

P a c i f i c P e o p l e s ' P a r t n e r s h i p

TOK BLONG PASIFIK

News and Views on the Pacific Islands

Vol. 57 No. 1
Fall 2003



**GLOBALIZING THE MEDIA:
CANADIAN JOURNALISTS
NAVIGATE ACROSS SEA OF
COMMON ISSUES**

Features:
Canoe Building in PNG
French Polynesia's
Black Pearls
West Papua Update



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About Tok Blong Pasifik

Tok Blong Pasifik is a phrase in Pidgin, whose rough translation is "News from the Pacific". This is the last issue of the journal in its present format. However, a semi-annual newsletter under the same name will continue to be published by Pacific Peoples' Partnership. Our aim is to promote awareness of development, social justice, environment and other issues of importance to Pacific islanders. Through the newsletter, we hope to provide readers with a window on the Pacific that will foster understanding and promote support for Pacific island peoples and their struggles for peace, justice and sustainable futures. PPP welcomes questions and comments about this and any other issue of *Tok Blong Pasifik*.

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Credit: Nelson Bird

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Subscription Information

Tok Blong Pasifik will no longer be available on a subscription basis. A comprehensive listing of back issues may be found on PPP's website at: www.pacificpeoplespartnership.org. Most issues are available at a charge of \$5.00 per copy plus postage.

Recycled and chlorine-free papers are used in the production of *Tok Blong Pasifik*.

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TOK TOK



By Rita Parikh, Executive Director,
Pacific Peoples' Partnership

Fijian women at a church camp near Raki Raki.
Credit: Tania Willard

Since its first press run in Spring 1982, *Tok Blong Pasifik* has featured a rich variety of "talk that belongs" to the Pacific: news, views, debates and insights from some of the most critical thinkers in the region on some of the most pressing development issues across the islands.

Begun in a pre-Internet, fledgling-independence, nuclear cold-war era, where communications among Pacific islands was prohibitively expensive and where North-South information flows were virtually non-existent, *Tok Blong Pasifik* quickly filled a void not only for Northerners concerned about peoples of the region, but also for Pacific islanders themselves curious to hear about neighbouring nations.

And so, we filled these pages with stories about Pacific life – about the quotidian struggles of those living with the legacy of nuclear testing, about the efforts of villagers to conserve traditional fishing grounds, about young leaders challenging elders on national development directions, and about the heroes and heroines in many arduous struggles to achieve peace, justice and sustainable livelihoods. We've explored the role that international aid programmes and policies have played over the years, and the corrosive impact that international economic policies have had on the fabric of community life.

Tok Blong Pasifik has been a voice for many in the Pacific, a space for activists and poets, artists and academics, to express their concerns about the present and their hopes for the future. Through it all, *Tok Blong Pasifik* has also "belonged" to Pacific Peoples' Partnership – pages have been devoted to the programmes we've pursued, from small

projects building toilets and kitchens in cyclone-devastated Tonga, to large, multi-year initiatives aimed at integrating traditional medicine and its practitioners into Fiji's national health care delivery strategy.

More significantly, however, *Tok Blong Pasifik* has served as a powerful tool for informing those outside the Pacific about the poverty, injustice, militarization and social exclusion that are just as much a reality in these thousands of island communities, as are their legendary beach resorts with warm winds and gentle surf. Indeed, the magazine has been an essential foundation upon which PPP has built national and international advocacy campaigns in common cause with civil society groups in the South.

Against this backdrop, the decision to cease production of *Tok Blong Pasifik*, a journal that has become a calling card for PPP across the Pacific islands, does not come easily. Despite serious financial and human resource challenges that *TBP* has posed over many years, we have struggled to maintain our commitment to its quarterly production schedule. But the toll – both human and financial – has been high. Ultimately we have had to conclude that to continue production in its present form is simply unsustainable.

So, what of the future of PPP's communications on peace and development issues in the Pacific?

PPP remains committed to engaging individuals in our mission to promote the aspirations of Pacific islanders seeking peace, cultural integrity, justice, and sustainability. Over the months and years to come, PPP will explore broader, more efficient and cost-effective ways of building an

Tok Blong Pasifik
has been a voice
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Pacific



informed constituency of global citizens. And, in doing so, we hope to reach beyond the limited readership of *Tok Blong Pasifik*.

"Speaking Out! Aboriginal Media Talk Development" is a case in point. This final issue of *Tok Blong Pasifik* features stories (see pages 8-15) from three journalists who accompanied PPP Programme Development Officer, Jennifer Talbot, on an intense, two-week research trip to Fiji and Vanuatu in spring 2003, as part of this initiative. While their works appear here for the benefit of *TBP* readers, other pieces they have produced have been widely disseminated to readers and viewers across Canada and North America. And, to the extent that the exposure trip significantly affected the way in which these journalists view global relations and Indigenous peoples' struggles within it, their radio and television documentaries, and magazine and newspaper stories will continue to reflect their heightened awareness and analysis in the months and years to come. PPP will continue to look for ways to influence – and contribute to – the coverage of the mainstream and aboriginal media both in Canada and internationally, as one way of raising awareness about development issues in the Pacific.

Many of you have already received our inaugural issue of our new newsletter, also entitled, *Tok Blong Pasifik*. This semi-annual communiqué is a leaner, cheaper, yet informative vehicle for featuring concise reports on emerging issues in the Pacific, and for documenting significant developments in PPP's programmes. We hope it will spark dialogue and we welcome any feedback and suggestions.

Finally, while it is true that access to Internet technology remains a remote possibility for the majority of Pacific islanders, electronic communications has become an increasingly critical tool for PPP. This is true, ironically, in particular with civil society organizations in the South Pacific. Most of our news comes via the 25-odd Pacific-based list serves to which we subscribe. PPP is in the process of redesigning its website to serve as a portal to these and other rich and dynamic information sources. We hope and expect that it will provide the depth and timeliness of news, opinion and analysis from the Pacific that *Tok Blong Pasifik* attempted to achieve over the years. Look for this portal launch early in 2004!

As a social justice organization promoting global transformation, PPP must be ready to embrace change from within. We are humbled by the faithful attention that readers have paid to *Tok Blong Pasifik* over the years and hope that our renewed commitment to finding innovative ways to inform and engage you in developments in the South Pacific will continue to honour the trust that you have placed in us. ■■■■■

WEST PAPUA UPDATE:

Militarization continues as a way of life for citizens

By Jennifer Talbot, Programme Development Officer, PPP

For those seeking justice for West Papua, March 27, 2003 was a landmark when the West Papuan Peoples' Representative Office opened in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Unofficially dubbed the first "West Papuan embassy", its opening represents a successful attempt by those in the independence movement to gain greater political support from another nation for their cause. According to Andy Ayamiseba from the office, "The opening of our office demonstrates to Indonesia and other governments that West Papua isn't sleeping".

With a population of more than 200 million, diverse human and ecological resources, strong military presence and a relatively unstable political system, Indonesia is often referred to as a "sleeping giant". Rather than awaken the giant, most countries turn a blind eye to the military atrocities and unjust policies committed by the Indonesian state and military in West Papua. Few countries have been as brave as Vanuatu in openly challenging Indonesia's policies and practices in Papua.

In October 2001, Pacific Peoples' Partnership published a special edition of *Tok Blong Pasifik*, entitled, "West Papua: Survival or Elimination?" providing a comprehensive overview and analysis of the situation. Unfortunately, little has changed for the Papuan people since this time. Some would even argue that the situation has worsened.

Increased militarisation and human rights violations have become a way of life in the Indonesian provinces of Papua and Aceh. On May 20, 2003 Indonesia embarked on an all-out war on the armed Free Aceh Movement, deploying 40,000 troops and declaring martial law in Aceh. It is not the armed guerrilla movement that bears the brunt of these attacks, however, but civil society – regular citizens, human rights activists, and other peace promoters.

While a repressive military attack to this extent has yet to be waged in West Papua, a more pronounced military presence and a systematic increase in human rights abuses have occurred since President Megawati Soekarnoputri assumed power in 2001. At her first cabinet meeting in August 2001 she stated that a plan would be formulated to quash all threats to "national security", including the separatist movements in Papua and Aceh.

Some examples of targeted violence are the kidnap and murder of pro-independence leader Theys Eluay on





photograph by Leslie Butt



Finally, there are countless environmental concerns. For decades, West Papuans have had little input into how their natural resources are managed and used. Aggressive forestry practices and illegal logging have devastated Papua's tropical hardwood forests, while foreign-owned mining companies have left ghastly scars on the land and polluted the rivers with the tailings from gold and copper mining.

The international community, including Canada, should follow Vanuatu's bold example. Governments and solidarity groups need to pressure the United Nations to review the implementation of the Act of 'Free' Choice in 1969, which handed Papua over to the Indonesian state, and to offer support for and solidarity with the Papuan people by urging the Indonesian government to stop its repressive policies and practices and to consider a new strategy for West Papua that will more positively impact the local people and environment.

PPP is developing a programme focused on the human rights and development agenda in West Papua. Together with other groups, such as the national West Papua Action Network, PPP will work to develop a coalition of Canadian individuals and organizations that will, through advocacy, education and community development initiatives, work together to support the West Papuan peoples in their struggles for peace, justice and development.

From 1999-2002 Jennifer Talbot lived and worked in Indonesia. For two of those years she served as a CUSO cooperant working with human rights and democracy groups from across the archipelago, including West Papua. She is now the Programme Development Officer at Pacific Peoples' Partnership. Contact Jennifer at officer@pacificpeoplespartnership.org for more information on supporting the people of West Papua or to obtain the West Papua *Tok Blong Pasifik* Special Edition.

