts, as carefully and objectively assembled and verified as possible, rather than fit them into preconceived conclusions. No one explanation by itself 'will satisfactorily account for the complex character of the Fijian crisis', I wrote in 1988, nor was 'it desirable to put the Fijian story into the straitjacket of political and social theories derived from other contexts and experiences'. This is no unique insight: it is simply sound historical practice of the type we employ in the course of our regular work.

While historians are good at predicting the past, they by and large make bad prophets, especially historians of the contemporary scene. Engrossed in the details and drama of events unfolding before their eyes, they miss the wood for the trees. I was no exception. When I wrote, I was deeply pessimistic about Fiji returning to normalcy in my own lifetime. In 1988, the architects of the coup were in power, implementing policies designed to entrench Fijian paramountcy. The economy was on the brink of collapse. Fiji was out of the Commonwealth. Capital drained out of the country and people queued outside foreign embassies seeking visas for permanent migration. The army was on the streets. The Opposition was demoralised. The world did not seem to care. But Fiji did, within a decade, return to embrace a new

¹³ Ibid., 7.

constitution, without violence and bloodshed, to launch the country tentatively in a new direction of inclusive multiracial democracy, only to have it shattered by George Speight's intervention – another case of historians not seeing what was coming. With hindsight, I should have glimpsed the shape of future developments. I had argued that provincial tensions, class interests and individual ambitions for power had led to the coup, along with ethnic fears. It should have been apparent that once the fears which had sparked the crisis had gone, these interests and concerns would have, in the course of time, gone on their own divergent paths. I should have seen that the politically expedient unity of Fijian interests was a chimera, that politics among Fijians, like any other community, was driven by vested social interests and personal ambitions. And my knowledge of history should have taught me that authoritarian structures imposed on a populace through force do not enjoy a long and happy life.

As I read the accounts of the coups, including my own, long after the dust has settled and the army returned to the barracks, I am impressed by the depth and detail of the narratives produced while the gun was still smoking. They convey passion, urgency and immediacy that are difficult for me to conjure up now. The authors argue different theses. There were few points of agreement between them then, and they remain as far apart even now. Time has not erased the difference, and it never will. The idea that one day when all the facts are available, when the first primitive drafts of contemporary, or eye witness history, will be transformed by a master historian into a standard, universally uncontested account, about the full significance of what happened in the past, is mere fantasy.¹⁴ Three of the earliest accounts of the coup were written by professional historians.¹⁵ The imprint of their training and approach is clear. The texts are well documented, but they also rely on types of evidence that go beyond the narrow range of sources typically deployed in conventional political histories.

My own analysis draws upon newspaper accounts and other published sources in the public domain. But it also draws upon other material, much of which is now probably lost to posterity: hand bills, draft copies of speeches, transcripts of radio broadcasts, television footage and interviews. In the future, those wanting to know the initial reaction of the people might turn to the handbills distributed on the streets of the major towns and centres. I reproduced two in my book to give the reader a sense of what was being said and heard as the crisis was unfolding. They capture some of the anxiety, frustration, suppressed anger, trauma at the time in a way that a latter day historian working from conventional sources might be unable to construct. I also used personal observation: the shops clogged with frenzied people buying emergency food supplies; shop windows barricaded behind hurricane shutters; the commandeered vehicles speeding along deserted streets; anxious, armed, balaclava-clad soldiers atop

14 Among the influential historians of the past who hold the hope of ultimate history is Herbert Butterfield. See his *History and Human Relations* (London 1951), 10: 'If we consider the history of the historical writing that has been issued, generation after generation, on a given body of events, we shall generally find that in the early stages of this process of reconstruction the narrative which is produced has a primitive and simple shape. As one generation of students succeed another, however, each developing the historiography of this particular subject, the narrative passes through certain typical stages until it is brought to a high and subtle form of organisation.'

15 Besides me, Deryck Scarr, *The Politics of Illusion: Military coup in Fiji* (Kensington 1988), and Robbie Robertson and Akosita Tamanisau, *Fiji – Shattered Coups* (Sydney 1988).

strategic buildings; the long queues seeking to emigrate, the hushed conversations in cars. These are the kind of details a future novelist writing about this event might find to be of primary importance. A contemporary historian, especially one working in societies where the culture of preserving the historical record is undeveloped and unappreciated, carries the dual burden of being an archivist and an observer as well as an interpreter of events.

Eyewitness history also provides the historian the opportunity to corroborate evidence through interviews, which is unavailable to those working on more remote periods. A case in point is the role of the judiciary in resolving the early stages of the first (May) coup. The matter was understandably shrouded in secrecy, encouraging rumours and false impressions about what was happening at Government House. What advice had the judges given the Governor General? Had their advice been sought? What was the legal status of the suspended constitution and other authority flowing from it? Wanting to find out, I rang the Chief Justice at his residence, and, much to my surprise, he readily agreed to see me that very morning. When I met him, the Chief Justice not only gave me a detailed account of the difficulties he had encountered in contacting the Governor General – he gave me the names of individuals impeding that effort – he also gave me a copy of the High Court judges' submission to the Governor General, which is reproduced in my book.¹⁶ The judges' advice that the 'purported suspension of the Constitution of Fiji by the military regime which has assumed de facto power is illegal and invalid', and that the independence constitution 'remains in force and unchanged', when it finally reached the Governor General, changed his mind. He proclaimed himself deeply disturbed by 'unlawful seizure of members of my government' 'which must not be allowed to continue'. The role of the judiciary was a crucial one, and one which I would not have understood properly without the assistance of the Chief Justice. I would be surprised if the Chief Justice would still be able to recall all the details and the emotion as vividly as he did a few hours after the event.¹⁷

I would not today be able to write the book I wrote in 1988. Is that an indictment of contemporary history? I do not think so. My own response is well put by David Butler: 'If one is trying to summarize an event as it seemed at the time, trying to get the facts together, the less one is contaminated by posterior wisdom, by looking back at the events with a knowledge of the consequences, the greater the force and immediacy of one's narrative.'¹⁸ Events and emotions which loomed large at a critical moment in time have a reality and identity of their own, irrespective of their place in the later assessment of history. Their meaning and importance, ethnographic historians will argue, should not be contingent upon the meaning placed upon them

16 In *Power and Prejudice*, 81.

17 In pre-electronic days, when people routinely kept daily diaries and wrote letters with greater frequency, such details might be there for the taking by later historians among private papers, assuming, of course, that these were preserved for posterity.

18 David Butler, 'Instant History', 109.

by posterity. To 're-present what actually happened in its specificity'¹⁹ is important in its own right. But having said that, I am also mindful of Doug Munro's contention that 'contemporary or participant history should not necessarily be regarded as intrinsically deficient or de facto primary source for future historians'. 'Every work of history, no matter the distance between the description and the event', he argues, 'has this same quality of transience, some more than others of course.'²⁰ Historians, as Greg Denning has reminded us, live with the certainty that they will one day become someone else's historiography'.²¹

Writing about your own society as a participant historian requires great sensitivity and tact and a certain degree of self-censorship. The quest for truth and objective understanding has to be balanced against the demands of other, sometimes equally, demanding factors. In a small island state, everyone is known to virtually everyone else, and news travels fast on the coconut wireless. Criticism and adverse comment, no matter how justified, are often taken personally. And they can easily be misconstrued in a country like Fiji which has two contrasting traditions of discourse. One, practised by the Indo-Fijian community, is at home in open, robust, democratic debate. The other, rooted in traditional communal culture, is presented in subtle, indirect ways, conscious of the rank and status of both the speaker and the person spoken about. Commenting on electoral politics in Fiji in the early 1980s, I was acutely conscious of the need to be cautious in my comments and analysis for fear of being misunderstood or, worse still, labelled. I practised a degree of self-censorship in my public comments though not in my writing, from the safety of a foreign university. In a divided society such as Fiji, everything is seen and assessed through the prism of ethnicity. Public memory is racially archived. Birth and death certificates register ethnicity; one is asked to indicate one's ethnic identity when opening a bank account or when taking out a driving licence. Upon leaving and entering Fiji, the citizens are required to declare their ethnic identity. In South Africa, the immigration forms distinguish five categories of ethnicity. In Fiji, the number is seven. Markers of ethnicity are everywhere. In the mid-1990s, when the National Bank of Fiji was on the verge of bankruptcy brought about by breathtakingly bad management, and the matter was raised in parliament by the Indo-Fijian Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Reddy, the indigenous Fijian Foreign Minister (Filipe Bole) attributed the criticism to racism because the employees were Fijians and Rotumans.²² When some Opposition Indo-Fijian members of parliament criticised French nuclear testing in French Polynesia, Rabuka denounced his critics as anti-Fijian, because his (Fijian) government had tried to cultivate relations with the French. When I dared to suggest that Ratu Sukuna's policies had, at least in part, disadvantaged many ordinary Fijians

19 Greg Denning, *The Bounty: An ethnographic history* (Melbourne 1989), 109. Denning argues: 'History is a way of knowing, an act of consciousness, constantly repeated, never the same, always relative to the language in which it is expressed, always relative to the audience to whom it is given, itself a cultural artefact of an age other than the one whose story it tells. History is reductionist insofar as it transforms the totality of the past into words.'

20 Personal correspondence, 5 July 2000.

21 See his 'Reflections on the cultural history of Marshall Sahlins and Valerio Valeri', in *Journal of Pacific History, Bibliography and Comment* (1986), 45.

22 See my *Another Way: The politics of constitutional reform in post-coup Fiji* (Canberra 1998), 54.

because he saw no value in academic education for his people – as distinct from chiefly Fijians, who, thus equipped, could then go on to perpetuate chiefly dominance – while other ethnic groups were marching ahead in the professions, I was labelled an anti-Fijian for my audacity to criticise the work and legacy of a high chief.²³ Physical distance now diminishes the impact of these criticisms, but they can be oppressive and dangerous to those living with them on a daily basis.

Academics resolve the dilemma in several ways. Some present their views openly, without being overly concerned about the consequences. Isireli Lasaqa, analysing the development dilemmas facing the Fijian people, writes forthrightly about 'Fijian life and thought, Fijian needs and aspirations, how they see their neighbours, and the Fijian scene and beyond'.²⁴ If one is labelled a racist for representing a racial point of view, so be it. Some attempt a 'middle course between partiality on the one hand and impartiality on the other', satisfying no one, while others take the grandiose view that 'there is a lot to be said on both sides'.²⁵ Some resort to anonymous but editorially sanctioned essays in the newspapers, getting their ideas into the public arena without revealing their identity. This approach, to me, seems cowardly. Others have used the path of fiction to circumvent the dilemma. The best exponent of this approach in the Pacific Islands is Epeli Hau'ofa. His justifiably well known satire, *Tales of the Tikongs*,²⁶ deals with the problems of aid, development, corruption and mismanagement, conflict between traditional customs and modern attitudes, in the tiny island of Tiko. The issues are identified, and the message gets across without the messenger being persecuted. Sudesh Mishra's searing poems on the coups and subsequent developments also achieve the same goal, but whether his work is read by those who are its target is another matter.²⁷

Participation enables one to see history in the making. It is a sobering experience to see how 'truth' emerges from a vast, chaotic mass of experience and activity, how small things get magnified, torn out of context and used in unexpected ways that change the course of history. One example will suffice. In 1982, Jai Ram Reddy, the leader of the National Federation Party, was fighting a tough election against the ruling Alliance Party which, for its part, wanted to wean away sufficient Indian voters from his party to destroy, once and for all, the NFP's claim to be the voice of the Indian community.²⁸ The campaign was closely contested, tense. In the course of one speech in Labasa, Reddy said that Mara was so desperate for Indian votes that he

23 For an example of distorted criticism, see Ropate R. Qalo, *Small Business: A study of a Fijian family* (Suva 1997), 5. See also Qalo's address to the Fijian Association convention, 1998, and his 'The stamp of the man: initial impressions', in *Journal of Pacific Studies* 22 (1998), 207-12.

24 Lasaqa, *The Fijian People*, xii.

25 The quotes are from David Thomson, *The Aims of History: Values of the historical attitude* (London 1969), 27. Without meaning to be unfair to him, I have the sense that Ahmed Ali held back from searching enquiry into Fiji politics in the 1970s because he had been closely allied to the Alliance party under whose banner he would enter national politics later.

26 Published by Longman Paul (Auckland 1983).

27 See his *Tandava* (Melbourne 1992), and his poems in Arlene Griffin (ed.), *With Heart and Nerve and Sinew: Post-coup writing from Fiji* (Suva 1997).

28 See my 'The Fiji General Elections of 1982: the tidal wave that never came', *Journal of Pacific History*, 18 (1983), 134-57.

would even open a toilet block in order capture them! A harmless enough remark given the context, but printed in the papers next day, it aroused more emotion and acrimony than I had ever seen before. Reddy, many Fijians said, had committed a serious breach of protocol, which in ancient times would have seen him clubbed. He had insulted not only a great man, but also insulted the *vanua* of Lau, of which Mara was the paramount chief, and the Fijian people generally. How dare an Indian suggest that a high chief like Mara would ever stoop so low to get Indian votes. Seizing the moment, Mara said in a deeply injured tone that those who had attacked him will not be forgiven or forgotten. Protest marches were held throughout Fiji, demanding Reddy's resignation. Racial rhetoric reached dangerous levels. Up went the call for Fijian unity. Reddy lost the election, winning 24 seats to Alliance's 26, but his words remained firmly in people's minds for a long time. Indeed, a few months after the election, at a meeting of the Great Council of Chiefs, opened for the first time by a reigning monarch, the chiefs vented their anger at the remarks made by the *kaitani*, foreigners, and passed resolutions demanding Fijian dominance in parliament.²⁹ A stray comment, uttered in the middle of a heated campaign, inflamed racial passions and brought Fiji to the brink of potentially explosive political conflict. Such is the nature of politics in an ethnically divided society.

The participant historian also learns from personal experience that sometimes the public record does not reflect reality, and may in fact be contrary to it. When that happens, should the participant expose the facts and face the consequences, knowing that left uncorrected, the historical record would forever remain distorted? Again, one example will suffice. During the course of public hearings organised by the Fiji Constitution Review Commission, I was attacked several times by a number of nationalist Fijians, who questioned my credentials and credibility and integrity to be on the Commission. The attacks were vicious and hurtful, accusing me of being an incompetent, anti-Fijian bigot. They were broadcast on the television and published in the newspapers, and several years later, people still remember the incident. The Commission expressed full confidence in me, but I was discomfited by such a brutal and unfounded attack especially when I could not respond without damaging the standing of the Commission. Much later, when I met one accuser in an airport lounge, and another at a social gathering, I gently asked why they had been so hard on me. The first, wrapping his arms around my shoulders, said that he was trying to 'soften me up', a routine tactic politicians use against all new opponents, trying to get their measure. That came as a surprise to me. The other, equally frank, regretted attacking me, but revealed a personal agenda. He was contesting a by-election in Tailevu, one of several caused by the disqualification of Adi Samanunu, as a member of the Fijian nationalist organisation Vanua Tako Lavo Party, a nationalist Fijian political organisation. Attacking me, he said, would assure him automatic publicity and national news coverage as a champion of the Fijian people, standing up against this 'smart Indian'. Not that it did him any good, because he lost the by-election by a huge margin.

29 See my 'The 1982 Fiji National Election and its aftermath', in *USP Sociological Society Newsletter*, 5 (1983), 3-17.

Serving on the Commission also made me realise how limited, and limiting, media coverage is or can be. Things are done on the run, deadlines have to be met, there is limited space in the news column, the story, important in its own right, does not have 'sale' value. Often, only the sensational bits and pieces get reported, and even then they are torn out of context. For instance, the future historian of Fiji's constitutional evolution will read, from the newspapers, that the reason why the Commission was unable to submit its report on time was that Tomasi Vakatora and I were bitterly opposed to each other and were unable to agree on the most important points.³⁰ I will not deny that we had our difficult days, but the reason had nothing to do with us: the delays were caused by the sheer amount of work we were asked to accomplish. For the record, the main details about the structure of the executive and legislative branches of the government were resolved by January 1996, several months before we submitted our report! This fact will be known only to those who care to comb the record of the Commission rather than relying on the newspapers. Sometimes, what is said never comes to light, again distorting the public record. Let me illustrate this with an example. One prominent advocate of separate representation for Muslims, then a civil servant, asked for a private audience with the Commission to plead his case. The request was granted. He repeated the usual arguments: Muslims were a separate group, apart from the larger Indian community into which they were lumped for the sake of administrative convenience. He also favoured making Fiji a Christian state, largely to win the support of the Fijians for his cause. How could he, a Muslim, agree to Fiji becoming a Christian state? Was there not a contradiction here? His response: his exact words were, 'No, because Islam is a heresy of Christianity anyway! Christians we don't mind, it's the Hindu gatekeepers we cannot abide.'

There were many others like him, saying one thing in public and another in private for reasons of pure political expediency that perplexed me. Take the Sunday Ban, for instance, a strict observance of the Sabbath, which came into force in 1988, proscribing all unauthorised commercial and recreational activity on Sunday. Many people, including, especially, indigenous Fijians, suffered from the ban on public transport, making it difficult for them to attend church or go to hospitals or access other essential services, and the closure of shops denied them the normal foodstuff such as bread, tea, sugar, all staples in the countryside. They wanted the ban removed, they said in private, but in public they remained steadfast in support of it. It was a similar situation on provincial representation. Many Fijians in private deplored its deleterious effects, sowing the seeds of provincial division and rivalry, impeding the development of an effective national political party not tethered to local provincial interests. They wanted us to recommend reversion to the constituency-based electoral system of the pre-coup era. Yet, these same individuals remained disconcertingly silent in public or actively joined the chorus to retain the status quo. In a meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, one participant arguing for change pointed out the absurdity of Filipe Bole not being able to stand from Suva, where he lived, but

30 Doug Munro, in a review of my book *Another Way: The politics of constitutional review in post-coup Fiji* (Canberra 1998), likened my working relationship with Tomasi Vakatora as a meeting of minds between two seemingly-irreconcilables akin to that between the German Stresmann and the French Briand, who put aside national differences in the quest for the greater cause of a lasting piece in Europe.

standing from Lau, where he was born but where he had not lived for decades. Many members agreed with the absurdity of the situation, but voted against the proposal. The public heard that the Fijian members of parliament were unanimously in favour of retaining the provincial system of election. Some of the most eloquent defenders of the status quo were among the most passionate pleaders for change in private.

For a historian, it is interesting as well as instructive to see how history is understood and used at the popular level. I was both impressed and dismayed by what I saw and heard during the Commission's hearings. Historical facts and events were often invoked in support of various demands. Often, the seemingly incontrovertible truth being presented was either wrong or misleading, acquired through hearsay, prejudice masquerading as principle, but the submitters did not know or care. The most troubling example of this was the SVT submission which used, unacknowledged, some 30 quotations from my book *Broken Waves*.³¹ Wrenched out of context, the words were used to support themes that directly contradicted my own position. So, Governor Sir Murchison Fletcher is quoted as saying that Indians who had gone to Fiji had come from 'the most ignorant and backward part of India', and he saw danger in 'placing power in the hands of untutored people'. But Fletcher wrote this to argue the more limited position that Indians were not worthy of equal franchise. Sir Maynard Hedstrom, an implacable foe of Indo-Fijian demands for political equality, is quoted approvingly. The 'British race', Hedstrom was quoted as saying, must continue to govern Fiji to safeguard the paramountcy of Fijian interests, because 'the Indian race has not yet in modern times completely proved its capacity for self-government'. And yet the same person wanted more native land to be converted to freehold title! The Great Council of Chiefs resolution of 1933 is quoted: 'The immigrant Indian population should neither directly nor indirectly have any part in the control or direction of matters affecting the Fijian race'. The chiefs were asserting the right to complete, unfettered internal self-administration, but now those words were stretched to mean denying the Indo-Fijians equal political rights. Ratu Epeli Ganilau is quoted as objecting 'to being ruled by Indians, as we always have regarded British to be sole foundation of honour, justice and fairness'. But Indians were not demanding the right to rule Fijians; they wanted equality with other British subjects. The context of these quotations is missing, the political and ideological logic behind them ignored.

Elementary errors of composition and argument are accompanied by more serious and deliberate misreading and manipulation of history. I will cite two examples mentioned most frequently to the Commission to illustrate the point. One concerns Lord Salisbury's Despatch of 1875, in which the Secretary of State for India asked the Government of India whether it would, after consultation with the various provincial governments, intervene to facilitate the recruitment and emigration of Indian indentured labourers to the British colonies.³² In return, the India Office promised to ask the colonies to grant the Indian settlers 'rights and privileges no whit inferior to those of any other class of Her Majesty's subjects resident in the colonies'. The

31 The SVT's remarkable submission is among the Commission's papers at the National Archives in Suva.

32 See my *A Vision for Change: AD Patel and the politics of Fiji* (Canberra 1997), 5-6.

provinces declined the request, the Government of India advised London accordingly, and the matter was dropped. The SVT argued that the promise made in the Despatch also lapsed, forfeiting any claim to legal authority. But this interested reading ignores the crucial fact that the intention of equality was never abandoned by India. In fact, it underpinned India's policy on indentured emigration throughout. It was explicitly reiterated in 1910 in these words:

The present administration itself fully recognises the value of Indians as permanent settlers and is willing to concede them the enjoyment of equal civil rights. The whole tenor of the correspondence between India and the colony shows that it was on this condition that indentured immigration in Fiji has been allowed in the past, and any measures leading towards lowering the political status of the immigrants or reducing their economic freedom would, in our opinion, involve a breach of faith with those affected.

The vagueness of the promises in Salisbury's Despatch is contrasted with the firm assurances given in the Deed of Cession by which the leading chiefs of Fiji ceded the islands in 1874.³³ That important document has been invested with a range of meanings, beyond the weight the document itself can reasonably be made to carry. It has come to be seen as a document of trust between the Fijian people, a compact, a solemn pledge, a charter that not only promised to protect Fijian rights, but also guaranteed the paramountcy of Fijian rights over all. What many Fijians wanted, they told the Commission, was an unequivocal re-statement of that right, fulfilling a solemn pledge made by Queen Victoria. To those unfamiliar with the document, the supposed promise of paramountcy and the British failure to fulfill it would seem a grave breach of trust. But in fact, the words 'paramountcy of Fijian interests', are not mentioned even once in the Deed of Cession. The Deed acknowledges the unconditional surrender of the islands to the United Kingdom, promises to promote 'civilisation and trade' in the islands, while Fijian rights 'shall be recognised so far as is and shall be consistent with British Sovereignty and Colonial form of government'. All claims to financial liabilities made by the chiefs would be carefully scrutinised according to principles of justice and sound public policy.

Throughout the 20th century, the colonial government and especially the local members of the 'British race' continually invoked the concept to forestall Indo-Fijian claims for elected political representation on the basis of universal franchise and a common roll. To acquiesce in that project would be to relinquish a solemn pledge to the Fijians – and safeguard their own vested interests, allowing political change to proceed at a pace acceptable to the colonial establishment. Nonetheless, the concept of paramountcy was used in a broadly protective sense. That is, in matters pertaining to the internal structure and administration of Fijian society – determination of land and chiefly titles, the drawing of traditional land boundaries, the allocation of the roles and responsibilities within society, sanctions for breaches of traditional, customary practices – the Fijian people themselves, through their customary elders and the Great Council of Chiefs, would exercise the paramount power. In this protective sense, it was intended to shield the Fijian people from the demands and

33 See my *Broken Waves: A history of the Fiji Islands in the 20th century* (Honolulu 1992), 11-12.

corrosive pressures of the modern world. As independence approached, paramountcy was transformed from a protective sense to an assertive one. The Fijian leaders began to argue that the paramountcy of Fijian interests could only be guaranteed if Fijians had political paramountcy. Legislative and constitutional safeguards were deemed to be insufficient. A concept, not found in a document to which its origin was attributed, was transformed from a protective instrument into an assertive tool for political dominance, and invested with historically unsustainable meanings and symbolism.

My second example is the now famous Wakaya Letter which was also invoked before the Commission on numerous occasions.³⁴ This was a letter signed by the members of the Fijian Affairs Board, the administrative and policy-advisory arm of the Great Council of Chiefs, and which had as its members all the highest ranking chiefs of Fiji, including Ratu Mara, and presented to Nigel Fisher, the parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1963. The signatories demanded certain preconditions before Fijians would discuss even the possibility of independence. Fiji, they said, had a special relationship with the British Crown, which had to be clarified and codified. Fijian ownership of native land should be guaranteed, in consultation with the Great Council of Chiefs. The Fijian Affairs Board should have the veto power over all legislation affecting Fijian rights and interests. Fijian wishes for Fiji to be declared a Christian state should be recognised, and the Public Service should ensure racial parity in the public sector. 'Subject to a satisfactory resolution of the issues we have raised in the foregoing memorial', the signatories concluded, 'we would be prepared to initiate, in co-operation with the other principal races, further moves towards internal self government'. The fact that Fijian leaders cooperated actively in the movement towards greater self government from the mid-1960s onwards suggests that their preconditions had been met, if not in full. The Wakaya Letter was only a negotiating document. But many people kept reminding the Commission of the document in support of their claim for political paramountcy, and especially in support of making Fiji a Christian state. It was difficult to convince the people that the Wakaya Letter was designed for a specific purpose for a particular moment, and that its import was now purely historical, superseded by another compact, the constitution which gave Fiji its independence. Assertions get transformed into unassailable facts before your eyes, one learns quickly, historical truth a matter of perception.

A participant is privy to information given in a variety of ways: a heavy hint, a slanted joke, a throwaway remark masking a serious point or indicating a point of view to be noted, malicious gossip of no permanent value but clearly intended to harm an opponent (though it is of permanent value to the perpetrator). It is often assumed, although seldom explicitly articulated, that things are being said in confidence. Much of this kind of evidence can be discarded or forgotten. But some information, from recounted conversations, and eye witness accounts about important players or critical events and episodes, raises troublesome questions. Uttered in confidence, or the expectation of confidence, how does one use it, especially if it relates to something of great public importance? An example. During the 1999 election campaign, Sitiveni

34 A copy is reproduced in my *Broken Waves*, 189.

Rabuka claimed that he had not acted alone in carrying out the coups, that in fact he was the 'fall guy' who had refused to fall. He named some of the co-conspirators and left others unnamed. A year later, through his authorised biography, he implicated Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in the pre-coup machinations, recounting a conversation he had with Mara on a golf course where Mara had tried to soothe the nerves of a clearly worried colonel about the possible intervention of foreign countries, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, in the event of a military coup in Fiji, by saying, 'Leave these to me'.³⁵ For the record, Mara has denied the conversation. The accusation caused an uproar in Fiji, but Rabuka's account was a public secret in Fiji long before it appeared in print. Some years ago, he had told me – and several other people as well – what his recent biographer has since revealed: that his biography, if ever one was written, should be titled 'The Fall Guy' or 'The Kleenex Man', the allusion to being used and then discarded like paper tissue. As a historian, I noted his remark, because in my own account of the Fijian coups, I had written generally that Rabuka could not have acted alone, and that circumstantial evidence pointed to the involvement, or at the very least the acquiescence, of others. But important as Rabuka's information was, I could not use it. First, I could not document or verify it. Secondly, since the information was given privately, and thus off the record, Rabuka could, if he so chose, deny it, leaving me to face the very likely prospect of a libel action. So both personal interest as well as ethical concerns about broadcasting the contents of a private conversation, led me to commit the information to my files.

I was chastened by an earlier experience, when a speaker flatly denied saying what he had, in fact, said. In the early 1980s, a former Fijian colleague from the University of the South Pacific visited the East West Center in Honolulu. During the course of an informal presentation, he was asked about the increasing rate of Indo-Fijian emigration, and its effects on the Fijian economy. The sooner more of them leave the better, he said, to uneasy laughter from the audience. I thought the remark inappropriate. I cannot now recall when or how I recounted this conversation to an acquaintance. The next day, to my horror, an Indian candidate at the Civic Auditorium in Suva recounted the substance of my conversation, alleging that the Fijian candidate was anti-Indian. The accused candidate, of course, denied the allegation the next day, and threatened a libel action. Fortunately, the allegation was never repeated, and soon swamped by other issues and forgotten, but the pragmatic need for discretion has remained with me ever since.

The possession of privately acquired potentially explosive information creates its own problems. The obligations of scholarship, the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and truth, should require full disclosure. This obligation, however, has to be assessed in the context of other competing obligations. Will the release of the information do more harm than good? Might it, for example, lead to civil strife, loss of life, poison race relations, affect the welfare of innocent people caught in the cross fire, or bring down a government? The question is: who is to act as the arbiter? What right does the possessor of important information have to withhold information from the public?

³⁵ See John Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji: The authorised biography of Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka* (Rockhampton 2000), 105.

The answer can never be clear cut. In my own case as a constitutional commissioner, there are certain things that my oath of secrecy requires me never to make public, however important they are. Some discussions, treating sensitive issues, were never recorded. Such was the case with the proceedings of the Joint Parliamentary Committee which deliberated on the Reeves Commission report and produced the draft constitution. Recording the proceedings, it was felt, would impede free flow of discussion, make people wary of the fact that their words were recorded, which might harden positions. In the Commission's own deliberations, discussion was recorded without attribution for the very same reason. But having said that, I should state that the substance of what I saw or was told and believed, I have reproduced in an indirect, allusive way, without specifying details. This is unsatisfactory, to be sure, but there does not seem to be any way around it.

There is an unmatched excitement about doing contemporary history. One sees events in the raw, unprocessed, unfolding haphazardly, with little sense of where they might lead. One thrills to the particularities of events, to their uniqueness and integrity. Human beings can never be reduced to abstract categories no matter how subtle or intricate they appear. One sees how history is created, and how messy and unpredictable the process is. Often what one reads in the media or in the official reports is not how one saw it at the time. One becomes acutely aware of how only a tiny fragment of what happens finds its way into the historical record. One learns painfully how complex seemingly simple things can be. One becomes aware of the role of contingency, fortuity, ignorance, chance and stupidity in human affairs. Participation humanises history, and reinforces belief in human agency. It is humbling to realise the limits and limitations within which instantaneous choices are made. One begins to develop a more sympathetic understanding of human frailties and human ambitions. Fijians who want political power to control their destiny are not necessarily racist chauvinists, but people who feel besieged, threatened, caught in the grip of forces beyond their control. They are saddened by the sight of their cherished world of childhood vanishing before their eyes, hurt to see things they believed to be beyond comment – the institution of chieftainship, for example – dragged into the cauldron of ordinary debate, thus debasing their culture. They want political power, enabling them to adjust to the world at their own pace. That is the romance of the idea. The Indo-Fijians do not necessarily want power to dominate others. They want equal rights, as human beings, to live with dignity and freedom. They invoke universal principles and their enormous contribution to the country in support of their claims, while Fijians support theirs by invoking the arguments of cultural uniqueness.

Can I be objective about what I write as a participant historian? Partial or biased scholarship is not the peculiarity of any one period or of a particular type of scholarship. As Walter Laqueur puts it, 'Violent prejudices are nursed and maintained more easily in sheltered academic surroundings than on the political stage, which provided on many occasions welcome corrections and may even teach patience and tolerance'.³⁶ 'The only completely unbiassed historian', says David Thomson, quoting Mark Twain, 'is the Recording Angel, whose works are unpublished: and even he,

36 Walter Laqueur and George L. Moss (eds), *Historians in Politics* (London 1974), 1.

said Mark Twain, doubtless has convictions which, to Satan, might look like prejudices'. Thomson goes on:

If prejudice is inevitable, and it comes from the 'spirit of the age' as well as from more individual inclinations, it should perhaps be welcomed and made use of. It may be argued that it is, indeed, as indispensable to the historian as is resistance to the autocrat who knows that, without resistance to his rule, he has no leverage to rely on. The battle against his own prejudices can be invigorating for the historian and an aid to him in his battle to find the truth. But only a few bold spirits among professionals accept the subjective element in historiography as not regrettable and not merely unavoidable, but as positively vitalizing and perhaps indispensable to it as an intellectual endeavour.³⁷

Meaningful participation requires attachment and commitment and an informed and long term engagement with the subject of one's research. And it can never be undertaken from intellectual inertia.³⁸ But these qualities are coming under threat from the changing culture within the academy. Financial cutbacks to universities have demanded increasing rationalisation of resources. Classes become bigger and teaching loads increase, reducing the already limited time for research. In an age of outsourcing, research funding is increasingly becoming outcome-oriented. Relevant research related in some way to Australia's (or the United Kingdom's or the United States') national and strategic interests gets priority. And when the currently fashionable research agenda – governance, poverty reduction, capacity building, structural reform – passes, emphasis moves on to some equally fashionable and equally transient topic.

Some of this policy-related work is important, but counterproductive when it is allowed at the expense of more fundamental, long-term, culturally informed research. The culture which nurtures participant history is also challenged by the current intellectual fashion in fields such as Cultural Studies which 'unsettles, destabilizes, and complicates the discourses of the humanities', where the 'line between words and things, subject and object, inside and outside, humanity and nature, idea and matter becomes blurred and indistinct, and new configuration of the relation of action and language is set in place'.³⁹ This kind of exercise may be stimulating in a graduate seminar, but unhelpful when dealing with the practicalities of the real world.⁴⁰ Generally, people, I have come to believe, want to entertain the possibility of hope,

37 Thomson, *The Aims of History*, 28. See also W.H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History* (New York 1958), 112: 'There is no such thing as history free from subjective prejudice', and 114: 'Inside any given set of presuppositions, historical work can be more or less well done. The history served by party propagandists to encourage the faithful and convert the wavering is bad history not because it is biased (all history is that), but because it is biased in the wrong way. It establishes its conclusions at the cost of neglecting those certain fundamental rules which all reputable historians recognise: scrutinise your evidence, accept conclusions only when there is good evidence for them, maintain intellectual integrity in your arguments, and so on. Historians who neglect these rules produce work which is subjective in a bad sense; those who adhere to them are in a position to attain truth and objectivity so far as these things are attainable in history.'

38 See Isaac Deutscher, 'From The Introduction (1961)', in his *Stalin: A political biography*, 2nd ed. (New York 1966), x-xi.

39 Mark Poster, *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In search of a context* (Ithaca 1989), 9-10.

40 See also Alan Ward 'Comfortable voyagers? Some reflections on the Pacific and its historians', *Journal of Pacific History*, 31:2 (1996), 238.

of change and progress, rather than dwell in the quagmire of self-pity and despair, disabled by doubt. They want clarity, not complication, stability, not uncertainty, rules, not anarchy. But they also want the simplicity that evades truth, that denies the complexities, contradictions and dynamics. That is what makes our task demanding – to get clarity and subtlety, clarity which includes discomforting exceptions and gaps in the evidence. We want to be able to write so that those who were there say, yes, that is the way it was – and learn something. Participant historians learn to live with the inescapable truth that we all live in our histories. ‘The world is what it is’, V.S. Naipaul has written somewhere. ‘Men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it.’ These words provide participant historians with both their challenge as well as their opportunity.

