

Tok Blong Pasifik

News and Views on the Pacific Islands

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Featuring

The Noumea
Accords —
Transition to
Independence
for Kanaky?

Promoting Self-
Determination
in Te Ao Maohi

France in the
South Pacific

Special Feature

A Writer's Story —
by Commonwealth
Writers' Prize
winner Sia Figiel



Winds of Change in the French Empire?

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ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Tok Blong Pasifik is a phrase in Pidgin, a language used in parts of the Pacific. A rough equivalent would be "News from the Pacific". **Tok Blong Pasifik** (ISSN: 1196-8206) is published by the South Pacific Peoples Foundation of Canada (SPPF). Our aim is to promote awareness of development, social justice, environment and other issues of importance to Pacific Islanders. Through the magazine, we hope to provide readers with a window on the Pacific that will foster understanding and promote support for Pacific Island peoples. SPPF gratefully acknowledges support for this publication from the Canadian International Development Agency.

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Cover Photo: Political graffiti in Noumea, Kanaky.
Photo by Ingrid Kircher.



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Tok Tok

Will the walls of empire come tumbling down?

**SPPF thanks our supporters
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The French have always been stubborn imperialists. As other European colonial powers in the post-1945 world moved to divest themselves of their colonial treasures and the pace of decolonisation escalated, France was a notable exception. Whether it was Indo-China, Algeria or its "overseas territories" in the Pacific, France has clung tenaciously to its empire and has fought every backward step it has been forced to make. The overseas territories and its nuclear arsenal seem interwoven into the very fabric of France's conception of itself as a continuing world power. And of course those two obsessions, empire and nuclear weapons, came together in the Pacific and have long bedeviled relations between France and the peoples of the Pacific.

How far France was prepared to go in the Pacific was illustrated by the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior in Aotearoa/New Zealand by French agents and the French government's subsequent use of economic blackmail to force the New Zealand government to release the two agents into French custody (where they were subsequently decorated for their services on behalf of the French empire).

France's resumption of nuclear testing in 1995 marked a turning point in its nuclear testing and its relationship with the Pacific. The level of negative international reaction must have shocked the French government and, for the first time, even public opinion in France was turning against the nuclear tests. The tests were ended and France subsequently signed a nuclear test ban treaty and the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. France has since begun to rebuild its relationship with Pacific nations.

The period since 1995 has also seen a gradual change in France's relationship with its Pacific territories. The recent signing of the Noumea Accords, providing greater autonomy and limited sovereignty for Kanaky/New Caledonia,

as well as provision for an eventual vote on independence, is a step that many felt France would never take. Reports from Paris indicate that the French government has also offered to discuss more limited autonomy for French Occupied Polynesia. (See pages 4-10 for these stories.)

The only country that rivals France in its stubborn and widespread adherence to a form of direct colonialism that has mostly gone out of fashion is the US. In these waning days of the Twentieth Century, the end of the decade that was to end colonialism (we'll leave the subject of economic neo-colonialism to another issue of *Tok Blong Pasifik*), it is a profound irony that the two nations, which rocked the foundations of colonialism and absolutist rule in the Eighteenth Century streets of Paris and Boston and Philadelphia, may become the last adherents to the imperialism they once opposed.

France may be changing, though there is still a long road to travel. Many remain suspicious of France's motives and how far it is eventually prepared to go. If there is suspicion, France should not be surprised considering how it has had to be dragged kicking and protesting to this point. But the mice continue to nibble at the foundations and the walls have begun to shake. Nor is the US immune to this challenge from the 'little people' and 'little nations' that remain under its sway. The news updates in this issue of *Tok Blong Pasifik* contain stories about protests against US rule in Hawai'i and a UN study that challenges the legality of the US annexation of Hawai'i.

And as winds, or at least breezes, of change blow through the tattered remains of the French empire, it is perhaps Washington most of all that needs to adjust its sails.

Stuart Wulff for SPPF





PACIFIC NEWS UPDATES

Regional

Forum Meeting Addresses Economic & Environmental Issues

The 29th South Pacific Forum, meeting in Pohnpei in August, featured several sessions and presentations focusing heavily on economic liberalisation and private sector development as the keys for development in the region. Forum leaders also approved a campaign to have the UN adopt a "vulnerability index" in deciding which nations have "least developed country" status, which often merits more favourable aid treatment. With their relatively high per capita incomes, Pacific Island countries often don't have such status or are in danger of losing it (Tonga lost it last year). The World Bank and Asian Development Bank already recognise the special vulnerability of small island states and give concessional aid terms. The Forum hopes to see such criteria incorporated for LDCs and to see vulnerability to climate change as one of the factors. Forum leaders endorsed an aviation action plan that included a proposal for liberalisation of air service agreements among Forum members and the proposed creation of a Pacific air space managed as a single entity. They reiterated the region's "deep concerns" about climate change and encouraged all countries to ratify the Kyoto Protocol as soon as possible. Forum leaders noted their "deep concern" at the nuclear arms race in South Asia and urged the US to ratify the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. Taking note of the International Atomic Energy Agency's conclusion that radioactive contamination at France's Pacific nuclear test sites was at levels that were of no concern, the Forum thanked the IAEA but noted limitations in their study. Saying that the study should be fully assessed, they called on France to continue radiological monitoring of the atolls. Forum leaders noted their

concern about plutonium and nuclear waste shipments through the Pacific. They also adopted a proposal for a Southern Ocean whale sanctuary.

[From: *Pacific Report*, Sep 2/98; *Pacific News Bulletin*, Aug/98]

Forum Offers Observer Status to New Caledonia

South Pacific Forum leaders "warmly welcomed" the signing of the Noumea Accords and approved observer status for New Caledonia at Forum meetings. The leaders agreed that the Forum should continue a monitoring role during the implementation of the Accords.

[From: *Pacific Report*, Sep 2/98]

Dissension (and Apathy?) over Forum

Many Pacific leaders and officials reportedly came away from this year's Forum meeting resentful about the "hijacking" of the Forum's agenda by Australia and New Zealand. A sore point was the extensive time spent discussing a whaling sanctuary proposal from the two regional "superpowers" when this year's theme was to be economic issues and when many Island members are facing major economic problems. This year's controversy follows the split between Australia and Island members last year over climate change. Several Pacific leaders, including ironically John Howard of Australia and Jenny Shipley of New Zealand, gave the Forum meeting a miss this year.

[From: InterPress Service, Sep 8/98]

Concern Over Sea Launch Project

South Pacific Forum leaders expressed concern about potential environmental effects from a proposed satellite launching project in the Pacific and called for a comprehensive environmental impact assessment. The Sea Launch consortium companies from the US, Russia, Ukraine and Norway proposes to launch satellites from a converted oil rig platform anchored just outside Kiribati's exclusive economic

zone. The South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the Kiribati government and others have voiced concern about the project, but have been largely ignored by the consortium and the US government, which maintain that they are free to do as they want in international waters.

[From: *Pacific Report*, Jul 6/98 & Aug 14/98; *Pacific News Bulletin*, Aug/98]

NGO Forum Puts People First

Delegates at a NGO Parallel Forum preceding the South Pacific Forum were critical of the profits before people orientation of economic globalisation and the liberalisation strategies being promoted by the Forum and its aid donors. The Parallel Forum communiqué stated that the Forum's Economic Action Plan is based on narrow economic models which are not a sound basis for Pacific Islands development. The communiqué proposed an approach that included increased trade and cooperation between Pacific Island countries, expansion of the ACP-EU development cooperation agreement (Lome Convention) to other Pacific Island states and territories, and increased social development spending. The Parallel Forum reiterated support for a nuclear free Pacific and was critical of the recent IAEA report on France's nuclear test sites. The communiqué proposed a range of Forum actions on decolonisation issues in French Occupied Polynesia, Hawai'i, Guam, West Papua and East Timor. The Parallel Forum expressed support for the peace process in Bougainville and urged self-determination for the people of Bougainville. Support was also expressed for a number of actions in support of human and Indigenous rights.

[From: *Fourth NGO Parallel Forum Communiqué*]

Indonesia Offers Limited Autonomy for East Timor

The Indonesian government has offered limited autonomy for East Timor. Under the proposed plan, East Timor would be given control over its own affairs in all areas except foreign affairs, defence and financial matters. The offer was made in UN brokered meetings between Indonesia and Portugal (the former colonial power). Portugal has agreed to further talks on the Indonesian proposal. However, as the offer is linked to international acceptance of Indonesia's annexation of East Timor, it has been rejected by East Timorese political leaders within and outside East Timor.

The East Timorese are willing to consider an interim period of autonomy only if it leads to an eventual vote on independence. They also insist that Indonesia must include them in the talks.

[From: *tapol*, Sep/98; *New York Times*, Aug 6/98]

Melanesia

West Papuans Call for Independence

West Papuans took to the streets in July in several towns to raise West Papuan flags and demand independence. On July 1-2, hundreds of protesters gathered outside the legislative assembly in Jayapura. Many were injured when Indonesian troops attacked the crowd. A protest at nearby Cendrawasih University on the 2nd saw troops fire on students; two students were injured with one later dying. Several days (July 2-6) of protests and flying the Morning Star flag in Biak led to an attack by troops in which over 100 people were shot, with several being killed (numbers in dispute). Thousands of people participated in a July 2 demonstration in Sorong, during which several people were shot by Indonesian forces.

[From: *tapol*, Sep/98; *Inside Indonesia*, Oct-Dec/98; *Pacific News Bulletin*, Jul/98]

Bougainville Twists and Turns on the Road to Peace

While the peace process has continued, differences between the PNG government and various factions in Bougainville have delayed implementation of important steps in the process well behind the agreed timelines. The PNG government has also been slow to implement some commitments under the peace process, but finally took the important step on August 19 of rescinding the "call-out order" under which PNG troops have been on a war footing in Bougainville. As both sides stake out their incompatible visions for Bougainville's future all major parties in Bougainville agreeing on the eventual goal of independence and the PNG government ruling this out the final endpoint of the process remains murky. Francis Ona, still outside the peace process, has renamed his faction the Mekamui National Chief's Assembly to distinguish it from his former BIG/BRA comrades.

[From: *Pacific News Bulletin*, Sep/98; *PNG Post-Courier*, Aug 7/98]

PNG Tidal Wave Kills over 2000

An earthquake induced tidal wave struck Papua New Guinea's northwest coast July 17, destroying several communities and killing over 2,000 people. The disaster prompted a large relief effort supported by donors within PNG and internationally (see page 28).

[From: *PNG Independent*, various issues]

Drought Puts Financial Strain on Fiji

The drought in Fiji, which has affected everything from water supplies to the sugar harvest, has cost the Fiji economy more than F\$150 million. A survey in mid-September showed 55,000 households in need of emergency assistance. As a result, the government has sought foreign aid to assist with the emergency.

[From: *Fiji Daily Post*, Sep 19/98 & Sep 24/98]

Fiji's New Constitution Takes Effect

A new constitution for Fiji came into effect on July 27. The constitution, approved last year, replaces the controversial post-coups constitution. Among other changes, the new constitution provides for Fiji's first human rights commission. Fiji and India have announced that they will be reestablishing diplomatic relations, broken off in 1990.

[From: *Fiji Times*, Jul 21/98; Amnesty International release, Jul 22/98]

UK Cancels Solomons Debt

The British government has agreed to cancel S\$26.6 million in debt in support of the Solomon Islands' structural adjustment programme.

[From: *Pacific Report*, Aug 14/98]

Polynesia

Hawaiians Mark 100 Years Since Annexation

Several thousand people gathered at Iolani Palace to protest the 100th anniversary of the US annexation of Hawai'i. At Noon on August 12, 1898, the Hawaiian flag was lowered and replaced with a US flag to mark Hawai'i's annexation. Organisers of the commemoration, which included a "Fallen Warriors" vigil and a march as well as the Iolani Palace ceremonies, provided their counterpoint to the 1898 event by ceremonially raising the Hawaiian flag over the palace. A smaller

march protesting the US annexation was held in Washington DC.

[From: *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, Aug 13/98; *Washington Post*, Aug 9/98]

UN Report Questions US Annexation of Hawai'i

A recent report submitted to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations challenges the legality of the US annexation of Hawai'i and recommends that Hawai'i be returned to a UN List of Non-Self Governing Territories. The report notes that the US government has already acknowledged the illegality of the 1893 overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. The report then questions the legality of the subsequent "unequal treaty" of annexation that provided the basis for the US annexation. Hawaiian sovereignty leaders hailed the report, which will work its way through the UN system before submission to the General Assembly.

[From: *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Aug 11/98]

Questions About Moruroa Safety

France's environment minister has called for further study of the safety of France's former nuclear weapons test facilities in Polynesia. Dominique Voynet, a Green Party member, stated that the results of the International Atomic Energy Agency inquiry were "only partially reassuring, raising a number of questions, and should therefore be completed". Her comments also followed the release of a report by the French Defence ministry claiming that there was "no relation" between cancer cases in French Polynesia and the testing.

[From: *Fiji Daily Post*, Aug 6/98]

Canada

Inco Looks for Partners for New Caledonia Mine

Inco Ltd., looking to sell a 20-30% interest in its Goro nickel project, says that it has received expressions of interest from "all the big players" and is evaluating potential partners. Inco is building a US\$50 million pilot plant, expected to be in operation by mid-1999, and is undertaking other engineering work on the mining project.

[From: *Victoria Times-Colonist*, Aug 14/98]

Winds of Change in the French Empire?