November 10, 2001 by Indonesian soldiers, and the Timika shootings on August 31, 2002, which left two Americans and one Indonesian civilian dead and 12 others injured. More recently, violent rampages have afflicted the central highlands region of Wamena following a raid on the local military command post by unknown men on April 4, 2003 where several weapons were stolen. While the Indonesian armed forces have accused West Papuan separatists of these acts, it is suspected that the Indonesian military itself is involved. In the aftermath of this raid, the Indonesian military and mobile police force launched a massive operation. From April through June, houses, churches, schools and crops have been set aflame and destroyed, 16 people killed, and hundreds have taken refuge in the surrounding forest.

There are also crucial social and political issues affecting the West Papuan people. The Indonesian state has adopted a 'divide and rule policy' in Papua. In January 2003, Megawati issued a decree calling for the division of West Papua into three new provinces. Not only does this undermine the Papuan special autonomy law passed in October 2001 - which, among other developments, changed the name of the province from Irian Jaya to Papua and allowed for the establishment of the Papuan Peoples' Assembly - it also has the potential to create great social strife.



KANAK DELEGATION VISITS CANADA TO VOICE CONCERNS ABOUT INCO

A high level delegation from Kanaky (New Caledonia) visited Canada in March to express their concern over upcoming plans by Canadian nickel mining company, INCO, to build a massive nickel mine in the island territory.

The fact-finding mission included members of the Customary Senate and the Rheebeu Nuu Monitoring Committee and came after INCO shut down construction of the Goro Nickel project in Kanaky. The delegation met with Assembly of First Nations National Chief Matthew Coon Come, the Grand Council of Cree, Makivik Corporation and a representative of the Innu Nation. The group also met with Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific David Kilgour and Paul Bernier of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and made presentations to Parliamentary Committees in Ottawa.

After ten days of meetings and exchanges in Canada, the delegation found that some Canadian aboriginal peoples and mining companies have succeeded in defining a framework for negotiations that takes into

account the claims and interests of the Indigenous people of Canada.

Georges Manadooue, Senator and member of the Customary Senate, said, "From our point of view these negotiations between mining companies and native peoples in Canada are encouraging for all Indigenous peoples who suffer under the relentless spread of globalization, exploitation and profit-making by multinational corporations."

Rock Wamytan, High Chief of the St. Louis tribe and Minister for Customary Affairs in the Government of New Caledonia, shares this view. "We call upon INCO management to engage resolutely and clearly into negotiations with the Rheebeu Nuu Committee and the Customary Senate, in the spirit of what has been done in Canada. The objectives we want to reach together with INCO must guarantee a sustainable development and succeed in a real benefit-sharing between INCO and New Caledonia. This represents the realization of the spirit and the letter of the Noumea Accord that a Canadian min-

ing company cannot overturn." The Noumea Accord, passed by referendum in 1998, defines New Caledonia's institutions and relations with France for the next 15-20 years. It sets out a timetable by which New Caledonia is to assume responsibility for most areas of government.

Following the Kanak delegation's trip to Canada, INCO CEO Scott Hand travelled to New Caledonia to speak at a community meeting in April. He attempted to address local concerns about the suspension of the Gore Nickel project construction, and promised a process of consultation with the mayors of affected communities to look at ways to promote local employment and training programmes, and allow local businesses to benefit from the project. He said that following the consultation process, he was hopeful INCO could sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the mayors.

MiningWatch Canada, an Ottawa-based NGO opposing irresponsible mineral policies, organized the delegation. Indigenous Kanak leaders continue to have strong concerns about the impact the project will have on the livelihood and health of their communities. More info: www.miningwatch.ca/issues

PALAU HOSTS CULTURAL FESTIVAL

A unique Pacific experience will envelop the tiny island nation of Palau as it plays host to the largest cultural festival in the Pacific islands from July 21 to 31, 2004. The ninth Festival of Pacific Arts will feature more than 2,000 participants from 27 island nations. It has been steadily growing in size and reputation since the first festival was held in Fiji in 1972.

Held every four years, the event is an opportunity for Pacific people to showcase traditional and contemporary aspects of their culture, but it's also a time to share and exchange ideas and discuss the challenges facing Pacific cultural identity in today's globalised world. The theme chosen for the festival in Palau underlines a recurrent concern to preserve and nurture culture.

The Festival theme comes from the Palauan phrase, *Oltobed A Malt*, which translates to "Nurture Regenerate Celebrate". It encompasses the celebration of life, and the vibrant cultures of the Pacific. Preparations are already well underway for the big event. More info: www.festival-pacific-arts.org/

KAVA STUDY SUPPORTS

A study instigated by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat into the kava industry has found there was no basis for the market recalls or restriction on kava by health agencies in Europe in 2001, a move that crippled Pacific island kava exports to Europe and other major overseas markets.

The kava study by Dr Joerg Gruenwald titled "In-Depth Investigation into EU Market Restrictions on Kava Products" was commissioned by the Centre for the Development of Enterprise (CDE), a facility of the European Union based in Brussels, at the request of the Forum Secretariat in July 2002.

Restrictions on kava were imposed by health agencies overseas after reports that some consumers suffered negative reactions, including a number of fatal cases that were blamed on processed



SOLOMON ISLANDS APPROVES INTERVENTION FORCE

Solomon Islands lawmakers have endorsed a plan to let an Australian-led security force into the Pacific nation to prevent it from plunging into anarchy. Conflict between rival islanders has led to a breakdown of law in the archipelago nation, with armed thugs murdering and carrying out kidnappings with impunity particularly in the capital, Honiara.

Teams of Australian and New Zealand defense and police officials are already in Honiara, planning the deployment of 2,000 troops and police in the country of 80 islands, 1,400 miles northeast of Sydney, Australia. An upsurge of violence in June on Guadalcanal left dozens dead and prompted Prime Minister Sir Alan Kemakeza to ask for help from Australia and New Zealand. More info: <http://pidp.eastwestcenter.org/pireport/text.shtml>

PACIFIC VIEW

kava by-products. Kava exports from countries such as Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu collapsed, costing the countries millions of dollars in export revenue. The exporters have since tried to make a distinction between the use of kava in its natural form (as practised in the Pacific islands) and the synthesized compounds and kava by-products offered by the pharmaceutical industry.

The study has suggested that a Kava Committee be established to try to regain the market authorisation for kava products, which have been processed by pharmaceutical companies into a range of prescription drugs and herbal remedies. This will complement the work started by the Pacific Health Research Council (PHRC), based at the Fiji School of Medicine, which is engaged in the scientific analysis of kava. More info: www.forumsec.org.fj

CALENDAR NOTES

Pasifika: the Frank Burnett Collection of Pacific Arts A major new exhibition of Pacific Arts opened in Vancouver, Canada at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology in June, showcasing 100 pieces from the Frank Burnett collection of 1,200 Pacific islands objects donated to the University of British Columbia in 1927. Including items from Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia, the exhibit is at the museum for a year, then travels for two more years to various Canadian venues. More info: jenwebb@interchange.ubc.ca

International Conference on Rethinking Pacific Educational Aid, organized by Victoria University of Wellington and the University of the South Pacific, will be held October 20-22, 2003. Its tentative location is Nadi, Fiji. The conference is part of the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative, a move by Pacific educators to encourage leadership for the educational development of their own communities. The convenors would like to encourage papers that help rethink scholarships and training, educational finance, multi-donor activities, institutional strengthening projects, curriculum development, planning consult-

ants and consultancies, quality, accountability, and other aspects of education. More info: Cherie.Chu@vuw.ac.nz

Europe Pacific Solidarity Seminar, the 14th annual meeting of the Europe Centre on Pacific Issues (ECSIEP), will be held at Le Liebfrauenberg in Goersdorf, about 50 km north of Strasbourg, France, from October 31 to November 2, 2003. The programme is not yet complete, but will include information-sharing sessions on relevant Pacific issues. Possible workshop topics include the role of small arms in conflicts in the Pacific, nuclear testing, and an issue related to fisheries in the Pacific/Barbados +10 conference. More info: ecsiep@antenna.nl

The Oceania Social Forum, which seeks to bring together the peoples of Oceania "to renew the vision of the world we share", will be held in Wellington, Aotearoa, New Zealand in November of 2003. (Exact date TBD). The organizing group hopes to encourage the development of movements for change in New Zealand, Australia and the nations of Oceania. More info: www.oceaniasocialforum.org.nz

TAIMI 'O TONGA NEWSPAPER FINALLY ALLOWED INTO TONGA

The Government of Tonga has finally agreed that the *Taimi 'O Tonga* (*Times of Tonga*) newspaper can be distributed there, after banning the paper for three months over its allegedly seditious content. The decision came after the paper's management had issued an ultimatum threatening to file for contempt of court. The government and eleven cabinet ministers named in the injunction were told to immediately withdraw any instructions to prevent the free movement of the paper into the country. The publisher Kalafi Moala said newspapers held at Customs, would be distributed immediately.

Although a ban on the newspaper has been lifted, there has been no public backing away from a bill introduced in the Tongan Parliament in June which would effectively abolish judicial review powers and press freedom. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) had earlier sent a letter of protest to the Prime Minister of Tonga, voicing its concern over customs officials not allowing 2,000 copies of the newspaper into Tonga, even though the Supreme Court had lifted the ban on the newspaper.

The New Zealand-printed paper is considered Tonga's only independent media. It supports the local pro-democracy movement. More info: www.pmw.c2o.org



SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR FIJI BRINGS RESULTS AND RECOGNITION

Fiji's tuna fishery looks a lot more viable these days thanks to an award-winning initiative involving key organizations in Canada and the Pacific.

The project, initiating an innovative and sustainable approach to management of the Fijian tuna fishery, has brought Canadian-based LGL Limited a prestigious Award for International Cooperation while bringing real benefit to the Fijian people. LGL was also presented with the AMEC Inc Award for Sustainable Development of Natural Resources or Protection of the Environment earlier this year by the Hon. Susan Whelan, Canadian Minister of International Cooperation.