Resurrecting the Foulards Rouges: How Old Is History?

DAVID CHAPPELL

A society is what it remembers; we are what we remember...history is the remembered tightrope that stretches across the abyss of all that we have forgotten. Albert Wendt¹

When Brij Lal and others inaugurated *The Contemporary Pacific* (CP) in 1989, the new journal claimed a subject area of 'contemporary issues of concern in the Pacific Islands, with particular reference to the latter half of the twentieth century'.² Such a broad mandate for 'contemporary history' challenged a longstanding tradition among scholars that 'history' applied to events distant enough in the past to be examined 'objectively.' In the Pacific, historians had often left most of the 20th century to social scientists.³ In the same issue of CP, Greg Denning challenged the objectivity premise by saying, 'The past is never contemporary but history always is.... History always represents the present in the way it re-presents the past.'⁴ History is thus interpretation, and therefore inherently subjective, however conscientious scholars try to be. But what about reconstructions of a *lived* past by participants? If participants shared a particularly contentious episode in their recent history, interpretations and symbolic meanings may well conflict, much as rival versions of the Vietnam war have continued to be fought out in American cinema.⁵

Studies of collective memory suggest that public versions of history must be articulated in commemorative rituals and transmitted through repeated performances to retain significance for succeeding generations, who may however assign their own meanings to past events.⁶ At the millennial conference of the Pacific History Association (PHA) in Canberra, Adrian Muckle pointed out that although the Noumea Accord of 1998 proposed that the peoples of New Caledonia should forge a new

1 Albert Wendt, 'Novelists and historians and the art of remembering', in Antony Hooper et al., *Class and Culture in the South Pacific* (Suva 1987), 79.

2 Information for Contributors, *The Contemporary Pacific: A Journal of Island Affairs*.

3 K.R. Howe, 'Preface', in K. R. Howe, Robert Kiste and Brij Lal (eds), *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth Century* (Honolulu 1994), xii.

4 *The Contemporary Pacific* (hereinafter CP), 1 (1989), 134.

5 For thoughts on the impact of Rambo movies on Asia, see Pico Iyer, *Video Night in Kathmandu, and Other Reports from the Not-So-Far East* (New York 1989), 4-13. David Chappell, 'The Noumea Accord: decolonization without independence in New Caledonia?', *Pacific Affairs*, 72:3 (1999), 373-91; idem, 'Political Review: New Caledonia,' *Contemporary Pacific*, 12:1 (2000), 515-20.

6 David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York 1985); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York 1989); James Fentress and Chris Wickam, *Social Memory* (Oxford 1992).

nation with a 'common destiny', the tendency so far is for indigenous Kanak nationalists and immigrant New Caledonian loyalists to cling to opposing parallel histories after many generations of polarisation in a colonial context.⁷ In fact, a 1992 pedagogical project that attempted to bring together Kanak and New Caledonian teachers to create a 'national' history manual that would combine both sides' viewpoints essentially failed for that very reason. The confrontational 1980s were still too fresh in memory, and the issue of future political status remained in question.⁸ The recurring inter-ethnic crises in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea remind us that history making is an ongoing process, and that lingering antagonisms do not simply go away.

The aspect of this problem that interests me is how the Foulards Rouges (Red Scarves), the radical Kanak students of the 1970s, are thought of 30 years later, in the context of nation-building, by both participants and observers. Why should the Foulards interest me, you may ask? I have two reasons. First, as a historian who teaches twentieth century Pacific Islands history at the University of Hawai'i, I have long been interested in the troubled decolonisation process in New Caledonia/Kanaky. After all, Hawai'i is also a multi-ethnic society whose indigenous inhabitants are struggling for recognition. I am interested in the background to the dramatic, often tragic, Kanak uprising in 1980s New Caledonia. Ismet Kurtovitch has already chronicled the post-World War II genesis of the Union Calédonienne (UC), whose founders came from moderate church organisations and campaigned for greater autonomy, under the motto 'two colours, one people'.⁹ From 1969 on, however, a second wave of Kanak nationalism emerged, that of the Foulards Rouges and Groupe 1878, which united in 1976 to form Palika (Parti de Libération Kanak). Today, Palika is the second largest Kanak nationalist party, but its origins and trajectory are relatively under-studied, except in general histories.¹⁰

The second reason why I am attracted to this topic is more personal. As a post-war 'baby boomer', I lived through the late 1960s and early 1970s as an opponent of the Vietnam War and other forms of imperial, economic and racial domination. Instead of fighting against what I regarded as Asian nationalism, I worked as a Peace Corps teacher in West Africa from 1968-70, where the 'independent' Ivory Coast seemed rather neo-colonial, since there were five times more French in the country than before 1960. While pursuing my MA in African history at Stanford in the early 1970s, I continued to oppose US actions in Southeast Asia and finally left with my backpack to explore the trans-Asian traveller circuit to understand that region better. People sometimes ask me if the '60s' left any enduring legacy, apart from its contributions to popular culture and its perceived excesses by young people. Forced to reflect and

7 Adrian Muckle, 'History in the Year 2000: Reformulating Historical Boundaries in New Caledonia', PHA conference 'Bursting Boundaries', June 27, 2000, Canberra, Australia.

8 Jaqueline Dahlem, *Nouvelle-Calédonie, Pays Kanak: Un récit, deux histoires* (Paris 1996).

9 Ismet Kurtovitch, 'La Vie Politique en Nouvelle-Calédonie: 1940-1953', thèse de Doctorat, Université Française du Pacifique (Noumea 1992).

10 Miriam Dornoy, *Politics in New Caledonia* (Sydney 1984); John Connell, *New Caledonia or Kanaky?* (Canberra 1987); Stephen Henningham, *France and the South Pacific* (Honolulu 1992); Robert Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific since 1940* (Honolulu 1993).

to compose a response, I find myself re-living and re-presenting (Denning's word) my own past.

I am therefore curious about the ways that Kanak activists of the same time period, but in a different national context, might see themselves 30 years later. I would like to suggest that the project proposed by the 1998 Noumea Accord, of 'building a nation together', requires making a contemporary history, a process that becomes an intensely personal task for actors who have to revisit their own youth. For them, constructing a national story requires defining, and perhaps redefining, their own trajectories in a new context. Catherine Hite's recent study of the Chilean left, from the Allende years through the Pinochet era, argues that the identities of the leading figures have changed little over the past 30 years, despite major traumas. However, there is 'an intimate relationship between memory and individual identity [which reveals] both conscious and unconscious efforts by individuals to claim a kind of continuity for their lives, even if their political lives have, in fact, been transformed'.¹¹

This paper will briefly chronicle the rise of the Foulards Rouges, in order to establish a reference base-line, and then address some reflections by participants whom I recently talked with in New Caledonia. A simplistic narrative of the past 50 years in the territory might suggest that the drive for 'autonomy' begun by the UC in the 1950s transmuted into a demand for complete independence in the 1970s and reached a peak in the violent 1980s. After that, the Matignon (1988) and Noumea (1998) Accords postponed the independence issue, while stepping up development aid and indigenous Kanak political and cultural recognition, as symbolised by the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre and control by Kanak nationalist parties of two out of the country's three provinces. The current discourse has returned to talk of 'autonomy', this time as a word used by Paris and some New Caledonian loyalists in an attempt to compromise with Kanak aspirations. But Kanak political leaders have already complained about a lack of 'collegiality' in the loyalist-dominated Territorial Congress,¹² and most seem to view 'autonomy' as a first step on the road to independence, which may take another generation. The nation-building project in New Caledonia is thus a daunting challenge, because attempts to form a political centre that bridges ethnic antagonisms have failed several times before.¹³

The UC, for example, had won territorial elections in the 1950s with a broad base of support and sent its leader as the local delegate to the Paris National Assembly. The hotly contested 1958 referendum on independence, however, led to political repression and more ethnic polarisation.¹⁴ In the context of an upsurge in global radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s,¹⁵ the Foulards Rouges and Groupe 1878 would

11 Katherine Hite, *When the Romance Ended: Leaders of the Chilean left, 1968-1998* (New York 2000), xxi.

12 *Les Nouvelles-Calédoniennes* (hereinafter *N-C*), 3 May 2000.

13 Chappell, 'The Noumea Accord'; 'Political Review: New Caledonia', *Contemporary Pacific*, 12: 1 (2000), 515-20.

14 Dornoy, *Politics in New Caledonia*; Henningham, *France and the South Pacific*.

15 Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (eds), *1968: The world transformed* (New York 1998); Robert Daniels, *Year of the Heroic Guerrilla: World revolution and counterrevolution in 1968* (New York 1989). The same era that saw the Red Guards in China and anti-Vietnam War protests in the US also witnessed a revitalisation of Aboriginal, Maori, Hawaiian and Native American movements against colonisation, many of which took inspiration from African-American and southern African civil rights struggles.

push the Kanak nationalist movement into a new phase of anti-colonial, leftist activism. In July 1969, returning Kanak students led by Nidoish Naisseline, who had experienced the May 1968 worker-student uprising in France, began to organise protest seminars. Naisseline was arrested for 'incitement to race hatred', and 300 demonstrators clashed violently with police. On trial a year later, Naisseline voiced the attitude of the Foulards Rouges¹⁶ in their publication, *Reveil Canaque* (Kanak awakening): 'We must destroy colonial exploitation. We oppose the capitalist killings, the bible, the land thefts, alcohol and firearms, the mass media owned by the bourgeoisie which represents French imperialism and White prejudices'.¹⁷

From the start, then, tropes of opposition to capitalism, colonialism and racism mingled in the rhetoric of the Red Scarves. In 1972 Naisseline was again arrested, this time for telling a French official that his uniform was invalid because he was not in France and for calling him 'an idiot and a land grabber.' In *Reveil Canaque*, Naisseline said: 'Our people have lost their dynamism and become fatalistic, but the spirit of the legendary Atai [chief of 1878 revolt] should galvanise them to oppose the common enemy'.¹⁸ The Foulards then attempted to ally themselves with an offshoot of the UC in the Territorial Assembly, but differences over strategy and ideology soon drove them apart, and an attempted alliance with young Caledonian leftists met a similar fate. In 1974, Kanak radicals from the main island, Grande Terre, which had experienced severe land alienations in the 19th century, formed their own Groupe 1878. This faction nevertheless allied with the Loyalty Islands-based Foulards to protest against the annual commemoration of French annexation on 24 September, calling it a Kanak 'day of mourning'. They also protested against the French-sponsored Melanesia 2000 arts festival in 1975, in opposition to Jean-Marie Tjibaou and the UC, calling it folklorisation for tourists. Together, the young radical groups engaged in sit-ins, land occupations, flag burnings and hunger strikes, despite repeated arrests, trials, injuries and deaths. Finally, in February 1976, the two groups united to form their own political party, Palika. Despite the 1981 secession by Naisseline (now a high chief on Mare), Palika has remained a force in Kanak nationalism ever since, joining the UC and other parties in the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS) in 1984, just before the uprising.¹⁹

Indeed, the very survival and growth of Palika since 1976 is itself a legacy of the Foulards Rouges and Groupe 1878. Since the mid-1980s, many of the former student radicals, along with like-minded Kanak of succeeding student generations who expanded the party's base, have found themselves holding elected and administrative government jobs, especially in the Northern and Islands Provinces, where Kanak nationalists enjoy a majority. Palika is now the largest party in the North and the second largest in the Islands, commanding one-third of the total nationalist seats in

16 The name came from a red scarf given to Kanak rebels during their 1878 revolt by Caledonian-exiled Paris Commune Louise Michel.

17 Domoy, *Politics in New Caledonia*, 204.

18 Ibid., 205.

19 South Pacific Action Network Resource Centre (SPANRC), 'New Caledonia: Paradise lost, a struggle for independence, Palika' (Wellington 1978); Susanna Ounei, *For Kanak Independence* (Leichhardt 1985); *Le Kanak* (Aug. 2000).

the Congress. It has actively supported negotiations for mining development in the north as well as the 'consensual solutions' embodied in the Matignon and Noumea Accords. During a visit to New Caledonia on my way to the PHA conference, I specifically asked several people the following question: what is the contemporary significance of the Foulards Rouges? One way to think of that question, I said, was to consider how a historian who was writing a 'national' history textbook for New Caledonia should describe the role of the young Kanak radicals of the 1970s in the political evolution of the country. What was accomplished, what was learned, what legacy?

Elie Poigoune recalled proudly that Groupe 1878 was the first Kanak nationalist organisation to openly demand independence, in February 1975, a step that led the Foulards and other Kanak parties to follow suit. He told me that the radicalism of the 1970s was essential for the revival of Kanak identity, after a century of French colonialism had undermined indigenous self-esteem. Young Kanak like himself, who had studied in France made contacts with African and Algerian nationalists, took up Marxist critiques of colonialism, and experienced the student-worker revolt of 1968. 'The Kanak activists regained their cultural pride', he said, and began to believe 'we could change things'. 'We were a little crazy in those days', he admitted, in reference to the confrontations with police, arrests and trials, prison terms and demonstrations. He no longer supports the Cuban model of socialism, but he said that veterans like himself have not given up on their ideals, they simply pursue different individual paths toward decolonisation today. He himself broke with the FLNKS in the mid-1980s because he opposed the establishment of Kanak People's Schools, arguing that education was 'the least colonial thing' that France did to New Caledonia, since it enabled young Kanak to have a broader vision of their situation. Exposure to Marxist and African nationalist ideas in France helped them to support independence.

As an educator at La Pérouse academy, Poigoune still works to reform the school system from within, organises students, and is secretary-general of a teachers union. Significantly, he is also president of the new local chapter of the League of the Rights of Man. While he says that Kanak values, such as spiritual attachment to the land and communal solidarity, should be preserved and even shared with other groups, he also respects the Western-derived, universalist concept of individual human rights, as his new position suggests. He also argues that formal reconciliations will be necessary in order to build a new country together, not only between Kanak and French New Caledonians but also among various Kanak ethnic groups, of which there are almost 30. 'People shed their blood [in the 1980s]. Some Kanak, some Europeans. Everyone who shed blood, their blood mixed with the earth. This land belongs to everyone.... In the Kanak world, man grows from the soil. Land was the first thing we reclaimed. We consider man as something that comes out of the earth, like flower, a plant. I want to share that value with others. You can go far when you have one foot planted somewhere.'²⁰ Clearly Poigoune has changed in some ways, both tactically and intellectually, but he also keeps his emotional link to the cause he espoused so actively 30 years ago and remains active politically in his own way.

20 Elie Poigoune, interview in Noumea, 16 June 2000.

Déwé Gorodey, a Kanak woman writer and educator, voices similar pride in the Foulards and Groupe 1878, which she participated in actively in the 1970s despite being put in prison with Elie and others. She regards the era as important not only because of the demand for Kanak independence but also because of the reoccupation of alienated lands. Groupe 1878 in particular was formed by Kanak radicals of the main island, because their peoples had lost 90% of their lands to France. Unlike Poigoune, Gorodey participated in the Kanak People's Schools of the 1980s, a time when she says the vanguard phase of radical activism changed into a movement of mass nationalism because of the dramatic confrontations with French troops and loyalists. She has waged a struggle on the cultural front for decades, teaching and writing, and her poetry has reached an audience outside New Caledonia. Also unlike Poigoune, she recently re-entered politics and in 1999 was elected to Congress on the Palika list; she is currently Minister of Culture in the Territorial executive council and, among other projects, is very busy working on the 2000 Pacific Festival of Arts, which will be hosted by New Caledonia. The country was supposed to host the Festival in 1984, but France vetoed the project because of the uprising.

I asked Gorodey if she ever felt that there was a tension, even a potential ideological contradiction, between the 'scientific socialism' espoused by Palika and the recognition of Kanak culture. This tension was one reason why Naisseline broke off from Palika in 1981 (though there was also an important factor of inter-Kanak regional rivalry in that move). Marx, after all, would probably say that culture is part of the superstructure of society, something manipulated by ruling élites to preserve their own power.²¹ Gorodey admits that a racial version of Kanak independence is unrealistic today, but she sees no real contradiction in embracing both concepts. It is simply a matter of emphasis: Palika gives the ultimate goal of socialism priority while pragmatically working with Kanak customs and traditions, since that is the social reality of most of her people. Palika works to promote education, mobilise people in rural areas, help the poor and exploited in urban centres and squatter camps, and has close ties with labour unions. But in the spirit of the Noumea Accord, which Palika supports, she says that people need to work on development projects that bring them all together to build a new nation.²²

I returned to the issue of whether Kanak cultural nationalism is compatible with 'scientific socialism' in conversations with Sylvain Pabouty, spokesman for Palika's Political Bureau, which has no president and works by internal consensus. Pabouty studied in Bordeaux in the late 1980s and found himself influenced by Marxists of various tendencies, from Trotsky to Mao, as well as by the radical writings of Cheikh Anta Diop, a Senegalese historian who argued that ancient Egyptians were black. I asked him what 'scientific socialism' meant to Palika, and whether it contradicted the pursuit of cultural paramountcy? Pabouty said that the members of Palika were diverse in their Marxism, and that they recognised the need to build on the social formation that currently prevails in Kanak society, since the educated are still a minority. He looked to the partnership between the Palika-dominated Northern

21 Karl Marx, Preface, in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1st pub. 1859; Chicago 1904).

22 Déwé Gorodey, interview in Noumea, 22 June 2000.

Province government and a Canadian transnational mining firm in expanding nickel production and building a processing plant to create more jobs for young Kanak. He welcomed support from non-Kanak progressives and believes in a non-racial basis of citizenship and civil rights in the new country-to-be, though he did admit that the dissolution of a small white leftist party that had been a member of the FLNKS was not really regretted, because 'those three guys talked too much'.²³

Marx, of course, argued that contradictions are the engine of historical change that pushes societies from one stage of development to another: 'No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society'.²⁴ The large-scale statist mining development in the Northern Province is partly designed to counterbalance the preponderant concentration of population and economic activity in the Southern Province, which empowers anti-independence parties. Yet Palika's program of industrial development in Kanak-inhabited rural areas has its opponents, from local mayors and tribal chiefs²⁵ to Kanak writer and Green Party member Sarimin Boengkih, who attacks 'men who, in exchange for some power, sell our riches...destroy our mountains that our ancestors before us regarded as sacred...destroy our forests...our ocean'.²⁶

I also asked a white leftist from the 1970s, Ismet Kurtovitch, what he thought the significance of the Kanak radical movements was. A former student organiser and a historian himself, he is now Director of the Territorial Archives, and ironically I found in the records he now administers once-confidential government reports on his own radical activities. When I told him about my intent to study the days of his youth, his eyes lit up with a flood of memories and he was soon bursting with ideas and contacts. He argues that the student radicals caused a revolution of sorts, because France stepped up development aid to the country, began to restore some lands to the Kanak people, and through the Matignon and Noumea Accords, has allowed increasing Kanak political participation and cultural recognition.²⁷ Another person I interviewed was Billy Wapotro, Director of the Protestant Educational Alliance and a longtime member of the UC from the Islands Province. He said that the 1970s were 'not a phenomenon of youth alone', but one can speak of itineraries of individuals, whose personal differences have emerged from behind the mask of their common cause in that era. He says that few have renounced their ideals, and most would probably do it all over again. Since the Matignon Accords, however, more and more young Kanak have had access to higher education, and they, he suggests, will change the politics of New Caledonia, because they now have specialised training and specific projects of development in mind rather than generalised anti-colonial

23 Sylvain Pabouty, interview in Noumea, 17 June 2000.

24 Marx, Preface, 12.

25 Donna Winslow, 'Sustainable development in New Caledonia', *Pacific Affairs*, 64:4 (1991-92), 489-505; *Islands Business* (Dec. 1998), 31.

26 Chappell, 'The Noumea Accord', 390.

27 Ismet Kurtovich, interview in Noumea, 21 June 2000.

ideologies.²⁸ Both Kurtovitch and Wapotro clearly see hopeful trends building on the struggles of their youth.

Other opinions on the 1970s vary. Charles Washetine, leader of Palika in the Islands Province, is a bright, engaging man in his early 40s who has an 1984 MA degree in ethnosociology from Toulouse and devotes himself to educational programs in the local government. He told me that he thinks a generational change is happening again among Kanak, just as it did in the 1970s. The UC is losing steam, and dissidents from the FLNKS are crossing over to the loyalist camp, but Palika is attracting more and more young educated Kanak – the generation Wapotro had pointed to as the future. Palika now threatens to overtake the UC in the Islands as it already has done in the Northern Province.²⁹ Some critics of the former Foulards claim that several have become well-off careerists, a Kanak bourgeoisie living in upscale houses and earning high salaries, implying that they either lost their ideals, like some ‘yuppies’ in America, or never really had any in the first place.³⁰ One young Kanak told me that he regards the ex-Foulards as ‘old ratbags’ who have lost touch with the needs of the people.³¹ Yet a Futunan friend of mine who lived through the era called it ‘an awakening of consciousness’ in New Caledonia, when people began to see that demanding independence was the only way to bring about significant change.³²

Perhaps the most enigmatic ex-Foulard who is still active politically is one-time radical hero Nidoish Naisseline, who broke away from Palika in 1981 to form his own party, Libération Kanak Socialiste (LKS), and has pursued his own path for the past 20 years. At the time, he explained the schism between the Amoa (LKS) and Temala (scientific socialist) tendencies in Palika³³ as a conflict between Temala’s centralised, vanguard style and his own preference for cultural nationalism and a mass-based, decentralised movement.³⁴ Yet in a recent policy statement on the Foulards and Groupe 1878,³⁵ Palika’s own party newspaper, *Le Kanak*, blames the split on ‘aristocratic customary values incarnated by the High Chiefs of whom Nidoish Naisseline is a representative’,³⁶ and even less politely, Palika members have called Naisseline a ‘sniper’ against the movement he helped to found. The LKS, for example, accepted that a transition stage was necessary before independence and participated in the 1984 elections when the FLNKS boycotted them, though it withdrew from the Assembly when the confrontations with France intensified.³⁷ Having thus gone from radical to moderate, Naisseline has even allied himself at

28 Billy Wapotro, interview in Noumea, 15 June 2000.

29 Charles Washetine, interview in Noumea, 24 June 2000.

30 Hamid Mokaddem, interview in Noumea, 21 June 2000; Max Shekleton, interview in Noumea, 24 June 2000.

31 Jimmy Naouna, pres. comm., May and June 2000.

32 Moleana 2000.

33 Amoa was the site of Palika’s founding convention, Temala the site of its schism.

34 FICT, *Front Indépendantiste, 1ère Convention Territoriale* (Noumea 1981), 36-7.

35 The feedback effects of historical research are interesting. The Palika policy statement on the significance of the Foulards Rouges and Groupe 1878 came out after my inquiries.

36 *Le Kanak* (Noumea), Aug. 2000.

37 Maurice Satineau, *Le Miroir de Nouméa: La classe politique Française face à la crise Calédonienne* (Paris 1987), 26-30.

times with loyalists in the Islands Province when it suited him, including the 25 June 2000 election, leading critics to say that once he became a high chief, he wanted power for its own sake and was willing to form a 'coalition against nature'.³⁸

I have not yet been able to interview Naisseline, who was in full political campaign when I visited the country in June. In newspaper interviews, however, he was accusing the FLNKS of colonising his province with its bloated bureaucracy, adding, 'in 15 years, we'll see whether it's necessary to be for independence or not'.³⁹ As it turns out, Naisseline's gamble failed, though he remained on the provincial council, and the FLNKS/Palika⁴⁰ retained a narrow eight-six majority and won the provincial presidency, with help from Palika's rising popularity, even on Naisseline's island of Mare.⁴¹ During the campaign, Palika concentrated on local meetings rather than television coverage and urged voters to reject old party hacks with foreign ideas and 'make way for the young, because the Noumea Accord process will last fifteen years, the time necessary to build the country'.⁴² After the election, Naisseline told the press that his coalition for progress had been above politics but got caught in the longstanding battle between loyalists and nationalists. He vowed to pursue his long-term goal of 'emancipation and sovereignty of the Islands [Province]'.⁴³

George Lukacs once wrote, 'however simple an enumeration of "facts" may be, however lacking in commentary, it already implies an "interpretation"'. As a Marxist, Lukacs was very critical of capitalists' efforts to isolate purportedly discrete data to obscure larger structures and said, 'facts can only become facts within the framework of a system'.⁴⁴ The charges and counter-charges between Naisseline and the leftist party he helped to create in his youth show that the question has become, whose framework(s) can make contemporary history 'real' in Kanaky New Caledonia?⁴⁵ Max Chivot, the leader of a radical New Caledonian youth movement in the 1970s, told me that his mental archive is fading, though he still supports the small party of his longtime ally, Nidoish Naisseline.⁴⁶ At the PHA conference, I cornered Emmanuel Kasarherou, who has been very active on the Kanak cultural front, and he was gracious enough to tell me his opinion of the Foulards era from the perspective of his own, younger generation. He said he looks to the 1980s as the real coming of age of the Kanak movement and regards the radicalism of the 1970s as a kind of 'prehistory'.⁴⁷

I have found, then, in my quasi-narcissistic inquiry, that contemporary history has its own perceived eras of ancient, medieval and modern. I know this myself, now that

38 Pabouty, interview; Washetine, interview.

39 *Nouvelles Hebdo* (Noumea), 22-8 June 2000.

40 Palika has run on a separate electoral list from the FLNKS since 1995.

41 *N-C*, 26 June 2000.

42 Palika, *Communiqué de Presse*, Bureau Politique, 23 June 2000.

43 *N-C*, 30 June 2000.

44 George Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist dialectics* (Cambridge, Mass. 1971), 5-6.

45 This name was first suggested to me by Pabouty in June 1998, only partly in jest.

46 Max Chivot, interview in Noumea, 23 June 2000.

47 Emmanuel Kasarherou, interview in Canberra, 26 June 2000.

I am in middle age. My music is from another time period, my mementos of youth tend to be in boxes in my closet, my memories of who I once was sometimes need reviving with the proper access code. We all have in our lives experienced larger-than-life moments that helped to mark us forever with aspects of personal identity, even if the old reflexes may not be as quick as they once were, numbed now by old bruises or muddled by too many qualifiers. Like war veterans who put on funny hats and get misty-eyed in annual ceremonies, we honour our own unknown soldiers, who may even be ourselves, symbolised by a flame kept burning deep inside us, flickering there in a haze of disillusionment but nourished by recurring hopes. History operates on many levels, and as we see new generations arrive, we muse, 'I remember when I was like that'. Perhaps, if we keep remembering, and re-presenting, the lived past will survive.

*J.W. Davidson – the Making of a Participant Historian**

DOUG MUNRO

Jim Davidson (1915-73), the foundation Professor of Pacific History at the Australian National University (ANU), is probably best remembered as the participant historian, or scholar-in-action, who not only chronicled history but who helped to make it with his involvement in the decolonisation of Oceania. This aspect of his life began with tours of duty in Western Samoa to facilitate the transition to self-government. Davidson resumed the mantle of scholar-in-action in the late 1950s as Constitutional Adviser in Western Samoa (1959-61), the Cook Islands (1962-64), and Nauru (1967-68). He then accepted consultancies on behalf of the Congress of Micronesia (1969-73) and the Constitutional Planning Committee of Papua New Guinea (1972-73). On this last assignment he died suddenly in Port Moresby, aged 57, doing the work that meant most to him.

The man of action was also a writer, although not a compulsive one, and his major book was *Samoa mo Samoa: The emergence of the Independent State of Western Samoa*. It was, as he explained, 'an essentially personal [account], since I have written it not only as a historian but also as a participant in many of the events of more recent years and as one for whom the participation was a major personal experience'.¹ Written in the final stages and immediate aftermath of Western Samoa's attainment of political independence, *Samoa mo Samoa* contains little in the way of open advocacy of participant history. Two years later, however, in 1969, Davidson published his only extended statement to that effect, under the revealing title 'Understanding Pacific History'.² Written only a few years before Davidson's death, 'Understanding Pacific History' pulled together long held views. In 1953, he had observed that:

* Dedicated to the memory of P.E.H. Hair, an undergraduate student of JWD's at Cambridge and distinguished historian of Africa, who passed away as this book was going to press.

I am working on a full biography of Davidson and would be grateful to hear from his former friends and colleagues. Thanks are extended to Mary Boyd, Susan Woodburn and Peter Hempenstall for commenting on an earlier version of the present paper, which was presented at the Wednesday Seminar Series of the Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, 20 Sept. 2000. The final revisions were carried out during my tenure as Harold White Fellow, National Library of Australia, Nov. 2000–Feb. 2001.

1 J.W. Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa: The emergence of the independent state of Western Samoa* (Melbourne 1967), x.

2 J.W. Davidson, 'Understanding Pacific History: the participant as historian', Peter Munz (ed.), *The Feel of Truth: Essays in New Zealand and Pacific history in honour of J.C. Beaglehole and F.L.W. Wood* (Wellington 1969), 25-40 (quotation, 25).

The writing of valid history requires not merely technical training but also a mature understanding of the human mind. The historian has to understand the ways of thought and action of a whole society; and to gain this understanding he cannot go to the actors themselves but has to rely on the desiccated residue which they left behind – a pile of documents. It is not surprising that the most eminent historians – like Macauley, or De Tocqueville, or Henry Adams – nearly all had experience of public life in their own times before settling down to the serious study of the past.... The historian's training comes as much from an understanding of men as from an understanding of books.³

At that time, Davidson had been little over two years at the embryonic ANU where he established himself as a singularly unconventional member of the professorial body. His multi-faceted character evoked respect and affection from some, dislike and disdain from others, never indifference. His egalitarian leanings, casual attire, exuberant behaviour (which included the love of a fight for a cause and recklessness behind the wheel of a car) and a pronounced element of the *enfant terrible* did little to endear him to stuffer colleagues, who were inclined to doubt his seriousness of purpose.⁴ At the height of the Cold War, his unflinching defence of academic freedom and a concomitant readiness to criticise Australian foreign policy enraged the ANU scientists (and Vice-Chancellor), who feared that his 'irresponsibility' would put their government funding at risk.⁵

Born and brought up in New Zealand, Jim Davidson graduated with first class honours at Victoria University College (VUC) in 1938. On that basis he joined the New Zealand government's ill-fated Centennial Atlas project as a researcher⁶ before heading off to Cambridge University where, in 1942, he was awarded his doctorate for a thesis on the European penetration of the Pacific. Wartime exigencies deflected Davidson into the Naval Intelligence Division, also in Cambridge, where he helped to write and edit the Admiralty Handbooks on the Pacific Islands.⁷ At the end of the war, Davidson returned on a full-time basis to his Cambridge college, St John's, where he had been elected to a Fellowship the year before. From 1947 he was University Lecturer in Colonial Studies at Cambridge, and was instrumental in having the pivotal 'Expansion of Europe' included as a subject in the History Tripos.⁸ The following year he published a short book on the Northern Rhodesian Legislative Council.⁹ There is

3 J.W. Davidson, 'New Zealand, 1820-1870: an essay in re-interpretation', *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, 5:20 (1953), 359-60.

4 E.g. Sir Mark Oliphant (inaugural Director, Research School of Physical Sciences, interviewed by Daniel Coward, 23 Apr. 1990); Noel Butlin (foundation Professor of Economic History, interviewed by Stephen Foster, 17 Dec. 1990), ANU Oral History Project transcripts, ANU Archives.

5 Some of Davidson's escapades and interventions at ANU during the 1950s are mentioned in Stephen Foster and Margaret N. Varghese, *The Making of the Australian National University, 1946-1996* (Canberra 1996), 125-6, 149-50, 153; Peter Hempenstall, *The Meddlesome Priest: A life of Ernest Burgman* (Sydney 1993), 287-90.

6 See Malcolm McKinnon, 'The Centennial Atlas, 1937 to 1940', in William Renwick (ed.), *Creating a National Spirit: New Zealand's first centennial* (forthcoming); Eric McCormick, *An Absurd Ambition: Autobiographical writings*, ed. Dennis McDoldowney (Auckland 1996), ch. 10; Mary Boyd, 'Women in the historical profession: women historians in the 1940s', *Women's Studies Journal*, 4:1 (1988), 78-9.

7 Naval Intelligence Division [of the British Admiralty], *Pacific Islands* (Geographical Handbook Series), 4 vols (London 1943-45).

8 Ronald Hyam of Magdalene College, Cambridge, is researching the history of Imperial History at Cambridge, in which Davidson had an important place.

9 J.W. Davidson, *The Northern Rhodesian Legislative Council* (London 1948).

nothing particularly out of the ordinary in this raft of attainments, so why did he do something seemingly out of character and sound the clarion call of participant history?

THE QUESTION is worth asking because it was hardly a case of the child being the father of the man. Davidson was never physically robust, despite his enjoyment of the outdoors and travel, and his fondness for sailing and tennis, which he played indifferently, being so uncoordinated. As a child he was rather sickly. Ill at ease in New Zealand's rugby culture, he put his energies into his studies and non-sporting extra-curricular activities. He was the epitome of the cleavage in New Zealand schools between the 'jocks' and the 'wimps', to use more recent coinage. As a boarder at Waitaki Boys' High School, which was then one of New Zealand's élite secondary schools, he took out numerous academic prizes, was on the stamp club committee, a member of the wireless club and he involved himself in drama and debating.¹⁰ At the age of 15, for example, in a school debate on Indian independence, 'J.W. Davidson for the negative pointed out the prestige India gained from being in the Empire. India as India would enjoy no prestige whatever, and with her 100 different creeds and 200 different peoples would be a maelstrom of complications. Opium would increase its deadly ravages.'¹¹ While the older Davidson would have been embarrassed had this little gem gone into circulation, he was only reflecting a pro-Empire ethos at Waitaki Boys' High School that was extreme even by the standards of the day.¹²

At university, he cut back his extra-curricular activities and concentrated on his studies; after an indifferent start, his degree was a very good one. Despite his spending five years at VUC, from 1933 to 1937, I cannot find a single reference to him or by him in either of the student magazines for that period, which indicates a lack of direct involvement in student affairs.¹³ He only gets mentioned in subsequent years as the recipient of the Jacob Joseph Scholarship and the Walter Frewen Law Prize of the Royal Empire Society.¹⁴ Around the time he left VUC, moreover, he considered becoming a librarian, and was offered a job by G.T. (Geoff) Alley, the Director of the Country Library Service. In the same breath, however, Alley talked Davidson out of accepting the job, urging him instead to pursue further studies.¹⁵ Librarianship was then widely regarded as something of a sheltered workshop for delicate males. Like

10 *The Waitakian*, 1931, pp 52, 62, 66; 1932, pp 26, 165. In the histories of the school, Davidson is mentioned for his international recognition as an academic historian but not specifically for his constitutional advising. Nothing he did at a pupil rates a mention. A.R. Tyrrell, *Strong to Endure: Waitaki Boys' High School, 1883-1983* (Oamaru 1983), 280, 283; K.C. McDonald, *A History of Waitaki Boys' High School, 1883-1958* (Christchurch 1958), 383-5.

