

Chapter 19

Biography of a Nation: Compiling a Historical Dictionary of the Solomon Islands

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I have been conducting research in the Solomon Islands since the 1970s, but must admit my intensity varied during the 1980s and 1990s, when I continued to visit my adopted family¹ but concentrated on other historical projects elsewhere. Then in the early 1990s, I conceived the idea of writing a history of Malaita Province from the time the British administration began on the island in 1909 and started working slowly, through the files in the National Archives in Honiara. At the beginning, this meant a few weeks each year or two, typing everything into my laptop as there was no photocopying facility available. I came to respect the huge amount of material in the archives and despaired that I would never get through it all. During the crisis years, 1998-2003, my attention to events in the contemporary Solomon Islands intensified and eventually I decided to write an account of the years, which appeared in 2004 as *Happy Isles in Crisis: the historical causes for a failing state in Solomon Islands, 1998-2004*.² At the same time, I applied for Australian Research Council funding to write a history of Malaita, and received a large grant over 2005-2007.

In writing *Happy Isles in Crisis*, I became aware of just how difficult it is to gather even basic biographical information on the leaders of the nation, or to get reliable information on everything from the oil palm plantations to churches and other organisations. I now know I got some things slightly wrong, and a few things quite wrong. I even slighted a Prime Minister, Francis Billy Hilly, in a short biographical piece, by omitting to mention that he had once been Premier of Western Province. These frustrations led me to think about how this situation could be rectified, both for myself in the future, and for other researchers. In my speech when the book was launched in Honiara in August 2005, I began to formulate a plan to create a historical dictionary of the Solomon Islands. During 2005, I had a full-time research assistant, and the funds to buy microfilm. I used it to complete the necessary Malaita research, but at the same time gathered a wider source base that will enable me to work on the whole history of the Solomon Islands, and to create a historical dictionary for the nation.

The Solomon Islands is the second largest nation in the Pacific in land area, and has a population of over half a million. Yet it is poorly served in historical literature. There is a substantial bibliography of published sources on the Solomon Islands to 1980, by Sally Edridge, which is something of a bible for all Solomons scholars.³ There is a large literature on the Solomon Islands, some of it scientific, relating to geology, agriculture and marine studies, but most of it is social science monographs, chapters and journal articles that are not easily accessible to Solomon Islanders. There are two excellent general histories, *Wealth of the Solomons* and *Pacific Forest* by Judith Bennett, church histories such as those by David Hilliard for the Anglicans, Hugh Laracy and Claire O'Brien on the Catholics, and Dennis Steley on the Seventh-Day Adventists, labour trade histories by Corris and Moore, and a substantial body of Second World War writings, but overall the Solomons has not been well served by general texts.⁴ There is also Graham Goldens' *The Early European Settlers of the Solomon Islands* (1993), which is of indifferent quality, and a large collection of autobiographical reminiscences by missionaries, planters, traders, government officials, and anthropologists, mainly written since the 1920s.

My proposal is to create a historical dictionary of the Solomon Islands which will contain a dictionary of biography and a historical encyclopaedia of events for the Solomon Islands, arranged alphabetically. The models for the project are Jackson Rannells' *PNG: a fact book on modern Papua New Guinea*,⁵ and to a greater extent Ann Turner's *Historical Dictionary of Papua New Guinea*.⁶ This Solomons' historical project will be in two volumes, one covering the period from first foreign contact to Independence in 1978, concentrating on the 1893-1978 British Solomon Islands Protectorate years, written or edited by Clive Moore. The second would cover the period from Independence to the present day. The overall aim of the project is to foster national consciousness in the Solomon Islands and to provide easily accessible information for use by government departments, churches, civil society organisations, the tourist industry, students, teachers, and the interested general public.

Based on the Scarecrow Press model that has worked successfully for Papua New Guinea and dozens of other countries, the two books would contain:

- A chronology
- A historical dictionary of biography on leading citizens of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) to 1978; and of the modern nation since 1978
- A historical encyclopaedia of information on important events and places
- A short bibliography of easily available sources on the Solomon Islands.