The recognition is the result of LGL's work in the development and implementation of an overall plan for the tuna industry in Fiji as part of their coordinating role for the Canada-South Pacific Ocean Development (C-SPOD) Program. The work was carried out in cooperation with the Government of Fiji and the South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency. Atlantic Canadian consultant, Don Aldeous, combined his previous experience in the Pacific and his knowledge of tuna fisheries management to coordinate the project in Fiji. His consensus approach, together with high level Fijian government support, guaranteed involvement of all affected parties and ensured the project's success.

The western and central Pacific is host to the most productive tuna fishery in the world. With tuna stocks in other regions declining, fishing pressure has increased on the Pacific stocks and over-harvesting by non-Pacific island nations is increasing. The conservation and management of these stocks is essential to the region's long-term economic viability in order to avoid the over harvest associated with many other fisheries elsewhere in the world. The highly migratory fishery requires a regional management approach; however, to accomplish this, each Pacific country will need to develop its own management and enforcement capacity.

Acting Permanent Secretary for Fiji's Fisheries and Forests, L.R. Jiko, was frank in his appraisal of the Fiji fishery before this project. "Prior to the initiation of the plan, our tuna industry faced a number of harsh realities. We had unreliable data on the current catch, growing pressure on the stocks from an increasing number of licenses, a lack of transparency in the licensing process and an insufficient overall capacity to manage the fishery," he said.

One of the key issues was the fact that Pacific island countries receive less than seven percent of the benefits from the multi-billion dollar fishery. Today as a result of this project, radical improvements to the licensing system have already yielded almost a million (Fijian) dollars to the government, a portion of these being dedicated to fund fisheries management and innovative new programmes to address social concerns related to the fisheries.

In addition to the immediate effects of the project, such as



Fijian tuna fishing vessel. Photo Bob Gillet

industry-wide buy-in to the management plan, implementation of conservation and monitoring measures, and fisheries management capacity building, the plan has also put in place a scheme to bring more Indigenous Fijians into the fishery. A set number of licenses will be issued to Indigenous Fijian applicants and seed capital is now available to support new entrants into the fishery.

The Fijian government also implemented an innovative programme that will see some of the money from licensing fees going into a Social and Community Fund, which will address social issues such as HIV/AIDS education. A gender consultant's report that examined gender and social issues related to employment, training and health was incorporated into the plan.

Dr. Kenneth MacKay, coordinator for C-SPOD, says Fiji has been able to put in place a sustainable approach to fisheries management, and is now well-placed to assist other countries with the regional management of tuna resources in the Pacific. "We are delighted to have played a strategic role in this initiative and in the implementation of similar plans in Palau, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu," he said.

For more information: www.c-spodp.org



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LEARNING HOW TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN: PPP's Aboriginal Media Project Sheds Light on Indigenous Struggles Across Pacific



By Jennifer Talbot, Programme Development Officer with Pacific Peoples' Partnership and coordinator of the "Speaking Out! Aboriginal Media Talk Development" initiative.

The heady scent of the Frangipani flower lingers in the air as we speed down the Queen's Highway in our rental van. Laughter resounds from the backseat where Stanley Simpson, coordinator of the Fiji-based Pacific Network on Globalisation, has just finished telling one of his warmly welcomed stories. Squished between bags, boxes and film equipment sits Tania Willard, a young woman from the Secwepemc Nation in the interior of British Columbia and editor of *Redwire Native Youth Magazine*. She wears her headphones, busily transcribing the interviews and sounds she caught on tape earlier in the day. Paul Barnsley, senior reporter for *Windspeaker*, Canada's largest national Aboriginal-owned monthly newspaper, and Nelson Bird from CTV-Saskatchewan, the host of "Indigenous Circle" and a Cree from the Peepeekisis Nation, chuckle at Stanley's stories while absorbing the sights and sounds along Fiji's main highway.

We are en route to Rakiraki - a village on the north coast of Viti Levu. Awaiting our arrival is Titila Nakarawa, a landowner fighting for the return of her hereditary land on which a handful of foreign-owned resorts currently sit. Titila is also a creative businesswoman; her latest initiative entails employing the village youth to hunt colourful fish that line the reefs. Her business name is "Make It Happen". These three words are painted along the side of her yellow boat. "I believe good things happen to people if we make them happen," she explains simply. Appropriate words from a woman who is a community force advocating for the return of her land.

Like Titila Nakarawa, many individuals, grassroots associations and organisations we met during an intense two-week tour to Fiji and Vanuatu are putting their energy towards trying to make positive things happen in their lives and their communities. Throughout the exposure tour, which constituted the first phase of Pacific Peoples' Partnership's "Speaking Out! Aboriginal Media Talk Development" initiative, the three journalists and I encountered an array of people and communities, all taking positive steps to address challenges within their lives and nations.

In some cases, challenges present themselves in the form of large transnational corporations, as is the case in Vatakoula, Fiji. For more than 12 years, 370 gold miners have been striking against the unjust policies and terrible working conditions of the Australian-owned Emperor Gold Mine. In other cases, challenges come by way of actions taken by the government or international institutions, such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. This is the case on Vanuatu's remote Ambrym Island, where a community group is actively addressing these external pressures to 'develop' and reform a centuries-old land tenure system, a step that they recognize will lead to the community's eventual collapse. In the




Make It Happen provides employment opportunities for youth.

Credit: Jennifer Talbot

process of doing "critical literacy" work - what is defined as the process of reading and writing one's own life - the Lolihor Youth Awareness Team is helping to empower rural communities to address this assault on community life. In Port Vila we met with a youth theatre group which spends its days rehearsing and performing, addressing issues often considered controversial, such as domestic violence, alcohol abuse and teen pregnancy.

The individuals and groups we met are diverse and numerous. Although they can't all be named here, each one contributed to opening the journalists' eyes to the ways that communities in Fiji and Vanuatu live, the challenges they face, and the initiatives they are taking to address those challenges.

Having returned to Canada, the journalists are each producing several pieces for publication, to encourage Canadians to examine the commonalities of experiences among Indigenous peoples in Canada and the South Pacific, and to gain a deeper understanding of how communities are addressing creatively the challenges they face.

What resonated most clearly with me is the positive attitudes and resilience shown by the individuals we met. Despite the Herculean social, economic and political challenges that impinge upon their lives, they continue to bring forth positive change within their communities. As Joseva (Joe) Sadreu, president of the Fiji Mine Workers' Union and one of the striking gold miners who left his station 12 years ago on the chance that he could improve the lot of all gold miners, says, "Our struggle is not only for us and our families, but for all workers who face injustice in their lives". Joe's words should inspire us all to take a chance and make some good things happen in our lives and in the lives of others. 



“Graon Hemi Laef, (Land is Life)”: STRUGGLE FOR LAND CONTINUES IN VANUATU

By Tania Willard

“Land is Life and Life is Land” is the declaration of the International Indigenous Youth Conference, held in the Philippines, April 2000.

Land is central to Indigenous culture, survival and resistance. The push of globalisation to ‘develop’ a world of cash economies and eradicate mixed and subsistence systems requires the transformation of land into commodity. Vanuatu is in this situation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) loans and government land policies that promote foreign investment. Yet this risk of losing ownership of the land and the subversion of customary land ownership effectively undermines the 1980 constitutional guarantee of land ownership for Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu people, and threatens their entire way of life.

It is a common experience for Native people in Canada that, when it comes to colonial governments and within our own governance systems, money divides and creates conflict. Aboriginal peoples’ poverty in Canada is different than in Vanuatu but the result is the same: when money and power are offered, it creates division between tribes and Nations, and leads to the breakdown of traditional governance and land ownership. The process of colonization transformed land from an entity with which people held a reciprocal, fluid and organic relationship, into a commodity - something associated with money that required papers to prove title. When the surveyors and land registrations come, they mark the boundaries and lay the groundwork for land to enter the market.

The philosophical shift from land belonging to a community to land as a commodity creates disputes. Those with more power in a community [often chiefs or men in leadership] sign the papers when in reality the land is owned by more than one person. Traditionally, certain trees, stones or rivers marked boundaries and that knowledge was passed down through oral tradition. In the old days, boundaries between different clan lands were often more delineated than those within clans, although in general they were flexible boundaries.

Disputes often arise as a result of this divisive practice. Since Vanuatu’s independence in 1980, a land dispute resolution process has existed in the form of Island Courts, also responsible for issuing

title to customary land. However, the court rulings are defined by Western ideas of private property, which are derived from a feudal system as opposed to the more fluid and customary land ownership practiced by Indigenous peoples.

The division and commodification of land has left it open to purchase by any who can afford it. And the Vanuatu government openly encourages foreign investment. Witness this statement by the Government of



Following a three-hour boat ride from the southern tip of Vanuatu’s North Ambrym Island, Canadian journalists accessed Ranon Village. Credit: Jennifer Talbot

Vanuatu, an island archipelago, is home to 113 distinct cultures and languages as well as to the official languages Bislama, French and English. The word Ni-Vanuatu is a fairly recent collectivization of these distinct peoples, used to bring people together after independence. This diversity can make land ownership complex and ripe for manipulation by governments and foreign powers.



Vanuatu in its effort to promote investment: "Vanuatu is currently one of the best bets for those people in the civilized world who are dreaming of escaping from the rat race into the tropical paradises of the South Pacific." The

Government passed new legislation - such as the Strata Titles Act - to make it easier for people to invest with a reasonable chance of a good return. It streamlined its Foreign Investment Board, customs, and immigration procedures to make formalities of investing and residency as profitable as possible. Although investors cannot currently buy land, they can lease it. Leases generally run for 50 years for residential property and 75 years for commercial property with the lease renewable if, for example, property is subdivided.

In urban areas of Port Vila and Lugainville, there are freehold lands to be bought and sold. After independence, the Vanuatu government negotiated with custom owners of these lands to compensate them for loss of rights to their clan lands. Expatriate-run waterfront hotels and resorts lie in telling contrast to the subdivision of tin houses where Ni-Vanuatu return home after working in these hotels and resorts. So not all Ni-Vanuatu still have rights to land.