11 *The Waitakian*, 1931, p.31.

12 Ian Milner, *Milner of Waitaki: Portrait of The Man* (Dunedin 1983), ch.8.

13 However, many contributions to the student newspapers (*Spike* and *Smad*) were anonymous so the possibility remains that he contributed occasional verse and prose.

14 *Spike: The Victoria College Review* [annual], 38:66 (1938), 35 (graduation photograph on opposite page; Davidson is in the back row, fifth from left); *Spike*, 38:67 (1939), 53. My research at this point benefited from discussions with Stephen Hamilton, who is writing a history of the VUW Students' Association.

15 JWD to his mother, 19 Dec. 1941, Davidson Papers, National Library of Australia (hereinafter NLA), MS 5105, Box 64; conversations with Rod Alley (the Librarian's son), Feb. and July 2000. Alley is Reader in Political Science at VUW.

all stereotypes, this one is only partly true as the case of Alley, a former All Black, indicates. But there was a grain of truth to it, and it is telling that Davidson, then the cloistered scholar, contemplated a life among books.

But Davidson was not as uninvolved or reclusive as his work habits might suggest. At VUC, he had initially intended to study towards a law degree as entry into the trade union movement and ultimately to Parliament for the Labour Party. His fascination with history, however, proved stronger and he took that path.¹⁶ He embraced the prevailing spirit of free discussion at VUC¹⁷ and enjoyed the liveliness of student affairs, even if he kept them at arm's length. As well as the milieu and ambience of VUC was the specific influence of his history teachers, F.L.W. Wood and J.C. Beaglehole. Despite differences in outlook, they gave history a salience and immediacy by

creat[ing] an atmosphere in which we were all persuaded that nationhood and independence, self-government, responsible government and an independent foreign policy were all linked together as part of the great battle for freedom which was being waged for social justice in every country and against Nazism and Fascism in the international field. The concern with history led to a concern with the present; and in this way the study of the past helped us all with our sense of identity, it made us more articulate and conscious.¹⁸

Davidson was very fond of the gentle Freddie Wood, but John Beaglehole had far greater impact as a teacher and mentor. This influence was profound and multi-faceted, one aspect of which was Beaglehole's sense of obligation as a scholar to respond to 'the whole of life' and his responsibility as an informed citizen to engage in public debate. As Davidson wrote many years later:

the context of his teaching was as important as the content. He introduced his pupils to books and pictures they had not previously known. He talked with irony and humour but with an undertone of involvement and of passion. He was an older man who shared our indignation with the stupidity and corruption of the mediocre and powerful – though he expressed it more moderately – and who cared about the issues that we had at heart.¹⁹

Beaglehole's influence can be seen in other directions. He taught colonial history and his radical-liberal-humanitarian outlook, which entailed a more realistic view of Empire, together with prescribed readings such as Hobson and Lenin, and perhaps even Moon's *Imperialism and World Politics*,²⁰ would have eroded any lingering pro-Empire idealism in Davidson. Another facet of his Waitaki education to fall by the wayside was the Anglocentric world-view with its emphasis on British history and a

16 *Canberra Times*, 26 June 1968, 24 ('Wednesday Profile', by Bruce Juddery).

17 See Rachel Barrowman, *Victoria University of Wellington, 1899-1999: A history* (Wellington 1999), 93-7; W.L. Renwick, 'Sir Thomas Hunter, 1876-1953', in Vincent O'Sullivan (ed.), *Eminent Victorians: Great teachers and scholars from Victoria's first 100 years* (Wellington 2000), 9-48.

18 Peter Munz, 'A Personal Memoir', in Munz (ed.), *The Feel of Truth*, 21-2 (quotation); W.H. Oliver, 'J.C. Beaglehole & F.L.W. Wood, 1901-1971 & 1903-1989', in O'Sullivan (ed.), *Eminent Victorians*, 167-80.

19 J.W. Davidson, 'The New Zealand scholar: a note on J.C. Beaglehole, 1901-1971', *Journal of Pacific History* (hereinafter *JPH*), 7 (1972), 153. See also Beaglehole's description of student affairs in his *Victoria University College: An essay towards a history* (Wellington 1949), ch.8.

20 Parker Thomas Moon, *Imperialism and World Politics* (New York 1926).

dependent foreign policy.²¹ As a postgraduate student, Davidson was anxious to write his thesis on the Maori Wars, as they were then called, but was talked out of it by Beaglehole who doubtless recognised that the topic was too big. Shopping around for another non-British aspect of New Zealand history, he embarked instead on a study of the Scandinavian settlements, which Beaglehole supervised. Davidson's later statement that his thesis 'work benefited from [being] able to walk over the farms that the settlers had laboriously cut out of the Seventy Mile Bush [half a century earlier] and to talk to the few survivors of the original migrants' is, if anything, an understatement.²² There was a definite fieldwork dimension to his research that bespoke the future participant historian. Topographical description was often taken from personal observations and entire sections are based, in part or in whole, on testimony from 'those who knew the district in its earlier days'.²³

In short, Davidson's years at VUC gave him a sense of liberation from the more conservative values of home and boarding school, freed him from the ethos of Waitaki's dormitories where physical prowess was often the arbiter, reinforced an interest (albeit detached) in current affairs, and provided him with fieldwork experience of a sort. They represent his first steps to becoming a scholar-in-action, although he still had a long way to go. Neither had he become a Pacific historian. This did not occur until he went to Cambridge University.

DAVIDSON arrived in Cambridge in late 1938 on a Strathcona Studentship; three and a half years later he submitted a PhD thesis on European penetration of Polynesia to 1842.²⁴ A number of Davidson's interests intersected in this work. There was a sizeable New Zealand content that recognised the role of private individuals and saw events in New Zealand as part of broader developments elsewhere in Polynesia. His decision to study such a historiographically undeveloped region as the Pacific Islands was by no means accidental. To the contrary it was the continuation of an existing interest that had been imparted by his mother, who had been enthralled by the Pacific ever since a cruise through the islands in her own childhood.²⁵

He worked solidly on his thesis but was not about to let the world go by unobserved. His family in Wellington fed him a steady stream of newspaper clippings on New Zealand affairs and his letters home are full of political commentary on the progress and exigencies of war. He wrote an article on the war for the left wing New

21 Vincent O'Sullivan (ed.), *Intersecting Lines: The memoirs of Ian Milner* (Wellington 1993), 159-60; Charles Brasch, *Indirections: A memoir, 1909-1973* (Wellington 1980), 76.

22 Davidson, 'Understanding Pacific History', 28.

23 J.W. Davidson, 'Scandinavian settlement in New Zealand', MA thesis, Victoria University College (Wellington 1937), 33-4 (topographical description of the Seventy Mile Bush and the Wairarapa), 55-9, 120-5 (first reaction of the settlers to their new life), 72-3 (lack of medical care), 79-85 (settlers' early difficulties), 89-93 (summation of settler life and work), 98-9 (role of the church), 127-8 (later arrivals and departures), 130-5 (supersession of Scandinavian languages; bush fires; the last 40 years in the Seventy Mile Bush).

24 J.W. Davidson, 'European penetration of the South Pacific, 1779-1842', PhD thesis, Cambridge University (Cambridge 1942).

25 *Canberra Times*, 26 June 1968, 24; H.E. Maude, 'James Wightman Davidson,' *JPH*, 8 (1973), 5; JWD to his mother, 23 Aug. 1942, 24 Jan 1943, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65.

Zealand journal *Tomorrow*, which the government shut down soon after as a subversive organ.²⁶ In a manner that would not have surprised his later colleagues at ANU, he expressed outrage at the censorship of mail.²⁷

It was a disruptive time and his thesis work did not go unimpeded. Wartime conditions and the closure of the Public Records Office in London restricted the scope of his research. More to the point, his father died in 1941 and, reluctant to impose financially on his mother, Davidson put aside his thesis and joined the research staff of a major project on colonial legislatures in Africa, under the editorship of Margery (later Dame Margery) Perham of Nuffield College, Oxford.²⁸ Davidson spent a good three months in the summer of that year researching the volume on the Northern Rhodesian legislative council, and he continued intermittently on this project as he completed his thesis (in May 1942). Perham was anxious to keep him on her staff, to write a survey of British colonial administration in the South Pacific, and Davidson was tempted.²⁹ But just before she (unexpectedly) secured the necessary funding, he accepted a position with the British Admiralty to assist Raymond Firth in the production of a series of volumes (the so-called Admiralty Handbooks) on the Pacific Islands.³⁰ Like so many other academics in wartime Britain, Davidson took employment in the civil service on war-related work.

Firth, a fellow New Zealander, was the Professor of Anthropology at the University of London. He already knew Davidson and approved of the latter's thesis as the first attempt by a historian to understand the Islander's perspective.³¹ Davidson was 'overjoyed' to get the job and entered the busiest three years of his life. There were times when he wilted. In addition to authoring or co-authoring some 600 pages of the Admiralty Handbooks, he undertook major additional responsibilities during Firth's numerous bouts of ill health.³² He was, at the same time, trying to finish the Northern Rhodesia book, and he admitted the 'strain [of] getting one's mind back to a quite different field of research'.³³ He also served in the Home Guard and when, in 1944, he became a Fellow of his Cambridge college, he had numerous associated duties. To cap it off, Firth urged him to collaborate in a war history, under the auspices of the Colonial Office, but it got too much and he regretfully pulled out: he simply 'hate[d] the thought of going on & on with every minute of my time having to be allocated to one job or another'.³⁴

26 JWD, 'The present war and the future peace', *Tomorrow*, 5:25 (1939), 778-80; JWD to his mother, 17 Sept. 1939, NLA, MS 5105, Box 64.

27 JWD to his father, 4 Jan. and 27 Feb. 1940, NLA, MS 5105, Box 64.

28 J.W. Davidson to Stanley J. Bailey (his tutor at John's), 11 Feb. 1941, Tutorial File of J.W. Davidson, St John's College, Cambridge (I am grateful to the Master and Fellows for permission to consult this material).

29 JWD to his mother, 21 May 1942, NLA, MS 5105, Box 64.

30 JWD to his mother, 13 July 1942, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65.

31 JWD to his mother, 4 Mar. 1941, NLA, MS 5105, Box 64.

32 JWD to his mother, 13 Feb. 1944, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65; R. Gerard Ward, 'Davidson's contribution to the "Admiralty Handbooks"', *JPH*, 29:2 (1994), 238-40.

33 JWD to his mother, 13 Dec. 1942, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65.

34 JWD to his mother, 6 Aug. 1944, 26 Sept 1945 (quotation), 7 Oct 1954, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65.

The pressures notwithstanding, his work with Firth on the Admiralty Handbooks was intensely interesting. His schoolboy interest in wireless, for example, saw him writing about it for the Handbooks.³⁵ In more general terms the nexus between experience of life and academic scholarship was also reinforced at Cambridge, not least by its endorsement by such luminaries as R.H. Tawney, who averred that the 'historian needs ... not more documents but stouter boots', and G.M. Trevelyan, who disapproved of cloistered archival historians because, in the words of his biographer, 'they had no other career, no knowledge of any other life except their own'.³⁶ Exposure to the flood of demobilised soldiers who descended upon Cambridge reinforced such influences. Many of them may have regarded their war service as wasted years. But Davidson saw it as an education in its own right, and he respected their maturity of outlook and wider experience. He may not have known E.P. Thompson, who had been a tank commander in the Italian campaign. But he did know Ronald Robinson (later of *African and the Victorians* fame), an RAF squadron leader who had returned to John's for postgraduate work, as well as Harry Hinsley, another historian at John's who had served in British intelligence, and who later wrote about it.³⁷ One of his students was George Shepperson, who had interrupted his studies to enlist in the King's African Rifles and who, in 1947, helped in the Bosnian railway project.³⁸ Another was his PhD student Angus Ross, another Waitakian, who had served with distinction in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Ross's earlier MA thesis on Te Puoho's ill-fated attack on Murihiku was after Davidson's heart because he (Ross) had retraced on foot and bicycle the invaders' incredible journey down the West Coast of the South Island.³⁹

The influences on Davidson during his years at Cambridge were various, but arguably the most telling were those associated with Margery Perham, even though she failed to secure him for her stable. Miss Perham, as Davidson always called her, could be frightfully conventional in her social attitudes, which Davidson is likely to have viewed with a mixture of scorn and amusement. But in other respects she may well have been a role model given her eminence as an Africanist, her role as an opinion-maker on colonial issues, and her influence in government and colonial service circles. Well travelled in Africa, and having visited the Pacific and New Zealand, she was herself a scholar-in-action – a link between the colonial pro-consuls and the African

35 JWD to his mother, 11 Apr. 1943, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65.

36 David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A life in history* (London 1993), 190.

37 Davidson to his mother, 4 Feb. 1945, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65; F.H. Hinsley and others, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, 5 vols (London, 1979-1990); F.H. Hinsley and John Stripp (eds), *Codebreakers: The inside story of Bletchley Park* (Oxford 1993).

38 See George ('Sam') Shepperson, 'The Youth Railway Newspaper', in Edward Thompson (ed.), *The Railway: An adventure in construction* (London 1948), 64-5; Shepperson, 'Brotherhood and unity: a moment in Bosnia', *Edinburgh University History Graduates Association Newsletter*, no.23 (June 1994), 6-8. Shepperson is Emeritus William Robertson Professor of Commonwealth and American History, University of Edinburgh.

39 Eric Olssen, 'Professor Angus Ross', *New Zealand Historical Association Newsletter* (Dec. 1999-June 2000), 42-5. Ross's PhD thesis was published as *New Zealand Aspirations in the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford 1964).

leaders.⁴⁰ Intellectually, moreover, Davidson's involvement in African history was crucial to his later career. He said at the time that the experience of being forced into a new field would probably be valuable in the long run, and so it was.⁴¹ As well as imparting a scholarly interest in the problems of colonial government, it provided a disciplined focus for his sympathy towards indigenous self-determination – for Davidson was strongly anti-colonialist by the time of his arrival at Cambridge, which made him unpopular with people who mattered.⁴² By kindling an interest in *contemporary* colonial affairs, his African research provided the springboard to becoming an academic who sought a life of action as much as a life of the mind.

The opportunity came unexpectedly on a research visit to New Zealand in 1946-47, his first since leaving for England eight years earlier. This was in the aftermath of the Samoans' petition for self-government, which put pressure on New Zealand, as the administering power, to promote political as well as social and economic advancement. Davidson renewed his acquaintance with A.D. (later Sir Alister) McIntosh, whom he had known while working on the Historical Atlas project in 1938 (and perhaps earlier still at VUC), and who was by then Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Department. Faced with an upcoming visit of a United Nations trusteeship mission to Western Samoa, McIntosh persuaded Peter Fraser (the Prime Minister) to send Davidson there. As McIntosh told it many years later, 'we wanted somebody who would go and make a report on Samoa... I knew Jim Davidson and I knew of his studies in the Pacific and I thought he would be suitable and I suggested him to Fraser and Fraser took my word for it.... You see we had no people of any academic qualifications ourselves.'⁴³ It was no less than an undercover operation, motivated by Fraser's distrust of the information he was receiving from his own men on the spot. In something of a comedy of errors, Davidson was sent in the guise of a research student, but his cover was blown when word got out that the New Zealand government was paying his expenses through the Samoan Treasury.⁴⁴ He also visited Tonga to compare the situation there with that of Samoa.

Beyond doubt, the first visit to Samoa as the Prime Minister's emissary, in April-July 1947, was a defining point in his life, a moment of intense self-discovery. It is not that he had any predisposition towards Samoa, he hardly mentions the place in his PhD thesis. The territory and its people made a profound impression on the 32-year-old Davidson, whose enchantment is expressed to a friend shortly before returning to New Zealand: 'My God, how can one tear one's self away? I have never been nearer to throwing up Cambridge, to casting away all ambition or any sense of duty to write & study history, than during the last few months.' He did add, in one of those asides that

40 See Alison Smith and Mary Bull (eds), *Margery Perham and British Rule in Africa* (London 1991); Margery Perham, *Pacific Prelude: A journey to Samoa and Australasia*, 1929, ed. A.H.M. Kirk-Greene (London 1988).

41 JWD to his mother, 9 July 1941, NLA, MS 5105, Box 64; JWD to Bailey, 18 July 1941, Davidson's Tutorial File.

42 Peter Laslett, pers. comm., 11 May 1999. Laslett, a fellow student of Davidson's at John's, is widely known as a pioneer of the techniques of historical demography and as the author of *The World We have Lost*.

43 Sir Alister McIntosh (interviewed by F.L.W. Wood and Mary Boyd, 2 Dec. 1975), typescript, Wellington, Alexander Turnbull Library, 80-413 (on restricted access). Gerald Hensley (formerly head of the Ministry of Defence in New Zealand) is preparing a biography of McIntosh.

44 Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 172n.

demonstrates the ongoing tension between his intellect and emotions: 'One factor, of course, which made the conflict less severe was [the] realization that if I came here to the sort of job I could fairly easily get myself I would be under restraints that I have not so far felt'.⁴⁵ The Samoan interlude also confirmed what Davidson had said the year before in book reviews, where he rebuked one author for not conducting the necessary fieldwork and praised another for fieldwork that supplied 'a valuable corrective to generalizations based solely on documentary sources. Such a corrective', he added, in a phrase that anticipated his inaugural lecture at ANU some nine years later, 'is especially necessary to the historian of non-European societies'.⁴⁶

Back in Cambridge, Davidson suggested to his undergraduate student Paul Hair, who had been assigned to the coalmines during the war, that he should write a short history of coalmining for a Penguin Books pictorial series – a suggestion made so casually that the reaction was astonishment rather than gratification. This is the first documented instance of Davidson as the champion of participant history – *after* he had returned from Samoa (and Tonga). Hair also indicates that Davidson could talk of little else: a tutorial on Tudor inflation 'turned into a monologue on Samoa, just as Henry VIII's wives rapidly led to the Queen of Tonga'.⁴⁷

Davidson then sought ways to return to the Pacific. He applied for a senior position at the newly created South Pacific Commission, one motive being that:

it would be wise to get as full a knowledge of Pacific affairs now, if I am to go on writing about them: it is easier for me to lead a life that involves a lot of travelling now than it is likely to be later on; and in any case I think that any one who has embarked on an academic career ought to strive to keep in touch with practical affairs, as well, so far as he can.⁴⁸

But he had second thoughts and arranged with Peter Fraser for a further, more extended, tour of duty in Samoa as Trusteeship Officer, with a range of responsibilities relating to the preparation of Samoa for self-government; and again he stressed that:

from the point of view of an academic student of colonial governments, the experience of actually occupying a position in a colonial territory would be invaluable – a chance no one else studying in a university (e.g., Margery Perham) has come near to having.⁴⁹

As well as being an *ex officio* member of the Legislative Assembly, he had a special responsibility for codifying the system of local government. Although his efforts in this field were ultimately fruitless in practical terms,⁵⁰ his work with the

45 JWD to Derek Freeman, 28 July 1947 (provided by Derek Freeman, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, ANU). Davidson mentioned this to me in 1972, remarking that he realised that, professionally, permanent residence in Samoa would ultimately have been subject to the law of diminishing returns.

46 J.W. Davidson, reviews of Kenneth K. Kurihara, *Labor in the Philippine Economy*, and Raymond Firth, *Malay Fishermen*, in *Economic History Review*, 16:1 (1946), 156-8.

47 George Shepperson, P.E.H. Hair and Doug Munro, 'J.W. Davidson at Cambridge University: some student evaluations', *History in Africa*, 27 (2000), 222. Paul Hair was Emeritus Ramsay Muir Professor of Modern History, University of Liverpool.

48 JWD to his mother, 1 Sept. 1948, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65.

49 JWD to his mother, 31 Oct. 1948, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65; Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 192-3.

50 Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 343.

commission of enquiry into district and village government (which he chaired), and particularly his travels with the Samoan committee members around Samoa, physically strenuous though they were, constitute perhaps the most exhilarating and happy period of his life. He rhapsodised about the experience, saying that the 'morning walks, so near to the spirit of a traditional Samoan *malaga* [journey], gained also the spirit of an Arcadian picnic'.⁵¹ His mother's influence in instilling him with a frankly romantic view of the Pacific is evident.

To Davidson, participation in Samoan affairs equated with involvement in and endorsement of Samoan causes. As he said of his approach to his job as Trusteeship Officer: 'I believed that my effectiveness would depend most of all upon a close association with the people of the country – both Samoan and local European. And this conviction accorded fully with my personal inclinations.'⁵² A combination of egalitarianism, ethnic colour-blindness and belief in indigenous self-determination resulted in an extraordinarily close association between Davidson and the Samoan leaders. A warm and trusting relationship developed between Davidson and the two *Fautua*, Tupua Tamasese Mea'ole and Malietoa Tanumafili II.⁵³

Davidson deplored the climate of distrust between the Samoa leaders and European officials. He placed the blame squarely with the latter and was not backward in diagnosing the problem:

It becomes more clear as time goes by that the only thing which is making my time here a success is the solid backing I have always had from the Samoan leaders. There seems to be little but jealousy on the part of senior officials over the fact that the Samoans talk to me of their hopes & fears & their ideas much more freely than they do to others... And the reason why they talk so freely to me is, in the main, a very simple one, I think. Even Tamasese ... is afraid that he is ignorant in matters of government; & they are afraid of appearing ridiculous or of being made to feel ridiculous by Europeans. I never feel that what they say is ridiculous, because it seems easy to understand how their opinions are the result of a different background & upbringing. Consequently, they are in no way embarrassed at talking [to me] quite freely; and I, of course, tell them my own views just as fully. It seems a shocking thing that so few Europeans in the Government ever do get beyond the stage of arousing the suspicion of the Samoans in this way.⁵⁴

It was not that Samoans were difficult to deal with. As far as Davidson was concerned, the New Zealanders in Samoa were far more difficult to work with, and he thought that most of them were 'nowhere near being fit for their responsibilities here' – sentiments which he echoed in *Samoa mo Samoa*.⁵⁵ The disparagement was mutual:

51 Ibid., 273. There is a remarkable parallel here with Brij Lal's journey around the Fiji Islands in 1995, as a member of the Constitution Review Commission, to receive submissions. Brij V. Lal, *Another Way: The politics of constitutional reform in Fiji* (Canberra 1998), 164-75.

52 Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 193-4.

53 Nancy Phelan, *Pieces of Heaven: In the South Seas* (Brisbane 1994), 35; Ian Fairbairn, pers. comm., 19 Apr. 1999. *Fautua* (Advisor) was an office created by the German administration in 1905 and occupied by the *tama'aiga*, or 'royal sons' of the two lineages in Samoa. The office was retained by successive colonial administrations. In April 1948, one of the incumbents died and was not replaced. The other two – Tamasese and Malietoa – remained in the role until independence in 1962, when they became joint heads of state.

54 JWD to his mother, 22 Feb. 1950, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65.

55 JWD to his mother, 22 Feb. (quotation), 5 Apr. 1950, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65; Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 171-2, 200.

expatriate society in Samoa resented Davidson's closeness with Samoans, disapproved of his identification with Samoan causes and commented adversely on his private life, notably that he associated with homosexuals.⁵⁶

The second assignment to Samoa completed the transformation of Jim Davidson into a participant historian. In mid-1949, while still in Samoa, Davidson was offered the chair of Pacific History at the Australian National University. He did not apply but was recommended by Raymond Firth, in his capacity as one of ANU's four Academic Advisers, on the grounds that Davidson's combination of academic attainment and 'practical experience' of the Pacific made him 'uniquely qualified'.⁵⁷ His Departmental colleague Harry Maude is quite correct in his later supposition that ANU was prepared to develop Pacific Islands history only if Davidson accepted its offer of a chair.⁵⁸ By the time he took up residence in Canberra in mid-1951, the image of bookish scholar had been exorcised. But it was not an overnight development, even allowing that the initial Samoan experience was decisive. The transformation of Davidson into the scholar-in-action was waiting to happen and Samoa provided the occasion.

FOR the remaining 22 years of his life Davidson tirelessly promoted the cause of participant history as a surer means of understanding Pacific history than any other. In a typical example, he criticised *The South Seas in Transition*, by the social anthropologist W.E.H. (Bill) Stanner, for being based 'too heavily on documentary sources, as against direct observation in the field'.⁵⁹ From the late-1950s he was the scholar-in-action once again as Constitutional Adviser to five island territories. Other ANU academics had done comparable work in colonial settings,⁶⁰ but Davidson alone committed himself to ongoing involvement in this sphere.

But what did he actually claim on behalf of participant history? This brings us back to his 1969 manifesto, 'Understanding Pacific History', which had the subtitle 'the participant as historian'. In general terms, the subtitle is self-explanatory: to adequately understand Pacific history, one has to be a participant; conversely, participation and attachment aid one's understanding. More precisely, the term 'participant' had several shades of meaning for Davidson. At one level, the historian's work drew on, and was enriched by, wider worldly experience. There is nothing exceptional in this view, which equates to Gibbon's famous dictum that experience in the Hampshire Grenadiers was not useless to the historian of ancient Rome. More to the point, Davidson argued that immersion and involvement were obligatory for

56 Nancy Phelan, telephone discussion, 20 Nov. 2000.

57 'Extract of letter from Professor Firth, dated 6/7/49', Personal File of J.W. Davidson, ANU Central Records, 6.2.1.3, folio 2; Sir Raymond Firth (interviewed by Margaret Murphy, 7 June 1973), National Library of Australia Oral History Project.

58 JWD to his mother, 6 July 1948, NLA, MS 5105, Box 65; Maude, 'James Wightman Davidson', 6.

59 Review in *Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand*, 6:22 (1954), 224.

60 H. E. Maude, 'The colonization of the Phoenix Islands', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 61:1&2 (1952), 62-89; D.A. Low, 'The Buganda Mission, 1954', *Historical Studies* [essays in honour of W.K. Hancock], 13:51 (1968), 353-80; Oskar Spate, *On the Margins of History: From the Punjab to Fiji* (Canberra, 1991), 99-116.

historians of cross-cultural situations, and he was inclined to appoint staff and students on the basis of previous experience with the scholarly field, be it occupational experience, family background or social circumstances.⁶¹ Finally there was the maker of history – as he himself was from time to time – whose analysis of events had the advantage of stemming from direct involvement.⁶²

Intellectually, Davidson's promotion of the participant related to the type of Pacific historiography that he developed at Canberra. Unconventionality extended to his own discipline with the rejection of some of his earlier precepts. The changing historical discipline had resulted in a hard-nosed professionalisation based on a sense of vocation and close archival research. Davidson had no problem with that. What bothered him was historians' lack of understanding of the processes within indigenous cultures; the few existing monographic studies were Eurocentric in that they distorted the picture, downplayed the role of Islanders in their own history and represented their actions and motives in bizarre ways. He therefore shifted the focus from colonial policies, imperial rivalries and European activity *per se* to 'multi-cultural situations', and he (and Harry Maude) inspired an island-oriented approach that dominated the field of enquiry for a generation.⁶³

He elaborated in his 1954 inaugural lecture, stressing the need for historians of cross-cultural situations to be participants, on the grounds that situations had to be analysed 'from both points of view'. But he put a twist to the argument by noting that knowledge of one's own culture was often an impediment to understanding another.

At the research level, the real problem now lies in working out methods for the study of ... multi-cultural situations. It is a problem on which little work has yet been done. To begin with, the opinions and interpretations of the European participants are generally much more fully documented than those of the non-Europeans. Again, the historian normally works his way through the complex situations that confront him with the aid of his personal experience as well as his learning. He knows, when he is dealing with the history of his own culture, that men are likely or unlikely to think or act in certain ways.⁶⁴

As he added 10 years later, in 1966: 'The historian studying multi-cultural situations must learn to use new forms of evidence, to involve himself in other men's ways, and to avoid interpreting men's actions in terms of the patterns of his own culture'.⁶⁵ Participation, involvement and engagement were the antidotes to Eurocentrism and the distortion that this entailed.

61 Peter Corris, 'J.W. (Jim) Davidson: a tribute', *Meanjin Quarterly*, 32:3 (1973), 316; Niel Gunson, 'An Introduction to Pacific History', in Brij V. Lal (ed.), *Pacific Islands History: Journeys and transformations* (Canberra 1992), 4-5.

62 Another proponent of this view is Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., 'The historian and history', *Foreign Affairs*, 41:3 (1963), 491-7; idem, 'The historian as participant', in Felix Gilbert and Stephen R. Graubard (eds), *Historical Studies Today* (New York, 1971), 393-412. Schlesinger was one of President John F. Kennedy's aides.

63 J.W. Davidson, *The Study of Pacific History: An inaugural lecture delivered in Canberra, 25 November 1954* (Canberra 1955); idem, 'Problems of Pacific History', *JPH*, 1 (1966), 5-21; H.E. Maude, 'Pacific History – past, present and future', *JPH*, 6 (1971), 3-24.

64 Davidson, *The Study of Pacific History*, 9-10.

65 Davidson, 'Problems of Pacific History', 10.

But participation was far more than a technique of scholarship. Rather, there were strong psychological and emotional impulses that took Davidson down the path he followed and sought to lead others. In this regard, he contradicts E.H. Carr's aphorism that the historian 'is a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs...'.⁶⁶ To the contrary, Davidson was too much of an individualist and too unconventional to reflect his society and period with any degree of exactness. He was, as he himself said of Beaglehole, 'a scholar of his own definition'.⁶⁷ Carr is closer to the mark when he says, 'Before you study the history, study the historian'.⁶⁸ So let us back trace and take a closer look at Davidson's intellectual upbringing and personal development.

Davidson said that '[t]he initial impetus towards the study of modern history not infrequently derives, I think, from the student's sense of involvement in his own society'.⁶⁹ That seems correct only up to a point. Certainly his schoolboy interest in history quickened when English history gave way to New Zealand history. It is also the case that Davidson kept himself well informed on current events at university. Increasingly, however, this sense of attachment was accompanied, and often outweighed, by a sense of disengagement, even rejection. This disengagement can perhaps be interpreted as a lateral interrogation – in other words the *result* of his involvement with his social environment. At VUC, he consciously sought to distance himself from the emphasis ordinarily attached to the British origins of New Zealand society, hence his decision to study the Scandinavians.⁷⁰ The subject, nevertheless, had some personal relevance because most of the Scandinavian settlements were in Hawkes Bay, the same area where he attended Hereworth School before going on to Waitaki.⁷¹ He then took the next logical step and developed a stronger sense of involvement with his subject through fieldwork and personal observation.

Davidson provides a more compelling clue for his heterodoxies in the ready admission that he was 'a rebel against established opinion'.⁷² His rejection of dominant societal values can be seen more clearly in his anti-colonial stance, itself a repudiation of Waitaki's unreflective ethos of loyalty to the British Empire. As early as 1948 he was publicly stating that independence should be the ultimate objective of colonialism.⁷³ Not only that, there was an ethnic colour-blindness, a quality which impressed Raymond Firth during their 1951 visit to Papua New Guinea, where Davidson was 'completely unconscious of anything but the personal and intellectual qualities of the people he was with'.⁷⁴ A complementary feature of Davidson's

66 E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Penguin edn 1964), 35; cf. Geoffrey Partington, *The Idea of a Historical Education* (Windsor, UK 1980), 71-2.

67 Davidson, 'The New Zealand Scholar', 151.

68 Carr, *What is History?* 44 (see also p.23).

69 Davidson, 'Understanding Pacific History', 28.

70 Ibid.

71 *Hereworth School List (incorporating Heretaunga and Hereworth)* (Havelock Nort, 1964), 112.

72 Davidson, 'Understanding Pacific History', 30.

73 J.W. Davidson, 'The idea of Empire', *The Listener*, 13 May 1948, 775.

74 Sir Raymond Firth, pers. comm., 30 Sept. 1997. A similar statement is in Maude, 'James Wightman Davidson', 9.

character, again in contrast to established patterns of behaviour, was his informality and egalitarianism, as former pupils readily attest.⁷⁵

These personal traits help to explain why Davidson had such an affinity with his biographical subject, the trader and adventurer Peter Dillon, who served as something of a role model. Davidson 'discovered' Dillon at Cambridge and worked on the biography intermittently for the rest of his life.⁷⁶ While recognising the less pleasant side of Dillon's character, Davidson was captivated with his cultural sensitivity and acuteness as an observer. The following passages (and there are others), have a marked autobiographical resonance:

The owner and master of the brig *Calder* [Dillon] was himself a familiar figure in many parts of the Pacific.... He mixed easily with men and women of the most diverse cultural backgrounds and social positions and had a great number of friends among both Europeans and Pacific Islanders.⁷⁷

Dillon was more, however, than a mere observer. He was a man of passion, driven by his joys and desires to involve himself in the lives of those with whom he dwelt. To many chiefs he became a friend and confidant, to young women in many islands a paramour. In the Pacific this readiness for self-involvement has always been the surest way by which a European can bridge the cultural gulf between himself and his island hosts. Dillon (or 'Pita', as he was known) was thus accepted as an individual; and he in turn, valued his island associates for their personal qualities, rather than for the mask of conformity that their culture had imposed on them.⁷⁸

Shortly after the long-awaited biography's posthumous publication in 1975, its editor, Davidson's old friend Oskar Spate, rightly remarked that the author was so engrossed in the subject because he identified with Dillon.⁷⁹ Davidson's choice of subject and his lifelong commitment to his book on Dillon stemmed, indeed, from an identification with the positive aspects of his subject's character. The strength of this identification was such that Davidson could never bring himself to finish the book: he could not let Dillon go.

Davidson's attraction to participant history, in other words, was probably more emotional than intellectual. The role of participant enabled this essentially shy and not very robust man to give expression to inner needs. While he sought to detach himself to some degree from the moorings (shackles, if you like) of his own society, it would be wrong to say that he sought to be other than what he was or that he identified with the aspirations of politically active Pacific Islanders because he 'wanted to be one of them'.⁸⁰ He was very much his own man with his own, sometimes disconcerting, way of doing things, which is why he was so widely regarded, with frequent discomfort,

75 John Young, 'The passionate partisan: J.W. Davidson, 1915-1973', *ANU Historical Journal*, 9 (1972), 40; Corris, 'J.W. (Jim) Davidson', 316; Shepperson, Hair and Munro, 'J.W. Davidson at Cambridge University', 217, 222.