The Noumea Accords and Decolonisation in Kanaky (New Caledonia)

by Nic Maclellan

After violent clashes in the mid-1980s, the Kanak independence movement, Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS), signed the Matignon Accords in 1988. This agreement, negotiated with the French government and the conservative settler party Rassemblement Pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR), set out a ten year transition with a vote on the future of New Caledonia by the end of this year.

However, the 1998 referendum will not be an act of self-determination, following the signing of the Noumea Accords on May 5, 1998 by the FLNKS, RPCR and the French government.

At this stage there is a period of reflection and debate about the Noumea Accords, with some people welcoming the agreement as an historic step forward for the independence movement while others are privately critical of the plan. If ratified in a referendum on November 8, this new agreement will mean a further 15-20 year transition before a referendum on self-determination for New Caledonia (see Page 5 for details of the new accords).

Many Kanaks accepted the ten year transition after the 1988 Matignon Accords in the expectation that a vote in 1998 would lead to political independence for New Caledonia. Some Kanaks also feel that, as the Indigenous population, they should be the sole people entitled to vote on the future, as they have been colonised since France annexed the islands in 1853. But the FLNKS leadership has compromised its vision of independence to

Stop Press
Accords Referendum
A November 8 referendum saw 71% of those who voted backing the Noumea Accords and greater autonomy for New Caledonia.
[From: Radio Australia, Nov. 9/98]

build links with the 'victims of history' - the descendants of convicts, settlers and indentured labourers brought to the country through the colonial period.

FLNKS leaders have been touring the country to explain the new agreement to grassroots independence activists and the wider community. FLNKS President Rock Wamytan stresses the historic gains of the Noumea Accords: a recognition by France and the RPCR of the colonial past; unprecedented changes to the French Constitution to create a New Caledonian citizenship; restrictions on voting and controls on immigration which may swing the political balance towards the Kanaks; the "irreversible" transfer of powers to New Caledonian institutions. Many Kanaks have also welcomed measures to recognise Indigenous Kanak culture and identity.

But some independence activists voice concern over other aspects: the 15-20 year delay before there will be an act of self-determination; the reinforcement and legitimisation of the RPCR's power in the local administration; social and environmental impacts of a development model based on mining and tourism; the rewriting of history and France's central role in the colonial process, with the French State presenting itself as an independent arbitrator between pro- and anti-independence parties.

People are also reflecting on the experience of the last decade since the signing of the Matignon Accords. The Matignon process has achieved some steps forward for the Kanak population in the areas of land reform, culture and control of the strategic minerals sector.



Photo: Ingrid Kircher

Kanak rally in 1985

THE NOUMEA ACCORDS

Key elements of the Noumea Accords signed on May 5, 1998, include:

- Constitutional changes to New Caledonia's status within the French Republic, creating "shared sovereignty" and a new citizenship for New Caledonians, and ending the current status as a *territoire d'outre-mer* (overseas territory) of France.
- Previously, the French constitution allowed New Caledonia to vote on independence or to remain as an 'overseas territory' of France, but there is no provision for the transitional status created by the Noumea Accords. In July a joint sitting of the French National Assembly and Senate approved a bill creating an annex to the French Constitution which changed New Caledonia's constitutional status.
- Elections in 1999 for new provincial assemblies, a Congress and Executive for New Caledonia, replacing the existing territorial parliament.
- The current customary council of New Caledonia will be transformed into a 'Customary Senate' of 16 members which must be consulted on issues that affect Kanak identity. The new assemblies will match the existing three provinces, while the Congress will be elected for five year terms and have powers to create laws. Voting will be limited to New Caledonian citizens rather than French nationals (in most cases those people resident in the country since 1988 and their descendants, though there are detailed exceptions set out in the Accords).
- An 'irreversible' transfer of powers from Paris to local authorities and the new Congress in New Caledonia.
- Powers currently held by the French State will be transferred to New Caledonia in four stages. Unlike the autonomy statutes for French Polynesia, these powers cannot revert to Paris once transferred:
 - a) Some will be transferred as soon as the new political system comes into force in 1999 (local employment, labour legislation, foreign trade, programmes for primary education, teacher training, provincial administration);
 - b) Others will be transferred in stages over a decade (police regulations, civil security, finances for public institutions, civil and commercial law, local government regulations, control of public institutions and mining regulations);
 - c) Some powers will be shared between New Caledonia and the French State. While international relations are within the state's responsibility, New Caledonia can join international and regional organisations as an observer (such as the South Pacific Forum, United Nations, UNESCO, etc). New Caledonia can be represented in the countries of the region and can create agreements with these countries in the areas of its powers;
 - d) Justice, public order, defence, finance and currency will remain as French State powers until after the referendum scheduled for between 2013 and 2018.
- Measures to recognise indigenous Kanak culture and identity (highlighted by a preamble to the Noumea Accords which acknowledges the "shadows" of the colonial period). This will include the creation of a Kanak customary Senate, introduction of indigenous languages into the school curriculum, land reform, the return of Kanak cultural objects and artifacts held in museums and galleries in France and other countries, and negotiations over the name, symbols, anthem and flag of the country.

The Noumea Accords provide for a further 15-20 year transition before a referendum on self-determination for New Caledonia, possibly leading to the "emancipation" of the territory. A vote on New Caledonia's political status will be delayed until after three terms of the Congress and before the end of the fourth term (i.e. between 2013 and 2018). The FLNKS sees the accords as a guarantee of the transition to full sovereignty, as this referendum would be based on a limited voter roll of people who were born in New Caledonia or who have had a lengthy period of residency (specific criteria are in the accords).

A positive vote would result in a full transfer of sovereignty to New Caledonia and the assumption of international status as an independent nation. If the vote is negative, the Accords provide for the possibility of further votes on the independence question.

This synopsis of the Noumea Accords was prepared by Nic Maclellan.



Noumea street scene

Photo: David Robie

After Kanak protests and blockades in 1997, a February 1998 agreement transferred nickel reserves between the Northern Province and Société Le Nickel (SLN), opening the way for the construction of a new nickel smelter in the north by the Canadian corporation Falconbridge. Kanak identity and culture remain a central part of the struggle, as shown with the June 1998 opening of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, named after the late leader of the FLNKS.

But many Kanaks have criticised the distribution of Matignon wealth and employment. The Matignon process brought significant inflows of government grants and foreign investment to New Caledonia. Most of this money, however, was paid to French public servants, the military and French corporations, in association with local conservative politicians (eg. of 97.6 billion CFP transferred in 1996, 40% went for public service salaries and pensions, 11% for goods and services for the public service, and 20% for the armed forces!).

At the same time, concerns over housing, health and education increase, as more Kanaks move to the capital Noumea. Those with jobs can't afford the apartments built with Matignon money and the squatters' movement in Noumea supports poor families living in shanties on the fringes of the urban centre.

As a result of immigration the Indigenous Kanaks have become a minority in their own land. The Kanaks actually declined from 44.8% to 44.1% of the population during the decade since Matignon, in spite of the high birthrate in the Indigenous community. The European population increased by 10-15,000 in the same period, affecting local employment. The '400 cadres' programme established under Matignon increased the number of Kanaks employed in the public service - between 1989 and 1996 the number of Kanak cadres increased from 143 to 344. In the same period, however, the number of French public servants from Europe increased from 2,078 to 4,548!

In May, FLNKS leaders started a series of meetings around the country to explain their vision of the Noumea Accords and how they could lead to independence. An interesting feature of the meetings

was the presence of many 'Caldoche' settlers. FLNKS President Rock Wamytan has also visited other Melanesian countries in the lead up to this year's South Pacific Forum to explain the new agreement, raise the issue of observer status for New Caledonia at the Forum, and promote trade and cultural links.

The period after the signing has seen a realignment of forces in the pro-independence movement. Key members of the early FLNKS leadership have broken from the independence coalition to form a new political grouping, the Fédération des Comités de Co-ordination des

Indépendantistes (including Leopold Joredié, François Burck, and Aymard Bouanaoue from the main pro-independence party Union Calédonienne; Cono Hamu of FDIL; Edmond Nekiriai of UPM; and Raphael Mapou of Palika, who has created a new party called Têpeû 1998). These political shifts will continue in the lead up to elections which will be held for a new congress and provincial assemblies in 1999.

Even though the RPCR has signed the Noumea Accords, RPCR leader Jacques Lafleur is working to exacerbate these divisions in the independence movement. In June the RPCR voted to remove the FLNKS from key positions in the Territorial Congress, denying FLNKS President Rock Wamytan the position of First Vice-President. The FLNKS lost control of a number of commissions of the current congress, only protecting

their leading position in the Sports and Culture Commission (no small matter given the forthcoming Olympic Games in Sydney and the 8th South Pacific Arts Festival, to be held in Noumea in October 2000).

In the coming months, there will be ongoing debate about the future of the country. The Noumea Accords do not guarantee a smooth transition to independence and the need for international solidarity with the Kanak people remains strong.

*Nic Maclellan works with the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre in Suva, Fiji. He is a co-author of **After Moruroa — France in the South Pacific** (see review on page 10).*

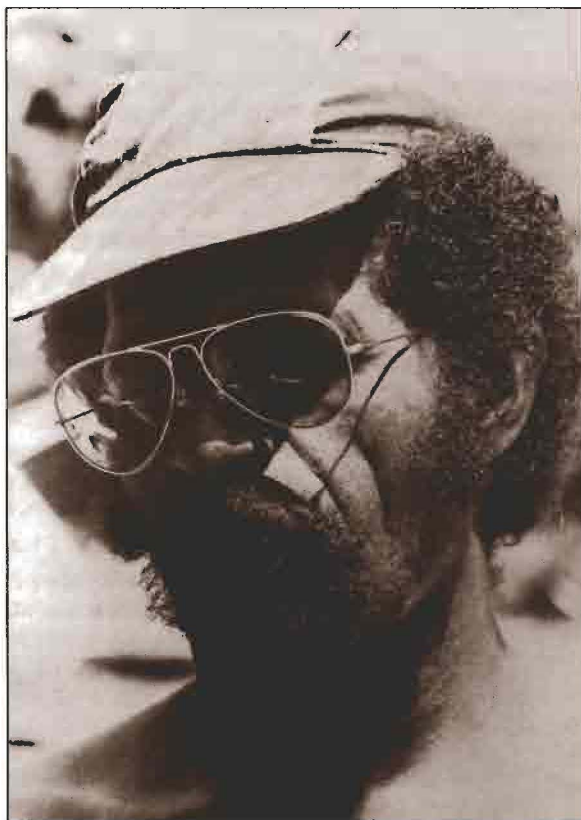


Photo: Mouvement Union Calédonienne

Éloi Machoro, independence leader killed by French police, but whose memory lives on in the hearts of his people. What would he think of the latest accords?



Promoting Self-Determination in Te Ao Maohi

An Interview with Roland Oldham of Hiti Tau

Hiti Tau is a coalition of NGOs and community groups in Te Ao Maohi (French Occupied Polynesia). Hiti Tau member, Roland Oldham, was interviewed by Stuart Wulff in Fiji in May, while Oldham was on a speaking tour that also included Aotearoa/New Zealand.

WULFF:

Why are you on a speaking tour at this time?

OLDHAM:

After nuclear testing resumed in 1995, there was opposition from all over the Pacific and from Europe. When the tests ended, we were abandoned by international attention. The claim seemed to be, "Now it's over, everything is back to normal." But for us, many problems remained: all these years of silence and mystery surrounding the Moruroa test site; 30 years of transformation of a society because of nuclear testing; 30 years of an artificial economy dependent on nuclear testing. That had changed completely the way of life of our people. A lot of our people abandoned our self-sufficient way of living and became completely dependent on the nuclear economy. Now we have to rebuild our economy. And worst of all, the French government keeps lying, saying that the Moruroa testing was one of the safest in the world and that there were no effects on the

environment or the health of the workers. We've been struggling for the past 30 years to get the French government to tell the truth about Moruroa. Today, Moruroa is still a big mystery.

We are very concerned about health care for the people who worked on Moruroa and the surrounding population. We still cannot have access to the medical files of those workers. So last year we did a survey to give the workers, for the very first time, an opportunity to talk about their experiences on Moruroa. Until now it has been a state secret. If the workers talked about Moruroa, they lost their jobs. Even today, it has not been easy, because a lot of workers are scared to talk. 15,000 people worked on Moruroa in those 30 years of experimentation. We got a list of 2,000 ex-workers and managed to interview 737 people who were courageous enough to talk. The pressure is still heavy. When we started this survey, the French police came to our office, trying to force us to hand over the list of 2,000 workers who wanted to speak.

Contrary to what the French authorities say, everything is not safe. A lot of people who worked on Moruroa are dying of cancer. There is no study of that. Nothing is done about it. Generations to come are also victims. That's why we are doing this tour, to raise the awareness of the people of the Pacific and to lobby organisations and politicians. Now that France has signed treaties on banning nuclear testing, we think, "It's good, but it's not good enough if the whole truth is not revealed about Moruroa." The contamination remains and the questions remain in the minds of the workers.

WULFF:

Now that there are no longer jobs at Moruroa, how does the French government keep people from speaking out?