The issue is control and power. As Indigenous people, with the land we control our own lives, and we have power to determine our own future. When we lose the land, we become commodities selling our labour and our culture to survive. To open the market for promised development, the new laws coming to Vanuatu are imposed by outside forces like the ADB. As land is gradually taken away, one must ask: who is this development for and who does it really benefit? Around Port Vila, the benefits seem to be restricted to a few wealthy foreigners.

ADB programmes for Vanuatu focus on financial infrastructure, land ownership, development, increasing the size of the labour force, and good governance. Vanuatu is the 32nd largest shareholder in the ADB among its regional members. ADB's strategy for Vanuatu focuses on reforms in economic policy, governance, and public sector management, poverty reduction, and private sector development. Cumulative ADB lending to Vanuatu in 2001 was US\$51.3 million. ADB also is in the business of hiring outside consultants, often foreign, who are involved in thousands of ADB projects.

With that kind of money, the ADB has more influence with the Vanuatu government than the people themselves. Indebted, the government has become more and


more hostage to ADB and foreign development guides. People in rural villages on outer islands are often not included in critical dialogue about land policy or what development they want. The Vanuatu government, pressured by the ADB and guided by expatriate consultants, makes the decisions.

"The Land belongs to the people, to our ancestors. Everyone in the villages has land, they cultivate it and grow the things they need to survive. No one is without land. Right now everybody has land and can make their living from it - no one is hungry. If we have our land we are free; if we lose our land then we don't have any more food or means of survival. That is real poverty."

These were the words of a member of a youth awareness team on Ambrym Island trying to look critically at government and foreign land registration policies.

The Lolihor Youth Awareness Team was formed in response to a workshop in Ranon that looked at land and colonization. LYAT will be travelling across Ambrym Island, meeting with communities and discussing these critical issues. It is this kind of awareness-raising that will help the Ni-Van people make decisions for themselves and become more involved in government decisions. No, they won't have cars and big houses, but they will remain free in their own land.

If the land is sold or if there is a drastic shift to a cash economy and local people lose the land, the Ni-Vanuatu will be labourers in their own land, no longer self-determined. The power of the people is transferred to government through land registration and people are afraid that, if this happens, they can be taxed. In a rural village subsistence economy, there is no cash. So, when land is registered and people can't pay the taxes, the government gets the land. ADB strategies are simply the next form of colonization for Vanuatu, the colonization of global economies.

Real poverty is loss of land. It is poverty that Native people in Canada know too well. These rural communities might not have cars or indoor toilets and washrooms but they have gardens and their systems and culture. They determine their future for themselves. That is freedom not poverty. 



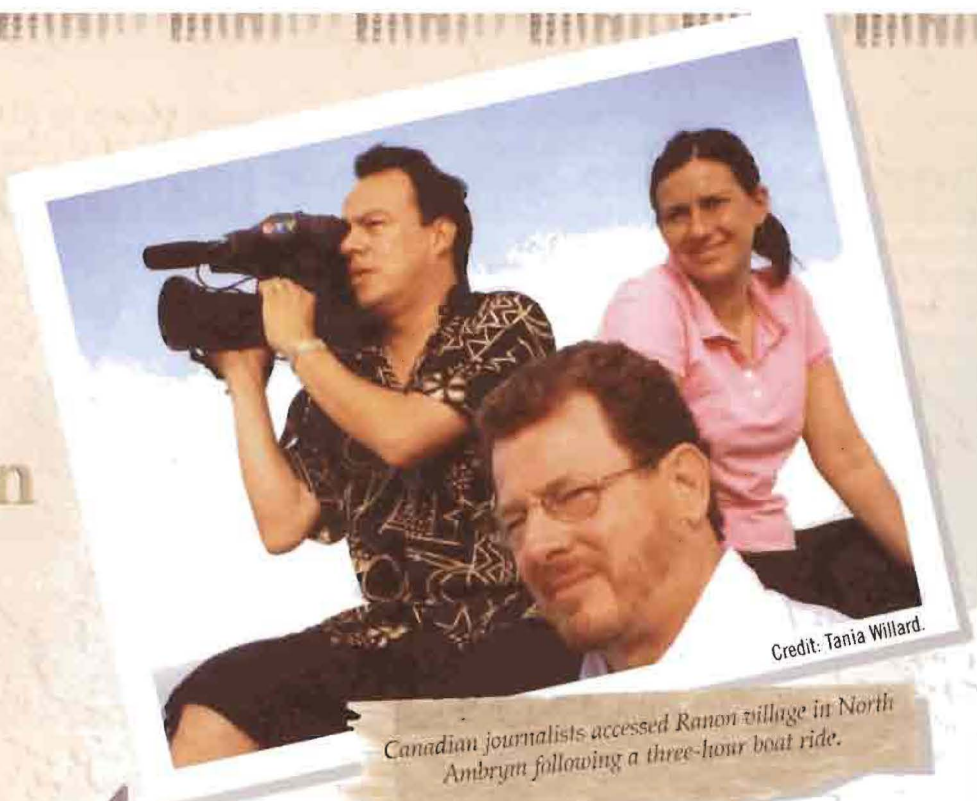
Stanley Jack, Chairman of LYAT on Ambrym Island, and Joel Simo, from NUMU on Aneityum Island, met with Canadian journalists in Ranon Village, Ambrym.

Credit: Jennifer Talbot

Tania Willard is from the Secwepemc Nation in the interior of British Columbia. She is the managing editor of *Redwire Magazine*, a quarterly National Native youth magazine. Tania graduated from the University of Victoria with a degree in Fine Arts. Communication and media have been her way of finding her voice and listening to others.



Encounters in Fiji & Vanuatu



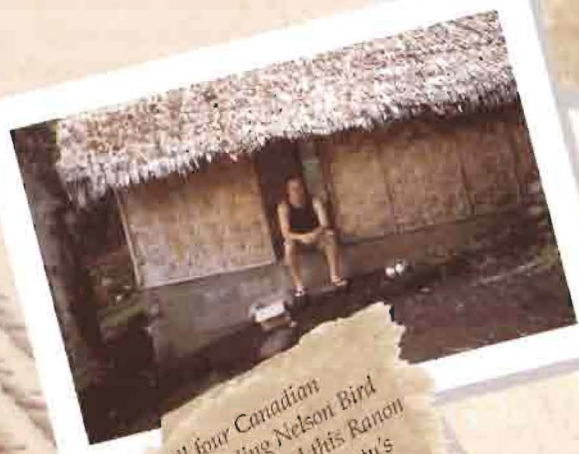
Credit: Tania Willard.

Canadian journalists accessed Ranon village in North Ambrym following a three-hour boat ride.

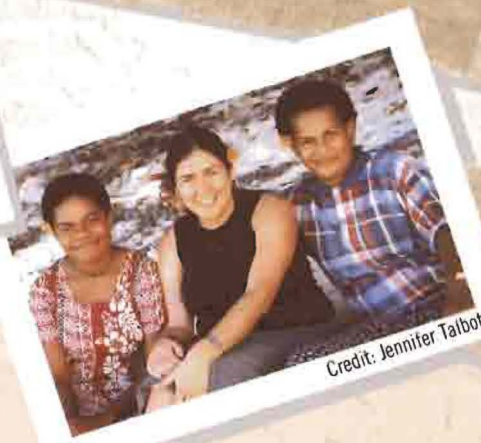


Credit: Jennifer Talbot.

Traditionally, the Rom Dance was performed in North Ambrym, Vanuatu during yam harvest. Today, dances such as these are more often performed for tourists.



All four Canadian guests, including Nelson Bird pictured here, shared this Ranon village home on Vanuatu's Ambrym Island.



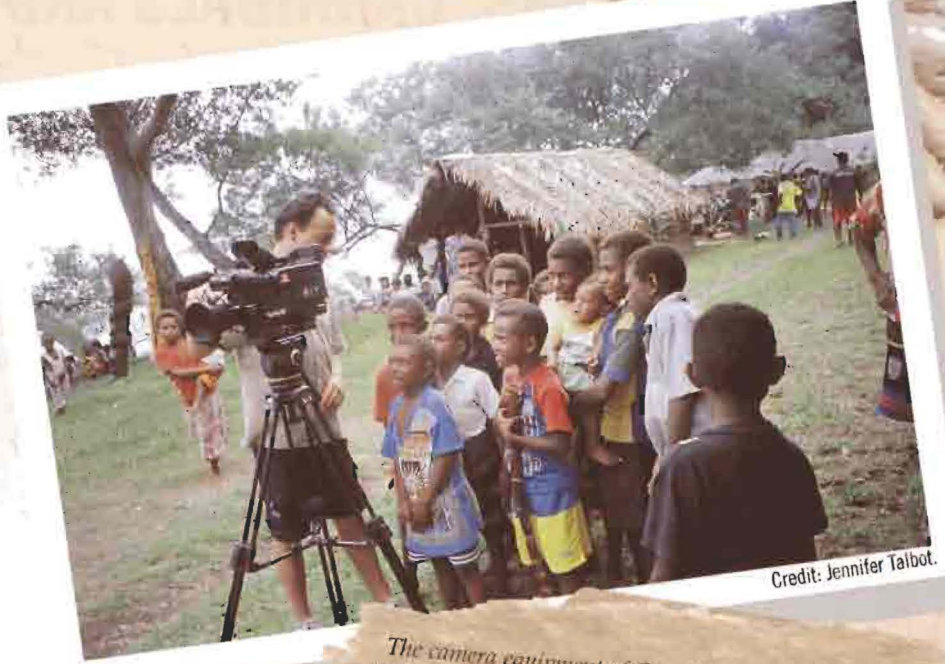
Credit: Jennifer Talbot.

Tania Willard and two Fijian women who work for Titila Nakortava's business, "Make It Happen", share a tranquil moment.