There are differences between this and the Scarecrow Press model: Scarecrow uses only one volume for each nation. My concept has two volumes, and the research base for each volume will be different. Scarecrow Press usually contracts

single authors to write each volume. This would probably be the case for volume one, but not for volume two of the Solomons project.

Volume One

Volume One will depend mainly on existing materials already published by the BSIP government, private newspapers, secondary sources, and hopefully the assistance of colleagues and the Solomons general public, both as critics and to supplement areas where my information is too meagre. I have gathered large amounts of material on a variety of topics from the National Archives in Honiara and from the Western Pacific High Commission Archives now situated in Auckland, which will form part of the basic entries. This will be supplemented by newspaper sources. The Government Information Service began a roneoed *News Sheet* in 1955, and each District also had its own local version. The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau has copied the main *News Sheet* and intends to copy the District *News Sheets* in the near future. In Malaita District, for instance, the local *News Sheet* began in 1954, continued until the mid-1980s, then staggered on until 1991. The Honiara-based BSIP *News Sheet* continued until 1975 when it turned into a weekly newspaper called *Solomons News Drum*. The first private newspaper was *The Kakamora Reporter*, published between 1970 and 1975, set up as an alternative to the government-controlled press. This was followed by *Solomons Toktok*, which began in 1977 (originally published as the *Melanesian Nius* and the *Kiokio Nius*), and continued publication until 1992. The *Toktok* was the first Solomons tabloid newspaper with its own version of sensationalist reporting. It came out in competition with the government-owned *Solomons News Drum* and was intended to have more popular appeal. The *Solomons News Drum* was privatised in mid-1982, taken over by Solomon Islander shareholders, and renamed the *Solomon Star*. It remains the main newspaper today, with five issues a week.⁷ Other newspapers have also come and gone. At present, the lesser rivals to the *Solomon Star* are the *National Express* and various church papers.

As in all newspapers, the quality of the reporting varies, but collectively the Solomons papers are an enormous resource that has been little tapped by historians. The print media from the 1950s and 1960s contained many biographical pieces on the nation's first educated and politically conscious citizens. It is possible to build up biographies and other items of interest by compiling them from a run of sources. Young future leaders such as Peter Kenilorea, Baddeley Devesi, Mariano Kelesi or Lilly Oгатina Poznanski start to appear through snippets in newspapers, and in government records bit-by-bit as they attended school, progressed through the public service or entered politics. Older famous citizens such as Jacob Vuza, Jonathan Fifi'i, 'Elota, Fred Osifelo, Lloyd Maepeza Gina, Belshazzar Gina, Gideon Zoleveke and Dominiko Alebua have written autobiographies or had books or chapters written about them,⁸

and they can also be followed in the media. Although newspapers are an invaluable aid, later in this paper I will give some examples of why newspapers should not be trusted as sole sources of information.

So far I have prepared a 50,000 word draft of 186 biographical entries and 184 general entries for Volume One, which vary in length from a few lines to 2,500 words for the Diocese of Melanesia (the Melanesian Mission). There are many entries for non-Solomon Islanders who have served the Solomon Islands in some way. The Resident Commissioners, some District Officers, planters and bishops all deserve entries, as do some of the quite remarkable lesser clergy. How could I leave out Sister Mary Joseph, or Mother Superior Marie Irene, or the Reverend Charles Fox? Sister Mary Joseph, an Australian, joined the Catholic Mission in 1941. In 1944 she was sent to the Makogai Leprosarium in Fiji for two years, to specialise in the care of those suffering from Hansen's disease. She arrived in the Protectorate in 1946 and became sister-in-charge of the Government Leprosarium at Tetere in 1949, where she remained, improving and extending the hospital. A 1950s World Health Organisation survey found that two-thirds of the lepers in the Protectorate were being treated at Tetere and the Mission leprosariums, using DDS (Diphenyl-dimena-sulphone), an effective cure for most cases, rendering the patients non-contagious. She was awarded an MBE in 1957. Although Sister Mary Joseph was much loved by Solomon Islanders, John Roughan, a long-time resident of the Solomons, has a memory of her as being quite ferocious to any patient who did not take their medication at the correct time, and as having an interesting hobby. She was a good shot and loved going crocodile hunting. They bred tough nuns in the Solomon Islands.⁹