OLDHAM:

They still have many ways to put pressure on people. The media are controlled by the government. Every time we tried to speak, they wrote things in the paper that destroyed what the workers have to say. So that's why we had to do the survey. And if you take a stand against nuclear testing, it means you're automatically taking a stand against colonialism. It's not very easy. You may lose your job. That has happened to a few of us, including myself. Some families are being paid a little pension for a husband or family member who

France Agrees to Discuss Polynesia Autonomy

The French government has expressed a willingness to look at increased autonomy for its overseas territories, including French Polynesia (Te Ao Maohi). President Jacques Chirac stated in late May that he supported greater autonomy for all the territories similar to that recently agreed for New Caledonia. Following a June 2 meeting with French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, French Polynesian Territorial President Gaston Flosse confirmed that the French government was willing to begin discussions on increased autonomy.

died after working in Moruroa. Those people are scared to speak, because this pension will be cut off. I now work for the public service in housing. Through my work in social housing, I know that it was hard for those people who have talked about their experience in Moruroa to get their houses rebuilt after the cyclone.

WULFF:

What are the principal findings and conclusions of the survey that you did last year?

OLDHAM:

It was a sociological survey about living conditions on Moruroa. We hope that more surveys will be done on environmental, health and psychological effects of the nuclear industry's 30 years on Moruroa. A key finding is that 94% of the workers had medical tests before they went to Moruroa, but only 48% had medical exams after they left. None of the 15,000 people who worked in Moruroa got the results of those examinations. The workers ask, "Are we OK? If we are

healthy, why don't we get the results to reassure us?" Another finding that really surprised us is that 10% of those who worked on Moruroa were under 18, the legislated working age at that time; some were as young as 10 years old. The French government denied this. The government also denied everything the workers were saying about fish poisoning. They'd been forbidden to eat fish on Moruroa, but a Polynesian cannot live without his traditional food, so after awhile some went fishing in the lagoon and ate the fish. Those people who did get sick and were sent to a military hospital. The survey also talks about coconuts, which in some areas were forbidden. A worker is not a doctor, but he asks, "How come we could not swim in those areas if it's safe? If I cannot fish, that means there's something wrong with that fish. If I cannot drink from the coconut, maybe the coconut tree is also contaminated." There is no answer yet to those questions. The workers ask that Moruroa and Fangataufa be opened up to independent missions of scientists and also ask for free access to their own medical files. It's unthinkable that in a country like France, a country of so-called human rights, the workers cannot have access to their medical files.

WULFF:

The opposition to nuclear testing also helped provide impetus to the movement for independence or sovereignty. Yet many people have said that the loss of the testing programme and a French pullout would be an economic disaster. What is the response of groups like Hiti Tau on the question of whether independence is financially viable?

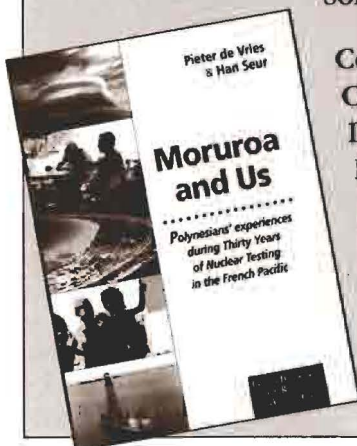
OLDHAM:

A main concern is rebuilding our local economy. Values were lost after 30 years of nuclear testing. Everybody had been bought by the money. The workers say in the book that the main reason they went to work on Moruroa was the salary. We have to rebuild the way of thinking of people. It's not easy after 30 years of nuclear testing and over 150 years of colonialism. The system has tools like television and media to keep colonising our people. Hiti Tau has invested in sustainable development alternatives because the development we've been seeing up to now is not for the wellbeing of the Indigenous people. Nuclear testing has been the kind of development that encourages corruption at a top level in our government and way down in the grassroots. The money they poured into Tahiti was only for nuclear testing.

Today they are proposing tourism development, but still the grassroots people are not involved and many projects are against the wellbeing of the people. For example, in Tahiti they are giving multinationals the right to a big space in the lagoon. This lagoon was

New Book on Impact of France's Nuclear Tests

Moruroa and Us: Polynesians' experiences during Thirty years of Nuclear Testing in the French Pacific, by Pieter de Vries & Han Seur, has recently been published by the Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Paix et les Conflits. The book presents the results of a recent sociological survey among former workers at the Moruroa and Fangataufa test sites in French Polynesia (see interview for further details). The study was co-sponsored by Hiti Tau, the Eglise Evangélique de Polynésie française and the Europe Pacific Solidarity Network.



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where our ancestors got their food, their fish; people today still live on the fishing. Big hotels are being built on some islands. When you build a hotel with even 100 rooms, it changes completely the way of life of the people. We think this is only development for multinationals to steal our resources. That's not the sort of development we want. We are putting Indigenous people first and trying to stop this stealing by multinationals. We are encouraging our people to think of projects, to master their own destiny, their own development. We have succeeded in Moorea to build cooperatives run by Indigenous people and they are starting to market their products, selling around the world. Of course we cannot work at a big level, but one thing is sure. When grassroots people sell vanilla, that money goes right into the local society. Until now, the local people in projects were only exploited - a modern slavery where local people clean the rooms, get very low salaries and get kicked out of jobs at the slightest thing. For example, Bora Bora is well known all over the world, but when you see how the local people live you ask yourself, "Where has the money gone?"

WULFF:

What are some of the local cooperative businesses that are being developed?

OLDHAM:

We are getting people to produce and market some of our traditional products. We think that a traditional product is also a symbol of our identity. It's very important for people to feel proud of these islands and their values. One such product is *monoi*, a traditional medicinal oil used by Polynesian people for massage, skin care and hair care. It is made by women who use flowers to scent coconut oil. They work every day, manipulating the coconut oil with flowers, and in one or two months they get this oil made in the traditional way. It's always been in our society, but now this knowledge of our people is being stolen by private enterprise. The industrial way of producing the *monoi* oil does not have quality. They grab a ton of oil in the factories, put it in a vat and add chemicals that have the perfume of the flowers. It is not the same thing at all. To us it's also a struggle to keep intellectual property rights in the hands of Indigenous people.

We have projects like vanilla, because it's always been part of the way of life of the people. We're also getting into taro, bananas, fishing and other traditional ways to feed the local population. Not like what's happening now, where the fishing industry is huge boats fishing for three months and taking all the tuna. The tuna don't have the chance to do what they normally do, travel from one island to another. We're trying to do development where we can preserve our natural resources and be respectful of nature. We're asking the

question, "What's going to be in 20 years?"

WULFF:

What about Hiti Tau itself? What is your organisation and programme of action?

OLDHAM:

Hiti Tau was born in 1992. We'd been watching what had been happening in our own country, feeling powerless seeing all these big changes. We started with some independent Polynesian human rights leagues and environment groups. Today we include about 45 groups — youth, human rights, women, environment and alternative and sustainable development. Hiti Tau's objective is to rebuild our nation and to get the grassroots people together. We talk about democracy and freedom. Hiti Tau is fighting for the sovereignty and rights of the Indigenous people.

WULFF:

You asked earlier what will this world be in 20 years if we carry on the way we are. What's your vision for Te Ao Maohi in 20 years?

OLDHAM:

I'm not saying we should go back. We should accept the positive things of modern day technology where people can get in contact with anywhere in the planet and much faster. We should also use the technology for learning. In 20 years I'd love to see the Indigenous people of Te Ao Maohi responsible for their destiny. I'd like to see people come first instead of money. I'd like to try to preserve nature and our resources. We should go back to some of the wisdom and knowledge that have been destroyed by modern society and try to make a balance between modern ways of life and traditional values. We'd like to see this planet live more peacefully. When we see this nuclear industry in Moruroa, any person knows that nuclear arms are built to kill millions of people. When we look at the history of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is that what we want? We are living in a very selfish world, when every group is trying to be stronger than the other, to grab things. We really hope that people get a bit more sense in their heads.

WULFF:

Does your vision include independence for Te Ao Maohi?

OLDHAM:

The destiny of this country should be in the hands of its own people, including the right of self-determination, sovereignty. In our name, 'Hiti' means 'rights' and 'Tau' means 'time', 'era' or 'sun'. It's time for the Indigenous people to rise up again.



Book Review

After Moruroa – France in the South Pacific

by Nic Maclellan and Jean Chesneaux. Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1998. 267 pages.

Review by Randall Garrison

After Moruroa is a timely and important work on the French presence in the Pacific. This is especially true given the dearth of publications in English on this topic. One strength is that it bridges the gap between English and French scholarship on the Pacific, a collaborative effort by Jean Chesneaux, emeritus professor of history at Université de Paris VII, and Nic Maclellan, Australian activist/journalist. Its timeliness is demonstrated by the changes now sweeping across the French occupied territories in the Pacific.

The title "After Moruroa" is a useful indicator of what is to come in this work. Even the very spelling of Moruroa in the manner consistent with the Maohi language (with a 'u' rather than 'o' as in the official French spelling) foreshadows the authors' view, one that is Pacific rather than Eurocentric. The title also emphasises the authors' view that nuclear testing has been central to French policy in the Pacific and that the end of nuclear testing at Moruroa potentially marks a major shift in French policy for all its Pacific territories. Perhaps most importantly, placing Moruroa in the title makes it difficult for the reader to indulge in myths of an idyllic Pacific. This book is about the real Pacific, the one scarred by cultural colonisation and nuclear testing.

After Moruroa is a history of the French-occupied territories. In Kanaky-New Caledonia this is a sometimes bitterly violent story of French settlers and an indigenous Kanak people now a minority in their own land. In Te Ao Maohi-French Polynesia it is the story of the Maohi people, still an 85% majority but a majority imprisoned in an artificial economy dependent on French subsidies and wracked by inequalities. Wallis and Futuna have suffered a benign neglect that has forced a majority of the population to move to New Caledonia in search of work. Only in the New Hebrides, where France and Britain shared colonial power, did the emergence of an independent Vanuatu allow some Pacific Islanders to regain their autonomy. Yet this was not without a struggle that nearly dismembered the territory in the attempt to preserve a French presence.

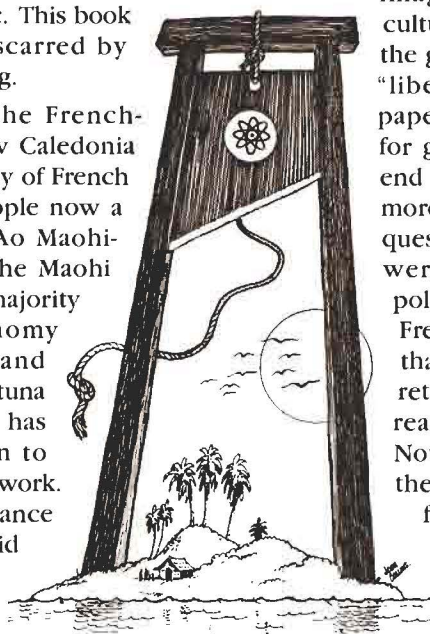
For Chesneaux and Maclellan it is the overriding interests of the French state that have always determined France's Pacific policy. From the voyages of "discovery" through the

post-war period, the consistent motivation of French action has been bolstering the position of France on the world stage. Who, other than the US and France, has had a chain of military bases stretching around the world? And who, other than France, the US and the USSR has had an independent nuclear strike force capable of being deployed around the world? France's Pacific territories have provided strategic links in a global chain of bases and a nuclear test site, both key to its great power aspirations.

While the focus of *After Moruroa* is on French policy, the growing hostility towards France as a nuclear and colonial power in the 1980s is well chronicled as is the emergence of greater contacts in trade, tourism and culture which have begun to breach the walls that kept the French Pacific an isolated enclave. Though we reach the period "after Moruroa" rather late in the book, Chesneaux and Maclellan do introduce the key factors which have been forcing France toward a new policy. Some are familiar. The military and strategic interests of France have not disappeared, only shifted with the end of nuclear testing. Some are new, including the potential bonanza of resources in the enormous maritime EEZs of France's Pacific territories. Some are ongoing as an increasingly European France struggles with the growing contradictions between integration into the European Union and holding on to overseas territories.

After Moruroa produces a story where the great power image of France and the pretensions of its cultural mission are often mocked by events on the ground. France's self-image as a champion of "liberty, equality and fraternity" could never paper over the underlying Indigenous struggle for greater autonomy or independence. In the end *After Moruroa* leaves the reader wanting more, in particular more explicit attention to the question of which of the many factors discussed were critical in forcing the break in French policy in 1996. Has the balance shifted so that French policy can now only respond to rather than attempt to shape Pacific affairs? Has the return of the French Socialist Party to power really brought a significant opening that the Noumea Accords seem to foreshadow. Certainly the vision of autonomy for Kanaky is one that few imagined would ever be acceptable to France. We look forward to hearing more from Chesneaux and Maclellan to help fill the gap in English literature on France in the Pacific.

Randall Garrison is an instructor in Pacific Rim Studies at Camosun College and former executive director of the South Pacific Peoples Foundation.





Loggers, Landowners, and Reformers in Solomon Islands

by Peter Dauvergne and
Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka

During the 1990s multinational loggers, especially from Malaysia, have destroyed large areas of forest in Solomon Islands. Logging rates rose quickly in the first half of the 1990s, especially on customary land, so that by the mid-1990s they had reached levels that would have depleted Solomon Islands of commercial timber in just over a decade.

This looming environmental disaster has been at least temporarily averted by the 1997 Asian economic crash, which has lowered international demand for Solomon Islands logs. This has provided a window of opportunity for the new government of Bartholomew Ulufa'alu to try to reform the actions and impacts of multinational timber companies.