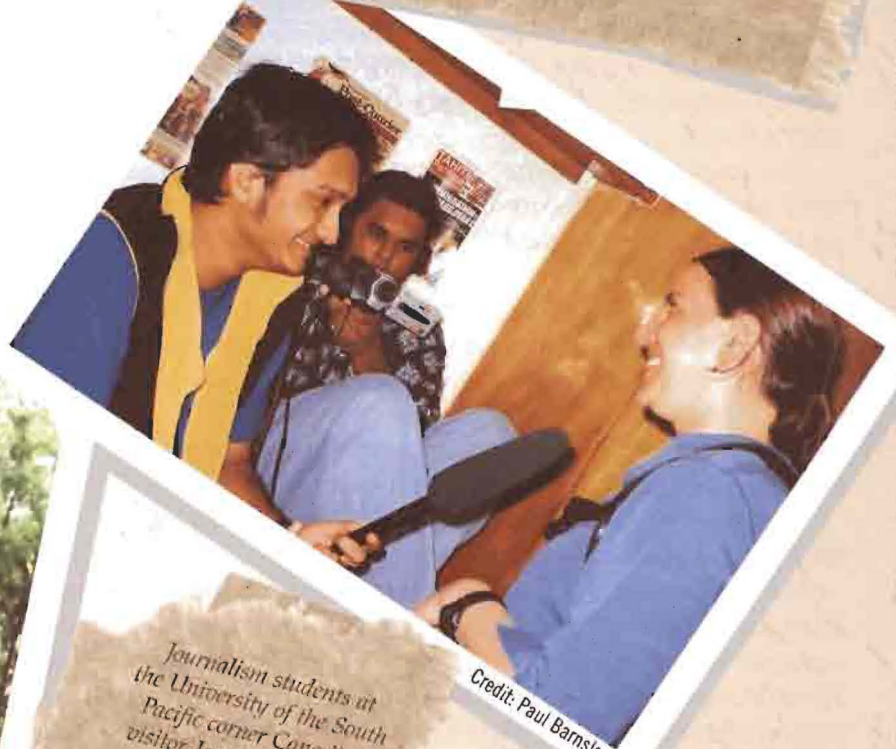
Credit: Jennifer Talbot.

A striking miner's wife reflects on 12 years of unemployment, poverty and loss of dignity.



Credit: Jennifer Talbot.

The camera equipment of Canadian TV journalist, Nelson Bird, arouses predictable curiosity among the children of Ranon village, Vanuatu.



Credit: Paul Barnsley.

Journalism students at the University of the South Pacific corner Canadian visitor, Jennifer Talbot, for an on-camera interview.



Vanuatu children.

Credit: Tania Willard.



SHARKS, CANNIBALS AND THE SPOKEN WORD

Story and photos by Nelson Bird

For most people, the word 'communications' conjures up images of TV, radio, newspaper and public relations people. I thought that too. I am a CTV reporter/producer in Canada and in my job of broadcasting the news, the main form of communicating is through the electronic medium. In May of 2003 my perspective changed when I had the unique opportunity to travel to Fiji and Vanuatu. Indigenous people of the South Pacific were responsible for opening my eyes to another, age-old form of communications - oral tradition.

Historically, Indigenous people from every corner of the world communicated orally. Many did not use written language so stories were passed on from generation to generation. That practice is still in use today, and is particularly evident in the rural and urban communities of the South Pacific islands.

Our journey led us to several rural villages as well as to two urban centres. Whether on a plane, boat, or bus, or in meetings in grass huts, the people we met were more than willing to share stories. Stanley Simpson was one of them.

Stanley was our resource person for the first leg of our journey. He is the coordinator of the Pacific Network on Globalization in Suva, Fiji. As we traveled throughout the main island, he shared many stories with us. It was obvious to everyone that Fijian Indigenous culture is extremely rich and interesting. We were like children seeing things for the first time and asking many questions. He had an explanation for everything.

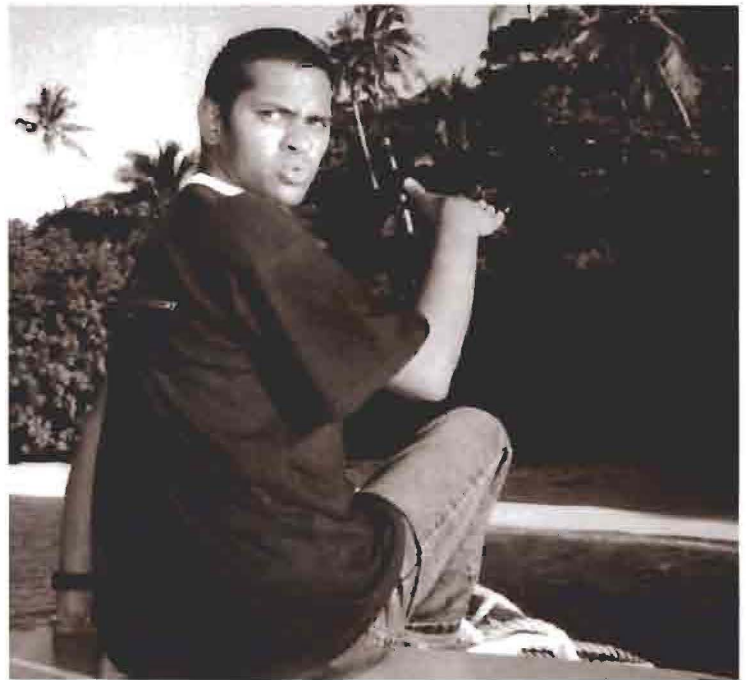
As we drove by the ocean I asked Stanley, "Are people eaten by sharks very often around here?"

"Oh yes," he said "all the time, but... they mostly eat tourists and seldom Indigenous people."

He went on to explain that in many South Pacific Indigenous cultures, sharks are seen as a symbol of strength, courage and respect, much like the eagle in North American Indian culture. Often at a First Nation person's funeral, an eagle will soar overhead, and people assume it to be the spirit of a loved one watching over the family. Stanley compared this belief to the place of sharks in Fijian tradition, "When a person dies and the body is transported by boat to the burial site, it's not uncommon to see a shark leading the way. Sometimes there will be several sharks accompanying the boat."

But, jokes aside, sharks do kill Indigenous people too.

Our resource person on the island of Ambrym in Vanuatu, Pakon Bong, says the main reason for the attacks in his area is Black Magic. Pakon lives on the dark island of Ambrym in a village called Ranon. It's dark for a reason: the island is one of the few in the world where all the beaches have fine black sand and all visible soil is black. Black Magic thrives here for many purposes but most associate it with curses which can be deadly.



Stanley Simpson, Coordinator of the Pacific Network on Globalization.

"When I was a child," Pakon says, "a bunch of us kids were swimming in the ocean when a shark attacked my sister and killed her." Her grave is located near the centre of the village with the words 'Shark Tragedy' below her name. "This happened 25 years ago and to this day," he says, "we know that a curse was put on our family for reasons I can't get into. None of the island's 9,000 residents have been attacked since."

It's stories like Stanley's and Pakon's that captivated me. Throughout our journey I often found myself saying to the people around me, "Wow, that's just like us!" Black Magic is much like Indian Medicine in Canada and both are often seen as negative rather than positive. Yet Black Magic, like Indian medicine, has a history of healing people through natural substance and rituals.



The comparison between sharks and eagles is also remarkably similar but it goes beyond that. Bears, wolves and coyote play as important a role in North American culture as do snakes, fish and tropical birds in the South Pacific.

While similarities exist, there are rituals that are unique (but not exclusive) to the South Pacific and one of them is cannibalism. The practice of eating people ended over 150 years ago but the stories remain and no one seems to be ashamed of it. In fact, many tourist shops sell 'utensils' used in the preparation of eating humans. Over 600 years ago Fijian society was superstitious and religious, believing in human sacrifices. By 1854 the practice of cannibalism had become so prevalent that it was not



A Black Magic practitioner draws mysterious designs in the sand.

uncommon for tribes to slaughter dozens of humans at a time. Victims were usually captured during wars but many also fell victim to village raids. Cannibalism ended abruptly on April 30, 1854 when a paramount chief of central Fiji became Christian.

With such a violent history, one would think cannibalism would be a taboo subject. It's not. People everywhere are willing to tell you stories, and mostly they joke about it. Several years ago, while travelling to England aboard an ocean liner, a much revered chief inspected the dinner menu, promptly discarded it and said, "Bring me the passenger list!" In one village we visited, the community hall had graffiti on the wall reading, "Please don't remove anything from this room...or I'll eat you!"

Humour aside, South Pacific Indigenous people are struggling in many ways to hold on to traditional forms of communicating. In the small island nation of Vanuatu, there's an age-old form of telecommunications still used in some form. It's called the Tamtam. Tamtams are wooden sculptures that resemble the totem poles of Canada's West Coast. "Each pole has a special meaning," says Ralph Regenvanu, Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila. "The face is a representation of the ancestors." Tamtams are used like drums to send messages over long distances, with the drummer transmitting a code between villages and islands. The larger the Tamtam, the wider the transmission. Tamtams are also used as drums to accompany dancers.

The traditions and rituals are not only observed in rural South Pacific areas; they are also observed in cities like Suva, the Fijian capital, where a subtle, yet odd, new tradition exists that most people would not notice. Like any large city, Suva has an abundance of traffic and car horns honk continuously. In most cities the noise is an indication of stress and anger but in Suva it's different. The stress is there, but more often than not, drivers are simply being courteous. They honk to allow pedestrians to cross. They honk to allow other vehicles the right of way and they honk simply to say hello - there's a lot of honking. There I was in downtown Suva with a thousand car horns bleating at the same time. Until then, I never thought I'd experience culture shock over car horns.