76 JWD to his mother, 1 Apr. 1940, NLA, MS 5105, Box 64; J.W. Davidson, 'European penetration of the South Pacific, 1779-1842', PhD thesis, Cambridge University (Cambridge 1942), 362-90 (Appendix V: Peter Dillon: a biographical note).

77 J.W. Davidson, 'Peter Dillon: the voyages of the *Calder* and *St Patrick*', in J.W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra, 1970), 9.

78 *Ibid.*, 11-12. For similar statements, see Davidson, 'European penetration', 362, 372; 'Peter Dillon and the South Seas', *History Today*, 6:5 (1956), 308; *Peter Dillon of Vanikoro: Chevalier of the South Seas*, ed. O.H.K. Spate (Melbourne 1975), 16-17, 76-7.

79 Quoted in 'Professor Davidson's last book published', *ANU Reporter*, 11 Apr. 1975, 3.

80 Francis West, 'James Wightman Davidson', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2:1 (1973), 115.

as being unconventional and heterodox. Never one for following well-worn paths, he self-consciously nailed his colours to the mast and presented himself to the world as the participant as historian. A 'scholar of unorthodox original turn of mind', as Raymond Firth described him,⁸¹ he sought to give appropriate expression to his singularity of character. When appointed to the Chair at Canberra his view that Pacific history preponderantly concerned the study of multi-cultural situations meant that historians as well as anthropologists had to forsake the 'armchair' approach of a Tyler or a Fraser and conduct 'meticulous' fieldwork: he had held these views for years.⁸² Of course, this advocacy of an on-the-ground knowledge of people and place dovetailed with Davidson's personal preference for participation and involvement. But it was not participation to the exclusion of scholarship. Davidson, for all the essential subversiveness of turning imperial history on its head, did not reject the canons of his academic discipline, for example insisting on the need for 'disciplined thought' and 'adequate formal training'.⁸³ But he was equally adamant that disciplinary traditions should not 'make a prison for the human mind'.⁸⁴ The scholar-in-action was still very much a scholar, the participant still a historian.

Such a recipe was, for Davidson, intellectually respectable and emotionally appealing because it gave him the scope to fulfil the inner need of involving himself in island life and affairs. As Firth explains: 'It was the fusion of the scholar and the man of affairs, concerned directly with people, which I think he loved and which let him express himself most fully. I would guess that it also allowed him a sense of power, of the kind ... once described in another context as "Let me just plan your life for you".'⁸⁵

The corollary of participation, at least in Davidson's case, was a disinclination to conduct documentary research; he had a pronounced aversion to a day in the archives. A noticeable feature of Davidson's writings is a reliance on printed records and far less concern with manuscript sources, beginning with his thesis on the Scandinavians in New Zealand. Wartime conditions in England prevented his consulting manuscript records during his PhD research and his book on the Northern Rhodesian Legislative Council, perforce, is based largely on the printed *Debates* of that chamber. His chapters for the Admiralty Handbooks are likewise based on printed material and in the process Davidson acquired, for a time, an unrivalled knowledge of the secondary material.⁸⁶ Although he consulted a wide range of manuscript sources for his biography of Dillon, it was spotty research in the sense that he would consult what was relevant to Dillon's brief visits to particular places. His essay on the Samoan leader Lauaki is firmly based on contemporary archival sources; but these are largely consolidated files, such as 'The Documentary History of the Lauati [*sic*] Rebellion',

81 Raymond Firth, in *The Davidson Memorial Fund* (Canberra 1973), unpaginated.

82 Davidson, review of Firth's *Malay Fishermen*, 158; see also Davidson, 'British policy in the South Pacific', *Pacific Affairs*, 21:4 (1948), 410.

83 Davidson, 'Understanding Pacific History', 30.

84 J.W. Davidson, 'History, art or game: a comment on "The Purity of Historical Method"', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 5:2 (1971), 120.

85 Sir Raymond Firth, pers. comm., 17 Oct. 1997.

86 See his article 'The literature of the Pacific Islands', *Australian Outlook*, 1:1 (1947), 63-79.

'The Mau of Pule – 1909', and translated summaries of the records of the German colonial administration.⁸⁷ In short, Davidson never went systematically through an extensive set of manuscript records and it was readily conceded that he was 'no archival researcher'.⁸⁸

That is true enough. What is not realised is the importance of Davidson's non-Pacific writing to his development as a participant historian. His PhD thesis and chapters in the Naval Intelligence provided his detailed and wide-ranging knowledge of the secondary sources. But the real influence on the type of historian that Davidson became must be traced elsewhere. The book on the Northern Rhodesian Legislative Council was the source of his interest in colonial government and his heightened sympathy for indigenous self-determination. These influences are evident in his major book, *Samoa mo Samoa*, where he staked his strongest, if largely implicit, claim for the utility of participant history. His work on the Scandinavians in New Zealand is just as important in that the methodological similarities between the young man's MA thesis and his *magnum opus* are too pervasive to be coincidental. There is the same reliance on printed sources; the same relatively light use of manuscript sources; the same participant observation, whether 'notes made at the time' or conversations with the old and not so old. Exactly the same techniques for his MA thesis, written as a 21-year-old, are deployed in his major book. In some respects Jim Davidson changed very little.

It remains to make some tentative comments on whether Davidson's practical philosophy of history made him a better historian. Reviewers of *Samoa mo Samoa* vary in their assessments on this point, ranging from unqualified endorsement of the advantages of participant history⁸⁹ to absolute denial.⁹⁰ The balance of opinion is qualified praise, although one reviewer asserts that Davidson lacked 'objectivity' on the very matters bearing on his personal involvement.⁹¹ Davidson would not have disagreed with this in principle,⁹² however much he would have disputed the reviewer's specific complaints.

One could certainly make a case that participant history has its disadvantages, not least in Davidson's particular application of it. His romanticised view of Samoan society as being 'satisfying, dignified, and complete'⁹³ is far too kind. As a 'triumphant ... exponent of nineteenth century democratic liberalism', as Fred Wood described

87 J.W. Davidson, 'Lauaki Namulau'ulu Mamoe: a traditionalist in Samoan politics', in Davidson and Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits*, 267-99.

88 In early 1972, I mentioned to Peter O'Connor of Auckland's History Department that I was going to study at ANU. Davidson's name cropped up and O'Connor's immediately responded that 'Jim Davidson is no archival historian'. Harry Maude repeated this in conversation shortly after my arrival in Canberra, in almost the same words.

89 E.g. Peter Lawrence, *JPH*, 3 (1968), 228; David Routledge, *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 7:2 (1968), 117.

90 Francis West, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 14:2 (1968), 286-7.

91 C.G. Powles, *Comment: A New Zealand quarterly review*, 9:4 (1968), 37.

92 Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, x.

93 *Ibid.*, 3.

him,⁹⁴ Davidson sometimes favoured democratic solutions that ran counter to Samoan cultural conservatism – which puts a dent in his confidence that ‘involvement enabled me to see Samoan society in a clearer light, not in false colours’.⁹⁵ He also pulls his punches when assessing Samoans and local Europeans of his acquaintance, and he observed a self-denying ordinance in declining to

mention by name any of those with whom I had worked when my comments were wholly derogatory. This, perhaps, was a restraint that I was not bound to observe. But my position was quite different when I possessed information gleaned from official discussions or confidential documents. In these cases I limited myself to simple assertion of my conclusion unsupported by evidence... My conclusions may be right or wrong. But they cannot – as yet, at any rate – be fully examined; and I, as a participant, am under a special obligation not to explain or defend them.⁹⁶

There is a similar reticence in documenting sources of any kind unless they were already in the public domain.⁹⁷ In other words, the participant historian’s advantage in having greater access to knowledge is somewhat negated if ethical and other restraints prevent its disclosure, or prevent him from revealing sources of information so that others can check. At another level, a participant cannot participate in everything and Davidson gets criticised for not recognising the significance of the 1954 Constitutional Convention, which he did not attend – a backhanded endorsement of his view of the value of participation!⁹⁸

Above all, Davidson did not speak Samoan, which effectively limited his association to English-speaking Samoans, and particularly the upper echelons of Samoan society. This linguistic limitation was not a crippling disability given the type of history that Davidson was writing; but it did serve to accentuate the *matai* (or chiefly) version of Samoan society and politics that his book was about anyway. As a colleague pointed out, *Samoa mo Samoa* was a ‘bird’s eye view’, sociopolitical change had been described from the ‘apex’, and that ‘worm’s eye view would reveal interesting contrasts’.⁹⁹

Davidson unabashedly stated that his position, in writing *Samoa mo Samoa*, was often that of a ‘passionate partisan’.¹⁰⁰ This is not dissimilar from the approaches adopted, before and after respectively, by Oskar Spate (in his 1958 report on the economic condition of Fijians) and Brij Lal (in his history of 20th century Fiji).¹⁰¹ The alleged peril of engagement and involvement, of course, is one of the criticisms

94 F.L.W. Wood, commenting on Davidson’s paper ‘The changing role of Pacific Islands people’, 29 Aug. 1951, in the proceedings of the Australian National University Jubilee Seminar, ‘Social Processes in the Pacific’, p.32 (ANU document 564/1951). Copy in my possession.

95 Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, x.

96 Davidson, ‘Understanding Pacific History’, 37–8.

97 See Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 440.

98 Sir Guy Powles, ‘Another view on West [sic] Samoa’s post-war development to independence’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Dec. 1967, 65; Mary Boyd, review of *Samoa mo Samoa*, in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 2:1 (1968), 94.

99 P.J. Epling to JWD, 31 July 1968, Davidson Papers, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Q25/19.

100 Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, x; JWD to Peter Lawrence, 13 June 1968, Davidson Papers, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Q25/19.

101 See Brij Lal’s chapter in this volume.

levelled against contemporary/participant history – loss of objectivity, loss of detachment, loss of critical distance. It is instructive at this point to compare Davidson's approach with that of Isaac Deutscher in his biography of Stalin. As Deutscher said:

one thing I was determined *not* to do was to write this book from intellectual inertia. I decided to take a fresh and critical look at the subject, so familiar to me, of my study. Some critics have remarked on my 'cool and impersonal' approach to Stalin. Yet the work on this book was to me a deeply personal experience, the occasion of much silent heart-searching and for a critical review of my own political record. I had belonged to those whom Stalin had cruelly defeated; and one of the questions I had to ask myself was why he had succeeded. To answer this question the partisan had to turn into an historian, to examine dispassionately causes and effects, to view open-mindedly the adversary's motives, and to see and admit the adversary's strength where strength there was. The political fighter cannot allow himself to be too severely restricted by a deterministic view of the situation in which he acts, if only because some of the elements of that situation, and some of the chances, are as yet unknown and even undetermined; and because he is never quite sure what will be the impact of his own action on any given situation. The historian, on the other hand, cannot help being a determinist, or behaving as one if he is not: he has not done his job fully unless he has shown causes and effects so closely and naturally interwoven in the texture of events that no gap is left, unless, that is, he has demonstrated the inevitability of the historic process with which he is concerned. The partisan deals with fluid circumstances: on all sides men still exercise conflicting wills, marshal forces, use weapons, and achieve or reverse decisions. The historian deals with fixed and irreversible patterns of events: all weapons have already been fired; all wills have been spent; all decisions have been achieved; and what is irreversible has assumed the aspect of the inevitable.¹⁰²

The differences in approach are marked. Deutscher draws a sharp distinction between the partisan and the historian, Davidson sees no necessary conflict in the two persona. While Davidson's work in Samoa was a major personal experience, for Deutscher it was the actual *writing* of his book and putting aside his political beliefs, which resulted in a work that others considered cool and impersonal. Davidson could never have done that, nor would he have tried.

To ask whether Davidson's approach is better (or worse) than Deutscher's is to miss the point. It is not a matter on which absolute standards can be applied. The difference between the two is a function of their respective roles: Davidson was one of history's winners whereas Deutscher acknowledged that he was on the losing side. Their contrary approaches stemmed from a profoundly personal and deeply-felt necessity to write in their different ways; and it is impossible to believe that Davidson would have produced a better book had he affected a posture of remote detachment and attempted the 'passionless pursuit of the passionless truth'.¹⁰³ Both he and Deutscher wrote in a way appropriate to their needs and location in the events they analysed.

102 Isaac Deutscher, 'From the Introduction (1961)', in his *Stalin: A political biography* (New York: OUP Galaxy edn 1967), x-xi. See also Isaac Deutscher, 'A reply to critics' (1954), in his *Heretics and Renegades and other Essays* (London 1969 edn), 191-209; Louis Menashe, 'The Dilemma of De-Stalinization: the future as history', in David Horowitz (ed.), *Isaac Deutscher: His life and work* (London 1971), 132-75.

103 Francis West, 'Professors who preach outside their fields', *Canberra Times*, 16 Apr. 1970, p.2.

Just as Davidson accepted the 'the role of emotion in politics',¹⁰⁴ he embraced the idea of involvement and attachment as part and parcel of the historian's armory, but tempered by 'disciplined thought' and 'adequate formal training'. It related to the type of person he was and reflected a personality that was passionate, outgoing, and committed to a cause. He said of Beaglehole that 'scholarship, as he pursued it, involved the whole man';¹⁰⁵ and (again) he could have been writing about himself for he seldom kept his many interests and activities in separate compartments. He believed that one's subject matter must stem from attachment and personal experience of some sort, and tug the heart-strings, otherwise the exercise is barren and futile. Davidson preached participant history and practised it in the way he did because it enabled the heart and the head to come together and to involve the whole man. Like Martin Luther, he could do no other.

104 Davidson, *Samoa mo Samoa*, 193.

105 Davidson, 'The New Zealand scholar', 154.

*Solomon Islands History: Writing With And About Malaitans at Home And Abroad**

CLIVE MOORE

In March 2000 I came out, so to speak, on the Iu Mi Nao Network. For several months I had been a subscriber to this World Wide Web Network for overseas Solomon Islanders monitoring the political and ethnic conflict occurring in their islands, but I had never participated in the discussions. As one of several Solomon Islands specialists reading the network, I was rather unsure of my status as an outsider, wanting neither to draw attention to myself, nor interfere with the flow of often very personal contributions. However, the time came to reveal my presence. A colleague, a French anthropologist who began working on Malaita in the 1960s, stayed with me in Brisbane on his way home after a few months in the Solomons. I told him of the Iu Mi Nao Network and he asked how to join, as information on the Solomons in Paris was hard to access. I checked about the possibility of his subscribing, which raised the whole issue of non-citizen participation. John Naitoro, a Solomon Islands senior public servant completing his PhD at the Australian National University, kindly asked the network what they thought of non-citizen participation. A Iu Mi Nao debate then raged for a few days, which clarified a few issues. There was some division between those who differentiated between indigenous citizens and naturalised citizens, and a further differentiation between citizens and spouses of citizens and long-term 'friends' of the Solomons, my category. Any distinction between categories of citizens was firmly discouraged, and a limited widening of the network to include 'friends' was accepted; however, not to such an extent that it would inhibit frank exchanges of views.

A related issue was raised during these Iu Mi Nao discussions – the nature of indigenous knowledge and history, in comparison with expatriate knowledge and interpretation of Solomon Islands history. Julian Treadaway, Director of the University of the South Pacific (USP) Centre in Honiara and a naturalised Solomon Islands citizen, and Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano, a Samoan lecturer at USP Suva campus, are editing papers from the November 1999 indigenous scholars' conference in Honiara. Treadaway asked for comments on the relationship between indigenous knowledge and Western scholarship. Perhaps the lack of response indicated that there is no difference, but the previous Iu Mi Nao discussion on categories of access to

* I wish to thank Doug Munro for his perceptive critique of this paper.

knowledge on the Solomon Islands really indicated that there is a division in the minds of some. Taking these issues as its starting-point, this paper explores aspects of the writing of the history of Malaita Island in the Solomon Islands, both at home and abroad.

Writing History

This paper concentrates on my relationship with two brothers from Fataleka language district in north Malaita, both prominent in the affairs of their island, and the best-known member of the immigrant branch of the Fataleka language-area descent groups in Queensland, Australia. Ishmael Itea, born in 1914, has served Fataleka since the 1940s: as a government-appointed Headman (1946-75), as a pagan priest (1952-57), then fervent Christian, and now elected Paramount Chief (1986+). His younger brother Charles Luiramo, who died in 1999, was well known as a paramedic in many areas of the Solomons between 1950 and the late 1980s. Luiramo was also a historian and leading figure in preserving the culture of east Fataleka. Noel Fatnowna, their Australian cousin, who died in 1991, was an Ambulance Officer at Mackay for four decades (1950-91), for six years served as Queensland's Commissioner for Pacific Islanders (1977-83), and was a distinguished community leader at Mackay. He too is a historian, but of South Sea Islanders in Queensland.¹

My first meeting with all three was not in the islands but in Queensland. I first met Noel Fatnowna in Mackay in 1974 when I began collecting oral testimony from South Sea Islanders in Australia. Twenty-three years old and a history tutor at James Cook University, I appeared at the Mackay Ambulance Station, requesting his help, which he gave readily, opening the doors of the Mackay Islander community to my historical inquiries. I met Charles Luiramo at Brisbane airport in 1975, when, dazed by the attention of so many new found relatives, he was part of a group going to Mackay, the north Queensland sugar cane town synonymous in the minds of most Solomon Islanders with the Australian Malaitan community. I met Ishmael Itea at the home of Noel and Minnie Fatnowna in 1976. All three participated in and facilitated the linking of Malaitans in Australia with those at home, after the two communities had lost contact for more than 70 years.

My initial academic interest was in the history of settlement in the Mackay district, not just the labour trade of the 19th century, or South Sea Islanders – the Kanakas of Blackbirding days. However, in grappling with collecting historical data, I soon realised that the only way to access the Islanders' experiences was through oral testimony supplemented by documentary evidence. Born in Mackay, I spent my childhood there in the 1950s and 1960s before going on to Townsville and James Cook University for tertiary studies. I went to school with the Islanders and although

¹ After the Australian government-sponsored deportation 1906-08, there was almost no connection between the remnant community in Australia and their families in the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) until the 1960s and 1970s. Since then the relinking has grown to be constant and considerable, through individual and church group travel, intermarriage and constant communication. Clive Moore and Patricia Mercer, 'The forgotten people: Australia's immigrant Melanesians', *Meanjin*, 37:2 (1978), 98-108; Clive Moore and Patricia Mercer, 'The forgotten immigrants: Australia's South Sea Islanders, 1906-1991', in Henry Reynolds (ed.), *Race Relations in North Queensland* (Townsville, 2nd edn 1993), 208-42.

I was not close to any of the families, my father was also from the district and knew many of them through school days, sports and working as a cane-cutter and stevedore. I was never a complete outsider because I belonged to the district, an advantage that proved invaluable not only in knowing the local geography, landmarks and personalities but in the difficult task of being accepted by the Melanesian community, which was long alienated by racism and paternalism.

With the ground work collecting oral and documentary sources in Queensland already done, I readily accepted Itea's invitation to accompany him back to Ambe, his picturesque village overlooking Fakanakafo Bay in east Fataleka, where I spent several months in 1976 completing fieldwork. I have since visited Malaita on many occasions, now adopted into the Rakwane descent group family, no longer the young academic who stumbled through his first words in Pidgin English a quarter century ago. My interests broadened into the myth-history of Rakwane and Fataleka. Along the way I came to learn much about Itea, Luiramo and Fatnowna as individuals. They are remarkable men, but only three of many similar Solomon Islanders who have seen their islands pass from small-scale political units, to inclusion in the British Protectorate which became an independent nation in 1978. Their importance relates to their part in the linking between Solomon Islanders at home and South Sea Islanders in Australia, uniting families separated by colonial processes.

Writing With and About Malaitans at Home and Abroad

Noel Fatnowna, Ishmael Itea and Charles Luiramo were formidable historians of their own people. My historical research has been conducted independently, although sometimes under their auspices, and in collaboration with each of them.

My initial interaction was with Noel Fatnowna, whose historical beliefs about the labour trade were initially fairly standard with those of the rest of the Australian South Sea Islander community, which stresses large-scale kidnapping and slavery. The pattern that my research began to uncover in the 1970s and 1980s was similar to that of my predecessors, Scarr, Corris and Saunders: an initial phase of kidnapping which was replaced by more legal although still violent and disreputable activity throughout the 19th century. The oral history work which Trish Mercer and I did with the Australian South Sea Islander community also revealed a great deal of Islander agency and cultural retention.² Noel was initially resistant, holding to the standard 'kidnapped slave, poor fella me' version of Kanaka history, but through his exploration of his own family's history and travelling to the Solomon Islands, he came to see the larger historical dimensions. He was a great orator, fond of using hyperbole and exaggeration to carry a tale, not worrying too much when facts got in the way of a good story. But, equally, Noel had read the work of European historians,

² The major texts on the history of Australia's South Sea Islanders are: Peter Corris, *Port, Passage and Plantation: A history of Solomon Islands labour migration, 1870-1914* (Melbourne 1973); Kay Saunders, *Workers in Bondage: The origins and bases of unfree labour in Queensland, 1824-1916* (St Lucia, Qld 1982); Clive Moore, *Kanaka: A history of Melanesian Mackay* (Port Moresby 1985); Adrian Graves, *Cane and Labour: The political economy of the Queensland sugar industry, 1862-1906* (Edinburgh 1993); Patricia Mercer, *White Australia Defied: Pacific Islander settlement in north Queensland* (Townsville 1995); Carol Gistitin, *Quite A Colony: South Sea Islanders in central Queensland, 1867 to 1993* (Brisbane 1993).

and his own research was preceded by that of Faith Bandler, a prominent Australian of Ambrym Island descent, who in 1977 published a historical novel based on the life of her father, Wacvie.³ She insisted that Wacvie's experience of being kidnapped and held in slavery on a Mackay plantation was typical of the Queensland labour trade. However, more than 2,000 Ambrym men and women had already been recruited to work in Queensland, Fiji and New Caledonia by the time Wacvie left the small island for Mackay. Noel could see the improbable side of Bandler's insisting that all of the Melanesian labourers were kidnapped and held as slaves, on the same plantations as his own relatives – some of the 9,000 Malaitans who worked in Queensland between the 1870s and 1900s. He knew they had wandered freely about the district on weekends and had a considerable degree of freedom, even given the harshness of the indenture system.⁴

Noel's own book was condensed from lengthy audiotapes, mostly dictated alone in his car at the beach, looking out across the Coral Sea to his beloved Solomon Islands. The first tape in the series was recorded by me, providing off-air prompt questions to set Noel on his raconteur track. He was a man of basic education, reluctant to write more than a one page letter, and yet he could produce voluminous tapes which made a huge manuscript. When *Fragments of a Lost Heritage*⁵ was launched at the 1989 Pacific History Association conference in Brisbane, those present were held spellbound by his theatricality, worthy of any Melanesian Bigman. He had the gift of the gab and larrikin irreverence which shows in his wonderful text, by far the best account of the Queensland labour trade written by a descendant of the labourers involved.⁶

Roger Keesing, anthropologist of the Kwaio of Malaita, who co-ordinated the project and edited the manuscript, first met Noel in 1976, in his quest to find out about Malaitans in Australia. Our relationship with Noel was as friends and collaborators, not as ethnographer and historian dealing with an informant. I had few differences with Noel over his book, and could see that his words and interpretation evoked the feeling of the voyage, the strange ordered life in the sugar fields, and the new cultural interactions. We differed on one point. Noel's imagination had his grandfather locked below in the hold for the entire voyage to Australia, food just poured from aloft into the putrid mess below. But just as uncovering his own family

3 Faith Bandler, *Wacvie* (Adelaide 1997). See also Bandler's *Welou, My Brother* (Sydney 1984), and her book written with Len Fox, *Marani in Australia* (Adelaide 1980).

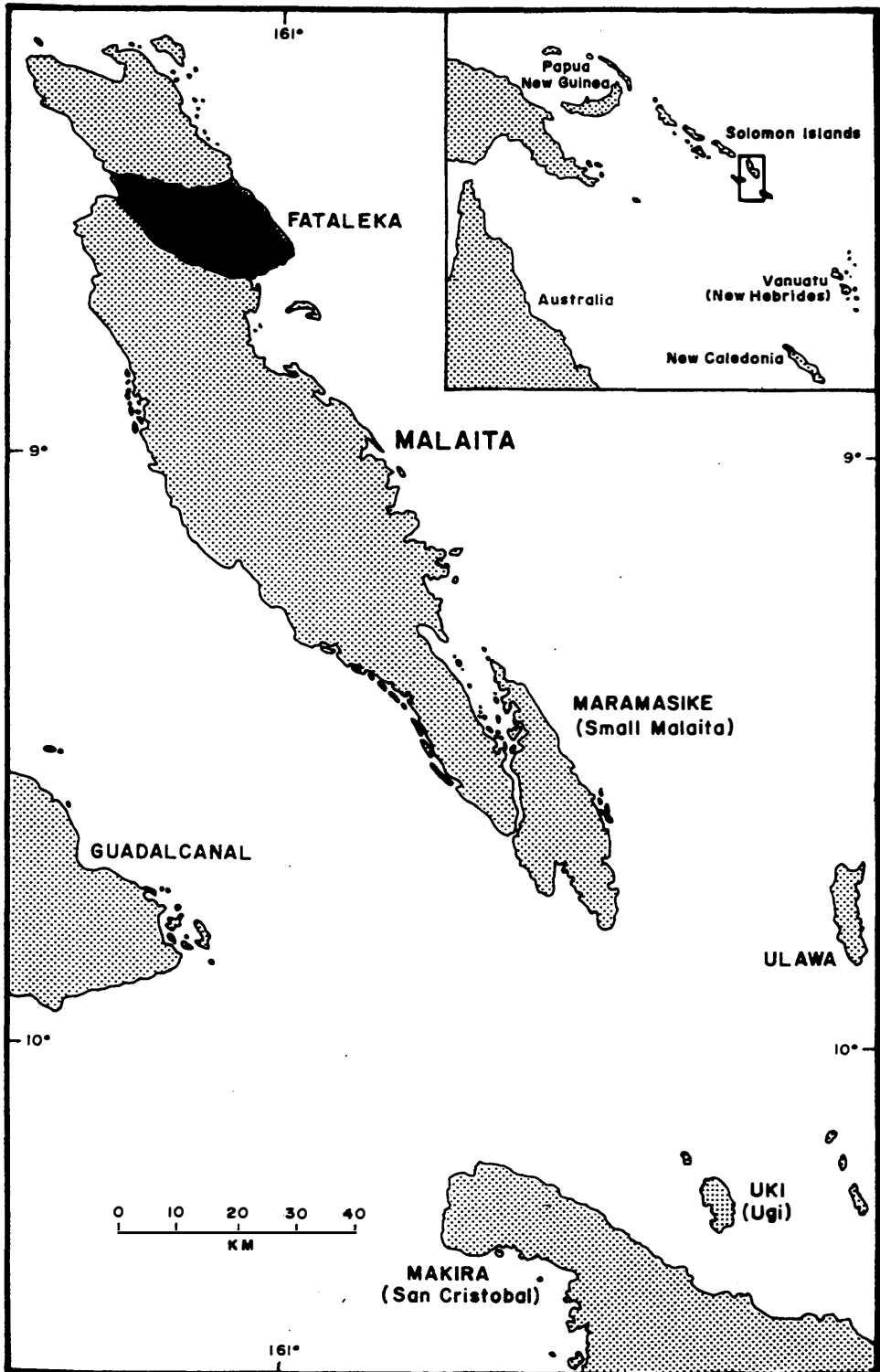
4 For reviews of Bandler's *Wacvie*, see: Clive Moore, *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 87:4 (1978), 345-6; and *Historical Studies*, 18:72 (1979), 497; Patricia Mercer, *Aboriginal History*, 2:1-2 (1978), 181-2; Peter Corris, *The Australian*, 20-21 Aug. 1977, Magazine, p. 12.

See also Clive Moore, "'Me blind drunk': alcohol and Melanesians in the Mackay district, Queensland, 1867-1907", in R. McLeod and D. Denoon (eds), *Health and Healing in Tropical Australia and Papua New Guinea* (Townsville 1991), 103-22; and, 'The counterculture of survival: Melanesians in the Mackay district of Queensland, 1865-1906', in B.V. Lal, D. Munro and E.D. Beechert (eds), *Plantation Workers: Resistance and accommodation* (Hawaii 1993), 69-99; and Mark Finnane and Clive Moore, 'Kanaka slaves or willing workers? Time-expired Melanesian workers and the Queensland criminal justice system in the 1890s', *Criminal Justice History: An international annual*, 13 (1992), 141-60.

5 Noel Fatmowna, *Fragments of a Lost Heritage*, Roger Keesing ed. (North Ryde, NSW 1989).

6 Doug Munro, 'The labor trade in Melanesians to Queensland: an historiographic essay', *Journal of Social History*, 28:3 (1995), 609-27.

MAP 1: Fataleka language district, Malaita island.



history led him to doubt the standard 'kidnapped slave' myth believed by most Australian South Sea Islanders, as a paramedic he was open to reason on health issues. How could anyone survive the conditions he described? Through long conversations with me, Noel also understood that Carolyn Edmundson and Ralph Shlomowitz's research showed that the death rate on labour voyages was not excessive, when compared with other immigrant voyages.⁷

The research and writing which went into *Fragments* paralleled my own academic work. It would be fair to say that each could not have succeeded without the other. Noel Fatnowna provided my introduction to the Islander families of Mackay and to his own family on Malaita. In return I completed the essential documentary research in newspapers, church and government archives, which provided the conclusive proof reconnecting two halves of a family separated for 70 years. There is always a degree of scepticism and high emotions when the Australian Islander families make linkages back to the islands. My independent research on the Fatnowna family in Australia and the Solomon Islands has provided more accurate cross-checking than for any other family re-linking. Noel had access to these details and was able to weave them into his book.

Most of my inputs were minor, fixing spellings of local names and correcting dates, but there was another large addition, which Roger Keesing never knew about because Noel swore me to secrecy. I have already written about this – after Keesing's death – in the *Journal of Pacific Studies*, at the behest of Doug Munro, who knew better than most that the book contained secrets.⁸ Especially noteworthy in *Fragments* is Chapter Six, which contains customary stories from Malaita. Noel wanted to be able to include authentic stories told by his people, similar to those his grandparents would have recounted to their children. However, like all of Australia's second and third generation South Sea Islanders, this information had not been passed down to Noel. He phoned me one day to explain his predicament, and I handed over copies of transcripts from tapes I had recorded with Ishmael Itea and Charles Luiramo in Fataleka in 1976 and 1978. The result, with a little embellishment from Noel, is a fine chapter, which gives the impression of cultural retention of myth-histories by the Queensland Malaitan community when almost none exists.

This takes me back to Malaita and the same writing project that produced Fatnowna's Chapter Six – my longest unfinished work, ongoing for almost a quarter of a century. I first went to Malaita to collect information on the labour trade, managing this fairly successfully under the tutelage of Itea and Luiramo, but they had other plans for me. The driving force of Malaitans is their ancestors, the *akalo*, who still govern the physical and spiritual world. Knowledge of them is power, formerly possessed only by the *fataabu*, the customary priests, of whom Ishmael Itea is really the last in east Fataleka. In contemporary Malaita this power translates as control of

7 Carolyn Edmundson, 'The Diaries of S.M. Smith, Government Agent: a new light on the Pacific Islands labour trade', in Brian Dalton (ed.), *Lectures on North Queensland History*, No 4 (Townsville 1984), 73-95; Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Mortality and the Pacific labour trade', *Journal of Pacific History*, 22:1 (1987), 34-55; and 'Epidemiology and the Pacific labor trade', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 19:4 (1989), 585-610.

8 Clive Moore, 'Noel Fatnowna and his book: the making of *Fragments of a Lost Heritage*', *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 18 (1994/95), 137-50.

land, and is played out in the Land Court in an ongoing legal codification process by which lineages and myths intertwine with learned judgements. Collecting genealogies is a major preoccupation of Malaitans, particularly as they are part of the legal ammunition necessary to win land claims. As Itea has said to me many times, the only reliable witnesses in these Courts are the few remaining pagans who know that death is the consequence of claiming false ancestors. Christians know that their lies can be forgiven.

Previously, two other *araikwao* (Europeans), Tom Russell and Remo Guidier, have tried to collect genealogies in Fataleka, and made attempts to create a history of the descent relationships. Russell, the Malaita District Officer in the 1940s, collected information for an article on Fataleka, which was published in *Oceania* in 1950, the only English language account of Fataleka.⁹ At the time, Ishmael Itea was Headman of Fataleka and Sumu was his deputy. Russell's attempt was ill-fated for three reasons. First, Itea recalls that Russell collected the material for his article mainly from pagans. If Russell had been willing to pay for it with traditional Malaitan currency, then the priests could have made sacrifices to the *akalo* asking permission to give him the information. Itea is certain that Russell did not do this. Second, because the young government officer could not speak the Fataleka language and had an incomplete grasp of Pidgin English, some of his mistakes probably come from mishearing and misunderstandings. Third, Sumu was one of Russell's main informants and Itea directed Sumu and others to skew any information given to Russell, hence the bizarre mistakes in his *Oceania* article. Russell collected his information in the middle of the Maasina Rule years, the post-war nationalist movement which caused immense disruption to government control on the island.¹⁰ Although Itea sided with the government, not with the Maasina Rule leaders, nevertheless he was suspicious of Russell's motives and the uses to which the government might put the information gathered.

Sumu identified eight major groups, which included the four major descent group clusters accepted today, but added four more as a false trail. The choice of eight was easy: Malaitan cosmology uses eight as the key numeral.¹¹ Russell was told that the founding ancestor of Fataleka was Ava (Afa), the eagle, who arrived in Fataleka 22 generations earlier. Ava, he was told, came ashore near the Kware River in west Fataleka, then moved inland to Kwaria, marrying a women named Aveambu (Afeambu), who was the child of a snake. They settled at Subea and built a special house, *beu alea*: a two-storied structure, with square foundations and a round roof.

9 Tom Russell, 'The Fataleka of Malaita', *Oceania*, 21 (1950), 1-13.

10 C.H. Allen, 'The Marching Rule Movement in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate: an analytic survey', Dip. of Anthropology thesis, Cambridge University (Cambridge 1950); Hugh Laracy, 'Marching Rule and the missions', *Journal of Pacific History*, 6 (1971), 96-114; Hugh Laracy (ed.), *Pacific Protest: The Maasina Rule movement, Solomon Islands, 1944-1952* (Suva 1983); Roger M. Keesing, 'Politico-religious movements and anti-colonialism on Malaita: Maasina Rule in historical perspective', *Oceania*, 48:4 (1978), 241-61, 49:1 (1978), 46-73.