Since coming to power in August 1997 the Ulufa'alu government has reduced the exemptions on log export taxes. It has also lowered the annual log production target to around 400,000 cubic metres, half of the 1995 and 1996 levels. While placing a moratorium on new logging licenses, it has proposed

establishing mandatory log auctions to try to lower production and raise prices.

The government is also currently reviewing forest legislation with plans to table new legislation in the near future. It is trying to improve enforcement and monitoring, and intends to increase the penalties for illegal and destructive activities. At the same time, the government is attempting to gather more accurate statistics, including a better estimate of the remaining volume of commercial timber.

The government has been especially critical of multinational timber companies. In parliamentary debate on the budget on April 20, 1998, Hilda Kari, Minister of Forests, Environment and Conservation, declared that "Our resources have been tapped by others who have only given us the crumbs as it were, by royalty payments, technology agreement, profit sharing arrangements and so on." She called for a review of "all existing licenses, whether local or foreign owned".

In this speech Minister Kari also argued that landowners often feel that logging deals are unfair and she vowed that the government

would try to rectify any injustices. She declared that the government would help "resource owners to take control of harvesting of forest resources so that the statement that resource owners must get maximum benefit is real".

Landowners and the government have good reasons for being angry with foreign loggers. Forests cover around 2.4 million hectares or 85% of the total land area in Solomon Islands. Approximately 80% of logging now occurs on customary land. To gain access to this land, multinational firms have agreed to build roads, bridges, schools and medical clinics. Yet companies have routinely broken these agreements, especially verbal ones. Sometimes companies have denied or ignored their promises. And sometimes they have evaded royalty pay-2

ments or built cheap and shoddy infrastructure projects that only last for a short time.

Skilled corporate executives have also negotiated highly favourable agreements. They have exploited ambiguous or vague laws, taken advantage of weak or corrupt leadership among landowners,



Photo: Peter Dauvergne

Sawmill on Guadalcanal

and bribed or pressured influential and defiant landowners. Corporations have also funded public meetings to negotiate agreements.

In addition, loggers have generally created far more damage than landowners expect. They have polluted rivers and streams, destroyed sacred areas and irreversibly damaged forest ecosystems (which in turn has destroyed crucial food sources). As a result of these broken promises and unscrupulous corporate tactics, many landowners have felt betrayed or cheated, both by corporations and landowner representatives, and have retaliated by threatening to take logging companies to court. However, this intention has, in many cases, been affected by the fact that landowners have limited access to legal representation. In most instances the only legal council available to landowners is through provincial magistrate offices at the provincial headquarters.

In a number of cases on Choiseul Island, for example, cases against logging companies have been

awaiting trial for far too long. The Lobu landowning tribe in South Choiseul has been trying to take a case to court for the last eight years. In this case, the Eagon Forest Development Company, a Korean registered company, allegedly trespassed on land not included in the Timber Rights Agreement negotiated between the company and landowners. In a letter to Minister Kari in November 1997, representatives of the Lobu tribe stated that "many more people on Choiseul . . . have also been fighting a losing battle with them [Eagon logging company] as the system to settle disputes is very slow and seems to be at times pro-logging".

But Solomon Islands logging-related disputes are not restricted to logging companies and landowners alone. In some cases there have been disputes between landowning groups as well as landowners and the state. Disputes between different landowning groups arise because of competing claims over land signed for logging. This is complicated by the fluidity and diversity of traditional land ownership systems throughout

the country. As a result, the state is unable to develop legislation that will accommodate all of the land tenure systems in the country. Hence, there is broad generalisation that around 87% of land belongs to 'customary landowners', yet the definition of 'customary ownership' is often vague.

This makes the task of identifying landowners difficult and impedes effective logging agreements. On East Fataleka in the northern part of the island of Malaita, for example, the Malaysian company Marvingbros Timber pulled out in early 1996 when some people in the area claimed that they had signed agreements with secondary and not primary landowners. This demonstrates the confusion between concepts of 'ownership' and 'rights' to use land.

Furthermore, Marvingbros was accused of failing to honour parts of the agreement by not giving notice before withdrawing from the area and not accounting for logs felled but left in the jungle. The company, in response to these allegations, stated that:

“From 1991 to 1994 Marvingbros had been operating out of Ata’a Camp in Ward 17. However, due to various disputes and uncooperative attitudes and extremely unreasonable demand of local landowners, Marvingbros has incurred loss of more than 3 million Solomon dollars.” (Letter from Marvingbros to the Commissioner of Forests, dated 16 April 1997.)

The state has also been a major player in Solomon Islands logging industry. This is particularly so because of its economic dependence on the industry as well as because of the interests of individual politicians. Beginning in the early 1990s, there have been widespread allegations that logging companies have bribed politicians and that certain national and provincial leaders have personal interests in the logging industry. Indeed, it is no secret that the former prime minister, Solomon Mamaloni, has his own logging company, Somma Products Limited. Furthermore, Somma and other locally owned companies were, during Mamaloni’s time as prime minister, enjoying a 100% export tax exemption.

In 1994 it was alleged that the then Francis Billy Hilly-led government collapsed because logging companies had bribed some of his cabinet ministers to cross the floor and join a Mamaloni-led government. Although this has never been proved in a court of law, many cases of corruption in public offices in Solomon Islands have never been tried. Moreover, no one has yet been convicted for corruption in the country’s 20-year history.

But those are the stories of the past. Eyes are now focussed on the Bartholomew Ulufa’alu-led Solomon Islands Alliance for Change (SIAC) government. Since coming to power in late 1997 the SIAC government has received favourable responses from many people within Solomon Islands as well as donor governments and international institutions. The Australian government, for example, in response to the SIAC government’s plans to reform forest policies, has reinstated the Timber Control Unit, a key group that helped push for better forest management during the Hilly government. This unit lies within the Division of Forests, which is responsible for monitoring and surveillance of logging operations. Whether the SIAC government will make any substantial changes in Solomon Islands logging industry is difficult to say at the moment, especially given the government’s financial crisis. For now, as we walk through the paths of Solomon Islands’ jungles, we must face the fact that beyond the canopy and tranquility bigger

forces are still waiting to cash in on this green gold.

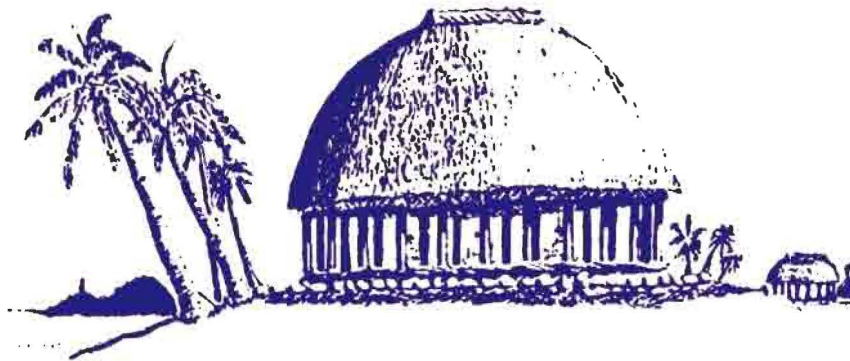
*Peter Dauvergne is a member of the Department of Government and Public Administration at the University of Sydney. He is the author of **Shadows in the Forest: Japan and the Politics of Timber in Southeast Asia** (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997) and **Corporate Power in the Forests of the Solomon Islands**, Working Paper No. 1997/6 (Canberra: Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, October 1997).*

Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka is a Solomon Islander Ph.D. scholar, Department of Political and Social Change, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University. He is on leave from a position as Lecturer at the University of the South Pacific. His Ph.D. thesis is on landowners and logging in Solomon Islands.



Photo: Tarcisius Tara

Logging in Choiseul Province



Window C

A Writer

by S

*Sia is a writer from Samoa. She won the Polynesian Poetry Prize in 1995 and the Commonwealth Prize for Best New Pacific Writer in 1997 for her first novel, **Where We Once Belonged**. SPPF's Stuart Wulff had the pleasure of attending a reading by Sia in May at the University of the South Pacific, where she was at the time writer in residence. Telling the story of her journey from child to writer, Sia in turn amused and mesmerized her audience. SPPF thanks Sia for agreeing to have "A Writer's Story" published in **Tok Blong Pasifik**. It will also appear in **To a Young Artist in Contemplation**, a collection of recent writing by Sia.*

It wasn't my ambition to become a writer. In fact I wanted to be a card dealer... because my Grandmother and my blind Aunt Mele Kupukala (both women have passed away) were the best card dealers I had ever known. And no-one I've met since could match them. Or perhaps a bingo caller since I would always be searched by the Women's Committee to call the bingo. Or perhaps an actress... since I was one of the best actresses during White Sunday when we would perform the stories in the bible... in front of the entire village. I knew I was good because I made everyone cry — even girls who wanted to beat me up because I had told their mothers they were smoking the night before and not going to *aoga mea*.

It wasn't my ambition to become a writer. Mainly because writer was never an occupation when I was growing up. It is now... because that's what's printed in my passport under the word occupation — in exchange for what I would usually write: between jobs or unemployed or worse even when I was

travelling in Europe, poet — which at one point (and still now I suppose) would make my mother cringe every time I used it within ten feet of where she would be standing.

My mother is Samoan. My father is Polish-American — meaning both his parents were Polish and couldn't speak English when they arrived in America. My grandparents were farm peasants from Cracow who came to America after the farm they worked and lived on was destroyed after the First World War. My father was born at the beginning of the depression. Because of that perhaps, he is a great storyteller. He used to tell stories of cold winters wearing nothing but shirts made out of potato sacks. His father became a fisherman when they got to America and fished for crabs on the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland. So there's stories about fish and Italians and Jews and growing up in the depression. But Papa told them with such a smile on his face. A secret only he knew. And no matter how painful — how hard life was... he would always tell his stories with a smile. A large warm all-embracing smile. Which is one emulation I have of my father — (I should only hope!!!) — one that comforts — keeps me warm in all this travelling....

I was born in the sea. That is my mother and my aunts were looking for *kuikui* when labour pains made themselves known. Which is probably why I embrace Epeli's idea of us being Oceanic people... more on that later... I was a sickly child. I nearly died a few hours after I was born... but that's a different story too.

I wrote my first poem when I was 8 and it goes something like this...

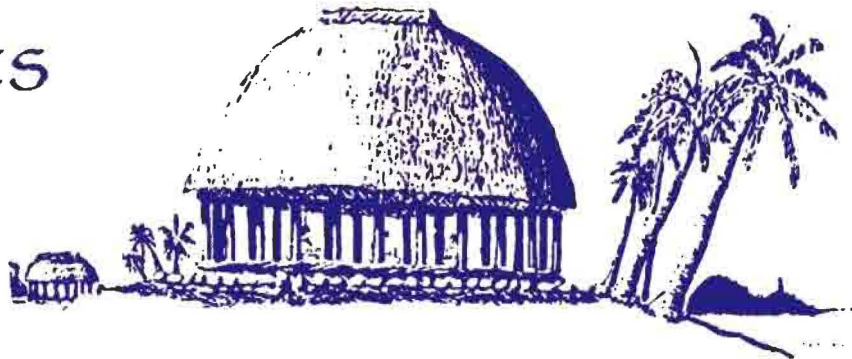
O le solo i le polo

O le polo e lapotopoto

In The Arts

er's Story

va Figiel



*E lapotopoto e pei o se popo
E fiafia iai teine ma tama
Aua e manaia e ta'aalo ai*

Even if you don't know Samoan it wouldn't take a genius to figure out that that does not rhyme.

In a vowel-dominated language where rhyme should come naturally to every child I was fascinated by the fact that there were other possibilities... if you stretched the language long enough. I realized very early on that I liked language — but that most importantly I liked the possibilities of rhythm in language — consequently every time they asked us to write short stories or essays I realized that mine always had a strange rhythm that often got me on detention — I would never conform to the conventions my teachers set and became rather bored quickly so I drew instead... always taking the art prize at the end of the year — my mother would always snigger when it came to the end of the year — Not another art prize — when are you gonna come first in something else? Like accounting? Or Maths? Or English! Anyone who knows me knows that I cannot add to save my own life and English? ... well... I'm still learning new words... royalties and advance being my favourite discoveries lately...

I was introduced to the magic of poetry when I was in Form Three and my teacher then was Sister Vitolia — a woman whose influence on me is unparalleled by any other human being... besides Ma of course. Sister knew Latin and would have us find the meaning to words we did not understand by going to its Latin root. She had us all singing 'The Daffodils' by William Wordsworth, 'Tyger! Tyger!' by William Blake and acted out Shakespearean plays — *Hamlet, Julius Caesar,*

A Midsummer Night's Dream — or William Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and yes, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* — none of us having the slightest idea of the countries these plays took place in or whether these were real people since they were so far removed from our own reality. But Sister made them real. And we had a lot of fun imagining... even if it meant Shakespeare in a *lavalava*....

I didn't start writing poems until I attended Windward College in Hawai'i. Before that I took a Pacific Literature course at the college in Samoa (Amerika) in which only one poem — or was it a short-story? I forget — by Albert Wendt was taught along with one poem by Momoe von Reiche (I remember it still — 'The Bible Class Teacher' which remains one of my favourite poems) and another by Konai Helu Thaman — 'You, the Choice of my Parents'. The rest of the course consisted of Gauguin's *Noanoa*, Herman Melville's *Typee, The Beach of Falesa* by R.L. Stevenson, something by Jack London and origin myths of Polynesia — a word I do not like to use, the same as Melanesia or Micronesia, because I find them limiting. Narrow. Haunting even because it conjures up too many images of us that are unreal.