Whether it was car horns, shark stories or cannibalism, the South Pacific struck me as an area in the world where life can be surreal while at the same time absolutely normal. Mainstream media exists, cell phone and computers are common, but generally people are content to share experiences through word of mouth. People in remote villages do not complain about material things they don't have; they are happy to work in the fields and on their fishing rigs. And at the end of the day, they are also happy to share their stories with each other. 📷

Nelson Bird is a member of the Peepeekisis First Nation in Canada's province of Saskatchewan. After studying journalism in university, he graduated with two BA degrees: one in Indian Studies and one in Journalism and Communications. Since 1998 Nelson has served as an Aboriginal Affairs Reporter with CTV Saskatchewan and has hosted a weekly TV show, Indigenous Circle.



Post-Colonial Struggles Haunt “Island Paradise”

Story and photos by Paul Barnsley

Since Indigenous people make up 52 percent of the population in Fiji, you would not think the country would have an “Indian problem”. That’s a uniquely North American situation, isn’t it? But many will tell you that’s the way it is in this former British colony. Others will say that is a simplistic, even dishonest, assessment of the situation.

As with so many post-colonial scenarios, the truth is never easy to discern. Racial tensions and resentments have played a role in two coups in the South Pacific nation. Everyone agrees on that point. The disagreement starts when the discussion turns to whether or not racism caused the coups.

Long before independence in 1970, the Indigenous Polynesian people of Fiji so charmed a colonial governor that he ordered them confined to their vilages for their own protection. Labourers from India, another British colony, were brought in to do the work of the Empire. Today, descendents of those Indo-Fijians make up more than 40 per cent of the population. They dominate the economy, running the shops, driving the cabs. Most Indigenous Fijians will tell you they are still trying to recover from that colonial governor’s supposed act of kindness.

About 170 nations are ranked in the United Nations human development index. Canada has moved up and down in the top three positions over the last several years, ranking number one on more than one occasion; Fiji usually ranks around 100 in terms of quality of life. That’s not the image the western world has of Fiji. Its many resorts and perfect climate make it a favourite vacation spot. But scratch the surface and you’ll find, as the old cliché goes, there is trouble in paradise.

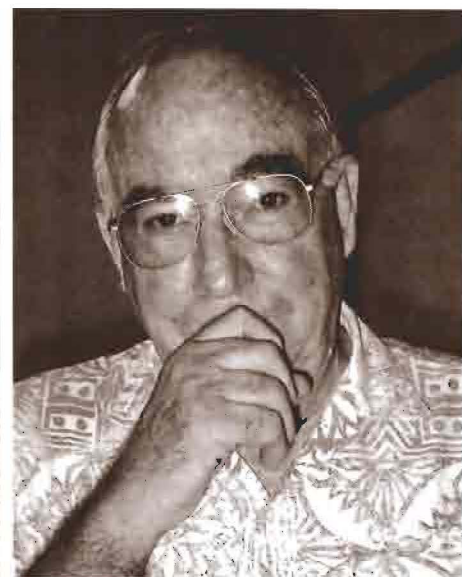
What was Really Behind the Coups?

In 1987 and again in 1990, armed insurgents seized the former colonial headquarters that now serves as Fiji’s parliament building. In each case, the call to arms was based on the fear that Indo-Fijians were not paying proper attention and respect to Indigenous issues.

Fiji-TV journalist, Riyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, was right in the middle of the 1990 coup. His show, produced at a studio across the road from parliament in the capital city, Suva, angered the people who occupied the government building because the guests on the show suggested the coup leaders were exploiting deep-seated racial tensions for political purposes.



Francis Sokonibogi.



Father Kevin Barr.

“They did not like what had been said because it was very critical of what had happened in parliament, about these people who had taken over,” the reporter admitted. “So they stormed Fiji Television with guns and rocks and, I’m not sure what else they had. Very fortunately, the staff members who were still inside the building escaped with their lives.”

Grassroots people and social activists say racism is not predominant in Fiji. People normally get along. “The coups were done by the ambitious and failed politicians,” declares Francis Sokonibogi, an Indigenous Elder and writer who speaks out for the poor on the main island, Viti Levu.

He believes the politicians were able to deflect the justifiable anger that was directed at them toward the Indo-Fijians. The anger is all about land. *Terra Nullius*, the now discredited western theory that Indigenous land everywhere was empty and therefore available for colonization, did not apply there. The people of Fiji owned their land.

“We had our title. We were recognized owners in the western legal sense and there was a deed of cession that provides this,” Sokonibogi says. “This is the first law of the land. Our title is just as good as fee simple.”

When independence arrived, land that had been seized by the British reverted to government control. Grassroots landowners have had to file land claims with their own government to get the land back. Frequently, the government keeps the land. Sokonibogi and others say there’s a lot of corruption involved in this process.

Fijian people, 30 years or more behind their Indo-Fijian



countrymen in terms of economic participation, were not allowed during colonization to learn how to work the land for profit. Today, there are few places for them in the economy. For years, they leased their land to Indo-Fijians. Now, they're being told by politicians to take it back. This has caused economic disruption and produced some tensions between the races.

"The leaders and administration didn't do their jobs by progressing the development of the Fijian people with the times. They kept the disempowerment programme until today for their own interests," Sokonibogi says.

The Great Council of Chiefs plays an important role in the government of Fiji. It has veto power over legislation that affects Indigenous people. Activists say the chiefs have usually acted in their own best interests, often at the expense of the people.

"With my traditional standing, I've been able to tell the chiefs that. For years, I've been telling them off. I've told them that modernity demands that if you have a chiefly council, you must also have a commoners' council. All my writing is built on that," the Elder emphasizes.

"There is a minority within the majority. The minorities are those who have used this system for their grievances, court cases and all, and just couldn't get any satisfaction for three or four generations. They want their land back but it's been set upon by someone else."

Sokonibogi believes the issues are more class-related than race-related - that the reality is there is no "Indian problem" in Fiji - but that's something the politicians seek to obscure by fanning racial tensions.

Father Kevin Barr, an Australian Catholic priest who has spent more than 30 years working with South Pacific peoples, agrees. He believes, like most people I interviewed in various parts of the country, that racism is not a major problem until the politicians invoke it to manipulate the electorate.

"Indo-Fijians have become the scapegoat," says Father Kevin. "But it's not that really. It can be the whole political process; it can be a carry-over from colonial times; it can be all these new economic policies - globalism - that they're upset with. A lot of things that are really class issues are deliberately transformed into ethnic issues. So people should be united because if they see these as class-based issues of poverty or equality they can be addressed. But somebody else is getting in there to manipulate, to say, 'No, no, no, this is an ethnic issue. It's those Indians that are to blame.' So they transfer the blame from, if you like, the elites, onto the Indians. It's been very subtly but consistently done and until people wake up to that, it can happen again."

Undoing the complicated threads left by the colonizers

is a complex and painfully slow process. Many Fijian people say their entire system of government needs to be revamped. There is a growing notion among Indigenous people that their chiefs have failed them and that there needs to be a great shaking out of even the traditional forms of government. Co-optation, a common tactic of colonization, has corrupted all forms of governance in the country, Sokonibogi believes.

"The problem that we have here is the legacy left by the colonialists, that the Fijian people should be protected. After the British left, [the chiefs] kept that archaic arrangement into modern times. To protect their power," he adds "there's a new phenomenon now being born. When the Indigenous people take over the reins of government, they do exactly what the colonialists do." 

Paul Barnsley, senior writer for *Windspeaker*, Canada's national Aboriginal news source, has been covering Indigenous issues for more than 10 years, always in the employ of an Aboriginal-owned publication. He is frequently sought out by the mainstream press as an authoritative and neutral commentator on First Nation politics. He also contributes to human rights and race relations journals.



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MANGI MONGO YU GO WE?

*The story
of a canoe;
the future
of a village*



← Article and photos by John Wagner →

When I first visited Kamu Yali in September, 1998, I was immediately struck by its raw beauty. Kamu Yali is a village of about 500 people located on the shore of Nasau Bay at the southeastern edge of the Huon Gulf in Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea. There are no roads to the village, so visitors arrive by boat, usually on a six metre dinghy carrying passengers and cargo between the village and the city of Lae.

Approaching by water, one's eye is drawn first to the majestic, blue-tinged mountain peaks that soar to heights of 2,000 metres just behind the village, and then to the perfect south seas beauty of the village itself. Houses of palm and pandanus stretch in a line along a white sand beach, their floors built a metre or more off the ground to protect against the occasional flood of seawater. Outrigger canoes, one in front of almost every house, dot the beach just above high water mark.

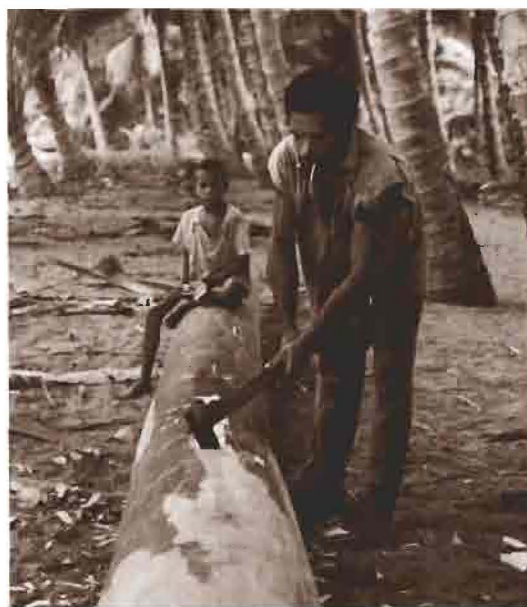
In Kamu Yali, life without an outrigger canoe would be unthinkable. Men use canoes to fish, an almost-daily activity since fish are virtually the villagers' only source of protein. Most men also use their canoes for commercial fishing when the chance arises. Women use canoes when they go to nearby reefs to dive for the shells from which they make *kambang*, a kind of lime that is chewed with betelnut. And both men and women regularly use their canoes to carry food home from their gardens in the Bitoi Delta, located some five to ten kilometres north.