Sister Marie Irene was the first Catholic nun to become a missionary in the Solomon Islands in 1904. Born in France in 1878, for nearly 40 years she directed the work of the Mission's Sisters throughout the Protectorate. First based at Rua Sura, Guadalcanal, where she educated women, she next served at Tangarare, opening the first girls' school there. Based at the Visale headquarters when the Japanese invaded, she escaped with other Mission staff to Tangarere, where she was picked up on a government boat and taken to Lunga to travel by American Liberty ship to Nouméa. Returning to the Protectorate in 1946, she was again stationed at Visale, this time as Mother Superior. After retirement, she continued to train local Sisters at Visale. Awarded an MBE in 1959, she died on 23 September 1965. She gave over 60 years service to the Solomon Islands, her few years in Nouméa the only absence.¹⁰ There are many other clergy who similarly spent many decades in the Protectorate.

While Mother Superior Marie Irene's stay was quite remarkable, she was eclipsed by Charles Elliot Fox, an Anglican priest and Brother who gave 65 years of his long life to the Protectorate. Born in 1878 in Dorset, England, Charles Fox holds the record as the longest-serving expatriate member of any religious order

in the Solomon Islands. Son of Canon John Elliot Fox and Emma L. F. (née Phillips), he was educated at Napier Boys High School, the College of St John the Evangelist, Auckland and at the University of New Zealand (Auckland College) where he obtained BA and MA degrees (1899-1901). After a short spell teaching science in New Zealand, he became a member of the Melanesian Mission on Norfolk Island in 1902, and was ordained in 1903. He taught for a short time at the Norfolk school, where there were 240 boys, 160 of them from the Solomon Islands, which was the beginning of his interest in the Protectorate. After a few months on Mota Island in the New Hebrides, Fox began his Solomon years as a missionary at Pamua on San Cristoval. In 1905 he returned to teach at Norfolk Island, before returning to San Cristoval in 1908, where he remained for the next 10 years. In 1911 he opened the first boarding school in the Solomon Islands, St Michael's at Pauma, for boys from San Cristoval, Ulawa and Malaita. In its early years the school had to post guards to prevent attacks from marauding bushmen. In 1922, the Melanesian Mission's main school on Norfolk was moved to Pawa on Ugi Ne Masi Island, near San Cristoval, and between 1924 and 1932 Fox became principal of All Hallows School, Pawa, which in the 1920s was the finest school in the Protectorate. In 1932 he declined the Melanesian bishopric, becoming a member of the Melanesian Brotherhood on Guadalcanal (1933-44), and at Fiu, Malaita (1944-50).

During the war, then well over 60, he spent some time as a coastwatcher on Malaita, before moving to Nggela as a guest of the American Seabee Construction Corps. In 1950 he became principal of the Catechists school, and in 1952 chaplain at diocesan headquarters, before two years (1952-54) as Head Brother of the Melanesian Brotherhood at the headquarter school at Tabalia. In 1956 he was made Canon of Melanesia, and finally (1968-70) was based as chaplain at Taroaniara. He retired to New Zealand in 1973. Also known as 'Takibaina', this was an exchange name given to him during his early years on San Cristoval, when he gave his name, house and possessions to a local man in a swap of identity. Author of a dozen books on the Solomon Islands, his major publications include *Introduction to the Study of Oceanic Languages* (1910), *Threshold of the Pacific* (1924), *Lord of the Solomon Islands* (1958), his memoirs *Kakamora* (1961), and dictionaries of the Nggela, Lau and Arosi languages. Fox received a Doctor of Literature from the University of New Zealand in 1922, an MBE in 1952 and a CBE in 1974. He died in 1977, one year short of 100.¹¹