I realized years later that that course more than anything shaped the way I wrote in the sense that I did not identify with any of the authors we were learning about let alone their characters which led me to ask — "Why is this called Pacific Literature?"

Months later I left for Berlin. While I was there I took up painting and literally lived in Museums of Modern Art wherever I went — whether it was Prague, Rome, Milano, Paris, London and later Boston and N.Y. I got a

continued on page 22



A Hibiscus in the Wind

The Micronesian Chief And His People

by Francis X. Hezel, SJ

Not so long ago a traditional chief on one island in Micronesia helped himself to a sizable amount of the money that had been appropriated for a public works project in his community. When asked by a foreign correspondent why he took it, knowing that he would leave his people bereft of the project they badly needed, the chief simply replied that he was entitled to do so. According to his tradition, chiefs were expected to take a hefty cut of the food or goods produced by the community, he told the newsman; he was only claiming the same rights over the present-day commodity that had replaced local produce — money.

This acquisitive chief is by no means an isolated example. Traditional leaders from many parts of Micronesia are insisting on their privileges today, perhaps much more strongly than ever before. This may stem from the feeling that their authority is under more serious challenge in the modern world. Clinging desperately to 'tradition', the beleaguered chiefs contend that they have a right to much of what rolls in from the outside. In a new society where elected political figures threaten to subvert traditional roles, many are poised to fight for their position.

Traditional leaders may have some legitimate cause for concern. They have been excluded as a group from the chambers of the modern political system for the past half century. In the first popular elections held by the US administration after World War II, Micronesians voted for their chiefs almost en bloc to fill the new elected positions, but an arrangement in which chiefs and others shared responsibilities in a single legislative chamber soon became untenable. If free and open discussion that is supposed to take place in the democratic process was difficult for

Islanders in ordinary situations, it was unthinkable in the presence of their chiefs. A few of the 'districts', as the island groups were then called, created a special chamber for their traditional leaders to allow them some voice in the modern political system, but this too was eventually abandoned everywhere but in the Marshalls. There the traditional chiefs constituted the equivalent of a House of Lords and later became an important power block in the Nitijela. Perhaps because they have retained ownership of the land, chiefs in the Marshalls exercise a position in the modern government not paralleled in any other part of Micronesia.

The Marshalls aside, most island people did not seem to want their traditional leaders sullied in the give-and-take of the new political process. They preferred that the chiefs be relegated to the traditional sphere where they could continue to command respect from their people. When one or another of these traditional leaders attempts to overstep his sphere and run for elected office, as happens at times, he will almost always lose. Now and then a small faction in the FSM proposes that the constitution be amended to grant traditional leaders a formal place in the government, but this has never had strong popular support and probably never will.

Even though chiefs have largely been excluded from the modern political system, they have still done rather well. Their prestige remains high, even where they have lost their former land ownership, and they receive recognition from their people both in respect behavior and local produce. Pohnpeians still engage in extensive competition to win recognition from their chiefs and acquire titles. Chiefs from the outer islands of Yap are still capable of imposing sanctions against

those who fail to observe the traditional forms of respect, as was exemplified a few years ago when they denied the people of one island use of the sea for several months for butchering and eating a turtle instead of offering it to the appropriate authorities on Mogmog. Even in thoroughly modern Palau, traditional chiefs are treated with reverential awe more often than not.

When we look more carefully at the historical record of chiefly tradition, we find another side to the whole matter. Chiefs had obligations toward their people that were every bit as real as their entitlement, even if the latter were not as apt to be noted by the foreign observers of an earlier age. "A chief is a hibiscus in the wind," says one Pohnpeian proverb, meaning that he is expected to bow and bend in response to his people's needs. Other islands had different metaphors to express the solicitousness that a chief should show for his subjects.

With minor variations, there was the common expectation everywhere in Micronesia that chiefs served the people by what we might today call community building. They did this, first of all, by initiating public projects — including construction of community buildings and docks, paving of public paths, and village cleanups. This role was recognized by colonial administrators, who worked through the chiefs to set into motion projects for the public good, as when chiefs were enjoined to oversee the planting of coconut trees under the German and Japanese administration. Chiefs were also expected to stimulate productivity in the community by inviting their subjects to plant and harvest more, sometimes offering the incentive of public recognition or titles as a reward for the achievements of individuals. Finally, they were

entrusted with keeping the peace within their realm by reconciling conflicts.

The “first cut of the pig” or other gifts received came in return for services performed (although neither people nor their chiefs would have put it this way). In consultation with his people, a good chief looked out for their interests and advanced the social status of his community.

There is the story of a highly respected village chief in Chuuk who stood up in

perishable items before the invention of cold storage, after all? As one anthropologist with years of experience on Pohnpei remarked, “accumulation serves only as preparation for distribution.” A popular Marshallese saying makes the same point more poetically: “The paramount chief has three stomachs — one for food, one for storing people’s gossip and one as a storehouse of goods for the people.” When needs arise in his people, the chief was expected to ‘regurgitate’ his

who proved unpopular because he was regarded as rapacious and greedy and did not discharge his obligation to care for his people? An anthropologist writes of one such individual, a paramount chief of Madolenihmw in Pohnpei long ago, who made many decisions without consulting his subjects. They rose up and marched against him, so he called on his own clansmates for help. Even they would not come to his aid since he had also alienated them, so he was killed. In some islands, Palau for one, unpopular chiefs were assassinated outright, sometimes even by their kinspeople. In most islands, however, the people’s recourse lay in withdrawal of support from their chief, leaving him unprotected in the face of his enemies, an almost sure sentence of death. Marshallese recognized the power that people enjoyed in this relationship by referring to the chief’s subjects as *kajur* or strength.

Today these sanctions against chiefs have disappeared. Not only will a greedy chief — one with a single stomach rather than three — escape an early violent death at the hands of his enemies, he might even convince his followers that the tradition they serve decrees that the chief should be allowed to continue his plundering. The sanctions have vanished and with them the very memory of such counterbalances to chiefly authority, leaving us with a very distorted view of what is permitted of them.

Once upon a time, Micronesian chiefs needed their people as much as the people needed them. Today, with the erosion of the controls that people once held over their chiefs, the reciprocity that has always been a hallmark of the relationship is also disappearing. What, then, is to restrain chiefs from taking the “first cut” even when they have done nothing to deserve this? What is to prevent them from plundering the communities they were meant to serve?

Francis Hezel has been with the Micronesian Seminar, working on Micronesian justice and development issues, since 1972.



Photo: Margaret Argue

Kapangamarangi Village, Pohnpei

a men’s house to give a speech laying out a course of action that he was proposing to the village. Hardly had he starting spelling out his plan when his audience dissolved into small groups with the men murmuring to one another even as he continued his speech. The chief went on for another 20 minutes, but by the end of his talk he had swung from his original proposal to a very different plan judged more acceptable to the people of the village. As he spoke, he was also weighing the response and making appropriate changes in the plan he was presenting. He was — as the Pohnpeian proverb suggests a good chief must be — a hibiscus blowing in the breeze.

Even the tribute received was largely supposed to be at the service of the community to be redistributed to the people. What else could be done with

goods to provide for the community, even at his own personal expense. Marshallese paramount chiefs in an earlier day would purchase tools for their workers and pay the passage to Jaluit, then the administrative headquarters, for anyone who needed medical attention. In this respect, Marshall chiefs were not unlike traditional leaders in other island groups.

Although the popular supposition is that chiefly authority was unchecked, constituting a kind of autocracy, such was not the case. Traditional societies had checks and balances which were sometimes far more effective than those built into our modern political systems. Chiefs had to walk a fine line between exercising authority and appearing to be authoritarian.

What might have happened to a chief



Environmental Issues in Pohnpei

by Ruth Lechte

The Federated States of Micronesia stretch across the Pacific at around 7 degrees north and consist of the original US Trust Territory island groups of Kosrae, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Yap. Pohnpei is made up of one major island, almost round, and a number of outliers. The population is about 34,000, with maybe 10,000 other Pohnpeians living in Hawai'i and Guam. Over 90% of the population lives on the main island, which has high mountains and forest in the centre and a long surrounding shelf lagoon at sea level with magnificent stands of mangroves.

Coral rubble is dredged from the lagoon for the construction of roads and buildings. Because the round island road is being upgraded and sealed (paved), a number of opportunist dredging companies have sprung up (two owned by sitting senators) and the island is consequently ringed by

pits and holes. These are known as "borrow pits" because the material is said to be "borrowed" from the reef, but the term is erroneous for the "borrowed" material is never returned.

The pits pose a number of problems. They have disrupted fish spawning and migration routes and result in sedimentation that affects fish stocks. There have been several drownings; Pohnpei has no beaches so children who play in the pits are in danger. There has been a loss of mangroves, mangrove crabs and other sea life. In deeper pits, the water at lower levels becomes oxygen depleted due to eutrophication.

The pits are also unsightly. The funds from the Compact of Free Association with the US are due to end in 2001 and Pohnpei will need other forms of funding which are threatened by such unsustainable

practices. The dredging is certainly inimical to tourism.

The Environment Protection Agency in Pohnpei is doing valiant work, often under pressure, but legislation is essential to conserve the unique environment and to prevent such destructive practices as coral dredging.

Given these problems, I have recommended that all coral dredging be terminated. The island is one big chunk of basalt and crushing of rock would be a more satisfactory method of producing building material. One stone crusher is already at work on the island. Certainly, once the major road work is complete, there will be no need for all the dredging pits. Perhaps one pit owned by the Pohnpei Transportation Authority could be kept open until the transition to crushed rock can be made.

Rock certainly costs more at this point in time, but if a true cost/benefit analysis was done, calculated against environmental loss and long term benefits, this



Photo: Ruth Lechte

Coral dredging in Pohnpei



Waste management leaves a great deal to be desired

Photo: Ruth Lechte

the unique environment and to prevent such destructive practices as coral dredging.

A Global Environment Fund supported programme is being developed to establish the Council for Sustainable Futures in Pohnpei. Made up of communities, traditional leaders, municipal authorities, NGOs and interested government departments, it is being administered by the Nature Conservancy. There is considerable hope that the very unique environment of Pohnpei can be protected by such initiatives.

Ruth Lechte is the busiest retired person in the Pacific. Formerly the director of the Energy, Environment and Appropriate Technology unit of the World YWCA, she remains very active with a variety of environment and women's organisations and causes, including Ecowoman, and serves as a consultant and resource person on environmental issues. This article is based on research done for the South Pacific Applied Geosciences Commission (SOPAC).



would not be so.

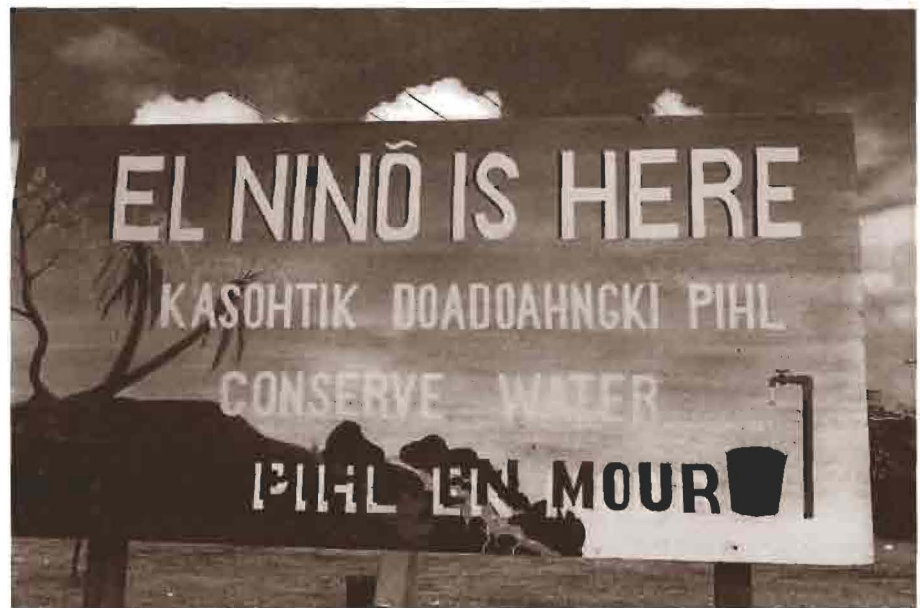
Both 'live' and 'dead' pits should be rehabilitated under the principle of 'user pays'. This would involve pushing the berms or walls into the pit and allowing normal flushing, and coral and mangrove re-growth, to eventually restore the area. Tests would need to be done on deep water quality. Some pits may be suitable for boat harbours or mariculture (farming of marine life).

Coral dredging is not the only environmental threat facing Pohnpei. The airport was constructed by the US Army Corps of Engineers in Trust Territory days and is linked to the capital, Kolonia, by a causeway. Unlike the Betio causeway in Kiribati, no culverts were built to allow water movement. The causeway has prevented the normal flushing of tides and currents and has interrupted fish migration routes. This has resulted in poor water quality in Kolonia harbour. The sewage outlet also discharges into the harbour.

The rubbish dump, while well managed, is badly sited at the

entrance to the airport. Waste management leaves a great deal to be desired in communities and tests should be done to check on leaching into coastal areas. Toilets and pig pens are also sited on the coastlines, with a consequent deterioration in sea water quality.