During one full year in Kamu Yali, I observed canoes in all stages of

construction and village men (only men build canoes there) were more than happy to initiate me into the lore of canoe building. When the family I lived with built a new canoe, for my use as well as their own, I documented the process from beginning to end.

"*Mangi Mongo yu go we?*" is the name of the canoe described here. It was built by my adoptive "papa", Giamsa Tusi, and his son Paio, with the help of family and friends. Paio took responsibility for gathering the many materials needed, and was also responsible for naming the canoe. Translated literally, the pidgin phrase "*Mangi Mongo yu go we?*" means "where are you going, kid from Mongo?" Mongo is the name of the village area in which Giamsa and his family live and the term *Mangi Mongo* is used to refer to the boys and young men who live there (and on occasion to older men as well - including me!).

At Kamu Yali construction of an outrigger canoe requires the use of as many as ten different kinds of tree and one or more vines. The main body of the canoe can be hollowed out from a variety of local trees, some easier to find than others, some easier to work with, some more durable. The most frequent choice at Kamu Yali, and the tree used to build *Mangi Mongo*, is known in the local Kela language as *eseri*. It grows abundantly throughout the Bitoi Delta on moist, fertile soil similar to that which villagers prefer for their gardens. Villagers tend "canoe trees" from when they are very young, sometimes using wild trees and sometimes planting



Paio makes the first cut.



them. In that way, they grow tall and straight, and they are clearly marked as owned. Bitter disputes arise on occasion if the ownership is not established by regular tending. Since it takes 20 years for these trees to grow large enough to make a two-person canoe, and 30 years for a four-to-six-person canoe, care is often passed from father to son.

The outrigger, known locally as the *samen*, is made from the soft, buoyant wood of the *sama* tree, also found in the Bitoi Delta. Unlike *eseri*, however, *sama* grows on stony ground near rivers. Since most of this is in the delta located well away from Kamu Yali gardens, and is frequented most regularly by a neighbouring people, the Kaiwa, villagers at Kamu Yali often ask a Kaiwa trading partner to cut and prepare a *samen* for them, paying them with several ropes of betelnut or *kambang* shells.

Three other kinds of wood together with a rope made from a local vine are used to attach the *samen* to the main body of the canoe. The body is first fitted with two *nomborodo* made from the *erangi* tree, which is found throughout Kamu Yali territory. Short spikes of *mato*, an extremely hard, red-coloured wood are then driven into the *samen* in two groups of four spikes. Finally, two crosspieces of *yanay* are lashed first to the *nomborodo*, then to the *mato*, using a rope made from *weng*, a local vine. All these materials must be sought out in the various habitats they prefer.

Still other species of tree are used to make the canoe bed, an essential feature of all outrigger canoes. The bed is used to carry cargo and passengers and when fishing, the men will sit on the bed, arranging their gear strategically beside them while dropping nylon lines with baited hooks and sinkers into 30 to 100 metres of water at the reef edge. The bed thus provides a comfortable platform from which to fish or relax, smoke a bit of tobacco, chew betelnut, and swap stories with a fishing partner. While the bed frame may be constructed from a number of different tree species, the bed itself, known as *yawe*, is made exclusively from the tough outer bark of one or another species of *Pandanus*, as are the floors of most Kamu Yali houses.

To build a canoe, then, one must come to understand the characteristics of a wide variety of trees and plants,

know their preferred habitats, and understand how their characteristics vary throughout their range. One must also know the sequence in which materials must be gathered, dried and prepared before the canoe is actually assembled. If these things are not well understood, or if a man is too impatient to work carefully, the canoe will not handle well in the water and will begin to fall apart within a year or two. A properly worked canoe, on the other hand, lasts as long as five years when the main body is made from *eseri* and as long as 30 years if a more durable wood such as *enga* (rosewood) is used.

Mangi Mongo was completed and ready for the water in just over three months from the day Paio initially cut down his canoe tree in the Bitoi Delta. In that time, over 30 village men had assisted either in the work of dragging the tree to the river, floating it to the village, preparing the many other materials needed, or assembling

these various parts into a finished canoe. On the final day, Giamsa's wife, Kali, with the help of her daughter Miriam, granddaughter Lema, and a dozen other female relatives prepared a feast to which all helpers were invited. In addition to re-affirming a rich body of traditional ecological knowledge, the process of canoe construction at Kamu Yali also re-affirms the social relations on which the community depends.

Still, the joking,

quizzical name Paio gave the canoe speaks less to social tradition than to certain fundamental processes of change that are also part of contemporary life in Kamu Yali. Like many young men and women in the village, Paio left for several years, going to live in a distant city, returning eventually to help his aging parents. Like many others he came back changed, uncertain of his place in the village, unsure of where his future lay. The construction and naming of the canoe provided Paio with an opportunity to speak eloquently to this dual nature of village life. The story of *Mangi Mongo* then, is not just the story of a canoe; it is also the story of a village. Paio might just as well have named the canoe "*Kamu Yali, yu go we?*" ■



Final assembly of Mangi Mongo.

John Wagner lived in Kamu Yali from September 1998 to August 1999 while carrying out doctoral research in anthropology. He now teaches at Okanagan University College in British Columbia, Canada.

Black Pearls of French Polynesia and the Cook Islands

By David Stanley

Kamoka Pearl Farm. Credit: Krackatoapartners.com

According to myth, Oro, the Polynesian god of war, descended to Earth on a rainbow to present a Bora Bora princess with a black pearl. Later, pearls appeared on the mourning costumes of Tahitian priests at the funerals of important chiefs. The commercial quest for pearls began around 1870 as island divers wearing only tiny goggles plunged effortlessly to depths of 25-30 metres in the Tuamotu lagoons to collect oysters. Finding a pearl this way was one chance in 15,000, with the more realistic objective being to collect the shell popular for mother-of-pearl buttons.

By 1960, however, over-harvesting had depleted the slow-growing oyster beds; today wild oysters are collected only to supply cultured-pearl farms. And the shell is now a mere by-product made into decorative items. But French Polynesia's cultured-pearl industry has exploded and is currently second only to tourism as a money earner, providing 75 percent of the territory's exports.

Black Pearl Culture

In 1963, an experimental farm was established on Hikueru atoll in the Tuamotus. The first commercial farm opened on Manihi in 1968, but the real boom hit only in the late 1980s. Today hundreds of cooperative and private pearl farms operate on 26 atolls, employing thousands of people.

Unlike the Japanese cultured white pearl, the Polynesian black pearl is formed only by the giant blacklipped oyster (*Pinctada margaritifera*), which thrives in the Tuamotu lagoons. It takes about three years for a pearl to form in a seeded oyster. A spherical pearl is formed when a Mississippi River mussel graft from Tennessee is placed inside the coat; a hemispherical half pearl can be cultured when the graft is placed between the coat and the shell. Half pearls are much cheaper than whole pearls and make outstanding rings, earrings and pendants.

The cooperatives sell their production at Papeete auctions twice a year. Local jewelers vie with Japanese buyers at these events, with some 60,000 black pearls in 180 lots changing hands for about US\$7 million. Private producers sell their pearls through independent dealers or plush retail outlets in Papeete. Every year about a million black pearls worth US\$150 million are exported to Japan, Hong Kong,

the U.S., France, and Switzerland, making the territory the world's second-largest source of loose pearls (after Australia which produces the smaller yellow pearls). To control quality and pricing, the export of loose reject pearls from French Polynesia is prohibited, although finished jewelry made with reject pearls is exempt.

The industry is drawing people back to ancestral islands they abandoned after devastating hurricanes in 1983. Although small companies and family operations are still able to participate in the industry, pearl production is becoming increasingly concentrated in a few hands due to the vertical integration of farming, wholesaling, and retailing. Robert Wan's Tahiti Perles now controls over half the industry and the next four companies account for another quarter of production.

Pearl farming relieves pressure on natural stocks and creates an incentive to protect marine environments. Pollution from fertilizer runoff or sewage quickly makes a lagoon unsuitable for pearl farming which is why the farms are concentrated on lightly populated atolls where other forms of agriculture are scarcely practiced.

On the down side, pearl farm workers often feed themselves with fish they catch in the lagoons, leading to a big decline in marine life. Another source of conflict are sea turtles, which crack open the oyster shells to get at one of their preferred foods. To prevent this, wire netting must be erected around the farms, although it would be far easier for the farmers to simply harvest the endangered turtles.

The strings of oysters must be constantly monitored and lowered or raised if there are variations in water temperature. The larger farms use high pressure hoses to clean the shells, thereby attracting anemones which compete with the oysters for food.

Smaller family operations like Kamoka Pearl Farms on Ahe atoll are proving to be pioneers in more ecologically-friendly production, www.kamokapearls.com. They have designated their lagoon areas a 'fish park' with no fishing allowed. Oyster strands are strategically moved around the fish park on a constant rotation so that the fish clean/eat the potentially destructive anemones from the outside of the shells. Those farms that clean oysters with pressure



hoses or by scraping with a knife contribute to the artificial growth of anemones because particles scraped or blown to bits regenerate into more anemones at ever-faster rates. Oyster overcrowding can also create disease hotspots that spread infections to other farms. More research and government supervision will be required if this industry is to flourish in the long term.

Pearl Farming Expands to the Cook Islands

In 1982 research began into creating a cultured pearl industry in the Cook Islands similar to that of French Polynesia. The first commercial farms were set up on Manihiki in 1989 and today over a hundred farms on Manihiki produce cultured pearls from the two million oysters below the surface of the lagoon. By 1994 the Manihiki lagoon was thought to be approaching maximum sustainable holding capacity. Farms have now been established on Penrhyn with hundreds of thousands of oysters presently hanging on racks in the Penrhyn lagoon, and a hatchery adding to their numbers daily.