11 Daniel de Coppet and Hugu Zemp, *'Aré' aré: Un peuple mélanésien et sa musique* (Paris 1978); Harold M. Ross, *Baegu: Social and ecological organization in Malaita, Solomon Islands* (Urbana 1973), 108-33.

Kokoi, the snake, lived on the ground floor, while Ava, the eagle, lived on the top floor.¹²

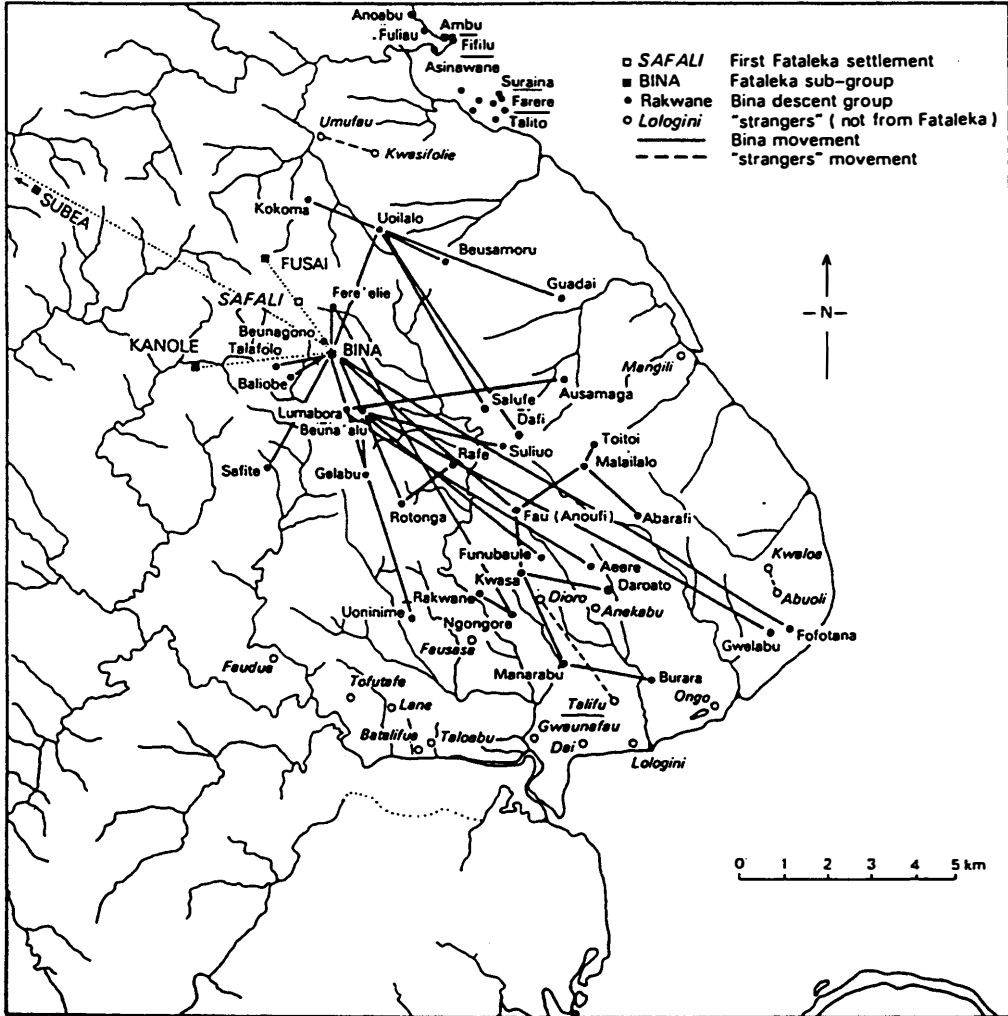
Sumu gave Russell a sanitised slightly altered version of a creation myth involving the eagle and the snake, not the story of the first Fataleka ancestors. The version of the story told by Itea and Luiramo differs considerably, and is certainly more risqué. Buli had been married many times before, but had killed all his wives on the first nuptial night because of the excessive size of his penis, made more awesome by being decorated by eight shell rings. Eventually no more women were willing to marry Buli, except Afeambu, who was living at Fusai. On their wedding night she carefully lined her vagina with a pandanus leaf, which has serrated edges. Buli's penis was cut and bled. The shell rings fell off, and Afeambu lived happily ever after at Subea with her humbled husband and his deflated penis. Their son was Afa, who was born with eight feathers on his shoulders, four on each side.

Russell was told that Afa's eldest great grandson, Sufu, had eight sons who each formed a separate family, the descent group clusters from which all of the Fataleka and some of the neighbouring Baegu language group are descended. He says that one group, the descendants of Kilo, moved to Baegu while the others all remained in Fataleka: Subea, Fusei, Kanole, Bailobe, Bina, Kokoma and Bakwa. In the 1970s version recounted by Itea and Luiramo, and standard in Fataleka, there are only four major groups: Bina, Subea, Kanole and Fusai. Russell acknowledged the seniority of Bina, which he called Baleobe (and also Rakwane), but placed the group second behind Subea, though still senior to Fusai and Kanole. Itea explained to me that Russell was deliberately given a mixed version of Fataleka history. The original Bina descent group cluster lived at Beu baita (big house) deep in the central mountains, then moved to Baleobe (Baliobe), Fere' elie, and finally to Ngongore and Rakwane by the 18th and 19th centuries. Russell lists two Baleobe (Bina) generations (Toniwane and Sufu) before the groups separated into eight. In Russell's schema, after the separation, Baleobe was headed by Kobi. But, according to Itea and Luiramo, Kobi is the third in the Talafolo descent line, which is a seventh generation offshoot of Bina. Russell records Abisiu as the founder of Bina. This name is not included in the 1970s Bina generations, although Sumu did use an actual ancestor: Abusi, grandson of Umaabu (the fourth Bina ancestor) of Beunaalu. Russell specified Kokoma as the sixth major group, but this is actually one of the five Uoilalo sub-groups in Bina. His seventh group is Bakwa, actually the third ancestor in the Fusai descent group cluster and not directly connected to Bina.

The history of Fataleka concocted by Sumu and Itea must in some ways have puzzled Tom Russell, as it does not fit together neatly. Elements are true, but other sections had been moved around to create a false genealogical trail. Why was Subea shifted to the lead? Because that was Sumu's descent line and in his falsification he chose to give emphasis to his own people. But he also had to explain away something that would have been obvious to Russell: the prominence of Rakwane leaders in the 19th and 20th centuries. In seeming contradiction, Russell noted that, despite being secondary in the lines of descent, Rakwane is senior to the other lineages. He then

12 Russell, 'The Fataleka of Malaita', 2.

MAP 2: The Bina cluster of descent groups, showing their movement from the mountains towards Fakanakafo Bay.



gave detailed descriptions of the Rakwane leadership roles of *aofia* and *taniota*, which although not altogether accurate contain a strong element of truth. During the 1940s Rakwane was the most prominent descent group in east Fataleka, and by inference, because no equivalent group is mentioned for west Fataleka, presumably Rakwane was the leading descent group in all of Fataleka. The questions that need answering are whether this is a long-standing prominence related to generations of descent and leadership traced back through Bina, and why there is an indication of

hereditary leadership rather than the usual north Malaitan pattern of egalitarian Bigmen who rise and fall based on their own abilities?

To complete the evidence, some more 1970s views need to be considered. An Italian anthropologist, Remo Guidieri, also worked in Fataleka in the early 1970s. In a 1976 article Guidieri mentioned nine major Fataleka descent group clusters but did not name them. In his 1980 book, *La Route des Morts*, he listed eight: Subea, Langwa, Syuboni, Bina, 'Oto, Lifwe, Kanole and Fusai.¹³ As he worked mainly in west Fataleka, his version may well be skewed towards their interpretation, which explains the paramountcy of Subea, Langwa and Syuboni, all in the west. His main informants were Dominic Beliga and Faneta Sirra. Beliga became the elected Paramount Chief of west Fataleka in 1976. When I interviewed Beliga in that year he claimed knowledge of 26 generations, and in a grand mixture of biblical and Fataleka history was attempting to trace the first settlement of Malaita from the time of Noah's great flood. Guidieri's assistant was Faneta Sirra, then a young man and aspiring politician who was eventually elected to the national parliament for one term. He had no depth of traditional knowledge and was more charlatan than historian.

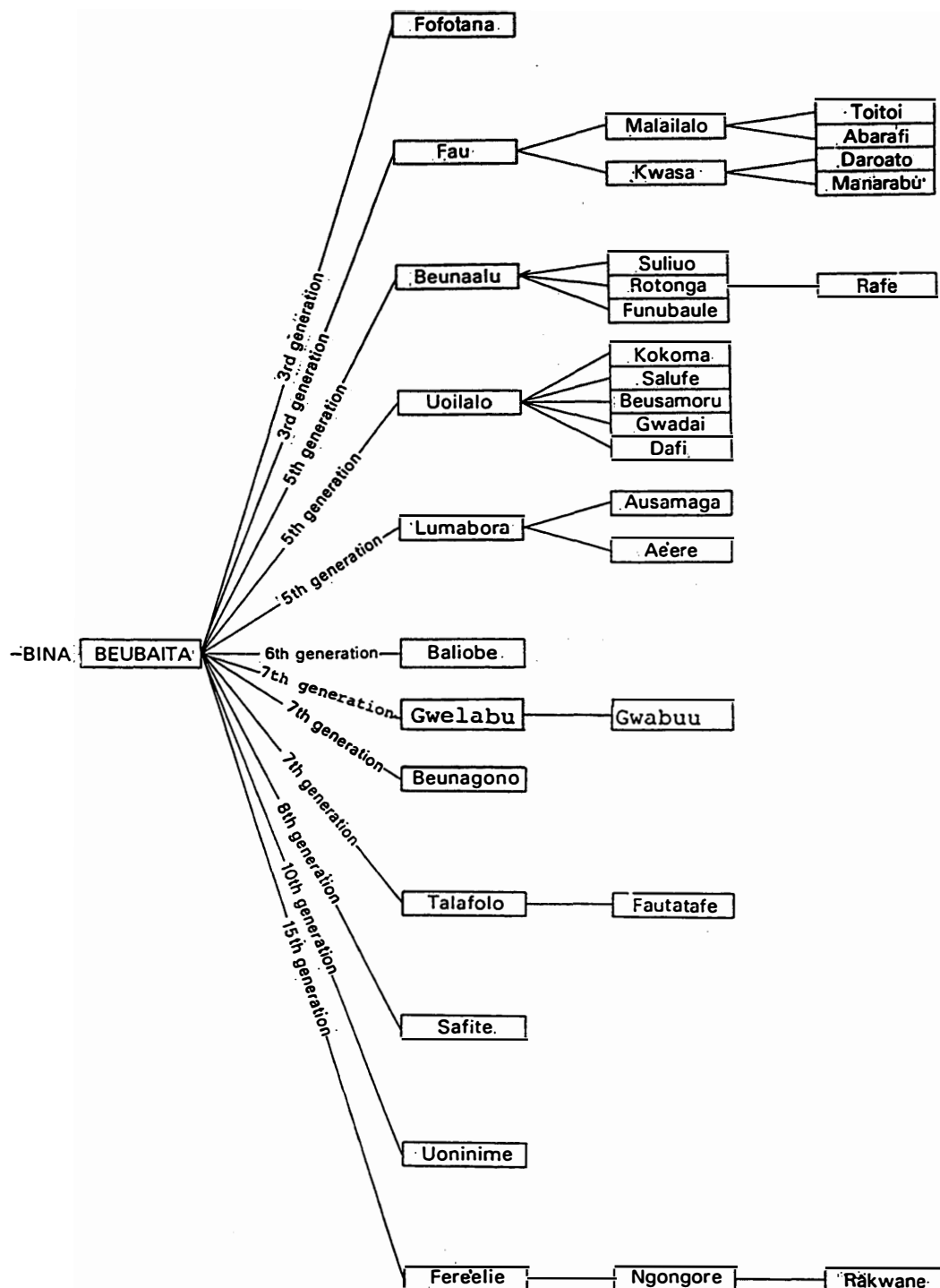
I also questioned other leading Malaitans from language groups on both sides of Fataleka. Salathiel Salana, first President of the Malaita Council and Government Headman of Kwara'ae from 1966 until 1974, supported Itea and Luiramo's interpretation of Rakwane's supremacy in east Fataleka. When interviewed in 1976 he recounted how the Rakwane *aofia* in the mid-19th century protected descent groups from southwest Kwara'ae who had fled to east Fataleka, away from inter-district fighting. Certainly, the number of Kwara'ae 'strangers' who moved into east Fataleka in the late 19th century adds support to Salana's view. Kalabet Fugui and Ramofafia, important southern Lau leaders from Suraena and Talito artificial islands at Ata'a, also supported Itea and Luiramo's interpretation of the place of Rakwane in Fataleka politics and leadership.

Almost 30 years after Russell collected his information Itea had quite different motivations. In the 1970s Rakwane's prominence was under siege from neighbouring descent groups, to the extent that they claimed that Itea's tenancy of Ambe, his commanding picturesque cliff-top village, was illegal. Itea, 62 years old in 1976, knew that the massive amounts of information he held in his head, which Luiramo had begun to write down in a school exercise book, needed recording in some permanent form, for future generations and to safeguard Rakwane's lands. While Itea was in Mackay early in 1976, he met a young postgraduate student from James Cook University, who had the trust of the Queensland branch of his family, and could accomplish his aim. His name was Clive Moore.¹⁴

13 R.I.A. Guidieri, 'Fata, fa'a: dire, faire, parfaire: conceptualisation et effectuation de pratiques rituelles mélanésiennes (Fataleka, Salomon orientales)', *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 31 (1976), 218-36; and *La Route des Morts* (Paris 1980).

14 I am far from the first Pacific researcher to be appropriated in this manner. For instance, refer to Michael Goldsmith's analysis of his relationship with a Tuvalu pastor and administrator, in 'Alovaka Maui: defender of the faith', in Doug Munro and Andrew Thornley (eds), *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific* (Suva 1996), 235-54.

FIGURE 1: Bina cluster of descent groups: showing the order of descent.



Gradually what unfolded, session after session, recorded on tape, then transcribed on to paper, was the history of 23 generations, back to Ifunakulu, the founding ancestor of Fataleka. In the early years there was still some holding back, as the first few ancestors remained hidden, but during one trip in the 1980s their names suddenly appeared, attached to the base of the genealogy. This came together in a 10,000 word English language history of Fataleka, authored by the three of us in the late 1980s, edited several times and distributed in a limited way among the Rakwane. I had hoped to publish a booklet through USP, but Fataleka and Rakwane politics prescribed further distribution, and there was the matter of the language in which it was written. General feeling was that it needed to be in the Fataleka language as well as in English.

Cristal Luiramo, the Australian-educated daughter of Charles Luiramo, brought up by Noel and Minnie Fatnowna, took on the translation. But her work was criticised for combining too much Lau with the Fataleka languages. I brought her cousin, Rex Ringi Angofai, to Brisbane in the early 1990s, to correct the translation, but Charles Luiramo still was not satisfied. Against everyone's advice, Luiramo insisted that it was more correct to record the 'i' sound as a 'y': hence Itea became Ytea etc., which changed the entire text. My other advisors refused to accept Luiramo's revisions and suggested stalling, which I did. Now Luiramo is dead. His feelings can no longer be hurt, and Itea is very old and wants the project to continue again.

Conclusion

Many Pacific historians are aware that over the last quarter century I have written history about the labour trade and Malaitans in Queensland, but few are aware that I have also written with Malaitans, nor of the complex problems this has involved. In discussing these processes and the individuals involved, I know that my experiences are similar to those of many other historians and anthropologists who have become closely involved with particular language groups or families or individuals. On Malaita, Roger Keesing, Daniel De Coppet, Ben Burt, David Akin and other anthropologists have faced the same problem. In writing about oral traditions from Rennell and Bellona Islands in the Solomons, Torben Monberg has essayed his informants reaction to the work of himself and Samuel Elbert.¹⁵ Doug Munro has recounted the difficulties of writing vernacular histories of Tuvalu, raising important wider issues about collaborative writing.¹⁶ Angela Ballara recently has written about the problems of cross-cultural historical scholarship in New Zealand, noting that searching for one 'truth' is futile. Ballara concludes that Māori and Pākehā scholars' academic histories of Māori New Zealand should not try to capture a fixed agenda:

15 Samuel H. Elbert and Torben Monberg, *From the Two Canoes: oral traditions of Rennell and Bellona Islands* (Honolulu 1965); Torben Monberg, 'Informants fire back: a microstudy of anthropological methods', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 82:2 (1975), 218-24.

16 Doug Munro, 'Pacific Islands history in the vernacular: practical and ethical considerations', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 29:1 (1995), 83-96.

'it is a phase of reconstruction of the past, a part of a debate. Whether or not it emerges from contemporary concerns it is always looking back from the present.'¹⁷ Western-style 'unbiased' history and anthropology is often at odds with indigenous intellectual traditions which value personal incorporation into and 'biased' involvement in matters which concern one's kin and land.

An Islander's analysis and appreciation of what Western-style academics are trying to achieve in writing about Pacific societies may be very different from the reception the published work receives from colleagues in universities. As well, the public agenda and the academic published work are not always what is most important to the Pacific people involved. They have other agendas which we also try to support, sometimes preferring to remain unacknowledged. Over these many years I have always tried to be academic and dispassionate in my published work on the labour trade, but when it comes to the Rakwane family I know I am quite partisan and would always support their view of land and politics on Malaita; or at least not publish anything which did them harm. To do otherwise would dishonour their adoption of me into their family. When, eventually, the Rakwane history of Fataleka is published, it will not gain me much academic kudos, but that is not its point. It is local history, participant history, family history, written from a particular view which may not be shared by other descent groups from Fataleka. I will be one author, using skills learnt in academic life, but really I am confirming my status as an adopted member of the Rakwane descent group.

This returns me to the question of differences between indigenous knowledge and Western scholarship. Perhaps the main point to be made is that where Western scholarship seeks to be balanced, to explain and reach one conclusion, in the Pacific there are always a 'plurality of indigenous viewpoints',¹⁸ even within one descent group, let alone a whole language group or island. Western historiography values re-interpretation by each generation of historians, based on use of new sources or incorporation of new ideas. Indigenous knowledge does not seek out and privilege one view, although necessarily the current dominant view is that of those possessing knowledge and political power. Once confidence and a long-standing relationship are established, any differences between the two approaches can be explored through discussion; although be prepared to spend a couple of decades to accomplish this level of familiarity.

Our history of Fataleka has been written primarily to preserve knowledge for the people of Fataleka, not for outsiders from other areas of Malaita, elsewhere in the Solomon Islands, or overseas. Western scepticism about genealogies calculated to work in multiples of eight, or the interpretation of the symbolism in Buli and Afeambu's sex life, are over-ridden if one accepts Malaitan cosmologies and gender patterns as the norm. A still bigger problem is how to present the knowledge in the vernacular as well as in English. The best solution occurs when the historian is fluent in English and the vernacular, although even an indigenous historian may well not

¹⁷ Angela Ballara, "'I riro i te hoko': problems in cross-cultural historical scholarship", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 34:1 (2000), 20-33.

¹⁸ Munro, 'Pacific Islands history in the vernacular', 92.

understand the nuances of an old language, such as Fataleka, which has no official written form and has been overtaken by the languages of larger language groups to its north and south. I can never equal Itea in his knowledge of Fataleka and its history, just as he can never equal me in archival research or use of the English language. However, a careful, lengthy, methodical partnership, a long dialogue based on trust and familiarity, can accomplish much. While there will always be criticisms, in the end, as with all historical writing it is a matter of interpretation. Others may well criticise and revise the history of Fataleka, but if Rakwane history was left to die with Luiramo and Itea, on what would future generations base their criticisms?

From Kepai of Enga to Divine Word University, 1979–1999

Exploring Issues of 'History as Social Memory' in Papua New Guinea

RODERIC LACEY

My aim is to explore the transmission of indigenous knowledge across generations in Papua New Guinea. The matrix and metaphor are my roles as oral historian and university teacher. I start by exploring three journeys of discovery, beginning with encounters with teachers during fieldwork in Enga Province in Papua New Guinea (PNG) between 1971 and 1973, to teaching at Divine Word University in 1998 and 1999. I pose questions about how knowledge gained from Enga teachers shaped my approach to and style of teaching at the University of Papua New Guinea, at Australian Catholic University (ACU) and at DWU. My responses to questions about transmission of knowledge move through reflection, unravelling threads, peeling off layers of meaning, like skins off an onion.

A point of reference for these reflections is the work of Chris Healy. I find Healy's argument about the elements and meanings of 'social memory' of much relevance for my explorations of ways in which historical knowledge and power were commemorated and transmitted among the Enga before and in the 1970s, and the impact of this knowledge upon the processes of my teaching history at UPNG at a time when a new nation was coming to birth. In *The Ruins of Colonialism: History as social memory*, Healy speaks of 'commemorations, ... history books, films, ... and the myriad ways in which relationships between past and present are performed, can be thought of as constituting the field of social memory'. Here he focuses on ways in which contemporary writings, actions and performances can both embody social memory and keep alive 'relationships between past and present'. Performances, 'remembrance of things past', writing, speaking and singing are all representations of social memory. His view is reinforced in his representation of key elements of social memory. It is made up of 'relatively discrete instances in a *network of performances*: enunciations in historical writing, speaking, ... the surfaces of historical discourses; the rendering of memory practices' (emphases mine).¹

¹ Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as social memory* (Oakleigh, Vic. 1997). I thank Dr Shurlee Swain and Alison Wedding, both of Aquinas Campus, ACU, for putting me in touch with this book.

He sees historical writing and speaking as instances in a 'network of performances' – an active and, perhaps, unpredictable relationship between history and performance. He has moved beyond debates about tensions between memory and history: 'we are all memory workers, recalling and forgetting, selecting, ordering and erasing memory'. He sees his task 'is an effort at mapping some of social memory's "infinity of traces" ... I am ... concerned to ask of social memory: ... how it functions; ... what elements it cuts out and removes, how it analyses and composes?'²

Alistair Thomson took this idea of active memory further when he proposed, in 1999, that memory can be seen 'as a resource rather than a problem for historical interpretation'. Drawing on recent work by a number of practising oral historians, Thomson argued, with Alessandro Portelli, 'what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings'; Michael Frisch proposed that exploring memory shows 'how people make sense of their past, ... and how people use [the past] to interpret their lives and the world around them'; and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy saw how, through memory and storytelling, people 'decide to construct and express their identity'.³

These preliminary explorations open for me new and challenging meanings about lines of continuity and discontinuity between my experiences of and encounters with 'men of knowledge' in Enga, such as my teacher Kepai, in the 1970s, and my reflection and teaching in UPNG between 1973 and 1981, at Aquinas, from 1981 to the 1990s, and in a new PNG university, at DWU in Madang in 1998 and 1999.

Storylines: Three Journeys of Discovery; Sources of Historical Knowledge and its Transmission

My first story begins with leaving Australia in August 1969. I had visited PNG a number of times since my first, almost overpowering encounters in March/April 1966. Following those initial visits, I was determined to respond to the jibes of colonial Australians who claimed that these people of many cultures, inhabiting a green land of great rivers, blue seas and high valleys 'had no history'. As I embarked with my young family for our journey to Graduate School at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, I left behind my manuscript of the book *Documents and Readings in New Guinea History: Prehistory to 1889*, not finally published until the year of Independence in 1975.⁴ I had written and edited the collection with which it began, entitled 'Understanding Ancestors', dealing with sources and writings on strands of indigenous cultures and histories.

At Wisconsin, between 1969 and 1971, I was fortunate to be guided by the father of African oral history, Jan Vansina, who led me to choose fieldwork among the

2 Ibid., 4-5.

3 Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different'; in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London 1998), 63-74; Michael Frisch, 'Oral History and *Hard Times*: A review essay', *ibid.*, 29-37; Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, 'Telling Tales: Oral history and the construction of pre-Stonewall lesbian history', *ibid.*, 344-55; Alistair Thomson, 'Fifty years on: an international perspective on oral history', *The Oral History Association of Australia: Journal 1999: Tales of the Century*, 21 (1999), 83-6.

4 Roderic Lacey, *Documents and Readings in New Guinea History: Prehistory to 1889* (Milton, Qld 1975).

largest ethnolinguistic group in PNG, the Enga people of the Highlands. Vansina also taught a seminar on 'Historical Methods in Non-literate Societies', which, with my work on the *Documents* book, opened me to exploring oral traditions as historical sources in a multidisciplinary way.

So I came to Enga country in July 1971 and left it to join the History Department at UPNG in Port Moresby in January 1973. Many threads of story and reflection have flowed from emblematic encounters and discoveries during those months in the Enga valleys. Here I encountered Kepai and Pangia during 1972, as well as Busa and others – all of whom taught me truths and traditions which began opening the riches of Enga wisdom, 'social memory', sources of history. Writing in a paper published in 1981, I represented Kepai as my principal teacher, we two being engaged in reciprocal exchanges, as teacher to teacher, as we participated in performances of 'conversational narratives' (that suggestive phrase from Ronald Grele).

This first story thread ends with those formative years at UPNG, which I named 'a place of concurrence',⁵ echoing John Henry Newman's writing from the 1850s on the nature of universities. Many threads, forces, contradictions converged in that place, in those years in which a new Pacific Island nation came to birth, not only in September 1975, when the ceremony of proclamation took place, but in those critical years following, when debates, and ideas shaped priorities about nationhood and its particular parameters.

1973 to 1981 were halcyon years in which I was a midwife (sometimes with colleagues) at the birth, and transformation, of courses on oral history, national history, fieldwork methods and writing history. We engaged with young people, women and men, caught in tides of 'modernisation' and 'nation-building'. We negotiated with them issues about history, tradition, ancient and new, and in those times, my historical imagination grappled with my understandings of Enga wisdom and knowledge, Enga truths, the character of Enga social memory and performance, and steered me and those students through our journeys of discovery about past and present.

The second thread of story was marked at its beginning, by our return journey to Australia, our homeland, after nearly a dozen years away. A return, not to the city of my birth, but to a southern, inland city, Ballarat, the home of the Eureka Stockade – a place redolent with debates, memorials and museums commemorating what some protagonists claimed to be where the spirit of Australian democracy was born. I moved from a developing Third World University, to a recently established College of Advanced Education, in 1991 to become a rural campus of the Australian Catholic University. The 1980s and 1990s were years of re-entry traumas, following times of absence; years of reflection and writing about my Enga research and my teaching at UPNG.

With the birth of ACU and my becoming a member of the new Faculty of Arts and Sciences, I was charged with designing a major sequence in history for Victorian campuses. Professor Greg Denning, from the University of Melbourne, challenged me

⁵ Roderic Lacey, "'A place of concurrence": a personal memoir on the University of Papua New Guinea in the 1970s', *Journal of the Institute of Catholic Education*, 2 (1981), 79-92.

to design, with colleagues, a sequence appropriate to a rising generation of Australians. So we focused on six units of teaching, which raised questions about indigenous inhabitants, migrants and women, both at a national and a global, comparative level. Later, I had my heart's desire fulfilled, with the addition of units of Pacific and Southeast Asian histories.

Having returned to the land of my birth, I was not only returning to and reshaping the discoveries made in Enga and at UPNG in the 1970s, in the style and design of teaching; I was bringing understanding from indigenous and oral cultures in the Pacific and returning to grappling with a burgeoning Australian Aboriginal history.

To the final, and most recent journey of discovery, storyline. (What began as a trim, sleek set of storylines, in brief outline, is growing into something more complex, even richer, as one thread unravels others in this tapestry, this (re)enactment of these critical years in my life story.)

This time, in July 1997, a 'return to paradise'; to those high green Enga valleys, where all has changed utterly, and yet is full of sparks of memory of a generation before, in the early 1970s. A brown, withering, drought and famine of late 1996 has given way to verdant, flourishing, green valleys. Valleys full of running, singing children of the 1970s are now jostling with young men and women, those children growing to adulthood; the turmoil of a return to bloodshed, conflict and warfare (repressed until the 1970s by the heavy hand of the *Pax Australiensis*), is now the vortex, violence, raw competition and gunfire of a national election which is to throw the country into the roguish hands of the 'born again' Bill Skate and his disastrous leadership.

But this was also a return in the cycle of exchange and knowledge, a 'partnership for peacemaking'. Through this partnership, I returned knowledge and wisdom given to me in the 1970s to a new generation of Enga researchers. In our partnership were a number of participants; it was one between Dr Doug Young SVD, an expert in conflict resolution and reconciliation, who sought to marry his work with local *gutpela sindaun* (living together in harmony and peace) communities, with my expertise in oral history; between the Enga researchers, one a graduate from those days at UPNG, and elders from whom they elicited and recorded testimonies about peacemakers and peacemaking; and between the researchers and elders and wider communities whom they wished to educate in alternatives to violence, rooted in changing wisdom and tradition. My return to Enga to work with this *mana epe kutingi* (searching for good ways) group was one journey of recovery and discovery.

In 1998 and 1999 I made other journeys of return, in which, in 1998, I followed Doug Young from Enga, where we worked again with the *mana epe kutingi* group, to help them hone their skills in reflection and communication. I also taught some themes from my Pacific History course at ACU to undergraduates at DWU, a new university to which Doug Young had moved as Dean of Studies and Head of the BA (PNG Studies) stream. Between the 1998 and 1999 visits to DWU, Doug Young and I planned a history major sequence within the BA (PNG Studies) stream.

Specific details of this history sequence aside, I had a strong sense of both continuity and discontinuity. Some subjects drew directly from the ACU sequence;

others were a return to what we had taught at UPNG; both were often rooted in that original knowledge and experience gained from interacting with Enga teachers between 1971 and 1973, and then reflected upon in writing and teaching. In working with students and a group of lecturers teaching history as a discipline for the first time, and in both staff development seminars and public forums given during April 1999, I had as starting points papers conceived in the UPNG days and written on my return to Australia, as well as books and papers on Pacific history published by scholars in the recent 1990s.

When I encountered a mature young woman at one of the public forums, who had been a student of mine at UPNG in the early 1970s, and she informed me that her daughter was now a university student, I knew that the teaching of those earlier years was central in my teaching a new generation of the 1990s – a sign of continuity of knowledge and of 'social memory'. But was it so simple?

These storylines are woven out of different strands that are entwined together and unravel in the telling. The world of the 1970s, the world of Michael Somare and his bright young men and women of UPNG shaping a new nation in hope and idealism, had become, a generation later, the murky world of the Sandline Affair and of Bill Skate's wheeling and dealing, a post-colonial world caught in the net of globalisation. So, the undergraduates of UPNG and DWU, a generation apart, were being shaped by contrasting worlds. Despite these marked discontinuities of context, as one who was shaped by and inhabiting both worlds, I sought, through knowledge gained and given in exchange, to build bridges across those worlds.

I argue that, by undertaking those journeys, crossing those bridges, we raise questions about 'social memory' and history, but also free and empower young people to pose and answer questions about their identities, their traditions and their own journeys of discovery and understanding.

Themes and Issues

Responding to the challenges presented by Chris Healy's work, some of the three strands of themes and issues (about encountering Kepai as a 'man of wisdom', teaching at UPNG and both reflecting and teaching at ACU and DWU), sketched in my original outline, have already begun surfacing.

That starting point: the powerful *sangai titi pingi* chants about which Kepai, that 'man of wisdom' taught me in 1972. In my doctoral dissertation of 1975 on 'Oral Traditions as History', I recall my first encounter with these beautiful chants, sung in January 1972, on the high northern bank of the Ambum River, north of where we lived at the Irelya Lutheran Station. Busa, a man in his 50s, requested me to record his song, so that his son, Waka Busa, shortly to leave his home for study at the Lutheran Seminary in Lae, would not be deprived of hearing this wonderful fragment of his heritage.

That performance was in itself a memorable event. It introduced me to a rich vein of oral traditions about which Enga are justly proud. It was recited by a man of fine talent, deeply concerned that this tradition should not be lost by his son's generation

who may have become forgetful of it because of more pressing modern concerns. This first version was recited by Busa at great speed and under severe compulsion, almost in a trance-like state, largely for fear that, after a lapse of more than 20 years, he would not recall this poem. He proved to have an acute sense of the situation, because many times when men of his age and experience tried to recall their clan's heritage of *sangai nemongo* after a similar lapse in time, they faltered, stumbled and sometimes with great sorrow had to admit that it was too late, that the break in transmission had been too severe and that they could no longer recall what they had been taught. Both the varieties of chant form and the differences in recall which I experienced after Busa's performance and as a result of it, posed important issues about the means by which these *nemongo* were handed down the generations.

Busa was not satisfied with his original performance. Two months later he walked 20 miles across the ridges of the Ambum and Lai to the house where I was living in Irelya. He told me that he wanted to recite the *titi pingi* praise poem and some other *sangai nemongo* in a spirit closer to the way in which they were chanted in the seclusion of the *sangai* house. The two parts of the original version lasted together for 15 minutes. This second performance went for 40. This time we sat together around my fire and he was relaxed and at ease and had had time to ponder over what he had done the first time. Now he seemed to play with the tradition which he had been taught and to fashion and reshape it as a poet into an elaborate personal form which blended the original with his own creations, but all the time he worked within a broad form that seemed to be the tradition received and passed on by his ancestors.⁶

The teacher who opened up the possibilities for my growth in understanding this core institution in Enga culture, the *sangai/sandalu* bachelor purification rites, was the 'man of wisdom', Kepai, and I have commemorated our exchanges as teachers and historians in my paper 'Coming to Know Kepai'. The insights which I gained from Kepai were confirmed and expanded in that work of partnership between Polly Wiessner and Akii Tumu, *Historical Vines* (1998). They drew on my body of taped testimonies and thesis. Of this bachelor cult they concluded:

The Sangai/Sandalu was used as a forum in which to instil new ideas, values, and goals in the upcoming generation, thereby steering the course of change. Sacred objects and accompanying incantations were purchased in the hope of setting new directions and improving clan fortunes. They were sold following the logic that distribution leads to prosperity. In this respect, the Sangai/Sandalu was quite successful, for it homogenized ideas on relations between the sexes in eastern, western, and central Enga, facilitating the expansion of exchange networks based on marriage ties. In most cases it was clan leaders – that is, senior bachelors and big-men – who manipulated the cult to meet the needs of time and place, though they were not the sole authors of change; in the case of the *enda akoko nyingi* women did the job. The consequences of innovation and transfer in the bachelors' cults, whether intended or unintended, were that within the span of historical traditions they underwent structural alterations that closely corresponded to the developments they mediated.⁷

6 Roderic Lacey, 'Oral Traditions as History: An exploration of oral sources among the Enga of the New Guinea Highlands', PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin (Madison 1975), 200, 201.