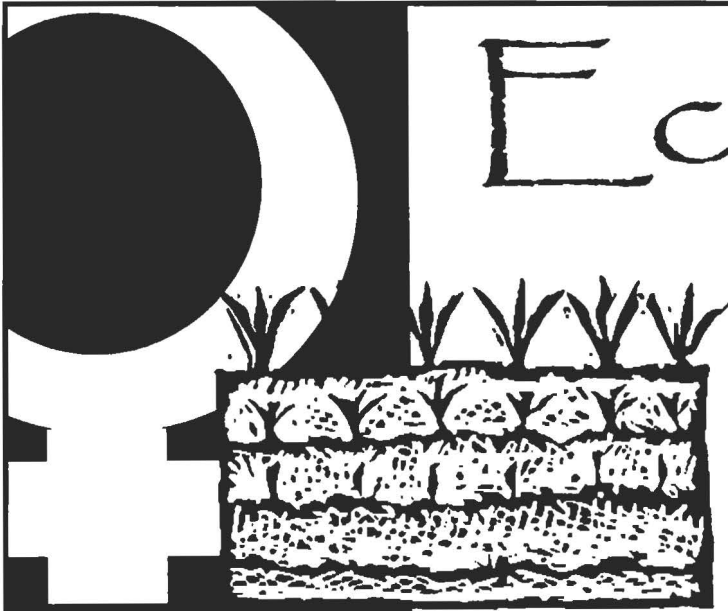
The Environment Protection Agency in Pohnpei is doing valiant work, often under pressure, but legislation is essential to conserve



Sign in Pohnpei encourages water conservation

Photo: Ruth Lechte

Ecowoman



SPPF and the Canadian International Development Agency are supporting the development of *Ecowoman*, a Fiji based regional network whose aim is to strengthen the participation of women in science, appropriate technology and environmental management. This *Ecowoman* section will appear regularly in **Tok Blong Pasifik**. Readers are invited to send us their own responses and contributions on *Ecowoman* themes.

Meetings Set Plans for Next Two Years

SPPF's executive director, Stuart Wulff, spent most of May in Fiji as a guest of *Ecowoman*. One of the conditions of the funding being provided through SPPF by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is that SPPF and *Ecowoman* meet at the end of each year (CIDA's funding is on an April-March annual cycle, thus the timing) to evaluate the previous year's programme and plan for the coming year.

The May visit and meetings were originally to mark the half-way point in CIDA's two year funding commitment. However, one of the findings of the evaluation was that the CIDA funded activities had got off to a

slow start and that the programme would likely be more successful if the activities were extended through a third year. A revised plan and budget was developed, extending the same \$100,000 of CIDA funding over three years instead of two, and is being submitted to CIDA.

While noting the slow start, the evaluation workshop with *Ecowoman* members concluded that the project was now progressing much better and that a significant amount had already been accomplished. In addition to the specific CIDA funded activities that were progressing well, it is clear that *Ecowoman* has already developed considerable momentum and an

increasingly high profile in the region.

The evaluation noted that *Ecowoman's* strength to date was in its programming and outreach, but that it had weaknesses in management, monitoring and reporting, all matters of some concern to funders like CIDA. A new management committee was formed to oversee implementation of the CIDA funded programme. Stuart worked with *Ecowoman* and SPACHEE members to improve financial and management systems and will return to Fiji for two weeks in December to work further with *Ecowoman*. During his visit, Stuart conducted a results based management training workshop. The workshop was organised by WAINIMATE and included *Ecowoman* and WAINIMATE members as well as other NGO representatives.

Ecowoman member, Cema Bolabola, kindly took one day to drag Stuart away from all the evaluation and planning workshops and management meetings and take him to Navatuyaba village in Toga, Rewa to see for himself the progress of the water hyacinth project (see next page).

Farewell and Welcome!

Ecowoman and SPPF bid farewell to Cherie Whippy-Morris as *Ecowoman's* first coordinator. Cherie is now working for the Fiji Department of Fisheries. But it's not really farewell. Cherie is still very active with *Ecowoman* and with the Women & Fisheries Network.

We bid welcome to Patrina Dumar, *Ecowoman's* new coordinator. Patrina was hired by the South Pacific Action Committee for Human Ecology & Environment (SPACHEE) in May as their projects officer. Her principal responsibility is to support *Ecowoman*.



Patrina

Turning a Weed into an Asset

Water hyacinth is an aquatic plant that grows profusely in streams and rivers and is considered a weed in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and many other parts of the world. An *Ecowoman* project has been supporting an attempt to control the plant by using it as a marketable product. The women of Navatuyaba, a village near Suva, identified water hyacinth as a major problem affecting their use of the Toga River that runs by the village. They approached *Ecowoman* for assistance in finding ways to address this problem.

The water hyacinth project aimed to use the plant as an alternative fibre for weaving handicrafts, providing an alternative source of income for women, and to involve the women themselves in community decision processes. Though the project would be the first in Fiji, control and use of water hyacinth is well established in Asia and Latin America.

A village seminar was held in April to educate the community on the life cycle of the plant, its function in the river ecosystem and alternative uses. Learning materials in Fijian were also provided to the community. It was agreed that all sections of the community would be involved in the initial stages of processing until the women took over at the weaving stage.

When the project commenced, the plants were abundant in the smaller tributaries of the river downstream from the village. The women invited the village youth to assist them to harvest and transport the plants. The senior men in the village organised the construction of the drying frames where bundles of water hyacinth were hung to sun-dry for about 1-2 weeks. It was noted that in rainy weather the drying time is prolonged. The dried fibre was found to be tougher than dried pandanus, already used by the women in weaving mats.

All the village women possessed weaving skills to produce mats and baskets. There were five weekly

weaving workshops aimed at familiarisation with the new fibre. Women were also taught how to price their new handicrafts. Samples of Asian handicrafts made from straw similar to water hyacinth were purchased and used to get an idea of basic weaves. The women then produced hats, baskets, purses, jewellery boxes, coasters and other small basketry. *Ecowoman* assisted with a craft exhibition at the village to display the prototype crafts.

The initial evaluation of the project from everyone involved has been very positive. The project has been successful to date in clearing the rivers and is providing 20-25 participants with supplementary income. It is attracting attention and interest from other villages, organisations and companies, and is therefore a source of self-esteem and pride for the participants. Other villages are now

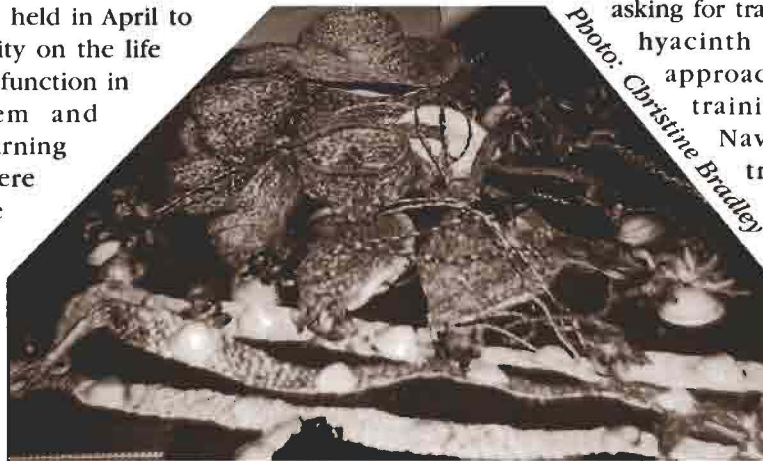
asking for training to work with water hyacinth and SPACHEE has approached UNDP to fund the training of 10 women from Navatayaba to become trainers of women in other villages. Other organisations in the Pacific are also becoming interested in the project.

For now, the women are selling at craft fairs and public events and through personal contacts.

However, if the use of

water hyacinth spreads to other nearby villages and the production of water hyacinth products expands significantly, attention will have to be paid to wider marketing. There has been interest from a couple of companies, but the women are not keen at present to go that route, preferring the flexibility of informal marketing.

From the beginning, one of *Ecowoman's* aims has been to promote ways in which scientific knowledge can be applied by village women to address environmental problems and improve their well being. The water hyacinth project represents a promising step in this direction.



Sample crafts produced with water hyacinth

continued from page 15

studio in East Berlin at a factory where Albert Einstein used to do experiments before relativity. The Berlin Wall had come down. Everything was cheap. Factory space. So I was painting with Czechs, East Germans and Columbians. I showed the slides here last year — that too is a different story entirely.

While in Berlin I joined a Creative Writing Group — members from Nigeria, China, London, US, Caribbean. I had never been to a reading then and didn't know what it was. The first reading I went to was by Toni Morrison. One that changed my life. Literally. After that my life became just going to readings. I went to readings by Hanif Kureishi, Jamaica Kincaid and other visiting writers to Berlin, the new 'capital' of art. Of literature. And it was then that the world I had left behind (Samoa) became more acute. More vivid. And memory became important to me. It was the only way I could visit home (besides my dreams). And it was there that I started writing. I held 4 different jobs at one time... baby-sitter/clerk/waitress/teacher of English as a fourth language (that's Europe for ya!).

It took me eight months to a year to write *Where We Once Belonged* — although the idea had been swimming in my head for such a long time — really since I took that Pacific literature class in 1986. It took another year and a half to edit since the original manuscript was in such a different form — It was in a strange form that did not conform at all to a particular structure — particular meaning the novel form of course — I had it written out in an epic poem style so that it became too long and Tony (my editor) actually did a lot of work changing it to its current appearance — which was the closest thing I could come to a compromise on conventionality. I had other intentions which had a lot to do with style — I suppose — it would be interesting to see it published perhaps in its original form.

"The Centre" was the first story to be written — and it was written on a napkin with the words BUNDESBahn in red on the Berlin-Prague night express train... which was the cheapest train my friend Monica and I could find to escape the realities of life in Berlin. I had been living in Berlin at the time and I felt more and more displaced from the 'centre of things' — 'centre' meaning Samoa. One grows up with

the natural assumption that one is in the centre of the world — the universe even — henceforth it became very difficult the more one leaves — and I'd been away too long.

In Prague I saw Kafka's castle from the Charles Bridge which was always full of middle-class American college kids with lighters singing 'We are the World'. I stayed at the YMCA there (the cheapest accommodation — packed with 'we are the worlders' singing from dusk till dawn and 12% alcohol and and....)

It was going through the marketplace and meeting Czechs that made me think of Samoa... a lot. There were a lot of changes going on... exchanging one economic/political system for another overnight was something that affected me as a visitor... particularly seeing the elders selling the little that they had at the marketplace (which was 180 degrees from affluent Germany) and even though there was a melancholic imprint of history on everyone's face — there was also a sense of happiness... I don't know if that's the right word but it will have to do for the moment... it was that look that reminded me of home.

What is the centre, I kept asking myself — this was a question that enveloped me for a while — while living in Berlin — is the centre more important than the periphery? How important is it to be in the centre? Where is the centre? Is there a centre?

The centre becomes important when one looks physically at a circle that is drawn — one places the centre (naturally) in the middle of that circle — in the middle. Momentarily the middle does not necessarily mean centre — for me — I am constantly questioning this definition and find that I am adding new definitions to it — according to the experiences in my own life — which is what I tried to do in that piece — that everyone has their



Photo: Elaine Briere

own definition of centre (which is very individualistic) and that there really is no one absolute — people operate from different points of references — from different definitions of centres. Which is ultimately the point in writing — that everyone has their own perspective — whether of fa'asamoa or of anything else — there cannot be a collective definition of that. The difficulty comes in asserting that difference — in saying that I see things differently! that perhaps there is no centre after all! — the same way the child looked at the emperor's clothes in the fairytale... Momentarily, wherever I take off my shoes — that is the centre....

It became very difficult to write about the issues that are in the book — to explore them freely — I had not seen any of this in previous writings and found that a big challenge. I became very interested in writing about what makes people strong and what makes them weak too at the same time — that is what I was interested in at that moment — there is an assumption that every character one creates is strong — but there are also realities of weaker characters — that I was more interested in as well. It is however the strength of Alofa that prevails in the book — and yet at the same time the complexities of Siniva and all her strengths and yes her weaknesses too — the ultimate weakness which became something so real to me since that is ultimately what I thought about on a daily basis — for a very long time particularly after the book was written. I was basically suicidal to put it more bluntly... particularly when I thought of all the people the book was going to affect. But like I said before we only have an hour.

I've spoken too often about using *su'ifefiloi* as a form in the book — which is what was in the back of my mind — I'd been thinking about that constantly — the need to use forms that are from the inside and not necessarily those from the



Photo: Elaine Briere

outside to tell stories — often at nights of writing I would actually hear the songs of *su'ifefiloi* in the back of my mind with all its beauty and that very haunting quality which is most powerful.

Perhaps it became more important particularly since I was living in Europe and was surrounded with Western forms only — it wasn't really until I met people like Grace Nichols and John Agard and James Berry and Amryl Johnson (Caribbean performance poets whom I had the pleasure of meeting once more at the Commonwealth Writers' Prize ceremonies) that I opened my eyes to the possibilities of *su'ifefiloi* and *fagogo* telling — they were the ones who really gave me an awakening that enabled me to write the way I did. The sing-song in their work triggered the *su'ifefiloi/fagogo/ faleaiku/solo* bug... which is now an intricate part of my work — of my life.