Oyster farming has also begun on Rakahanga. However, a proposal to establish a pearl farm on uninhabited Suwarrow atoll was rejected in 2001 over fears that the atoll's large seabird colonies would be disturbed.

To build a farm, an investment of NZ\$5,000 is required, and no return is expected for five years. There are currently more than 300 farms in the Cook Islands with just 20 per cent of them accounting for 80 per cent of the oysters. Oysters are seeded by Japanese, Chinese, and Cook Islands experts screened by the Ministry of Marine Resources. The pearl industry has reversed the depopulation of the northern atolls and brought a degree of prosperity to this remote region.

Thanks to pearls, Air Rarotonga can afford to operate regular flights to Manihiki and Penrhyn, making life a lit-

tle easier for the 1,750 inhabitants of the Northern Group. Fortunately a major hurricane at Manihiki in 1997 did little harm to the underwater oysters, although surface facilities were destroyed and 20 people died.

Fluctuations in water temperature and overstocking can affect the amount of plankton available to the oysters and reduce the quality of the pearls. In 2001, a bacterial pearl shell disease outbreak at Manihiki caused by a combination of over-farming and high water temperatures wiped out almost half the juvenile oyster population. Some would say that the rapid growth in pearl farming over the past decade has pushed sections of the Manihiki lagoon well beyond its capacity of oysters. The algal bloom killed 15 per cent of seeded oysters, leading to an estimated loss of NZ\$34 million over five years.

Despite this setback, annual production is around 200 kilograms and black pearls account for 90 per cent of the Cook Islands' exports, bringing in NZ\$15 million a year and

employing 700 people. Japanese and Chinese dealers are the main buyers of the official production, and it's believed the industry is actually worth much more as large quantities of pearls are smuggled out of the country each year to avoid customs duties.

Pearl prices are currently falling as production increases and some producers are worried that the boom may already have peaked. The governments of the Cook Islands and French Polynesia are currently working hard to control pearl smuggling, encourage sustainable farming practices, and impose stricter quality controls. ■



The oyster grafting process is a delicate operation requiring training and expertise.

Credit: Krackatoapartners.com

Respected Canadian travel writer, David Stanley, has written guidebooks to the South Pacific, Micronesia, Alaska, Eastern Europe, and Cuba, opening those areas to budget travelers for the first time. His authoritative website, www.southpacific.org, showcases all his publications. The Black Pearls article is edited from the 5th edition of Moon Handbooks *Tahiti (Including the Cook Islands)*.

THE CURE FOR THE COMMON TRIP



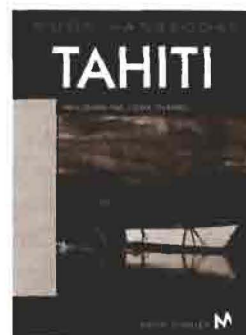
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Beyond the Cheque Book: Giving as an Act of Political Solidarity

By Rita Parikh, Executive Director, Pacific Peoples' Partnership

It is probably fair to say that in close to 30 years of activism and education in the field of international development and social justice, Pacific Peoples' Partnership has not encountered the level of retrenchment and resistance to giving that we have witnessed in Canada over the past 12 months. Despite our historical positioning as an international organization promoting the aspirations of Pacific islanders for peace, justice and development, PPP has always relied on the generosity of Canadian institutions to sustain the organization and our programmes in the Pacific. Yet from the federal governmental level on down to the provinces, and across national foundations and local corporations, the institutional will to contribute to change in any meaningful way has so diminished, it has been tempting to despair and consider closing up shop.

Financial support, for instance, from the Canadian International Development Agency, historically PPP's most reliable and generous

dations report that their own holdings have been so crippled by the collapse of financial markets, they have had to drastically curb their granting programmes, and redefine their priorities. Moreover, in dealings with community liaisons representing some of this country's most thriving and vibrant private sector entities, it has become clear that there is little room for risk-taking and innovation, or for promoting reform, let alone transformation. Despite the new rhetoric of corporate social responsibility, few corporations appear interested in contributing to any real movement for social change.

How are we to respond, then, to this economic climate? Do we accept the behaviour of these institutions as reflective of the sentiment of the general public? Are Canadians truly indifferent to the plight of people in the Pacific, and unmoved by their heroic efforts to sustain their communities and their livelihoods? And what do we make of the solidarity and commitment expressed by

year - each carries with it, more profoundly, an expression of so much more. Indeed, to Pacific Peoples' Partnership, each contribution reflects an act of political solidarity: not merely, or even essentially, proof that Canadians care about the Pacific, but more critically, that they believe in human beings' capacity to create lasting and positive change. More than a recognition of our responsibilities and obligations as global citizens, it represents both an overt statement about the world in which we currently live (and indeed, about the values that sustain and underpin both poverty and wealth), as well as a conscious act of collaboration to create a more just, peaceful and hopeful world.

Cheque book activism is as profound as any on the continuum of acts that contribute to the growing social movement of communities and individuals working for political, economic and social transformation. To Pacific Peoples' Partnership, it stands in sharp contrast to the emerging institutional acquiescence to the perversity of the globalized system, and the poverty and injustice it embraces.

Sustained morally, financially and politically by this support, Pacific Peoples' Partnership will continue to be an expression of Canadians' will for profound change. And, through our educational programming, advocacy, youth exchanges and development initiatives, we will continue to work in collaboration with, and on behalf of, our civil society counterparts in the South Pacific.

Are Canadians truly indifferent to the plight of people in the Pacific, and unmoved by their heroic efforts to sustain their communities and their livelihoods?

source of funding, has all but dried up as its recent and explicit drive for greater "effectiveness" has shrunk the aid flowing to regions of little strategic importance for Canadians, focusing it instead on only nine developing nations in the world. Representatives of some of Canada's wealthiest foun-

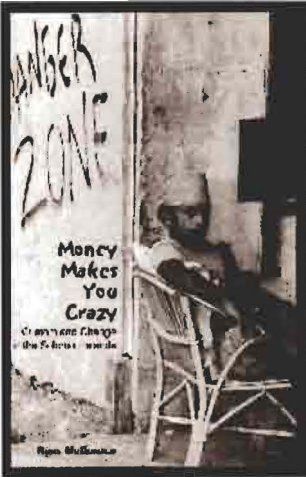
Canadians over almost 30 years of collaboration and exchange with people of the South Pacific?

Today, the letter carrier delivers three precious envelopes to our door. And while each bears within it a new gift to PPP - the money with which we will build our programmes this



Money Makes You Crazy Makes a Whole Lot of Sense!

Book Review By Michael Bodden



In *Money Makes You Crazy*, author Ross McDonald presents an all-too-familiar portrait of the havoc that unbridled capitalist economic development schemes are wreaking on the Solomon Islands. For McDonald, fascinat-

ed by the contrast between the "self-sufficient world" of basic sanity and genuine contentedness still found in most Solomon Island villages, and the "often strained workaday existence of the more 'developed' world", the ruin visited on customary culture by capitalism stands in stark contrast to various efforts made over the past several decades by Solomon Islanders to chart a different, compromise course.

In the book's first few pages, McDonald documents the struggles of several Solomon Islands communities to pursue an alternative approach to development. This grew out of his fieldwork in the Solomons between 1998 and 2001. Each of the book's five chapters records a visit the author made to communities on New Georgia, Malaita, and Guadalcanal. Each chapter raises one or more of the key problems facing Indigenous islanders, many generated by foreign companies and corporations: land appropriation for mining and other projects, often with grossly inadequate compensation; unsustainable logging practices; or declining fish stocks. The increasing intrusion of a cash economy has also eaten away at traditional community bonds, tempting greedy local chiefs to cut selfish deals with foreign business interests, and luring youth away from the villages with the promises of a showy, consumerist lifestyle in the capital, Honiara.

Each chapter (with one key exception) also relates the efforts of local groups and communities to take charge of their own destiny and manage development for the good of all, rather than for selfish personal interests. These efforts range from the educational programmes and volunteer reforestation work of the Christian Fellowship Church on New Georgia, to the local sustainable tourism practices of a New Georgian village, to the historical cooperative movements of Malaita (Maasina Rulu) and Guadalcanal (Moro Kastom Kampani). Interestingly, a number of these

efforts combine messianic leadership and legacy with modern economic and educational ventures.

It is in these movements that McDonald sees the main hope for helping the Solomons avoid the pitfalls of modern capitalist life. In their adherents and leaders, he finds a "great and simple wisdom" of cooperation and human caring/sharing. Yet a number of the historical movements he encounters also seem to have stalled due to colonial persecution or refusal of support by both colonial and post-colonial governments. Thus, the challenges they face are not presented with naïve optimism.

Particularly tragic is the story of the residents of Gold Ridge, whose land was appropriated by an Australian mining company, working with the Solomon's own government, both eager to benefit from the area's abundant gold reserves. Given meager compensation and resettled in a shabbily-built, unhygienic settlement in an isolated spot, the former Gold Ridge natives with little means of livelihood seemed doomed, according to McDonald, to squander their compensation payments on drink or gambling in order to soothe their pain.

The author's account is sensitive and sympathetic to Indigenous Solomon Islanders who find themselves in such terrible straits, as well as to those still living in custom areas, and those trying to fight against the tide of consumerist individualism. With deft anecdotes he draws our attention to basic issues and attitudes important to the conflicts he is examining. What seems to be missing, however, is a more comprehensive analysis of the overarching political dynamics of the country. Given recent events, such an account could have brought added clarity to how multi-national-driven development works to corrupt the national government and exacerbate ethnic tensions, making the work of cooperative community movements even more difficult, albeit necessary.

***Money Makes You Crazy by Ross McDonald
(Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press,
2003) ISBN: 1 877276 44 8.***

Michael Bodden is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. He teaches Indonesian-Malay language, literature, theatre, and Pacific literature.



Celebrating 27 years of working with Pacific island peoples to support their efforts to create lasting solutions to the realities of poverty and injustice in their communities and across the region...

photo: Elaine Brien



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