7 Polly Wiessner and Akii Tumu, *Historical Vines: Enga networks of exchange, ritual and warfare in Papua New Guinea* (Washington 1998), 243.

Two things are apparent from my reading of this interpretation which grows from their close study of those Enga traditions which I began investigating in 1971:

- they vindicate and reflect what Busa was singing about in his second performance: the sacred plant at the centre of the *sangai* rite was praised for the ways in which the heroic ancestors, through their journey, brought new possibilities for power and prosperity to their clan;
- this bachelor cult was part of a greater whole, one instrument through which innovation was brought and mediated before the colonial age came – I had only an inkling of this integration of forces for change which I sketched in outline at the close of my dissertation),⁸ given that I was opening up the field for further exploration, by Enga scholars (a challenge which Akii Tumu took up with Polly Wiessner).

So, without fully realising it, but drawn by Busa's singing of those epic chants, which honoured heroes from his grandfathers' generation, as well as men in his own, I was encountering an institution of social memory, a performance of historical remembrance and teaching, at the heart of Enga society. When I encountered this performance, the bachelor rites were still alive, though then undercover among the generation born and shaped in the years immediately following the breaking in of a new world brought by Jim Taylor (*keapo telya* – the word *telya* in Enga means 'spear', a name given to Taylor to denote remembrance of his breaking in as being violent, in the people's 'social memory'), on his Hagen-Sepik Patrol of 1938.⁹

That formative institution, that body of performance, ritual and memory, became a template within which I have reflected and taught across the generations. This reflection on Busa's song and Kepai's teaching, these exchanges and performances of knowledge and social memory, shaped the transformations and structures of my teaching over these decades. Once more, Healy's insights make me realise that there are discontinuities entwined with continuities, questions which take us beyond 'the surfaces of historical discourses', to map some of social memory's 'infinity of traces', to pose questions.

Questions for Consideration

The outline plan for this paper, and its questions, were written before I covered the ground over which this writing is leading us. They now seem too surface, too simple, perhaps misleading.

We have already engaged with the first question about meanings of that process of transmission from Busa and Kepai in the 1970s through to the teaching in the late 1990s. There is no easy answer to the second question: what happens to that historical knowledge and to the practice of oral history in this intertwined and multiple process of transmission across generations and cultures?

⁸ Lacey, 'Oral traditions', 263ff.

⁹ See Bill Gammage, *The Sky Travellers: Journeys in New Guinea 1938-1939* (Melbourne 1999), Ch. 5, 'Enga', 50-62.

This process of the transmission of knowledge and power through oral tradition was practiced in Enga culture, before the incursion of colonial categories, questions and power into their valleys from 1938. Those oral traditions then became the subject of an oral history inquiry in 1971 which was translated into a doctoral dissertation on 'Oral Traditions as History' in 1975. During the 1970s at UPNG, both the traditions and the dissertation became stimulus and framework for a university course on the methods of oral history for a new generation of undergraduates and graduates. Later I applied this practice to life histories and the search for meaning among Australians in the 1980s and 1990s. My return to PNG and then to DWU from 1997 to 1999 was marked first by those negotiations with the Enga *mana epe kutingi* group for developing their practice and reflection on oral testimonies. This varying practice of oral history culminated in designing a course on 'Issues in oral history' for my colleague Doug Young to teach at DWU.

In the light of Healy's reflection on 'history and social memory', what are the meanings of this tangled history in the practice of oral history? Perhaps we can detect an 'infinity of traces' in mapping this journey through social memory.

From this perspective, that *sangai titi pingi* which Busa sang that evening in January 1972 became a spark igniting the memories of other Enga singers. And it marked a new stage in my own journey of discovery into Enga tradition and history. It drew Kepai to begin teaching, performing, singing and exchanging with me as fellow teacher. And Busa's song, fragmentary at first, and then more elaborate, lived on, like a cell of memory and insight, in my inner consciousness as historian and teacher, to be sown again, in the minds of a new generation in Madang. If the tapes have survived, Busa's song lives on in archives, as a performance in sound, left behind by one man, who with his son, has returned to the spirits of those ancestors, who travelled on that original journey, perhaps a hundred years ago, and are commemorated in the song of the *sangai titi pingi*.

There is the question raised by Busa as to whether the transmission of this sacred knowledge would persist beyond his generation in a context of colonial forces for change which were drawing young men of his son Waka Busa's generation into other worlds of knowledge and power.

The answer is ambiguous and complex. In the 1970s, I witnessed pressures from Lutheran missionaries, particularly, who perceived *sangai* rites as 'works of the Devil'. This teaching meant that men like Busa, as converts, took the rites underground. As we were leaving Enga in January 1973, some communities began reviving these rites. This was their expression of cultural identity. They were seeking to hold on to those young men who were being drawn away into worlds outside these valleys. Some observers were also arguing that the re-assertion of the *sangai/sandalu* was also a response to a rise in violence associated with times of uncertainty. Their aim was to discipline and prepare young men to act as warriors and protectors for their clans.

That is one thread in response to this question. Another is represented by the joint investigation of Polly Wiessner and Akii Tumu which led to the publication of *Historical Vines* in 1998. Their project began when Polly Wiessner arrived in Enga

in 1985 and their investigation lasted for the next 10 years. The chapter from which I quoted above, Chapter 8, 'Bachelors' Cults: Purity, Prosperity and Politics', as well as Appendix 9, 'The *Sangai Titi Pingi* of the Potealini Anae Taanda Subclan',¹⁰ are strong evidence of the remembrance of songs and chants among elders whose testimonies they recorded. So, a decade after Busa sang and Kepai taught, there were still men remembering this sacred and central tradition, despite its being suppressed in some quarters in the early stages of the colonial age in Enga.

Two other threads. After my dissertation, I published papers based on my investigation. There was a major exception, Chapter 5, 'The Making of Men and Warriors: Traditions of Purification'.¹¹ My reason for not publishing those teachings about *sangai/sandalu* was that, in the context of patrilineal ideology and patriarchal gender relations, this was men's sacred knowledge. Busa had broken the tabus of male secrecy, because he wished Waka Busa to be in touch with his rich heritage. For this same reason, Busa had charged me to go to other 'men of wisdom' and play his song to stimulate them to remember and record what they could of that tradition.

When I returned in the 1990s, I felt, after conversations with key men, that in these times of change it was important to reveal secrets, both because that rich heritage may be lost, and to enable a rising generation who had not been exposed to these riches to encounter a significant source of Enga identity. The publication of *Historical Vines* has now placed that once hidden knowledge on the public record. Perhaps it is time for me to make the findings of my Chapter 5 public too.

So, is it possible to trace the tangled geography of social memory, using Busa's song as marker and guide? This reflection tells something of the transformations and diverse contexts of this 'trace' of memory and performance. It also raises more questions.

We come to that next question: what questions about exchange, ownership, sacred knowledge, power, authority and ethics does this transmission of wisdom raise?

In June 1998 I read a paper on 'Issues of ownership and authority in Enga history' at the Pacific History Association/ Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (PHA/SICHE) Conference, in Honiara. The starting point was neither the singing of Busa, nor the teaching of Kepai, but a challenge issued by Pangia, another elder, whom I met in July 1972. Two concluding remarks in this paper raise further questions about ownership, authority, exchange, mediation and ethics:

I have argued in this paper that, by engaging in research and exchange with Enga elders in the 1970s, particularly with Pangia and Kepai, but, too, with those elders acknowledged in my writings as teachers, I mediate their voices into larger spheres of academic discourse, beyond the worlds of their high green valleys. Now, a larger task faces me, one of interrogation in comparison with other investigations of ownership and authority in the transmission of knowledge across cultures among and beyond Pacific Islands' peoples.

After reflecting briefly on four comparative cases, I concluded:

10 Weissner and Tumu, *Historical Vines*, 215-44, 404-10.

11 Lacey, 'Oral Traditions as History', 199-244.

These studies put my reflection and writing into a wider comparative context. Their contexts and arguments, touched on here, suggest that Pangia's teaching and questioning of the authority of 'a curious European' is not isolated...¹²

Earlier we began considering that fourth and final question: are there real and/or imagined continuities about historical knowledge arising from these journeys of discovery and this transmission across generations and cultures?

There are clear indications of continuities between what elders taught me in the 1970s, and my teaching in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. But, from Healy's perspectives about social memory, performance and history, are these continuities mere surface appearances? Pangia's teaching about the disruptions brought to his understanding of his knowledge by the questioning of 'a curious European' alerts us to discontinuities between the worlds of Enga tradition and wisdom and Western questioning, history and knowledge. Those tensions and discontinuities between worlds persisted in each cross-cultural exchange/performance, whether at UPNG in the 1970s, in Enga in 1997, or in DWU in 1998 and 1999.

A Framework of Discourse and Interrogation: Exploring Themes from Chris Healy's From the Ruins of Colonialism

Here let us combine the issues posed in the outline: some issues about 'too many Cooks' and Jan Vansina's conception of 'floating gaps' between 'historical (secular) time and mythological (sacred) time',¹³ is 'social memory' about oral sources as 'historical' sources entangled in the colonising project, or providing new sources of identity in post-colonial societies?; And many more.

In Part 1, Healy juxtaposes the iconic character of Captain Cook's 'discovery' of the eastern coast of Australia in 1770, in 'White Histories of Cook' with 'Black Histories of Cook'. His fascinating reflection on Cook as hero, founder, icon, both remembered and forgotten, I leave aside here. His reflection on 'Captain Cook and Death' in 'Black Histories of Cook' is germane to the question of continuities and discontinuities in a history which seeks to straddle indigenous and intruder worlds of 'social memory'.

In exploring a text produced by Chips Macknoity and Paddy Wainburranga which itself was a commentary on the 1998 painting 'Captain Cook Story' by Paddy Wainburranga, he writes:

Here we have two Captain Cooks, or more accurately one Captain Cook and too many Captain Cooks. ... Jan Vansina has argued that the social memory of predominantly oral cultures tends to make sharp distinctions between historical (secular) time and mythological (sacred) time. While the reach of oral memory will vary, Vansina maintains that the division between historical and mythological time will be separated by a 'floating gap', a separation which refers to actual time. Whatever its applicability elsewhere, this notion is clearly less than useful in relation to Aboriginal social memory because, like the notion of 'dreaming time', it imposes a sense of chronological

12 Roderic Lacey, "'A Curious European Asking Many Questions': issues of ownership and authority in Enga history, 1973-1997", in Julian Treadaway (ed.), *Indigenous Knowledge and Western Scholarship* (Suva in press), 14, 15.

13 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison 1985).

sequence derived from European historical imagination – prehistory followed by real history – onto another historical system. In Wainburranga's history Cook has clearly ignored the 'floating gap' between historical time and mythological time so as to exist in both worlds and thus become more than a figure of history in the process. ...¹⁴

Here he refers to Vansina's historical (secular) time and mythological (sacred) time, and how this division is separated by a 'floating gap'. He also argues that this distinction is 'clearly less than useful in relation to Aboriginal social memory', because '[w]hatever its applicability elsewhere', in this instance, 'it imposes a sense of chronological sequence derived from European historical imagination ... onto another historical system'.

I am not in a position to discuss the relevance of this critique of Vansina for understanding an Aboriginal Australian sense of history and time. To return to the business in hand, in seeking, in my dissertation, to reconstruct Enga genealogies and to sketch out parameters of their pre-colonial history, I did find Vansina's interpretation of both relative and absolute chronologies useful. I also found his notion of 'floating gaps' relevant for my seeking to construct chronological frames based on genealogies.¹⁵ There appeared to be 'floating gaps' at crucial and formative stages in the genealogical sequences. I returned to Enga with some undergraduates and an Australian geomorphologist to explore the distribution and physical evidence for the 'time of darkness' tradition about a major volcanic eruption, traced by the geomorphologist to the eruption of Long Island on the northeast coast of PNG, the consequences of which were said to have been witnessed by William Dampier in 1700. One result of our exploration was a division in interpretation between one Enga student, Paul Mai, and the geomorphologist, Russell Blong, as to the relevance and validity of dating based on the relative chronology of genealogies compared to the absolute estimates based on physical evidence in Enga garden lands, identified as chemically equivalent to physical remains from Long Island.¹⁶

In this context of continuities and discontinuities in transmission, Healy's commentary on Captain Cook and Aboriginal time and social memory, and his critique of Vansina's conception of 'floating gaps' in indigenous time, raise a fundamental question: is perhaps the engagement in projects of oral history investigations and university teaching by 'curious Europeans' an entangled 'colonising project' at heart? He continues:

Each of the Aboriginal narratives reproduced here is a product of colonial exchange and confrontation. Because I can appropriate them here by quoting from books, transcribed tape-recordings and films these histories are necessarily partly a product of colonialist discourse: melding articulations of knowledge in a world of domination. What of the non-Aboriginal side of this

¹⁴ Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, 67.

¹⁵ Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 23-4.

¹⁶ For details of this debate see Paul Mai, 'The Time of Darkness or *Yuu Kuia*', in Donald Denoon and Roderic Lacey (eds), *Oral Tradition In Melanesia* (Port Moresby 1981), 125-40; Russell J. Blong, 'Time of Darkness Legends and volcanic eruptions in Papua New Guinea', *ibid.*, 141-50; and Russell J. Blong, *The Time of Darkness: Local legends and volcanic reality in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra 1982).

investment? The documentary desire to possess indigenous people by 'knowing' them has been and is strong in European-derived Australian culture.¹⁷

In terms of this critique, is the drawing of Enga wisdom into constructing and engaging in university teaching a clear case of this appropriation? Or, earlier still, as Pangia's questioning and resistance indicated, was the enterprise of asking questions about Enga wisdom and then writing testimonies into a thesis, which itself posed questions about Enga oral traditions as historical sources, more an act of colonising informants, rather than seeking understanding across cultures? Was, in fact, the tradition which Jan Vansina developed and taught in Wisconsin, the seminar on 'Historical Methods in non-Literate Societies', so embedded in the classical positivist European historical tradition that it was a case of colonising indigenous minds and categories?

Healy continues:

... The histories considered here are both products of Aboriginal historiographical traditions and available because of a variety of non-Aboriginal historical visions: ... Nevertheless it is an inescapable effect of colonial discourse that my use of these histories is an appropriation of sorts: but of what sort exactly?

And finally,

Aboriginal histories of Cook provide a powerful sense of the limits of non-Aboriginal social memory, a sense that the historical imagination of European modernity that we all inherit (although in distinctive ways) is not the only valid way of understanding the past. ... These histories refuse to make categorical distinctions between past and present, explicitly speaking the affective and symbolical dimensions of history and acknowledging the audience of the present. In these histories we hear a whole range of alternative forms and plots which handle time/space differently, experiment with identity differently, juggle continuity and discontinuity differently and take as their structures not progress or heroism, but morality, culture, land and Law.¹⁸

In terms of this discourse in Aboriginal Australia, it could be argued that, since these journeys of discovery may well have become entangled with colonial projects and frameworks, I may have been, for Enga elders like Pangia and others, an instrument of colonial power. It could also be argued that, despite these colonial entanglements, exchanges may well have taken place which enabled two generations of Papua New Guineans to draw on this wisdom, which empowered them to bring a new society to birth, rooted in ancient wisdom.

Perhaps?

¹⁷ Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, 69.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69, 70, 71.

Converting Pasts and Presents: Reflections on Histories of Missionary Enterprises in the Pacific

DAVID HANLON

The title of this presentation plays in part on John Williams's 1837 publication, *A History of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands*. I seek to do several things: (1) to revisit critically, if only briefly, the written histories of missionary enterprises and religious change in the Pacific Islands region; (2) to place these histories against the persistence of missionary efforts in current contexts; (3) to link the historical proselytisation of Christianity in both metaphorical and material forms with the more secular but related, equally transformative and on-going agendas of development; and (4) to suggest the ways in which histories of conversion are also about converting the past. I begin on the island of Pohnpei.

The Reverend Albert A. Sturges, an American Congregationalist missionary from Granville, Ohio who lived and worked on the island for over 30 years, wrote in 1869 that Christianity would have prevailed on Pohnpei 'even without us'.¹ The Reverend Sturges was perhaps more correct in his assessment than he knew, though for reasons he could not recognise or credit. Sturges and other missionaries sent to the island by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions believed that conversion to Christianity required a simultaneous acceptance of the American civilisation through which it was being conveyed.² In the eyes of these missionaries, the success of Christianity necessitated, then, a major restructuring of Pohnpeian society. To achieve this, the missionaries allied themselves with certain chiefs, took sides in wars they understood to be between the forces of light and darkness, promoted Christian commerce, designed Christian towns around mission stations, and advocated a system of government that included elected sheriffs, appointed judges, a popularly chosen legislature, and a written code of laws. They opened schools and mission stations, taught domestic skills to prospective female converts, translated, printed and distributed copies of the Bible, drafted a vocabulary of the Pohnpeian language, and translated English-language hymns into Pohnpeian. In so doing, they struggled against an array of hostile and contradictory forces in the world around them, and in

1 American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (hereinafter ABCFM), reel 4, document 297 - Sturges to (unknown), journal letter of 2 Dec. 1868, entry for 6 Jan. 1869.

2 This summary of Protestant missionary efforts on Pohnpei is drawn from my book, *Upon a Stone Altar: A history of the island of Pohnpei to 1890* (Honolulu 1988); see especially chapters 4, 'God versus Gods', and 5, 'Strategies of Salvation'.

particular, against an island people and way of life they did not love, like or much understand, but sought mightily to change. In their larger themes and general patterns, the stories of these missionaries on Pohnpei parallel closely the efforts of other evangelicals elsewhere in the Pacific Islands region.³

In their struggles, these missionaries consoled themselves with the 'arithmetic of salvation', as Greg Dening has termed it. By the mid-1870s, half of the island's population was counted as at least nominally Christian.⁴ Yet, the missionaries ultimately found much to negate or undermine their own calculations. There was the backsliding, spiritual apathy, crass opportunism, and gross materialism that the missionaries thought coloured Pohnpeian attitudes toward the Christian endeavour. Assessing their efforts as largely for naught, they took out their frustration and despair on one another. In the 1883 report on his recently concluded trip through the Micronesian mission field as captain of the *Morning Star*, Isaiah Bray stated that it would be sheer folly to spend more money on the badly divided, dissension-racked company of missionaries.⁵ Looking about Pohnpei, Bray claimed it difficult to identify the fruits of more than three decades of missionary labour. There were fruits, nonetheless.

We might ask ourselves what induced the people of Pohnpei to make a place for Christianity on their island and in their lives. The missionaries themselves are not much remembered; the graves of their children are overgrown or forgotten. The Congregationalist church on the island commemorates annually the arrival of the message, but not the messengers. The explanations most often given for Pohnpeians' openness to Christianity have a utilitarian or rationalist character to them. This litany of determining factors includes the political machinations of chiefs, the literate skills taught in mission schools, the opportunities that Christianity's egalitarian message offered to the lesser chiefs, women and the commoner class, the use of mission stations as a conduit for the material wealth of the Western world, and Christianity as consolation for disease and the harsher elements of colonialism and general contact with the outside world.⁶ These factors find echo in many of the histories of

3 See, for example, Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical missionaries in the South Seas* (Melbourne 1978); Diane Langmore, *Missionary Lives: Papua, 1874-1914* (Honolulu 1989); Donald Denoon, et al. (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* (Cambridge 1997), especially the chapter by Jocelyn Linnekin, 'New Political Orders', 185-217; Francis X. Hezel, *The First Taint of Civilization: A history of the Caroline and Marshall Islands in precolonial days, 1521-1885* (Honolulu 1983), especially chapters 3, 'Mission to Palaos', 6, 'The Powers of Darkness and Light', and 8, 'Christianity and Copra in the Marshalls; Hezel's *The Catholic Church in Micronesia: Historical essays on the Catholic Church in the Caroline-Marshall Islands* (Chicago 1991); K. R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall: A new South Sea Islands history from first settlement to colonial rule* (Honolulu 1984), especially chapters 6, 'To Recover the Remnant', and 14, 'Mission Frontiers'; and James A. Boutillier, Daniel T. Hughes and Sharon W. Tiffany (eds), *Mission, Church and Sect in Oceania* (Lanham, Md 1978).

4 ABCFM 1874, *Annual Report* (for 1873), 77.

5 ABCFM, reel 8, document 97 - 'Report of the 11th voyage of the Missionary Packet *Morning Star*, no. 3 to the Micronesian Islands, 1881-1882'.

6 I do not mean to minimise or dismiss the physical or cosmological consequences of epidemic disease on Pohnpei. A smallpox epidemic in early 1854 reduced the island's population from roughly 10,000 to fewer than 5,000, and within a six-month period. One Pohnpeian chief asked Albert Sturges if it were Jehovah who was inflicting such death upon the island. Another chief, more certain than the first, asked Rev. Luther H. Gulick not if, but why the Christian god was killing the people of Pohnpei. See Hanlon, *Upon a Stone Altar*, 110. Nonetheless, Pohnpeians did not convert but rather warred amongst each other in the period immediately following the smallpox epidemic. The first

missionaries and missionisation in the Pacific; they provide at best partial explanations for religious change on Pohnpei and elsewhere.

I do not know, and think beyond recovery, the ways in which Pohnpeians came to understand Christianity's symbols as meaningful, as signs for larger lessons and truths that resonated or accorded with their experiences in a changing, sometimes violent world turned upside down or inside out by those who came from Pacific outlands and whose deity was Jehovah.⁷ I do not know enough about the pools of anxiety, doubt and restlessness within Pohnpeian society stirred by the arrival of Christianity. And I am unsure of the exact ways in which new truths, symbols and rituals replaced old ones.

I am more certain that the history of religious change on the island does not begin with the arrival of Christian missionaries of any denomination.⁸ Various groups of voyagers brought to the island their gods, their beliefs and practices, and established these in the various areas of the island which they settled or seized. Any history of religious change on Pohnpei would include a consideration of more indigenous or local systems of belief, cosmologies if you will, that joined material and spiritual worlds, and encompassed a totality of experiences and relationships far beyond the compartment that most social science researchers call 'religion'.⁹ There is a diversity here that subverts any attempt to speak about a unified, consistent, island-wide system of religious belief in existence prior to the coming of European and American missionaries. In light of this varied geography of beliefs and practices, the history of Christianity may be more appropriately rendered as the histories of Christianity for the island.

Or, perhaps, we should be speaking of the histories of Christianities as Pohnpeians had to engage and assess denominational differences between American Congregationalism and the Roman Catholicism brought by Spanish Jesuits in 1886. In any event, the issue becomes not eliminating but, in Vicente Diaz's words, repositioning the missionary within local historical and cultural contexts, and within an approach that considers the reception as well as delivery of the message.¹⁰ In light

'conversions', three in number, did not occur until Nov. 1860.

7 On the process of religious change, see the essay, 'On Religious Change', in Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches, Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Honolulu 1980), 199-204. For Pohnpei, there are accounts of Pohnpeians abandoning their gods or ceasing to perform the ceremonies of atonement or supplication associated with them. See for example Paul Hambruch, *Ergebnisse der Südsee Expedition, 1908-1910*, 2, B, 7, Georg Thilenius (ed.), *Ponape* (Hamburg 1936), II, 113, and III, 94-5. These histories do not link this abandonment of god and ritual to foreign disease or to the activities of foreign missionaries; this is not to say they could not be, however.

8 Roman Catholicism, not American Congregationalism, was the first denominational variant of Christianity to reach Pohnpei. It arrived aboard the ship *Notre Dame du Paix*, and with the French priests Alexis Bachelot and Désiré Maigret on 13 Dec. 1837. Bachelot and Maigret were members of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, more commonly known as the Picpus fathers. Bachelot actually died eight days before the ship reached Madolenihmw Harbor on Pohnpei. The first order of business for Maigret was to locate an appropriate burial place for Bachelot. Dissatisfied with, among other things, the lack of quantifiable progress, Maigret abandoned the fledgling mission in July of 1838.

9 See 'The Other Side of Yesterday' in Hanlon, *Upon a Stone Altar*, 3-25; also, 103-5.

10 Vicente M. Diaz, 'Repositioning the Missionary: The beatification of Blessed Diego Luis de Sanvitores and Chamorro cultural and political history on Guam', PhD dissertation, University of California at Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz 1992), 14-19. Diaz concerns himself largely with the contemporary cultural politics between coloniser and Chamorro over the canonisation of Fr Sanvitores. His argument also has salience, I believe, for investigations of the

of all this, I think it not at all profound or radical to suggest that the histories of missionaries are not histories of Christianity in the Pacific, and that the causes or explanations for Christianity's grounding in Pacific soil lie beyond missionaries and are more locally focused.¹¹

My concern is not just with the historiography of Pohnpei. How might histories of religious change be done or be done differently in the larger Pacific Islands region? The wording used to describe indigenous responses to new belief systems is certainly at issue in the histories of missionaries and of religious change in the region. 'Conversion', in its most literal and often-employed meaning, implies a process too final, too complete and too one-sided; a response more about uncritical submission or mindless consumption than engagement or deliberation. 'Absorption', 'adjustment', 'incorporation', and 'revitalisation' are words also employed to understand indigenous encounters with Christianity but they lack, I think, an ability to represent an engagement whose stakes were large and ultimately cosmological.¹² 'Appropriation' suggests dynamism and negotiation, but is too often rendered as fact rather than process. Peter Brown would remind us of religious change as a process that is about power and persuasion, and that includes paradox, contradiction, tension, testing, and continuity.¹³ I do not doubt that Christianity has become indigenised. My concern is for the process of that indigenisation, and the representations of it.¹⁴

'Translation' and 'consciousness' are two concepts that might be advantageously deployed in the doing of histories of religious change in the Pacific. They have been deployed with insightful effect elsewhere. The process of indigenisation certainly raises the issue of translation or the 'art of the impossible' as Andrew Walls has termed it.¹⁵ Vicente Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism* considers the efforts of Spanish Jesuit missionaries in the Philippines to translate Catholic doctrines and concepts into Tagalog, and the partial failings of those efforts as Tagalog speakers made a very different sense of the words they heard. Rafael writes that,

deeper past and around the issue of religious change.

11 There has been some very interesting work on early Islander interpretations of Christianity and its missionaries. See, for example, Ron Adams, *In the Land of Strangers: A century of European contact with Tanna, 1774-1874* (Canberra 1984). Bronwen Douglas is another practitioner of history in the Pacific who possesses a sensitivity to the complexities and local dynamics that informed the process of religious change. She suggests that what is called 'conversion' may have constituted one of several empowering strategies intended to cope with novel but threatening forces. Douglas also argues that religious change may have resulted from the desire to evade or undermine the efficacy of more malevolent local deities and their human agents. See her 'Autonomous and controlled spirits: traditional ritual and early interpretations of Christianity on Tanna, Aneityum and the Isle of Pines in comparative perspective', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 98 (1989), 7-48; also 'Power, discourse and the appropriation of God: Christianity and subversion in a Melanesian context', *History and Anthropology*, 9 (1995), 57-92.

12 Andrew F. Walls reviews these variously ascribed forms of response in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the transmission of faith* (Maryknoll, NY 1996), 131-9.

13 Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of St. Augustine* (London 1972), 12-14.

14 In concentrating on what I understand to be the deficiencies and oversights in histories of religious change, I in no way mean to slight several excellent contemporary ethnographies of Melanesian women's negotiations with Christian practices and institutions at both the national and local levels. There is, for example, Margaret Jolly's 'Women-Nation-State in Vanuatu: Women as Signs and Subjects in Discourses of "Kastom", Modernity and Christianity', Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (eds), *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific* (Cambridge 1998), 1-25; and Lissant Bolton, 'Dancing in mats: extending "kastom" to women in Vanuatu', PhD thesis, University of Manchester (Manchester 1993).

15 Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 26.

Spaniards' efforts to translate Christian doctrine into the native vernacular transformed the vernacular and in time the consciousness of its speakers. Similarly, the Tagologs' efforts to read and appropriate Christian-colonial discourse in their own language tended to change the meaning of that discourse and hence the very shape and feel of the colonial legacy as a whole.¹⁶

Rafael's work alerts us to the possibility of multiple and alternate translations, and to the issue of consciousness.

The history of religious change in the Pacific or anywhere for that matter also entails changes in consciousness. John and Jean Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution* deals with the encounter between British missionaries and the Tswana people of South Africa.¹⁷ This work contextualises the missionary effort there against the rise of modernity in Great Britain and Europe, the revivalist counter-movement, the colonising impulse, European notions of the 'savage' and the 'heathen', and the complex and dynamic world of the Tswana themselves. Missionary efforts to change the signs and practices of the Tswana resulted in new forms of consciousness for both the coloniser and colonised. In their efforts to incorporate the Tswana into a world-wide Christian commonwealth, the missionaries sought first to re-make the Tswana by refashioning or otherwise trying to fundamentally alter the more visible and external areas of Tswana life; namely, modes of production, architecture, clothing, aesthetics, personhood, and social calendars.

The Comaroffs find the Tswana not at all passive in their encounters with LMS and Methodist missionaries. The Tswana proved sceptical of the methods of conversion used by the missionaries, reading their own significance into these methods and taking from the material, technological and ideational resources of the missionaries what they found useful or interesting. At the same time, the Tswana resisted the intrusion of the missionaries into everyday life by struggling to retain control over space and place, words and water, arguing for example over the efficacy of rain-making and the ontology of ritual. This selective engagement with the discourse of Christianity brought transformation all the same. To argue for the credibility and worth of Tswana ways against European science, technology, rationalism, and empiricism was to allow these alien beliefs and the world from which they came entry into the life of the Tswana. In the end, the European colonisation of Africa proved less a direct coercive conquest than an ultimately persuasive attempt to colonise consciousness, to remake people by redefining the taken-for-granted surfaces of their everyday worlds.

The possibilities of doing a history of religious change for Pacific Islands may be in part a function of disturbance, the quality of existing local histories, and the richness of the ethnographic and historical written record. If the historical record prohibits us from understanding local encounters with Christianity, perhaps there is value in considering those areas of the Pacific where Christianity has been resisted

¹⁶ Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog society under early Spanish rule*, 2nd printing (Durham, N.C 1996), 11. Rafael also offers a more nuanced definition of conversion as translation in his preface to the 1988 edition of his book (p. xvii), a definition considerably different from the meaning of the word 'conversion' in most Pacific Islands historiography.

¹⁷ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago 1991), 309-14.

or those instances in which Christianity has blended or combined with local beliefs and practices to address the contradictions, inconsistencies and inequities that colonialism causes in Christianity's message.¹⁸ This is not an argument for reconstructing the past through the ethnographic present, but a suggestion for perspective, constructive imagination and creative reflection in assessing religious change of more distant pasts.

In a 1982 study of the Kwaio, Roger Keesing writes that their religion makes awesomely powerful ancient spirits both personal and accessible through dreams and the use of familial intermediaries.¹⁹ Keesing argues that this association between family and ancestors constitutes a central and affirming emotional source for the Kwaio people; it provides them with a religion of the concrete and the immediate, a way of living and acting, which is not to deny or denigrate its deeper metaphysical features. Kwaio religion then exists not on some abstract plane of formal structure, but in the minds and acts of individuals, and in the social and political life of communities. Kwaio belief in their ancestral ways and their consequent resistance to Christianity enable a strong sense of identity and autonomy. The Kwaio, according to Keesing, see the costs of colonialism for other peoples in the Solomons who have lost their cultures, and in losing them, have lost their ties to the land and to the ancestors.²⁰ Alienated from their customs and their ancestors, they have become like outsiders in their own homeland. Resistance to Christianity and Westernisation is perpetuated and articulated through an ideology of *kastom*. Following the rules of the ancestors is thus a mode of political struggle, as well as a way of life that is not at all Christian.

Embedded within the sensational renderings of cargo cults and millenarian movements may exist evidence of cultural difference and resilience expressed through what Gary Trompf calls the particularity of local or regional histories.²¹ Cargo cults may be understood as resulting in part from the failure of missionaries to tell the whole story about how to acquire the goods or from a more general disillusionment with Christianity for simply not producing or delivering the goods. Perhaps, as Lamont Lindstrom suggests, descriptions of cargo cults are as much about the West's own fears, anxieties and desires as they are about imperfect, incomplete or frustrated encounters with Western capitalism and Christianity.²² Following Lindstrom's point about the nature of Western discourse on cargo cults, it is tempting to argue that

18 In addition to the examples cited in this section of my text, I have in mind such syncretist or revitalisation movements as the Siovili in Samoa, the Mamaia in Tahiti, and in Aotearoa or New Zealand, the King Movement, the Pai Marire and the Ringatu. See for example Judith Binney's biography of the founder of the Ringatu, *Redemption Songs: A life of the nineteenth-century Maori leader Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki* (Honolulu 1997). Along this same thematic line, there is also Judith Binney, Gillian Chaplin and Craig Wallace *Mihaia: The prophet Rua Kenana and his community at Maungapohatu* (Auckland 1990).

19 Roger M. Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The living and the dead in a Solomon Island society* (New York 1982), 242-3. See also G. W. Trompf, *Melanesian Religion* (Cambridge 1991). For contrast, see Ben Burt, *Tradition and Christianity: The colonial transformation of a Solomon Islands society* (Chur, Switzerland 1994); and A. R. Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A study in growth and obstruction* (London 1967).

20 Ibid., 240.

21 G. W. Trompf (ed.), *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements* (New York 1990), 16.

22 Lamont Lindstrom, *Cargo Cult: Strange stories of desire from Melanesia and beyond* (Honolulu 1993), 205.

issues of conversion or religious change might be more the concern of scholars from beyond the region who look for affirmation of their own beliefs or who feed their agnosticism on the violence that is so much a part of the history of Christianity in the Pacific.

Religious change or conversion within the Pacific is a topic which has not attracted, at least on the surface, a great deal of critical analysis from indigenous historians. Equating Tangaloa with Jehovah,²³ citing the prophecy of the goddess Nafanua,²⁴ or underscoring the social and religious flexibility of the *fa'a Sāmoa*²⁵ do not go very far in explaining the spread of Christianity in Samoa, for example. Pohnpeians' epistemological engagement with Christianity is not a topic that Luelen Bernart of Pohnpei expounds upon at any great length. Bernart states simply that: 'In the year 1852, the rule of God came to Ponape'.²⁶ What follows in his published text is not a history of conversion to Christianity, but a short account of machinations and struggles for power around the Congregationalist mission, and later between the Protestant and Catholic churches on the island.