Although I already had a publisher, taking that step towards actual publication became difficult — extremely difficult and I was becoming paranoid to say the least about the work — there was such a fear there about what the family might think — particularly my mother — that it stopped me from

seriously thinking about publishing for a long while even after it was written. When I had my residency at UTS in Sydney — the book was already completed — however, I started thinking that it wasn't good enough and did not think highly of it at the moment. I had too many mixed feelings which interfered much with the actual step towards publication and I was not at all confident about the book — in fact there were several occasions when I nearly threw away the disk — that became most difficult — perhaps that too contributed to the problem — I was actually living in the book — to the extent that it was almost a shock to come out of it and into the 'real world'. Nine months later I wrote *The Girl in the Moon Circle* — *The girl* saved my life. Period.

About that opening line... and specifically about the 'explicitness' of the book... "When I saw the insides of a woman's vagina for the first time I was not alone." This is written in such a scientific way — in an at your face lesson in anatomy — removed from any notion of romanticism that the reader might have or already has — because of the allusions to sex and other such preconceived notions that westerners have of the Pacific — of Polynesia particularly. This became



Photo: Elaine Briere

such an issue with me at the time I was writing. Whenever I met strangers and I would tell them where I was from they would jokingly refer to sex... free love... Polynesian babes... and that would I pull out my hula skirt (anytime — since I carry it with me, naturally) and perform the hula — which mind you is not a Samoan dance... more on that later. The opening line is not so shocking to me as a writer because I feel it to be the honest way a thirteen-year-old girl would talk about such a scene — very matter of factly she would — especially to other girls her own age — without any morality stigmas which leads most adults to censor. That was my intention as far as sexuality is concerned. And because sex once more is so intricately a part of the images upon which we, Oceanic people, are conceived by outsiders, I wanted to use it to disempower those who are generally thought to hold power — such as the case of Mr. Brown who is the manager of the bank. Not only does he have power on that level but also because he is a man. A *palagi* man. However Mr. Brown is disarmed or disempowered completely at the hands of a 17 year

old girl (Lili) through his impotency. Nevertheless, it was the compassion of Lili also that I wanted to get across to the reader. That Lili was truly in love with Mr. Brown. And that when someone's in love nothing else matters — whether the significant other has the face of a frog or a dead penis for that matter. Love with all its strengths and weaknesses — and the price one pays for it was more interesting to me at the time I wrote "A Good Man" thus deconstructing the notion of the free-love sex savage Polynesian maiden. Love is not free. It is not for free. Lili knew that. At 17 she knew it... breaking Mr. Brown's heart... and made him not take her with him to Australia because "you would never be able to make an *ainga* with me Ma'alili." Even though she kept insisting, "But I don't want *ainga*! I already have..."

Once more...

Gauguin is Dead!

Margaret Mead is Dead!

Fayaway is a figment!

And Uma is Uma!

Many people have asked about my usage of the Samoan language in the books and why I do that so liberally. There are several replies to that question which need to be addressed — first of all the Samoan is in there because in my own mind it is important to capture people speaking in the vernacular — in their own language which is often very grassroots level — and I wanted to make the reader aware of that. Also it is not an attempt to confuse the reader or to puzzle them and say how well I speak Samoan — NO! The Samoan is in there too because it is important for Samoans and other Pacific people to realize that their language is being prioritized in an English context — the English which is often at times prioritized over their own language — we must absolutely empower the Samoan or Pacific Island person who reads the book and knows that their language is being included. It's amazing to me

when my *palagi* friends tell me how much they've learned about Samoa because of the Samoan in the book.

Additionally, because of the poetics of the language itself — it became impossible to translate to English — therefore to capture the essence of the original thought I had in Samoan I couldn't possibly translate which is why the Samoan is left untranslatable — and if the reader really scrutinized the text they will eventually realize that the Samoan is explained contextually.

Listening around, particularly among young people, there is much appreciation of the books - which is something so far out for me — with everything considered. Two of the teachers here who've actually read it say they couldn't keep it since others want to read it and go off with it and that they couldn't get back the only copy which is at the Savai'i public library. When I took my kids to the library the other day to do library research the librarian enthusiastically asked me — "Are you Sia Figiel? Could you sign our book?" I said sure I'll sign your book. She went out to get it and came back with hands in the air. "It's out again! That book is hardly in the library!" And she was angry about it — that it didn't get to be signed. I of course on the other hand was absolutely thrilled. She didn't understand why I looked so happy. And one of my students whispered to me — "It's those *fa'afafitges* from our village who are constantly checking it out." Oh.

When they told me (they being my publisher, my editor and the staff at Pasifika Press in Auckland) that I had won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for best first book in the region I nearly fainted. I think I did but I was in such a state of delirium that I didn't know I had fainted! It took me a whole year to recover from that faint — in fact I only just fully recovered from it a week before I left for NZ at the beginning of the year.

It's been a long and painful year. A year of great uncertainty. I didn't know what to think. Immediately of course there was a sense of joy. Pure joy which lasted a week. Then came the media scrutiny. Attention from big-time publishers. I had gotten 'international recognition' and I didn't even know it. I kind of got a clue only when people I did not know suddenly knew me. Smiled whenever they shook my hand. It was all so chaotic. A big blur. I was alone. I became very distrustful of people. And the few people I thought of as friends turned on me... I was greatly disappointed. I became even more alone.

Then there were the lunches and dinners with people whose names I only knew on books: Keri Hulme. Patricia Grace. Arundhati Roy. Louis de Bernières. A.L.Kennedy. Pico Iyer. Owen Marshall. Elizabeth Knox. Alex Miller. Maurice Shadbolt. Phil Kawana. The Governor General of New Zealand. The Mayor of Wellington. My Aunt in the North Shore who always thought I would amount to nothing. And so on....

A week after the prize, *Where* was sold to Penguin books Australia and the UK. Translation rights were sold to good publishing houses in Switzerland and France. I just recently heard from Linda Crowl here at IPS that *The girl* is being translated as well by the same houses that are translating *Where*. My publisher is looking into translation rights to other European languages but only under the condition that the Samoan remains untranslated... this I insist on!!

In all this hype — I decided the best thing to do was to disappear. Which I did. For seven months I taught in Savai'i — School C English (which was taught basically in Samoan) with 16 of my students passing School C nationals at the end of the year. I also held writing workshops with students and staff from the seven high schools there — which were

held at the Tuasivi College Hall — I don't know if the students and staff knew but I was very nervous... addressing all seven high schools was something I had never done before. The writing I received at the end of each workshop was amazing...absolutely amazing.

Writers who influence me the most are — naturally Albert Wendt — one can not live in the Pacific Islands in the last 30 years and not be influenced by him... his work does not cease to inspire... It was after reading the works of Toni Morrison — the great Black-American writer — that I saw the possibility in the voice of girls, adolescents and yes, women. Because of the influence of Albert Wendt it became really impossible to write since one just did not know how to write as a woman — since the perspective was so omnipresent in its maleness — which is probably why when I told another Samoan woman writer friend of mine that I was writing what was later to become *Where* she looked at me as if I was this pest-thing and said, "What are you going to write about? Al's written everything!"

Books I enjoy range from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to *The Famished Road* to *The Bluest Eye* to *The Buddha of Suburbia* to *The Lover* — *Slaughterhouse 5* — *Pouliuli* — *The House on Mango Street* — *Potiki* — *The Sorrows of Young Werther* — *The Moor's Last Sigh* — *The Tales of the Tikongs* — and still *Crime and Punishment* (every chance I get) and still *The Holy Bible* too — in particular the Psalms of David and the Song of Solomon.

A recent name that excites me — Junot Diaz! Read him.

Poetry — I like Neruda. Hone Tuware. Mr. Allistar Te Ariki Campbell. Grace Nichols. Jully Makini. Some of Sudesh Mishra's.

And I'll read a Subramani short story anytime.

One point I really want to stress before I end this is that the Commonwealth Writers' Prize is not mine alone. I've realized this now. A year after the ceremonies. Nor does it belong to Samoa because I am Samoan. Or Poland or America for that matter because I am Polish-American. It belongs to me just as much as it belongs to all the writers before us. Writers who stood there with *sapelu* clearing the way for us younger voices — making it possible for us to tell our stories. Our way. Therefore I feel that the Commonwealth Writers' Prize belongs to all of us Pacific Islanders. And if anything I hope for it to inspire more Pacific stories — to be told — to be heard.

Soifua ma la manuia.



To purchase
Sia Figiel's books:

Where We Once Belonged is published by Pasifika Press in New Zealand. Other publishers or distributors are: Australia — Viking; UK — Hamish Hamilton; US & Canada — University of Hawai'i Press; Germany — Unionsverlag; France (1999) — Actes Sud. If you can't obtain the book through your local bookstore or nearest publisher/distributor, it can be ordered directly from Pasifika Press (NZ\$29.95). Pasifika Press also distributes *The Girl in the Moon Circle* (NZ\$19.95).

Pasifika Press — PO Box 68446, Newton, Auckland 1, New Zealand <press@pasifika.co.nz>

The Girl in the Moon Circle is published by the Institute of Pacific Studies — PO Box 1168, Suva, Fiji. *To a Young Artist in Contemplation* will also be available from IPS.

Okinawan Women Say 'NO' to Military Bases

by Caroline Canafax

A message to our American friends from concerned Japanese citizens:

We are concerned that the relations of trust between the United States and Japan may be seriously jeopardized by the continued presence of huge U.S. forces in Japan, specifically marines in Okinawa. The people of Okinawa and people throughout Japan living near the U.S. bases have been deprived of the right to live in peace and to live with dignity.

PLEASE REMOVE YOUR MARINES FROM OUR SOIL!

Thus begins a full-page ad in the *New York Times* on May 30, 1997. The ad was paid for by donations from more than 7,000 citizens from all over Japan, including Okinawa.

Okinawa, where 75 per cent of the US bases in Japan are located, is a group of beautiful islands surrounded by coral and tropical seas. Following World War II, huge tracts of land were confiscated from local people by U.S.

occupation forces using "guns and bulldozers." Today about 20 per cent of the main island is occupied by US bases, some of it resulting from forced leases opposed by the owners of the land. These leases have continued although they expired in May 1997. A Japanese revision of the law allowed them to continue. These lands are the most arable parts of Okinawa.

Okinawa, formerly Ryuku, was annexed in 1879 by the Japanese Empire. During World War II, the US invaded Okinawa, leveling most of the islands. Only in 1972 did the US return the administration of this island group to Japan. But the US Marine bases remain. US military and their dependants comprise four per cent — or 54,000 people — of the 1.32 million occupants of the Okinawan prefecture.

The US forces occupy important land areas and create noise and environmental destruction. As told by Mariko Matsuda: "Today I am living only 100 meters from the Futenama Marine Corps Air Station, a marine

helicopter base. From morning to night, we hear the sounds of helicopters flying overhead. They fly directly over the apartment house where I live. We are told that helicopters take off an average of 150 times a day. When they fly overhead their sound drowns out our TV and we cannot talk on the telephone. Especially when we've finished our day's work and come together to enjoy dinner, relax or sleep, it makes me angry to hear the roar of helicopters flying overhead. I also realize that one could crash into my apartment building. In fact, there have been helicopter crashes where U.S. military personnel have been killed." [From testimony provided at the General Synod of the United Church of Christ and at the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).]

Firing exercises are defoliating the hills, leading to soil runoff that muddies the rivers and surrounding sea. Coral reefs are dying because of this pollution. US forces recently used depleted uranium bullets on Tori Island. Those bullets were also used by US forces during the Gulf War and are suspected of causing Gulf War Syndrome and high incidences of cancer among Iraqi children. A year later, the US military admitted to the Japanese government that these bullets had been used.

US forces have also been guilty of sexual assault. For more than 50 years, women and children have lived under the threat of violence. The rape of an Okinawan school girl by three US marines in September 1995 brought renewed strength to the anti-base movement. Unfortunately, this was not the first incident during the occupation. The most savage was the rape-murder on September 3, 1955, of



Photo: Okinawa Prefectural Government

85,000 Okinawans attend protest rally after 1995 rape of a schoolgirl by US servicemen

a six-year old girl named Yumiko, whose body was thrown into the sea by the US officer who raped and killed her. In 1993 a 19-year old girl claimed to have been raped by a US serviceman in Okinawa City, but dropped the case before the man was charged.

Suzuyo Takazato, a member of the Naha Municipal Assembly, was determined not to let the 1995 case disappear, as she believes happened in 1993. Takazato said, "I was sorry that the earlier woman dropped her case, presumably after getting little support from the outside. I did not want to let the same thing happen to the 12-year old girl who came forward and reported her case. She might not have fallen victim to rape if we had made a more aggressive effort to get our voice heard."

Takazato called a news conference immediately after she learned of the 1995 incident, breaking a routine of protesting to the US Consulate General in Okinawa and the Naha Regional Bureau of the Defense Facilities Administration Agency, which ordinarily handles affairs related to American bases. "We wanted the public and the US military to realize that rape and other sexual assaults constitute grave damage stemming from the presence of the US military. That aspect has long been ignored even by those who oppose the bases."

The Okinawa Prefectural Assembly had called an emergency session to discuss the crash of a US Marine Harrier fighter off Okinawa that occurred three days before the 1995 rape. But it took no such action in the days following the attack on the school girl, Takazato recalls.

Takazato believes that the official figure of 111 rapes by military personnel between 1972 and 1996 represents only the "tip of the iceberg", saying that many sexual attacks go unreported. Rape victims fear the adverse publicity in small Okinawan communities; and Okinawa is a male-dominated society in which women are discouraged from



speaking out.

To compound the situation, Okinawan women have few places where they can turn for help. Takazato and fellow members of a group called Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence started a rape emergency counselling service in 1995. To date, the hot line has received 160 calls, but she knows more victims need to pursue criminal charges against their attackers. "We have to create a society in which a perpetrator must pay a terrible price if he violates the human rights of a woman by raping her," says Takazato. But she believes that sexual violence will be unavoidable as long as a large number of troops remain on the island. "The military, whether it is Japanese or American, has violence built into its structure."

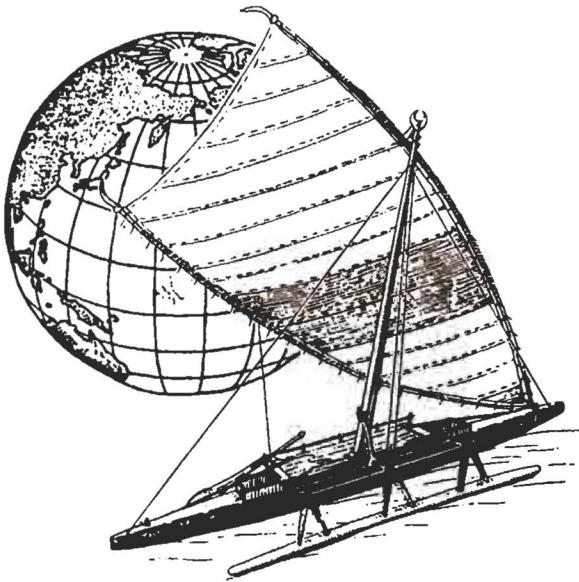
But the women's struggle to be heard isn't over. Once the recent wave of discontent over the American military presence reached the main stage of Japanese politics, the plight of women was forced to take a back seat. "I was disturbed when I heard some men say that we should not reduce such a weighty issue as Japan-US security to a question of the rights of women.

What is a national security for if women in communities neighboring US bases have to suffer?" Takazato declared.

The *New York Times* ad ends with this: "But aren't the bases necessary? We have been told again and again by U.S. and Japanese officials that the Marines are stationed in Japan to defend us or to maintain stability in East Asia. Military officials and politicians like to remind us that the Marines are necessary because of instability on the Korean Peninsula. However, we believe there are better ways to deal with the tension than to station tens of thousands of Marines on our shores. We believe that reconciliation, trust, and mutual aid with our neighbors are what are really necessary for our safety. What we need today is 'human security' which seeks to provide a stable and fulfilling life for all rather than 'military security' which seeks to dominate by force of arms."

Caroline Canafax is the editor of Pacific Vision, a publication of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.





SPPF in action

Tidal Wave Appeal Raises Over \$6,000

News of the tidal wave which struck Papua New Guinea's northwest coast in July galvanised many Canadians to call SPPF's office wanting to provide support to the relief efforts. Spearheaded by Board member Elaine Monds, SPPF quickly moved to identify how we could be of assistance and to begin a collection of funds. Through Elaine's contacts in PNG, we found that the Catholic Diocese of Aitape was playing a key role in the relief effort and we decided to support their efforts.

Over \$6,000 was raised. As well as donations mailed directly to SPPF, two community efforts were very successful, one in Whitehorse (see related story) and one centred on the Alcheringa Art Gallery here in Victoria. SPPF thanks everyone who contributed.

Yukon Responds to Tidal Wave

by Ian Robinson, Yukon Development Education Centre

Yukon does not have a Pacific coast, but we are in an earthquake zone and every summer we have many forest fires. Many Yukoners live close to nature as hunters, fishers and trappers. In winter the temperature often drops to 40 below zero. The forces of nature are known well. Many people had seen the images of the tidal wave disaster and people's suffering on national TV.

The PNG relief fundraising effort began with three Whitehorse residents - Judge Barry Stuart, Pat Westburg and Ian Robinson - who had worked in PNG in the 1970s and 80s. The Yukon Development Education Center gave support and a link was made with SPPF. Eleanor Millard at the local Red Cross office was very supportive. Radio stories and newspaper ads were done and donation boxes were set up at local retailers. An information booth was set up at the downtown Mall and posters were placed around town.

The opportunity to make a donation gave Yukoners a way to help people far away in a time of need. The local Home Hardware Building Center used their sign to ask people to donate at the store. A wonderful surprise - some people from PNG who were passing through came into the store and expressed how touched they were to see that PNG was thought of so far away and that Yukoners cared enough to help.

Over \$1200 has been raised to date. My personal thanks to the many Yukoners who gave generously. Your contributions in cash and in kind show the world that Yukon is a caring place. And thanks to my kids for their cool artwork on the donation boxes.

TOK BLONG PASIFIK SUBSCRIPTION FORM

NAME: _____ TEL: _____

FAX: _____ E-MAIL: _____

ORGANIZATION: _____

ADDRESS: _____

POSTAL CODE: _____

COUNTRY: _____ AMOUNT ENCLOSED: _____

Annual subscription rates are as follows: Canada - students \$15, individual \$25, organisation \$40. Pacific Islands - individual US\$10, organisation US\$15. Other countries - students US\$15, individual US\$25, organisation US\$40. Send to: SPPF (subscriptions), 1921 Fernwood Road, Victoria, BC, V8T 2Y6, Canada.

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Secretariat to assist Pacific Island companies to penetrate Canadian markets. This study, in conjunction with a similar but separate study focusing on the United States marketplace and initiatives being undertaken within the region to implement quality assurance systems for seafood, will provide the basis for developing and implementing a strategy to enhance commercial linkages between Pacific Island marine product producers, and the North American marketplace.

Marine Studies Programme Development, University of the South Pacific

– The purpose of this project is to develop USP's Marine Studies Programme (MSP) as a self-sustaining, multi-disciplinary, world-class centre for training, education and research for the long-term benefit of the Pacific Island peoples. The C-SPOD contribution is enabling the University to retain the services of a highly-qualified Canadian marine scientist in the position of Professor of Marine Studies, who will oversee the overall development of the MSP in a sustainable manner. He is overseeing the full development of undergraduate degree programmes in Marine Science and Marine Affairs, supervising regional post-graduate students at the masters and doctoral levels, co-ordinating and implementing MSP staff development activities, establishing to a fully operational level the new MSP Facilities on the Laucala campus, and establishing institutional, NGO, and private sector linkages within the South Pacific and between the South Pacific, ASEAN and Canada. The project will also enable USP to enhance its information and resource services in support of teaching and research, and to improve marine awareness among programme staff, students, NGOs and the general public. As part of this project, a Canadian consultant has just completed a gender analysis and has provided recommendations for MSP curriculum revision, recommendations related to the university regulations and gender equity as linked to the post-graduate handbook, and recommendations for ongoing professional development for staff.

Marine Studies Programme Post-graduate Scholarships – The purposes of this project are to attract highly-qualified graduates from, and retain them within, the region; address the marine research priorities of USP member countries; and forge research links between USP, other regional organizations and Canada. A total of 16 masters and 4 doctoral scholarships will be awarded, spread over the seven-year term of the project. Of 32 applicants for the first set of scholarships, nine students were selected and are currently being supported (eight M.Sc. and one Ph.D.; six from Fiji and one from each of Kiribati, Samoa and the Solomon Islands). Three are women, representing 50% of the women that applied. Recently, another three candidates have been recommended for acceptance (one M.Sc. and two Ph.D.). The project also provides for three-month research attachments for the students, either as part of their studies or on completion of their post-graduate degrees, at other regional organizations, other appropriate organizations such as national Fisheries departments, and private sector companies. These attachments are intended to supply the scholarship holders with skills not available from

USP; increase contacts between students who have completed their degrees and potential employers in the region; and increase contact between staff and associates of other regional organizations and USP.

Development of Capacity for Management of Coastal Systems and Living Resources

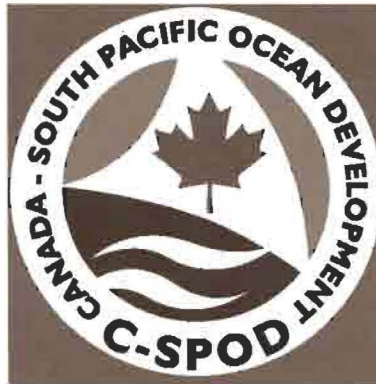
– This project, being implemented by SPREP, consists of three components. As a basis for monitoring coastal systems and developing management plans, training in survey and monitoring of coral reefs and mangrove wetlands is being provided to all SPREP member countries through a series of regional, sub-regional, and national workshops with assistance from USP staff. In three countries, Federated States of Micronesia (Kosrae), Tuvalu and Vanuatu, the project is initiating and developing National Coastal Advisory Groups who will prepare and submit advice to their governments on coastal resource issues. The groups will consist of key stakeholders, including staff from the middle levels of coastal management and related agencies, community leaders and womens' groups, relevant national and local government bodies, NGOs, and the private sector (such as dive operators, tour operators and coastal developers). Advisory group meetings will include training in marine conservation and eco-tourism, presentations on a range of coastal issues, 'exposure tours' of good and

bad resource use practices, development of communication strategies, and training in alternative dispute resolution. The third component of this project is increasing the understanding and skills of local communities so that men and women in their respective roles can better manage their coral reef resources, through (1) translating education and awareness materials from the 1997 Pacific Year of the Coral Reef (PYOCR) campaign into local languages, (2) a regional workshop of representatives from all 18 participating countries to evaluate the campaign and develop a 5-Year Coral Reef Strategic Plan,

and (3) training workshops for communities to enable them to establish coral reef reserves and develop alternative income-generating options, such as ecotourism, without disrupting the simple traditional lifestyle of the communities.

PACPOL Pacific Ocean Pollution Prevention Programme

SPREP/IMO Strategy and Work Programme – This project is updating a marine pollution strategy, related specifically to shipping issues and ship-sourced oil pollution, that was developed by SPREP and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 1993 and previously called the SPREP/IMO Strategy. The purpose of Phase I of the project, currently underway, is to revise and update the current strategy to ensure its relevance, appropriateness, cost-effectiveness and operational effectiveness, before proceeding with on-the-ground implementation. This is being done largely by the SPREP Marine Pollution Officer, with consultation with and site visits to all stakeholders, including all SPREP member countries, regional and national agencies, IMO, and the port, shipping, oil and waste management industries. The purpose of Phase II of the project, which will be submitted to C-SPOD and other potential donors once Phase I is completed, is to implement selected high-priority sub-projects to ensure that the marine environment of the region is adequately protected from maritime pollution.





The Canada-South Pacific Ocean Development (C-SPOD) Program is one of the major Canadian commitments to the Pacific Islands, reflecting the Canadian and Pacific views that ocean development is a key priority. C-SPOD Phase II, initiated with the signing of the Management Plan in February 1997, is a \$14 million, seven-year program. This article briefly describes the seven C-SPOD II projects that are underway at this time. The projects are being implemented by four of the regional organisations in the Pacific Islands: the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the South Pacific Forum Secretariat (ForSec), the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the University of the South Pacific (USP).

Co-Ordination of Management and Conservation of the Fisheries Resources of Pacific Island Countries – One of the FFA's focuses is fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS). The C-SPOD project is based on the need to establish an effective framework of domestic fisheries legislation as a foundation for the effective prosecution of fisheries offences, the final component of all MCS effort. The project is promoting the necessary level of in-country co-ordination between agencies and organisations responsible for fisheries MCS matters, and developing a draft model for such co-ordination that will be implemented in each FFA member country according to individual needs. It includes training courses, in-country prosecution workshops, a Legal Projects Officer (LPO) position at FFA until 2001, legal and MCS fellowships at FFA Headquarters, and annual MCS working group meetings.

Sustainable Tuna Industry Development in Selected Pacific Island Countries – FFA is the implementing agency for this project, which is currently providing support to the Government of the Solomon Islands to develop a national tuna management plan. The plan will determine the strategies and policies by which the Government will safeguard the sustainable use of the country's tuna resources and increase the economic contribution of the industry to the local economy. Similar plans will be developed in Palau and Vanuatu during 1999. Each development plan is being prepared in

the host country by a Pacific Island or Canadian national acting as Project Co-ordinator, working under the direction of FFA's Deputy Director and drawing upon specialist staff from FFA, the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC), and the Forum Secretariat with expertise in fisheries management, fisheries policy analysis, practical fisheries training, fisheries science, investment analysis and promotion, and gender analysis. In each country, a project management committee is established to oversee the development of the plan. Selected individuals from the private sector, from different government departments/authorities, and from community interest groups are invited to join the project committee. Additional consultations are held with interested stakeholders throughout the preparation of the plan. The use of this interactive consultative framework enables all sectors of the community to be involved in the preparation of the plan, enhances the prospects that the final plan addresses the views and concerns of these interested stakeholders, and results in the final plan being a broad-based representation of the stakeholders' views. This sense of community ownership is a pivotal element in the subsequent adoption and implementation of the plan.

Analysis of the Opportunities and Barriers for the Export of Pacific Island Tuna, Deep Water Bottom Fish, Long-Line By-Catch Species, and Marine Aquarium Species into the Canadian Marketplace – ForSec is undertaking this study to analyze the opportunities and barriers for the export of selected finfish products and marine aquaria species from its member countries into the Canadian marketplace. Based on research done in Canada, a Canadian consulting company has prepared an analysis of the Canadian market for tuna, deep-water bottom fish, longline by-catch species, and tropical marine aquarium species, and has formulated options and recommendations for the Forum

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