There are, however, indigenous written histories whose re-reading could enhance an appreciation of the dimensions and processes of religious change in the Pacific. The written histories of Hawaiians Samuel Kamakau, David Malo, John Papa Ii, and the Rarotongans Ta'unga and Maretu have been dismissed as uncritical tracts that too readily evidence the missionary-training of the authors.²⁷ A careful, critical rereading of Kamakau, Malo, and Papa I'i, however, might promote more nuanced and sophisticated histories of Hawai'i and of Christianity in Hawai'i. On the surface of things, the English-language translation of *The Works of Ta'unga* reads very much like a missionary condemnation of primitive 'cultures' with their heathen practices of cannibalism, warfare, idolatry, and polygamy.²⁸ There exist, however, ambiguities and contradictions in Ta'unga's text that reflect a more personal and complicated relationship with the various peoples among whom he worked over the course of his 63-year missionary career. Ta'unga's struggles to incorporate his Rarotongan background, his missionary training, and his experiences in Melanesia and Samoa into an encompassing worldview indicate something of the negotiations, tensions and discontinuities involved in local and personal engagements with Christianity.

23 Lalomilo Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel* (Apia 1996), 8-14.

24 Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga: A short history of Western Samoa* (Suva 1987), 52. See also Meleisea's 'The Postmodern Legacy of a Premodern Warrior Goddess in Modern Samoa', Alex Calder, Jonathan Lamb and Bridget Orr (eds), *Voyages and Beaches: Pacific encounters, 1769-1840* (Honolulu 1999), 55-60.

25 Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional authority in the modern history of Western Samoa* (Suva 1987), 17.

26 Luelen Bernart, *The Book of Luelen*, trans. and ed. John L. Fischer, Saul H. Riesenberg, and Marjorie G. Whiting (Honolulu 1977), 115.

27 This call for a more critically nuanced reading of these Islander writers and historians is not intended to evade or deny the very serious issues surrounding the translating, editing and contextualisation of their works, then and now and in the future.

28 Ron and Marjorie Crocombe (eds), *The Works of Ta'unga: Records of a Polynesian traveller in the South Seas, 1833-1896* (Suva 1984). I am indebted to Keith Camacho for his insights and observations on this under-appreciated and often wrongly utilised text. Equally worthy of a more careful and sensitive rereading is Maretu's *Cannibals and Converts: Radical change in the Cook Islands*, trans., annotated and ed. by Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, repr. edn (Suva 1987).

The rereading of indigenous written histories constitutes but one item on an agenda for revisiting histories of religious change in the Pacific. In distinguishing between histories of missionaries and Christianities, we should not forget the role of Islander missionaries in promoting religious change. Their histories remain largely untold, their roles as agents of change unexamined or not well considered.²⁹ Histories of missionary efforts in the Pacific have been largely by and about men. We have some histories of Euro-American missionary women;³⁰ we have precious few studies of the historical responses of Islander women to Christianity.³¹ The role of Ka'ahumanu in the history of religious change in Hawai'i, and the prominence of Islander women in the earliest churches and in the ranks of missionaries, point to histories that are far from being only about men.

It is certainly hard to deny the legacies or effects of missionaries in the Pacific. We write from or against their histories and ethnographies.³² We find their metaphors of light and darkness pervading representations of Pacific pasts by outlander and even Islander scholars.³³ And there is the fact too that missionaries continue to come to and proselytise within the Pacific Islands region. While Christianity may be declining in the industrialised West, it remains an expanding and changing religion within the Pacific Islands region. New religious groups such as the Assembly of God, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Baha'i are growing rapidly in the region and at the expense of mainline churches.³⁴ In addition to these five, relatively recent religious groups, there are more than 30 other proselytising entities, most of them either evangelical and fundamentalist para-church organisations or breakaway religious groups. Many of these new and active groups are informed, often sponsored, by a Christian fundamentalist renaissance emanating from the United States; their commitment to individual progress, material betterment and enhanced social status link them to the extension of a more global capitalist order in the Pacific.³⁵ It is the relationship of Christianity to this more secular missionary agenda to which I now

29 Four notable exceptions to the general dearth of histories on Islander missionaries are *The Works of Ta'unga*; Maretu's *Cannibals and Converts*; Sione Lātūkefu, Ruta Sinclair, et. al., *Polynesian Missions in Melanesia* (Suva 1982); and, more recently, Doug Munro and Andrew Thornley (eds), *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific*. (Suva 1996).

30 See, for example, Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American missionary wives in nineteenth-century Hawaii* (Honolulu 1989).

31 On the responses of Islander women to Christianity, see the collection of essays by Margaret Jolly and Martha Macintyre (eds), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic contradictions and the colonial impact* (Cambridge 1989); also Margaret Jolly, "'To save the girls for brighter and better lives': Presbyterian missions and women in the south of Vanuatu', *Journal of Pacific History*, 26:1 (1991), 27-48.

32 On the possibilities that arise from this tension, see Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial discourse Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge 1997), especially his chapter 4, 'Missionary Endeavours'. In distinguishing between histories of missionaries and histories of religious change, I am not arguing that missionaries are an exhausted topic; Edmond's fine chapter suggests how much there remains to do or do over.

33 See Vilsoni Hereniko, 'Representations of Cultural Identities', in K. R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste and Brij V. Lal (eds), *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the twentieth century* (Honolulu 1994), 407-17.

34 Manfred Ernst, *Winds of Change: Rapidly growing religious groups in the Pacific Islands* (Suva 1994), 6.

35 Ibid., 272, 277-8.

turn. I refer here to another process of conversion – a process of conversion to capitalism that goes by the name ‘development’.

Christianity and capitalism are alike and linked through their globalising agendas and their visions of a new world regime. There is a long, varied history of an unequal, often tense but ultimately complementary partnership. The link between capitalism and Christianity, more particularly Protestantism, has been the subject of numerous scholarly works. Max Weber wrote of the importance of the Protestant work ethic to the rise of capitalism in the 17th century.³⁶ In Weber’s analysis, the striving for profits and the rational employment of those profits were related to the Calvinist concept of predestination. Doubts and angst developed over the identity of the chosen. An aesthetic, work-oriented and rational approach to life emerged as the best way to prepare for the hereafter. Work became the measure of piety; an aversion to work reflected an individual’s position as outside the perimeters of divine grace. The economic prosperity that followed from a commitment to this culturally specific notion of work came to be seen as a likely sign of God’s favour.

Norman O. Brown’s take on the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism is somewhat different, though ultimately in agreement with that of Weber. Luther, according to Brown, saw capitalism as under the dominion of the devil. Capitalism is the inevitable bondage to the devil that is the consequence of original sin.³⁷ Given this fact, what is the Christian to do? Luther’s essential directive was to be in but not of this world. There is a practical accommodation to living in the world, then; ‘whosoever would walk peacefully in this world, must be money’s guest, and money a guest with him’.³⁸ By keeping the spirit free while surrendering the flesh to the devil, the Christian becomes lord over Mammon.

The business of capitalism provided both a guiding metaphor and a concrete set of practices for the proselytisation of evangelical Christianity in the Pacific.³⁹ Members of the ABCFM advocated a missionary strategy that forged business with evangelism. Cornelius H. Patton, a member of the ABCFM’s Board of Directors, wrote of how effective business practices might be employed to enhance the mission effort. In his *The Business of Missions*, Patton proclaimed: ‘We are living in a business age. We believe as never before in business results. It is a working, rather than fighting church to which we belong.’⁴⁰ Andrew Walls describes Patton’s attitude as characteristically American;⁴¹ John Williams, however, would certainly have seconded the use of Christian commerce as an instrument of evangelism.

Protestant mission groups in the Pacific, earlier and now, have linked spiritual salvation to a way of life that includes values, attitudes and beliefs not only compatible with but linked to a market economy. This linkage between market and

36 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York 1938).

37 Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The psychoanalytic meaning of history*, 2nd edn (Middletown, Conn. 1985), 221.

38 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 222.

39 Interestingly, the 10th edn of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA 1993), 154, gives ‘mission’ as a secondary definition of business.

40 Quoted in Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 231.

41 *Ibid.*

mission can be seen rather clearly and in contemporary times through the film *Advertising Missionaries*.⁴² The 1996 film follows a troupe of actors, 'Walkabout Marketing', employed by the HRD advertising agency of Port Moresby to spread the 'gospel of the new way of life' to the Huli people of the Yaluba Valley in the remote Highlands area of Papua New Guinea. These actors are missionaries, not for Christianity, but for consumerism and for the adoption of responsible economic practices required of citizens of the state and would-be nation of Papua New Guinea. The film's narrator calls the actors 'prophets of the consumer revolution'. Skits, written by the director of the HRD agency, represent the interests of various multinational corporations and industries in the country. These presentations serve as comic, entertaining and apparently persuasive advertisements for soft drinks, toothpaste, insect repellent, peanut butter, and detergent. The troupe also performs more serious but related stories that advocate responsible family planning through the use of contraceptive devices and that warn against domestic violence, the dangers of alcohol, and over-dependence upon such local food crops as the sweet potato.

The message is not at all subtle; what is being promoted is not simply the purchase of a product but subscription to a massive project of social transformation which touches in deep and fundamental ways almost every aspect of life and living in the Yaluba Valley. The parallels to the efforts of past and present Christian missionaries are equally explicit. The troupe leader, Elijah Bennett, describes the actors as 'just like missionaries' in their advocacy of a new lifestyle and related products, and the skits themselves as 'similar to what missionaries do'. The connections with Christianity are clear too in the actors' individual identifications as Christians and in their use of mission stations as rest spots along their journey to the Yaluba Valley.

There are far more formidable forces behind the promotion of development in the contemporary Pacific. In the area of the Pacific called 'Micronesia', where Christian missionaries of different nationalities and denominations have laboured for nearly three and a half centuries, the United States government has sought of late to transform in dramatic fashion peoples who occupy real estate deemed strategically vital to the welfare and well being of the United States government. Development plans and strategies have been employed to re-make these islands into places that have the look, feel, sound, speed, smell and taste of America⁴³ The compacts of free association between the United States government, and the governments of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau represent in a sense a culmination of these efforts. These compacts of free association are designed to secure continued American influence over the islands under rhetorical pledges to respect the sovereignty of the different island groups and to contribute to their economic development.

'Post-colonialism' is a term whose use and currency are strained by what looks to many to still be 'American Micronesia'. Meanwhile, the development of the islands remains an on-going story of incomplete or failed conversion as the Asian

42 *Advertising Missionaries* (New York, First Run/Icarus Films 1996).

43 David Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia: Discourses over development in a Pacific territory, 1944-1982* (Honolulu 1998), 10-11.

Development Bank, rather than various agencies of the United States government, now prescribes ways in which the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands can reform their tax structures, maximise their human resource potential, improve their infrastructure, enhance their business climate, reduce their dependency on foreign aid, and expand their exports, all in a necessary and critical effort to become economically self-sufficient.⁴⁴

This kind of development, or more appropriately developmentalism, shows itself in other areas of the Pacific. Greg Fry writes of Project 2010, an almost evangelical prescription for development emanating from Australia, that paints a doomsday scenario for Pacific peoples unless they transform themselves into responsible, productive and informed citizens of the modern world. Fry sees this doomsday scenario as linked to security and development studies of the Cold War period that presumed a superior, exclusive, essentially racist knowledge about the ways Pacific Islands were to be made modern.⁴⁵ The metaphors of 'mission' and 'missionary' seem applicable and appropriate to efforts at development in 'American' Micronesia and through Project 2010. Against the norms and values of capitalist cultures that define themselves in terms of productive, economic activity, Micronesians and other islands peoples are labeled as passive, indifferent, lazy, irresponsible and unreliable. The transformation from 'heathen' to 'underdeveloped' has proven a short history, indeed.

Beyond missionaries?⁴⁶ The reasons for Christianity's spread in the Pacific involve much more than the efforts and initiatives of missionaries. In the histories of religious change in the Pacific, the issue becomes one of relocating missionaries. And they are certainly still very much with us. At both a literal and metaphorical level, we can see missionaries at work in the contemporary Pacific. New religious groups, most with an evangelical commitment and a fundamentalist agenda linked to conservative social and religious movements in the United States and advocating a lifestyle compatible with an encroaching global capitalism, operate extensively and successfully in the Pacific Islands region. Linked to these on-going missionary endeavours are continuing efforts at a more secular conversion process that goes by the name of development and that has its own brand of missionaries.

Like the histories of religious change in the region, the histories of development are about much more than the particular efforts of planning specialists, aid experts or government officials from different metropolitan nations. The local responses to development are equally varied, distinctive, and dynamic. Given these cultural and political complexities, we might be better advised to think in terms of histories of developments rather than a history or histories of development. The histories of developments are and will be no neater or simpler than the histories of religious

44 Asian Development Bank, *The FSM Economy: 1996 Economic Report* (Manila 1997); and Asian Development Bank, *Marshall Islands 1996 Economic Report* (Manila 1997). See also the ADB's agenda for the broader Pacific, *Strategy for the Pacific: Policies and programs for sustainable growth* (Jan. 1996), <http://www.adb.org/Work/Strategy/Strategy_Pacific>.

45 Greg Fry, 'Framing the islands: knowledge and power in changing Australian images of "the South Pacific"', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 9:2 (1997), 329.

46 This essay was originally written for the panel 'Beyond Missionaries', chaired by Christine Weir and a part of the Pacific History Association's Millennial Conference, held 26-30 June 2000, at the Australian National University in Canberra.

change, though perhaps more doable. It becomes hard to argue, then, that the study of Pacific pasts and presents is beyond missionaries, just as it is difficult to argue that histories of change in the Pacific are defined by, limited to or synonymous with the histories of those agents of change, secular or religious. It may be that histories of religious change are beyond doing in many areas of the Pacific. Victoria Lukere has commented on the impossibility of describing encounters with the Sacred.⁴⁷ If true, the issue then becomes the recognition of the resulting void rather than the filling of it with histories of missionaries.

History, it seems to me, is also at stake in the conversion process. No missionary effort or undertaking, be it secular or religious, can be complete or successful without an accompanying conversion of the past. Frederic Jameson has written that the process of development does not allow for history outside of the West.⁴⁸ Development seeks to complete the colonial project by redefining non-Western areas in terms of the experience of colonialism. History as usually practiced in and by the West becomes a part of the colonising process in its sacrifice of other people's pasts to the demanding gods of progress and productivity. It strikes me that histories of missionaries that purport to be – or are read as – histories of religious change also contribute to this kind of conversion or erasure.

47 Vicki Lukere made this public comment at the close of the second morning session of the panel, 'Beyond Missionaries', 28 June 2000, Pacific History Association Millennial Conference, Australian National University, Canberra.

48 Frederic Jameson, 'Third World literature in the era of multinational corporations', *Social Text*, 15(86), 68-9.

Writing of the Lotu-Bearers

CHRISTINE WEIR

At the end of the session entitled 'Beyond Missionaries' at the Pacific History Association conference in Canberra, Victoria Lukere asked, without expecting immediate answer, three pertinent questions for secular history writing, questions described by another participant as a 'benediction' for the session. The papers had been wide-ranging; they had included discussions on (amongst other subjects) the development of a distinctively Pacific theology, the linkages between evangelical Christianity and anthropology in the 19th century, the causes of splits in the Torres Strait Anglican church, and the perils and delights of bilingual writing. The approaches had been varied, as had the personal positions of the presenters. But for all there was resonance with Lukere's questions:-

How can you ultimately honour an expression of the sacred without approaching it in its own terms?

How can you share it without huge losses or distortions in translation?

How can you criticise it without violating it?

So, then, is writing about religion qualitatively different from writing about other subjects, and does one need to be a believer to write about religious belief or religious change?

Any discussion of religious history or religious change requires a consideration, implicit if not explicit, of what comprises the category 'religion'. Is there a discrete dimension of life to be labelled 'religious', and if so how is one to define it? Writings on the philosophy and anthropology of religion are of course voluminous,¹ but the very vastness of the literature reflects an underlying problem over definition, as functionalist assumptions vie with more symbolic or intellectualist approaches. At issue is a debate about whether religion's role is to unite and organise a society, or whether it is part of humankind's search for meaning in the world, or whether it is humankind's response to a larger reality. Somewhat cross-cutting this divide is another, more personal dilemma: does one need to believe that 'the sacred' exists to write convincingly about religious history and religious beliefs, indigenous or imported? Or does one only need to acknowledge that others believe that it exists? Or can one legitimately reject the whole notion of belief in the sacred, and see all actors as influenced by political and other pragmatic motivations? Does one have to be a co-

¹ For an introduction to the vast literature, see Brian Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion: An introductory text* (Cambridge 1987).

believer to fully understand the motivation, assumptions and mindset of religious figures? Alternatively, can one fully acknowledge the disruption and possible damage inherent in religious change if one does share the creed being adopted? Attitudes to these questions will influence the attitudes towards those who initiated change, and towards those who responded to it with acceptance or rejection – or, most frequently, with something in between.

This paper is an attempt to give at least some reflections on, if not answers to, these questions, within a particular narrow framework. My purpose is to look at how other historians – and anthropologists of a historical bent – have dealt with the nature of ‘religion’, the motivations for religious change and the encounter between European and Pacific belief systems. Many writers discuss the relationship between the political, the religious and the cultural domains, though this debate assumes that such domains are discrete, an assumption others, particularly many Islanders, would not accept. My interest lies in writing about the introduction, development and reception of Christianity, known almost universally as the *lotu*,² to the islands of the Pacific, from the early 19th century to the present. Thus, writing about the many manifestations of traditional religion is beyond my scope, and my main concern is with the major denominations, rather than millenarian and pentecostal manifestations, since the numerical dominance and long history of mainline denominations gives them a historical and political importance so far denied millennial and pentecostal groups. In this I am reflecting a mainstream interest of Pacific historians, who have always regarded the introduction and development of Christianity in the Pacific as an integral part of Pacific history, and a growing interest amongst anthropologists. Bronwen Douglas has recently³ investigated the ways in which the religiosity of Christian communities within mainline denominations has increasingly come under the consideration of anthropologists, after long being ignored. Criticisms of authenticity, in which Christianity was deemed non-traditional and hence not worthy of serious consideration, have been widely replaced by the acknowledgement that Christianity is part of most modern Pacific Islanders’ identity, and thus must be taken seriously by anthropologists. This paper will inevitably be selective; the literature on Christianity in the Pacific is vast. I have chosen to discuss what I see as representative texts, with varying perspectives. Region has been one of my criteria; my own greater familiarity with work on Fiji, the Solomon Islands and parts of Papua New Guinea has guided my choice.

In practice many historians of Pacific Christianity have family links to missionaries, and several participants in the PHA session noted their mission inheritance. I share it too. In the early 1960s I attended a Congregational Sunday School on the outskirts of London, and collected ‘ship halfpennies’ for the London

2 *Lotu*, a word of Tongan origin, which meant to be one of the praying people and to publicly acknowledge the supremacy of the Christian God. It is used as noun – the Christian religion, service or society, adjective – Christian, and verb – to become a Christian.

3 Bronwen Douglas, ‘Encounters with the enemy? Academic readings of missionary narratives on Melanesians’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43 (2001), 37-64; Bronwen Douglas, ‘From invisible Christians to Gothic theater: the romance of the millenials in Micronesian anthropology’, *Current Anthropology*, 45:5 (2001).

Missionary Society's Pacific mission ship *John Williams VII*.⁴ For a child whose path to school went across what was still a bombsite, the sheer exoticism of a ship that was to travel around palm covered islands had great appeal. Later, I married into a Methodist missionary family,⁵ and heard stories and examined photographs of mission station life in Fiji in the 1920s and 30s. This personal history, and my continuing Christian belief and practice, place me in good company professionally; the challenge, however, remains to maximise the advantages which this insider perspective may give me in terms of theological understanding and shared ethic, but also to recognise the possible disadvantages of a partisan position.

The early ubiquitous presence of missionaries of many denominations on Pacific Islands meant that, as many explorers, sea captains and traders testified, the Christian missionary was often the longest serving and most knowledgeable European around. The profound effect of their presence on Islanders meant that contemporaries tended to have strong opinions about their influence. Similarly, historians and anthropologists have taken varied positions in writing about Christianity and its agents. Missionaries saw themselves as agents of religious change; others concurred, of course, but also sometimes saw them as useful civilising agents, or as opponents of commerce, or as proponents of a particular colonial power. Note here the conflation I have already made between 'history of Christianity' and 'mission history'. In any writing on Pacific Christianity, the doings of missionaries, particularly those from Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, have inevitably loomed large. In earlier work, they tended to be the exclusive focus of attention. This has shifted, as we shall see, but as John Barker has noted, by far the largest body of work comes still from 'the pens of missionaries and their supporters and critics'.⁶ This largely reflects the fact that the main sources, certainly the main historical written sources, are mission sources.

The missionaries left behind a prodigious amount of written material. Richard Lyth, Methodist missionary in Fiji from 1839-54, wrote in his journal almost every day, often for several pages, had a wide correspondence, and made extensive notes on Fijian custom and history.⁷ George Brown, Methodist missionary to Samoa and New Britain, was similarly prolific, writing anthropological notes and papers for scholars in Britain as well as his journal and letters.⁸ Most others kept some sort of journal, and many wrote memoirs – they can indeed be seen as participant historians. Some of this material was published virtually contemporaneously,⁹ and some was

4 My memories are confirmed by accounts of the fundraising, building and launching of the *John Williams VII* in the LMS journal, the *Chronicle*, of Apr. 1962, p. 75; Nov. 1962, pp 202-9; Jan. 1963, pp 22-4; Nov. 1963, pp 283-91.

5 My husband's maternal grandfather was the Rev. Robert Green, Methodist missionary to Kadavu, Nadroga, Lakeba, Bau and Davuilevu (Fiji) between 1921 and 1942.

6 John Barker, 'Introduction: ethnographic perspectives on Christianity in Oceanic societies', in J. Barker (ed.), *Christianity in Oceania: Ethnographic perspectives* (Lanham/New York/ London 1990), 1-24.

7 These volumes are now in the Mitchell Library, Sydney (ML B533-B553).

8 These volumes are also in the Mitchell Library, Sydney (mostly at ML A1686, 24 parts). As an example of his anthropological papers, see George Brown, 'Papuan and Polynesians', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 16 (1887), 311-27.

9 For example James Calvert, *Fiji and the Fijians: Mission history* (London 1858).

published after revision during retirement.¹⁰ A few journals have been recently edited for publication,¹¹ but much has never been published, for example the papers of Lyth, and of John Hunt, his colleague in various parts of Fiji from 1838–48. These missionary writings have been used by numerous historians and anthropologists with a historical bent, and in a variety of different ways. Biographies, pious and more critical, emerged from this material, and historians of particular missions have used missionaries' writings as primary source material, but other and more unexpected uses have been made of their work. Marshall Sahlins used the journals of Hunt and Jagger, another Fiji Methodist, and their observations about the Fijian wars of the 19th century, to explore theories about the relationship between structure and event, about the nature of historical events, and the relationship between a chiefly individual and his structural position within a polity.¹² And, as we shall see, these journals and memoirs provided material for developing theories of colonialism, investigating modes of representation, examining 19th century notions of domesticity and femininity, and most interestingly, attempts to rescue indigenous voices.

Early secondary histories, those written up to around the 1960s, consisted almost entirely of official mission accounts. The official histories are mostly uncritical, hagiographic, and Eurocentric, exemplified by two denominational accounts concerning the Solomon Islands. The official Methodist history, an account by Luxton described as 'empowered' by the New Zealand Mission Board,¹³ was published in 1955. It begins with lurid accounts of traditional life, declaring, 'Surely no people needed the Gospel more than these notorious head-hunters of New Georgia',¹⁴ but the photographs show missionaries at comparative ease. In general this is a triumphalist account. In imagined conversations, pious words are put into the mouths of missionary and convert alike, and the major controversies of the long-serving Reverend John Goldie's tenure (1901–52) are ignored. For example, the major row between Goldie, George Brown and Commissioner Woodford over Ernest Shackell's removal from Ontong Java in 1911, subject of a whole box full of acrimonious correspondence in the Methodist archives,¹⁵ is completely glossed over. Luxton indeed states that the incident concluded with the 'mark of government approval set on the mission work', a truly remarkable inference. The official Catholic account was written by L.M. Raucaz, a former vicar apostolic, and published by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.¹⁶ It is told as a story of heroism against great odds, and indeed the 1845–47 Marist expedition to Santa Isabel must rank as one of the most

10 For example George Brown, *George Brown, D.D., Pioneer-Missionary and Explorer: An autobiography* (London 1908); William Bromilow, *Twenty Years among Primitive Papuans* (London 1929).

11 Two examples come from Fiji Methodists; Albert Schütz, *The Diaries and Correspondence of David Cargill 1832–1843* (Canberra 1977); E. Keesing-Styles, and W. Keesing-Styles, *Unto the Perfect Day: The journal of Thomas James Jagger, Feejee 1838–1845* (Auckland 1988).

12 Marshall Sahlins, 'The return of the event, again; with reflections on the beginnings of the Great Fijian War of 1843–1855 between the Kingdoms of Bau and Rewa', in A. Biersack (ed.), *Clio in Oceania: Towards a historical anthropology* (Washington 1991), 37–99.

13 C.T.J. Luxton, *Isles of Solomon: A tale of missionary adventure* (Auckland 1955).

14 Ibid., 29.

15 MOM 168, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

16 L M Raucaz, *In the Savage South Solomons: The story of a mission* (Lyon 1928).

disastrous mission attempts anywhere. Bishop Epalle was attacked and died within the first two weeks, and six others died from attack or malaria before the mission was withdrawn, amidst famine and accompanying accusations of sorcery. But in Raucaz's account this merely sanctifies what follows: 'A day would come when the seed, cast on ground which seemed barren, would, by the Grace of God, produce fruit'.¹⁷ Although later efforts were more successful, the motif of the missionaries' suffering and sacrifice is strong throughout the account. These accounts vary in tone, either portraying the missionary as hero or as martyr, but both fall within the accepted norms of missionary literature.

They are also archetypally 'insider' accounts, where the sacred, the Christian gospel, was approached entirely on its own terms, and the assumption that Christianity (in a particular denominational variant) ought to be introduced as a universally accepted good remains unquestioned. In this writing God, or in more restrained prose, Providence, is an actor in the narrative. Thus Raucaz describing Father Pellion's arrival in the northwest Guadalcanal area in 1904: 'He had been told to found a station at Visale; he would found one; how? he did not know, but God would provide'.¹⁸ Here the modern scholar is confronted by a problem; most are uncomfortable when presented with 'providential' discourse from another genre. Dipesh Chakrabarty, long concerned with the place of what he calls the 'non-rational' in historical explanation, pointed out this dilemma particularly clearly in a rather different context. In responding to Ranajit Guha's analysis of a Santal revolt in India in 1855, in which he noted that the Santals expressed their motivation in explicitly religious terms, Chakrabarty commented:

The supernatural was part of what constituted public life for the non-modern Santals of the 19th century. This, however, simply cannot be the past in the language of professional history ... Fundamentally, the Santal's statement that God was the main instigator of the rebellion has to be anthropologised (ie converted into somebody's belief) before it finds a place in the historian's narrative ... the historian, as historian, and unlike the Santal, cannot invoke the supernatural in explaining/ describing an event.¹⁹

Historians cannot use 'providential' explanations and remain intellectually respectable. This seems incontestable, but the challenge still remains to find a suitable vocabulary in which to discuss seriously religious motivations and beliefs; this may involve citing and discussing sacred writings, hymns, and prayers, which assume transcendence – and make many secular writers uncomfortable. Many historians of religion have struggled with this dilemma, and continue to do so, as our opening questions attest.

One response, a somewhat idiosyncratic attempt to bring a social scientific approach to the study of religion and religious change, came from Alan Tippet, briefly a missionary, but primarily a missiologist who saw potential in using anthropological methodology. His study of Christianity in the Solomon Islands,

¹⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., 146.

¹⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Minority histories, subaltern pasts', *Humanities Research* (1997), 23-4.

commissioned by the World Council of Churches as an examination of 'the factors which favour or retard church growth', exemplifies the mixed tone of his work. Missiological in intent, his graphs and charts illustrating the stages of conversion and the Biblical framework is alien to a secular mindset.²⁰ Yet his examination of kinship links and the indigenous meaning of conversion, and his sophisticated analysis of the phenomenon of Etoism resulted in his work being consulted by many secular historians. Some of his unpublished studies of Fijian traditional religion and adaptations of Christianity are also of interest, though they also exemplify Tippet's enthusiasm for models.²¹ *The Deep Sea Canoe*, his story for young readers of the Islander missionaries, and apparently influential, shows his tendency to mix theology and history.²² The individual stories were placed 'in a Biblical frame of reference', that is, a model derived from the book of Acts, which required a degree of distortion of chronology.

Tippet had few followers, though Darrell Whiteman's study of the Anglicans in the Solomon Islands is in the same genre; it developed theories about the effectiveness of missionaries as 'agents of change' using similar sociological models.²³ But more within the mainstream, in the 1960s and 1970s there developed a new school of mission history, undertaken by research scholars who were mostly based at the Australian National University, and influenced by Jim Davidson's 'island-centred' approach. This began with Niel Gunson's study of the early evangelical missionaries to the Pacific, which emphasised the social, educational and intellectual backgrounds of the British Protestant missionaries who went to the Pacific.²⁴ A later group, mostly Gunson's students, looked at individual mission 'fields', focusing on the receiving area rather than the metropolitan headquarters, and seeing each area as distinct, with particular problems and opportunities. This group produced detailed, comprehensive and meticulously researched histories of (amongst others) the Methodists in Fiji (Andrew Thornley), the Protestant missions in the Solomon Islands (David Hilliard), the Marists in the Solomons (Hugh Laracy), relations between Church and State in Tonga (Sione Lātūkefu), the Anglicans and LMS in Papua (David Wetherell), and a group study of missionaries to Papua (Diane

20 Alan R. Tippet, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A study in growth and obstruction* (London 1967), ix; see, e.g., charts on pp 210, 271.

21 See, for example, Alan R. Tippet, 'The nineteenth century labour trade in the South West Pacific: a study of slavery and indenture as the origin of present-day racial problems', MA, The American University (Washington, DC 1956); Alan Tippet, 'Shifting foci in Methodist witness in Fiji, 1835-1900', in (ed.), 'Historical writing: Fiji 1947-67', MS, St Mark's Library, Canberra, 1-58; Alan R Tippet, 'The idiom of honorable and dishonorable killing in Fiji in the contact period', in (ed.), 'Fijian world view encounters', MS, St Mark's Library, Canberra, 82-97. One of the problems with using these pieces is their poor referencing, but they are a neglected resource. Certainly Tippet's collection of Pacific books and manuscripts – including all his own unpublished work – housed at St Mark's Library, Canberra (now part of Charles Sturt University), is one of the great sources for Pacific history in general, and religious history in particular.

22 Alan Tippet, *The Deep Sea Canoe: The story of third world missionaries in the South Pacific* (Pasadena, Calif. 1977). Esau Tuza (interview, 24 June 1998, Honiara), confirmed its wide readership in the islands.

23 Darrell L. Whiteman, 'Melanesians and missionaries: an ethnohistorical study of socio-religious change in the South West Pacific', PhD thesis, Southern Illinois University (Carbondale 1980).

24 Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical missionaries in the South Seas 1797-1860* (Melbourne 1978).

Langmore).²⁵ These researchers worked from mission archives, especially letters and reports sent between missionaries and their metropolitan superiors, and letters between missionaries, and the resulting studies have served as a basis on which much later work has relied. Wetherell, Langmore and Hilliard undertook interesting comparisons between different denominations in the same area; Langmore's study continued Niel Gunson's emphasis on the intellectual and social backgrounds of the missionaries. Reflecting their reliance on what might be called the churches' administrative archive, rather than a personal one, the resulting histories tend to emphasise administrative development, educational policy, the growth of an indigenous clergy and financial structures, and relations with governments, a situation they were well aware of. As Laracy put it, 'The danger of relying heavily on mission material is plain. How accurately does it represent the other side of the story – especially that of the islanders?' But this was a task 'for the anthropologist working with a small community', not the writer of a national history.²⁶ Hilliard noted that his book was 'primarily about the missionaries; it is only indirectly concerned with the complex phenomenon of Melanesian Christianity'.²⁷

In general these writers could be described as 'sympathetic but critical' in their approach to their subjects, the missionaries. They are academic historians who are in some sense also 'insiders', and are aware of the dangers of that position. Often with family and personal links to Christianity, they were critical of individuals, specific decisions and particular policies, but not of the basic project. On the other hand, they did not paper over dissension and argument, as had the earlier 'official' historians. Thornley, for example, described in detail the conflicts amongst the European Methodist missionaries over the status and privileges of Fijian ministers, describing some missionaries as 'reactionary'.²⁸ Laracy was blunt in his criticism of the rivalry between the Catholics and the South Seas Evangelical Mission, calling the 'unabashed contest for the possession of souls' in western Guadalcanal 'a battle of abuse and misrepresentation' on both sides.²⁹ But overall these are generous portraits of the missions, and my own response to these accounts, on reading them some years ago, was to find myself comfortable with their assumptions and attitudes, approving

25 Andrew Thornley, 'Fijian Methodism 1874-1945: the emergence of a national church', PhD thesis, Australian National University (Canberra 1979); David Hilliard, 'Protestant missions in the Solomon Islands 1849-1942', PhD thesis, Australian National University (Canberra 1966), published in part as David Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A history of the Melanesian Mission, 1849-1942* (St Lucia, Qld 1978); Hugh Laracy, 'Catholic missions in the Solomon Islands, 1845-1966', PhD thesis, Australian National University (Canberra 1969), published as Hugh Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians: A history of Catholic Missions in the Solomon Islands* (Canberra 1976); David Wetherell, 'Christian missions in Eastern New Guinea: a study of European South Sea Island and Papuan influences 1877-1942', PhD thesis, Australian National University (Canberra 1974), published in part as David Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission: The Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea 1891-1942* (Brisbane 1977), and also David Wetherell, 'From Fiji to Papua: the work of the "Vakavuvuli"', *Journal of Pacific History*, 13:3 (1978), 153-72, and David Wetherell, 'Pioneers and patriarchs: Samoans in a non-conformist mission district in Papua 1890-1917', *Journal of Pacific History*, 15:3 (1980), 130-54; Diane Langmore, 'European missionaries in Papua 1874-1914: a group portrait', PhD thesis, Australian National University (Canberra 1981), published as Diane Langmore, *Missionary Lives: Papua 1874-1914* (Honolulu 1989).

26 Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, x.

27 Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen*, xiii.

28 Thornley, 'Fijian Methodism', 58ff.

29 Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 44.

their moderation. There is little discussion of theology, this generally being assumed knowledge on the part of the reader, and little examination of the way Islanders received Christianity. Islander Christians are seen mostly in apprentice roles, under preparation to take over from Europeans within a fundamentally European model; such a succession, paralleling and often in advance of political decolonisation, and already begun in the 1960s, was represented as the natural, rather than contested, outcome of missionary endeavour.

Essentially in the same genre, but larger in scope, was John Garrett's three-volume history of Christianity in Oceania.³⁰ Again critical and sympathetic, this work emphasises an aspect of mission and church history which was to be followed up by later researchers: a particular focus on the Islander missionaries, who left their own islands and communities to evangelise other Islanders. These teachers and catechists – and their wives – had tended to be ignored in the earliest histories, and were treated patchily in memoirs and biographies.³¹ Nor had they generally been the focus of the academic historians of the 1960s and 1970s, though David Wetherell considered the Fijian and Samoan missionaries in Papua.³² John Garrett brought them into the limelight, taking as the title for his first volume the words of Tongan missionary to Fiji, Joeli Bulu: 'I will *lotu* that I may live among the stars'. This emphasis, coupled with the island-specific studies, led to a more nuanced understanding of the encounter between Christianity and Pacific Islanders in different island communities. But though much of this work tried to move beyond the mission station, the attempt was not entirely successful. While Garrett in particular looked at the development of a distinctively Pacific theology within the independent island churches, the emphasis was on the incorporation of Islanders within the church still as understood in primarily Western terms. Attempts to examine how the evangelised understood and adapted Christianity were to be the contribution of another group of scholars, from another discipline, and often with less sympathetic intent.

Anthropologists interested in colonialism, and the accompanying modes of domination, especially in the domestic and familial sphere, looked to the encounter between missionaries and Islanders to develop their analysis. While the historians of the 1960s and 1970s considered the relationship between missions and colonial governments, it was not a major focus, and in general the distinctions between the two were emphasised, rather than similarities. Thus David Hilliard, investigating the relationship between the Anglican Melanesian Mission and the Solomon Islands Protectorate, concluded that the Anglicans wanted protection for the mission, but saw themselves as intermediaries between the locals and the government, and, contrary to the wishes of the government, emphasised conversion over any civilising project.

30 John Garrett, *To Live Among the Stars: Christian origins in Oceania* (Geneva/Suva 1982); John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II* (Geneva/Suva 1992); John Garrett, *Where Nets were Cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War II* (Suva/Geneva 1997).

31 Most missionary journals and some memoirs give considerable prominence to the assistance given to European missionaries by Islanders. George Brown in his *Autobiography* gave glowing testaments to the work of Aminio Baladroka and Semisi Nau. Some other memoirs ignored Islanders' contribution, but in general the testimony of individual missionaries was more appreciative of Islander teachers than 'official' histories.

32 Wetherell, 'Pioneers and patriarchs'.

While they in practice had an 'uneasy partnership' with the Protectorate government, the Anglicans did not see themselves as 'agents of colonialism'.³³ Anthropologists such as Margaret Jolly, Michael Young, Nicholas Thomas and Richard Eves shifted the perspective on the missionary encounter. Instead of being normative, it became problematised, and I still remember my sense of shock – but also exhilaration – on first encountering such argument. From this perspective, missionaries became implicated in colonialism, and their entire project questioned from a very different perspective.

Margaret Jolly's article "To save the girls for brighter and better lives" is a particularly interesting example of this genre. Her aim is to historicise the observation made by development studies researchers that 'the effect of capitalist expansion has been the "domestication" of women',³⁴ and to do this she examines the attempt of the Presbyterian missions, particularly the missionaries' wives, in Vanuatu to introduce their converts not just to Christianity, but to a new notion of womanhood. Using the letters and journals of the missionaries, she looks at the attempt to reform domestic space, to change the norms of good motherhood, to introduce limited cash cropping of arrowroot, and literacy – all with the aim of re-forming ni-Vanuatu women in the mould of Western 19th century bourgeois Protestant wives and mothers. Jolly does not share the assumption of the missionaries themselves, or of many of their historians, that this is desirable; rather she sees it as part of the colonising project, problematic and ambivalent. The focus has been moved from spiritual change to the changes exhorted in clothing, housing, work patterns, and relationships between the genders. And there is here an emphasis on the ordinary men and women in the receiving communities, those confronted with the religious system and belief that missionaries brought them.

Other work in this genre has used more public sources; an interest in representation has led to a close examination of the words and images used by missionaries within the public sphere to describe both their task and the Islanders. This close textual analysis requires both different sources and different skills from those demanded of the denominational historians. Published texts and photographs have been increasingly used, alongside the private material. Particularly fruitful sources have been the monthly journals published by the denominational missionary societies. These journals, which carried news of missionary activity, produced for average congregation members, aimed to inform, and to raise money, the two being closely connected. The *Missionary Review*,³⁵ published in Sydney by the Methodist Church of Australasia, covered the mission fields of that church, which were concentrated in the Pacific; this makes it a particularly fruitful source for Pacific historians. The *ABM Review*, published from 1910 by the Anglican Australian Board of Mission, and the *Chronicle*, published by the London Missionary Society from

33 Hilliard, 'Colonialism and Christianity', 116, 91.

34 Margaret Jolly, "'To save the girls for brighter and better lives': Presbyterian missions and women in the south of Vanuatu 1848-1870", *Journal of Pacific History*, 26:1 (1991), 27.

35 Its title varied during its lifetime, from 1891. It is referred to by its older name, the *Australasian Methodist Missionary Review*, in some studies.

1867, are similar in nature.³⁶ They are filled with presuppositions which by modern standards are paternalist, and sexist – indeed frequently offensive – yet it would be a mistake for scholars to reject them on these grounds.

It is precisely because these journals were the public face of the missionary societies that their modes of representation are so interesting. Michael Young examined the 'tropology' of the Dobu mission, using primarily William Bromilow's memoirs³⁷ and the *Missionary Review*, noting that 'whenever a Wesleyan picked up a pen the metaphors flew thick and fast', to produce 'a morass of verbosity amid muddled metaphors and tangled tropes'.³⁸ He took it upon himself to do some untangling. Most of the tropes he elucidated are Biblical (to a greater degree than he perhaps acknowledged), and thus unsurprising, yet the sheer encompassing persistence of them is striking. His analysis of the 'conversion' of canoe racing, and of the use of family tropes with regard to the orphanage are revealing; once one is alerted to them they seem obvious, yet they show clearly the constructed nature of the familial image mission societies wished to convey. Nicholas Thomas, Richard Eves and Virginia-Lee Webb have done similar work both with missionary texts, and with photographs, published either in the mission journals or as postcards.³⁹ In his discussion of the photographs and texts from the early years of the Methodist mission in New Georgia, Thomas investigated the representation of the relationship between missionaries and Islanders.⁴⁰ In contrast to the essentialism of many secular racial dichotomies, the missionaries saw the relationship in familial child/adult terms, a relationship which could encompass growth and change, and notions both of hierarchy and of human equality. Thomas demonstrated this using both text and photograph, focusing on the 'basic conjunction' evident in the photograph of three children entitled 'A Study in Black and White'.⁴¹

Exciting and enlightening though these analyses may be, this work by 'outsiders' investigating mission Christianity within a colonising framework has drawbacks. There can be problems of historical specificity when a writer uses material from a particular missionary context and then generalises from it to make wider comments about mission activity. So Thomas's emphasis on the New Georgia civilising project overlooks the specificity that Goldie's preoccupation with commercial copra

36 As the London Missionary Society worked mainly in India, Africa and China, there is only limited material on the Pacific in the *Chronicle*.

37 William Bromilow, *Twenty Years among Primitive Papuans* (London 1929).

38 Michael Young, 'A tropology of the Dobu Mission (in memory of Reo Fortune)', *Canberra Anthropology*, 3 (1980), 84-8.

39 Eg. Richard Eves, 'Black and white, a significant contrast: missionary photography in the Pacific', Paper read at 12th Pacific History Association Conference, Honiara, Solomon Islands, 1998; Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, travel and government* (Cambridge 1994); Virginia-Lee Webb, 'Missionary photographers in the Pacific Islands: divine light', *History of Photography*, 21:1 (1997), 12-22.

40 Nicholas Thomas, 'Colonial conversions: difference, hierarchy and history in early 20th century evangelical propaganda', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 (1992), 366-89.

41 Thomas, 'Colonial conversions', 375-6. The conjunction seems greater when one realises, as I am convinced, that the white girl in the middle is mission leader John Goldie's daughter (cf. Luxton, *Isles of Solomon*, photo opposite p. 36).

plantations was unique and much criticised within the Methodist mission.⁴² Perhaps more importantly, such analyses tend to overestimate the degree of missionary impact, and downplay the level of Islander agency, a point Bronwen Douglas has made strongly.⁴³ Here is Nicholas Thomas describing the Methodist Mission in New Georgia: 'It created an entire social geography of circuits ... it sought to impose a new temporal regime ... It produced not just a population of Christians, but a people that engaged in periodic plantation work.'⁴⁴ There is a level of over-determinism here, in spite of warnings a few pages later, which is striking.

For those concerned with religious change, including myself, there are other problems with this approach, since in at least some of these analyses, any notion of the sacred seems to disappear completely. This can be demonstrated particularly clearly from stimulating and exciting work concerned not with the Pacific but with southern Africa, the study by Jean and John Comaroff of the encounter between the Tswana and LMS and Methodist missionaries.⁴⁵ They look carefully and sensitively at the changes in consciousness attempted by the missionaries, recognising the complexity of the task and the variety of possible responses. They examine dissonances between the 'civilising mission', complete with changes relating to family structure, clothing, work and labour, which are all paralleled in the Pacific, and the increasingly racist South African colonial state – and note that they are considerable. Yet their explanation for this does not fully acknowledge the most obvious difference between missionaries and the colonial authorities, the *religious* motivation of the former. The Comaroffs quite deliberately reject any notion of the 'reification of religious "belief"'⁴⁶ which, they suggest, removes belief systems from cultural embeddedness, and, apparently, from serious consideration. They came under criticism for this neglect in their first volume,⁴⁷ but the change of attitude in the second volume is limited.⁴⁸ Their analysis also marginalises those Tswana, and they were many, who found an accommodation with what the missionaries brought to them. There is much emphasis on resistance and rejection, but little consideration of those who embraced religious change. There is no similarly comprehensive work on religious, cultural and political change for any society in the Pacific, but some of the same neglect of religious motivation can be seen in some of the work of the anthropologists discussed, particularly work done some time ago. Michael Young

42 See for example the correspondence between Goldie and the Australian Methodist Mission's General Secretary Benjamin Danks between 1909 and 1911, MOM 116, MOM 168, Mitchell Library, Sydney; Kim Byron Jackson, 'Tie Hokara, Tie Vaka; black man, white man: a study of the New Georgia group to 1925', PhD thesis, Australian National University (Canberra 1978), especially chapters 4 and 7.

43 Douglas, 'Encounters with the enemy?'

44 Thomas, 'Colonial conversions', 384.

45 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago 1991); John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier* (Chicago/London 1997).

46 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, I, 251.

47 J. D. Y. Peel, 'Review of J. & J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, volume 1', *Journal of African History*, 33:2 (1992), 328-9.

48 For further discussion, see Christine Weir, 'Contesting the "civilising mission"', *Canberra Anthropology*, 22:1 (1999), 121-6.

once framed an examination of the Methodist mission on Dobu through considering their probable actions had they intended to create a theocracy. He concluded their best plan would be to 'gain control of the means of social reproduction' through the control of children and the introduction of an alternative leadership structure, which, he then notes, is exactly what they did.⁴⁹ While he acknowledges that subjugation was not Bromilow's aim, he does see his motivation in terms of 'power' and the transformation of traditional life into a 'European–Wesleyan–Victorian family model'.⁵⁰ This, it seems to me, incorporates the same kind of denial of religious motivation as the Comaroffs' work.

The challenge now appears to be to find a way of incorporating the stimulating insights from anthropologists' work alongside a respect for Island people's understandings of religious belief and change. The anthropologists have shown us the importance of representational issues, have enlivened the debate over the place of missionaries in the colonial enterprise, and have shifted the focus from institutional studies of missions to studies of cultural, intellectual and religious change, often at the village level. In recent years there have been various attempts to find some sort of accommodation, following very different paths. Aiding this has been the work of Ann Laura Stoler, and later work of Nicholas Thomas,⁵¹ which questioned any homogenising view of colonialism, and turned its attention to the tensions and ambivalences within the colonial project. An examination of missionary activity which considers both the continuities with other colonial projects and also that which is unique can further this mode of inquiry, and it is clear that some writers who earlier displayed a rather unconsidered hostility to missions are coming to a more nuanced understanding of their motivations and activities.⁵² More orthodox historians have also been more inclined to incorporate the perspectives gained from anthropology. For example, Ross Mackay's study of the Methodists and Catholics in Papua considers the indigenous understandings of Christian teachings of (in particular) marriage and sorcery in a way not so accepted 20 years earlier.⁵³

There have been many paths taken in recent years to achieve some sort of synthesis between historical and anthropological understandings of the phenomenon of religious change in the Pacific, including a renewed interest in photography and film, fictional approaches, and more nuanced works in the more established genres. I would like to consider further a few approaches which seem to me particularly useful. Firstly Pacific Islander scholars, calling upon largely untapped oral and vernacular written sources, have started to write the histories of individual Islander

49 Michael Young, 'Suffer the children: Wesleyans in the D'Entrecasteaux', in M. Jolly and M. Macintyre (ed.), *Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic contradictions and the colonial impact*, (Cambridge 1989), 108–34.

50 Young, 'Suffer the children', 122.

51 Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 'Between metropole and colony: rethinking a research agenda', in F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1997), 1–56; Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture*.

52 See the discussion of these issues in Douglas, 'From invisible Christians to Gothic theater'.

53 Ross Mackay, 'Catholic and Methodist missionaries in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea, 1930–1980', PhD thesis, Australian National University (Canberra 1999).

missionaries and Christian communities.⁵⁴ Interestingly these studies share characteristics with the denominational historians of the 1960s and 1970s, and Sione Lātukefu's work falls into both categories, not least in their sympathetic but critical stance, and the element of personal, family and community involvement. The identification (in the endnotes) of Dominiko Alebua as the author's grandfather comes, after reading Tarcisius Kabutaulaka's affectionate account of a Catholic catechist on Guadalcanal, as no surprise.⁵⁵ Early Christian Islanders have left a much smaller written record than the European missionaries, but the publication of the few existing accounts is welcome.⁵⁶ Little work has yet been done on the vernacular mission magazines that circulated in Fiji and further east; they would repay study.

Another approach to oral history is to consider the ways missionaries and the introduction of Christianity have been remembered and memorialised. In 1991, Frederick Errington and Deborah Gerwertz witnessed a re-enactment of George Brown's arrival in New Britain in 1875. This was not the first European description of such an event; John Burton, when General Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society, had been incorporated into such a re-enactment during the Jubilee celebrations of 1925, and reported on his experience. Errington and Gerwertz examined both Burton's and their own experiences, 66 years apart, and noted that while in 1925 the drama illustrated the ambivalences about the extent of local initiative possible in the colonial situation, in 1991 it valorised the cultural heritage of Christianity as an integral part of shared identity in modern PNG.⁵⁷ Geoffrey White's examination of stories and enactments in Santa Isabel concerning the arrival of the Anglicans shows how the Islanders have incorporated local structures and persons into the conversion narrative by portraying local chiefs as the true bringers of Christianity.⁵⁸ Here are imaginative attempts to explicate local understandings of Christian missionaries and the Islanders' incorporation into a Christian society; they both accept the reality of the importance of local Christianity, and place it within the context of current politics. We may note too that such appropriations and reconfigurings are now seen as entirely valid, though the re-interpretation and the mode of acceptance of new ideas is often contrary to the missionaries' original expectations.

While approaching historical encounters through their current memorialising is one way of examining their current indigenous meanings, it is necessarily unlikely to throw much light on contemporary meanings. Bronwen Douglas has however attempted to achieve this through a direct examination of the archival record – using

54 See individual articles in Andrew Thornley and Tauga Vulaono (eds), *Mai Kea Ki Vei?: Stories of Methodism in Fiji and Rotuma*, (Suva 1996); Doug Munro and Andrew Thornley, *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific* (Suva 1996); *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2:14 (1995).

55 Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, 'Thy will be done on earth: Dominiko Alebua and catechism on Guadalcanal', in Munro and Thornley (eds), *The Covenant Makers*, 276-89.

56 The most outstanding recent example is Allan K Davidson (ed.), *Semisi Nau, The Story of My Life: The autobiography of a Tongan Methodist missionary who worked at Ontong Java in the Solomon Islands* (Suva 1996). See also ed. R. G. and Marjorie Crocombe, *The Works of Ta'unga: Records of a Polynesian traveller in the South Seas 1833-1896* (Canberra 1968).

57 Frederick K. Errington, and Deborah B. Gerwertz, *Articulating Change in the 'Last Unknown'* (Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford 1995), ch. 3.

58 Geoffrey White, *Identity through History: Living stories in a Solomon Islands society* (Cambridge 1991).

what she describes as 'provocative reading'. She notes the danger in assuming missionary agendas were realised, for this is to miss the slippages, and instead undertakes a detailed textual analysis of the journal accounts of Charlotte and John Geddie, early missionaries to Vanuatu, focusing on the comments about gender relations. Demonstrating the method of reading she advocates, Douglas shows that by examining the tropes and the absences within the written record one can find traces of indigenous agency – in her example, the choices and appropriations made by Aneityumese women from that which was offered to them.⁵⁹ Again, this approach, probably the most challenging, and detailed, interpretation of the colonial missionary archive so far, acknowledges as valid appropriation and re-interpretation of Christian beliefs and practices. There is, in Lukere's terms, an acknowledgment of the possibility of the sacred, certainly of its importance in indigenous lives.

Coming then to writing of Christianity in the Pacific, and faced with this array of past and current approaches, I have to place myself. From personal conviction inclined to be a sympathetic observer of the missionaries and their endeavour, I nonetheless recognise that the insights of anthropologists and historians concerned with the colonial experience make very convincing arguments. So how am I to acknowledge the evident shortcomings of the missionaries while still honouring their motivation? The route I have chosen is to investigate more closely the world view of the missionaries, to understand their preconceptions of their own place in the world, and the place of those they tried to change. This is in some ways a return to the approach pioneered by Niel Gunson, when he examined the intellectual and social origin of the earliest Protestant missionaries to Oceania. Nor am I alone; Helen Gardner's recent thesis on George Brown⁶⁰ aims to place him within the European debate on race and evolution, and looks at his rhetoric, his place in the developing discipline of anthropology, and in imperial cultures, and his positioning, and appropriation, of indigenous material culture. She has produced an intellectual biography of one of the more impressive missionaries of the 19th century. My own study, not yet complete, of the Christian (in particular, Methodist) ideology surrounding work, employment, and indenture, examining who was regarded as fit to do what work – questions shot through with complex racial assumptions – attempts to do something similar. I have tried to maximise my own advantages – a background both in the formal study of British history, and an understanding of the social history of a British city, in my case of Birmingham, complete with its imperial past. When I read Davidoff and Hall's marvellous study of the Midlands bourgeoisie, the sending people, it resonates with the architecture, the landscape, not to mention the factory smell of chocolate, of my own adolescence.⁶¹ So, perhaps, I can bring that background to add to our understanding of how missionaries from Britain came to feel it their duty

59 Bronwen Douglas, 'Provocative readings in intransigent archives: finding Aneityumese women', *Oceania*, 70 (1999), 111-29. Douglas uses a similar approach in essays in *Across the Great Divide: Journeys in history and anthropology* (Amsterdam 1998).

60 Helen Gardner, 'Cultures, Christians and colonial subjects: George Brown's representations of Islanders from Samoa and the Bismarck Archipelago', PhD thesis, La Trobe University (Melbourne 1999).

61 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London 1987).

to sail to the far Pacific, to attempt to change the lifeways of Islanders of whom they knew little.

But surely all historical exploration is at least in part an attempt to explicate meanings. And surely to understand the encounter between groups of human beings, where one group was attempting change – but also being changed in the encounter – and the other assessing what was offered, and then accepting, rejecting and accommodating in many complex ways, those meanings are vital. Many scholars, over many years, have explored the backgrounds, motivations, understandings and actions of the varied protagonists in the drama of bringing the *lotu* to the Pacific Islands. They have not finished yet.

Conveying Text in Context: Bilingual History

ANDREW THORNLEY

These reflections arise from the work I have been doing over the past five years on the church history of Fiji. I wish to answer two questions: firstly and mainly as a matter of explanation, how and why did I come to be involved in bilingual writing projects, and secondly what do I see is the particular significance of bilingual history?

First, the more straightforward question. In 1994, while lecturing at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, I was encouraged by the editor of the *Pacific Journal of Theology* to apply for a scholarship from the Pew Foundation in the USA. I submitted more in failing hope than genuine expectation. But I got the nod. The assessors liked my project: I had the idea of bringing together Methodist church people from throughout the country to relate their oral traditions concerning the arrival of Christianity in their district. It was not long before these Fijian representatives gathered at the Davuilevu Methodist Theological College, near Nausori, in October 1995. Each session of the conference was recorded. I had contributions in English, from distinguished scholars such as Charles Forman and John Garrett, while the Fijian stories were related in an atmosphere of great excitement as the participants heard their history disseminated in their own language.

Under the terms of the scholarship I was required to produce a book. There seemed no point in doing so without the Fijian contributions. Among an interested group of women who attended the Conference was one exceptionally gifted and self-taught scholar of the Fijian language, Tauga Vulaono. She knew most of the dialects. As the Conference entered its final days, and the box of Fijian tapes grew at a disconcerting rate, I tentatively asked Tauga if she would help with translation and transcription. She offered immediately and my first bilingual text, *Mai Kea Ki Vei*, soon followed.¹ Tauga remains a key figure in my endeavours to present bilingual history. She is the Fijian translator in my current bilingual biography of John Hunt, which I decided to do after the first successful endeavours with the Methodist Oral Traditions Conference.

In working with me on the Hunt project, Tauga has the difficult task of translating an English script into a language which currently is undergoing considerable scrutiny and comment, mainly from the Albert Schütz-trained Paul Geraghty, Director of the Fijian Institute of Language and Culture. He is working on a new and innovative dictionary of the Fijian language. Tauga has already enjoyed a lively debate with

1 A. Thornley and T. Vulaono (eds), *Mai Kea Ki Vei: Stories of Methodism in Fiji and Rotuma* (Suva 1996).

Geraghty over several issues related to the proper forms of written Fijian. That debate was one Tauga did not initially expect but she has relished the opportunity to present her particular Fijian prose, and the discussion of words and phrases among Fiji's linguists will hopefully continue and prosper.

I am fortunate to have a highly competent translator. This has made my aim of publishing in both English and Fijian that much easier because the major publisher of regional Pacific literature is the Institute of Pacific Studies (IPS), at the University of the South Pacific. In most cases, as a general rule, they will only publish Islander writing because they claim that Europeans have access to overseas publishers. (This policy can overlook some major problems, not the least of which is the cost of scholarly books on the Pacific that are published in countries such as Australia or England.) When it comes to European writers, IPS are more welcoming if at least 50 per cent of the book is of Islander authorship. When I co-edited with Doug Munro our book *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific* – half of our contributors were Pacific Islanders and IPS were happy to publish.² I was able to make a similar case for bilingual writing. If half of my book was going to be in a Pacific language then the IPS Director (Asesela Ravuvu) was happy to publish.

A translator and a publisher made my task easier. But the existence of these supportive people is not the sole justification for such a book. Since I began to write on Fijian church history in the 1970s, I became aware that what I knew from English sources was known by very few of the Fijians with whom I spoke, including the Fijian church academics at Methodist Headquarters in Suva and at the Davuilevu Theological College. Of course, they were delighted with what I was uncovering from the vaults of the Mitchell Library in Sydney and similar rich repositories. But they did not necessarily read my English material; it remained, as a written text, their second language and I had not yet convinced them of the value of reading what I had to say. Fijians speak good English but that does not necessarily mean that they read it to the extent of embracing academic texts of overseas origin. The English colonisers may have been sensitive conquerors but, whether we like it or not, the English language bears implications of an imposed cultural framework, not one with its roots in Fiji.

The potential readership of material in Fijian remains healthy. The Methodist Church in Fiji has a 70 per cent following among indigenous Fijians. That is a higher Methodist following in percentage terms than any single ethnic group in the world. In terms of numbers, we are referring to about 200,000 people. I needed to be in touch with the majority of that readership. The interest was there; the Conference of 1995 had proved that. It is true that history at the grassroots level is predominantly embedded in the oral context but that situation is changing. More books are going into school libraries. Also, the Fiji Department of Education is searching for vernacular material. Hence, when I launched my first bilingual book – *Mai Kea Ki Vei* – at the Methodist Conference of 1996, 800 copies sold in the first two days and I could afford an immediate reprinting. The key to the book's appeal was its ample use of the Fijian language – both translations of English seminar papers and transcriptions of the Fijian oral stories. I later heard that copies of *Mai Kea Ki Vei* have reached the upper

2 D. Munro and A. Thornely (eds), *The Covenant Makers: Islander missionaries in the Pacific* (Suva 1996).

tributaries of the Rewa River and the outer islands of Fiji. I have made no money from this book, and I will not make any from the IPS publication because they pay no royalties, in order to keep the cost down. However, my greatest satisfaction is to know that *Mai Kea Ki Vei* is being read extensively.

Turning to the second question, I wish to engage in a reflective, speculative and perhaps controversial exercise on both the significance and relevance of writing bilingual history. My feelings about this are a mixture of the personal and the objective, of experience intertwined with analysis. At the outset, I need to acknowledge that some important pieces of bilingual history have already appeared, though they are noteworthy by their rarity. (I am here relying on my memory, because the Mitchell Library surprisingly does not carry these books, but I am pretty sure that Hank Nelson's Penguin history of Papua New Guinea was published in the two major nationwide languages of PNG, while Neville Threlfall's history of the United Church in Papua New Guinea was also published in English and Pidgin. I know for a fact, because I have copies of the book, that the Vanuatu government-sponsored history of their islands was a remarkable trilingual effort in English, French and local Pidgin.)³

In the wider political and cultural framework, what I have to say is buttressed by the bewildering speed of national developments in Melanesia in the last 12 months. From East Timor right through to Fiji, we have witnessed the demonstration of vigorous and violent moves in the assertion of indigenous rights, described variously as localism, tribalism, regionalism, racialism, nationalism. Explicit in all of these movements is an exploration of identity and roots. In fact I would venture to suggest that the fundamentalism being witnessed in the Islamic, Christian and Hindu religious worlds over the last 10 to 20 years has as its foundation the same search for selfhood and security that we see in more recent Pacific Islander political and cultural movements.

The assertive demonstration of race identity will in time, if it has not already, lead to the fostering of local languages and beyond that the demand for vernacular literature. To extrapolate further, the virtual monopoly which Westerners hold over the writing of Pacific History (together with the use of English and French to convey those historical interpretations) will eventually come to an end, and it may be sooner rather than later. After all, in the Western world, it is rare indeed that a country accepts the idea that their major histories emanate from regions beyond their boundaries, more particularly in a language that is not vernacular. At present, that anomalous situation remains the case in the Pacific. I doubt it will be for much longer. Ownership and identity are emotive and powerful concepts which are shaking societies to the core. In short, outsiders wishing to write will need to be more sensitive to the populist role of the vernacular language.

Certainly there is at least one major exception to this development and that is in the area of general or survey history. Where a piece of writing embraces the whole of the South Pacific, then either English or French will obviously be employed;

3 H.N. Nelson, *Papua New Guinea: Black unity or black chaos?* (Ringwood 1972); Neville Threlfall, *One Hundred Years in the Islands: The Methodist/United Church in the New Guinea Islands Region, 1875-1975* (Toksavé, na Buk Dipatmen, United Church New Guinea Islands Region 1975); *Vanuatu: Twenti wan tingting long team blong independens* (Suva 1980).

however, even in this case, the credibility of those histories will increasingly depend either on sole Pacific Island authorship or substantive Islander contribution.

A central part of my research on this subject involved going back to the very beginnings of *The Journal of Pacific History* and tracing the idea of bilingual writing over the course of almost 40 years. What degree of credibility is given to this idea? In the very first journal article in 1966, Professor Davidson observed that those writing in the area of Christian history would be 'largely dependent on records in the vernacular language'. 'In our own time', Davidson concluded, 'the European Age has ended, and the world order that has emerged is one in which people of all countries lay claim to equal recognition, in terms of legal rights and human dignity'.⁴ I would suggest that the equality of vernacular text is implied in Davidson's words.

Five years later, we read the words of Harry Maude who, having recalled his 20 years living alongside people of the Pacific, realised 'that here was a society possessing an innate historical sense far transcending our own'. And Maude concluded, '[Pacific History] has a very practical and therapeutic role to enact in assisting the rehabilitation of the Pacific peoples...by renewing their self-respect and providing them with a secure historical base'.⁵ Does not self-respect derive partially – if not considerably – from the communication of history in a people's living language?

There follows a gap of almost 20 years in which I search in vain for comment related to bilingual history. My attention is caught in 1990 by an article by Nicholas Thomas on 'Partial texts: representation, colonialism and agency in Pacific History'.⁶ Maybe here might be a breakthrough but no. On the one hand, the material is largely devoted to the 'contests of interpretations' among European historians and anthropologists of the Pacific, such matter indicating, in my opinion, the extent to which expatriate researchers have become removed from the realm of discussion and learning currently pursued within the Pacific communities. This latter comment is not to be interpreted in a patronising way but stems from my own experience of teaching mature-aged Pacific Islander students both in the Pacific and in Sydney. Their study and understanding of history is generally focused on securing a good knowledge of the available written sources; this goal remains a limited hope beyond academic centres on the rim of the Pacific. Thus intellectual debate by Pacific Islanders on historical issues in the Pacific will only flourish when the fundamentals of securing a good working knowledge of a particular history have been satisfied.

On the other hand, Thomas does address the valid question of the audience for Pacific history – for whom is Pacific history written? – a question more directly tackled by Doug Munro in 1994.⁷ Both Thomas and Munro properly point out that there should be no boundaries in the subject matter available to all researchers, provided they approach their subject in an appropriate way, taking into account the

4 J.W. Davidson, 'Problems of Pacific history', *Journal of Pacific History* (hereinafter *JPH*), 1 (1966), 19, 21.

5 H.E. Maude, 'Pacific history – past, present and future', *JPH*, 6 (1971), 24.

6 Nicholas Thomas, 'Partial texts: representation, colonialism and agency in Pacific history', *JPH*, 25 (1990), 139-58.

7 Doug Munro, 'Who "owns" Pacific history? Reflections on the insider/outsider dichotomy', *JPH*, 29 (1994), 232-7.

importance of context. To which I would add: an appropriate linguistic context has to be considered.

This brief survey of journal articles suggests that the awareness of writing text in a linguistic context has not been a major discussion point in the journal; perhaps that is predictable even though I personally am disappointed. However, I hasten to conclude that the journal's literary offerings have provided one visionary comment that points us forward. In the 1991 volume of *The Journal of Pacific History* – hidden in the depths of a weighty article on the French Language in the Pacific – linguist Darrell Tryon reminds his history colleagues that the time to change is now: 'While it is important for Pacific nations to have access to the world of learning through French and English', Tryon writes, 'it has become more and more obvious that national identities in the Pacific are built on national local languages and that especially in this post-colonial era these languages must be accommodated at every level'.⁸ I am sure we can all understand the implication of that observation for our own discipline: an indigenous history can be lent – indeed has been lent – to Westerners or outsiders; we must be conscious of returning it to the people, if I can stretch the metaphor, with linguistic 'interest'.

I do not denigrate the rich library of Pacific historiography that the passing years have given us; my plea is primarily for serious consideration of legitimate ways forward which take us closer to the subject audience. In this brief and concluding section of my paper, I wish to consider bilingual history in the light of the Conference theme – Beyond Mission.

I appreciate the sentiment behind the phrase Beyond Mission. A strong desire exists to move Christian history or mission-centred contact history beyond the simple study of missionaries and issues surrounding them. Such a movement has been going on as fruits of the post-colonial and post-modern era. To a large extent, this movement has involved expatriate writers. I would contend, however, that our Western understanding of church and mission issues has not been appropriately taken across into the receiving or subject culture. (Instead of 'taken across' a writer like Lamin Sanneh, Forman's successor at Yale, would use the word 'translated' in its broadest sense.)⁹ Many of the books well known in our academic environment are not easily or widely available in the local context and frequently engage with issues that simply are out of touch with indigenous points of reference.

I am referring here to Pacific church history matters but I would suspect that my observations apply in other areas of history and indeed in other disciplines. The fact is that, in church history in the Pacific, there is still a huge amount of interest in knowing the basic narrative and primary source material of the contact period. Although oral traditions preserve some valuable stories that need to be shared, those same traditions wish to come into dialogue – and understand their association – with the record of written sources. This can be carried out more appropriately, perhaps even more thoroughly, with history in the vernacular. I would say that Western

8 Darrell Tryon, 'The French language in the Pacific', *JPH*, 26 (1991), 286.

9 See Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The missionary impact on culture* (New York 1993; first printing 1989).

historians have reached a certain point on an imaginary line of historical investigation but the vernacular audience remains some distance behind, still grappling with issues frequently dismissed in our quarters as old-fashioned or irrelevant. There is a need to pause, look back and reconsider the appropriate pathways along that line.

Writing exclusively in the English language – or for that matter French – does not allow a ready entry of text into the context. A bilingual history goes some way towards closing the gap which has opened up between the Western historian and the indigenous audience. All of us have passion for our subject matter and a privilege to work among cultures outside our own. In order to retain that privilege, along with our professional integrity and our credibility among the receiving populace, our challenge in this century is to communicate in ways more sensitive to the local context.

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Pacific Lives, Pacific Places



We live in a constantly dissolving moment as the world leaps boundaries of technological and cultural change which appeared uncrossable just a few years ago. Certainties crack open, our confidence about our history is undermined. Over the last 50 years Pacific History has become a vast and complex field of multi-disciplinary analysis practised by historians, anthropologists, linguists, prehistorians, literary and cultural studies critics, even natural scientists. It involves discourses about complex groups and communities, whose foundations are constantly being re-drawn.

The conference of the Pacific History Association held in 2000 provided the opportunity to re-think some of these matters, under the banner 'Bursting Boundaries: Places, Persons, Gender and Disciplines'. It met in the shadow of the armed coup of 19 May in Fiji, trouble in the Solomon Islands, and instability in Irian Jaya, giving a sharp currency to discussions about the meltdown of borders, lives and disciplines. Scholars have been forced to think actively about their understandings of the past, and about questions of political and moral judgement.

Lines that create Lives is a major theme in exploring boundaries. These essays reflect a variety of biographical modes, demonstrating the richness of the field in its approaches to this genre.

In *Pacific Lives, Pacific Places* authors have been challenged to reflect on the lines that have circumscribed their activities and to move beyond them. This volume is designed to mark a moment of recognition and personal re-examination by individual scholars of the various boundaries that have dominated their lives.