What is clear from these three European biographical entries is that the detail on expatriates is usually better than on Solomon Islanders in this period, but I have also tried to include as many indigenous entries as possible. Two will serve as examples. In 1851 William Didi was the first Solomon Islander to be baptised by the Melanesian Mission. Born on San Cristoval, he was taken from the island in 1850 by the Captain of the HMS *Havannah* and sent to St John's College in New Zealand where he spent 1850-51. Then he joined a vessel as crew, which

took him to China and around the Pacific. Returning to St John's in 1858, Didi helped Bishop George Selwyn translate the Lord's Prayer into the Arosi language.¹² Another very different Christian convert was Monilaws Soga, the last great chief of Isobel Island. Soga, son of the great fighting chief Bera, was a chief at the time when head-hunting raids from New Georgia were causing havoc. He lived at Pirihandi in the Bugotu area and was personally responsible for a great deal of the upheaval. In the 1890s it was said that Soga had earlier destroyed many of the coastal communities, and he had entirely wiped out the people of St George's (Maumolu Naunitu) Island. He was baptised in 1889 after an 1886 influenza epidemic, when he was nursed back to health by Bishop John Selwyn. Charles Fox described him as a 'tall, lean, powerful man' who always travelled with an armed bodyguard.¹³ Bishop Wilson described Soga as 'a very remarkable man', 'with a face and bearing of one greater than all his neighbours'.¹⁴ Easily able to raise an army of 200 men, after baptism he was as fervent a Christian as he had ever been a warrior, and used his power to befriend the New Georgia raiders and his enemies on Isabel. Through his great influence, peace was achieved and the Melanesian Mission was able to spread Christianity through the island. In later life he lived at Sepi village and when he died in 1898, the cross on his grave bore the inscription *Ke vonungia na dotho* (He was filled with love).¹⁵

There are many other such individuals of note, and the art will be in achieving a balance between foreigners and Solomon Islanders, and between the biographical and historical events and places sections. At the moment, Honiara has the longest place entry, and my favourite entry is on the *Kakamora*, the legendry midget humans of San Cristoval, Guadalcanal, Malaita and the Banks Group, believed to be about two feet to four feet tall with long black hair and long finger nails. On South Malaita they are called *Mumu*. They are said to hide in the mountains, living in caves and eating wild bush foods, never using fire. They have a reputation as mischievous, and were said to become aggressive when cornered.¹⁶ Charles Fox seemed to believe they existed when he wrote about them in his book *The Threshold of the Pacific* (1924), and used the name as the title for his autobiography, in which he said '[t]hey build no houses, have no tools, make no fires, but they are strong and live in holes or caves'.¹⁷ They may be like fairies and goblins of European mythology, but since the early 2000s archaeological discovery that a small, pre-modern human-related race once lived on Flores Island in Indonesia, the myth has regained some validity. Whatever the truth, how could I leave them out?

Volume Two

The plan for Volume Two takes an altogether different approach. Because of its time-period, it will consist primarily of entries on citizens of the Solomon Islands and would be written mainly by Solomon Islanders. The problem is how to

gather the material. The various newspapers since 1978 will still be a basic resource, but the second volume is intended as a people's history, gathered largely through public cooperation and as a nation-building exercise. Its level of success will depend both on local support and on obtaining funding.

Gathering a new set of biographical pieces, provided by the citizens of today, along with support from foreign academics, clergy and others who work or have worked in the Solomon Islands, will be a crucial part of the project. Although some entries will be about the rich, famous, illustrious, dreaded, or in some other way well known, many of the entries for Volume Two would not be about national Bigmen and Bigwomen. Along with the national personalities, a regional/provincial focus will be necessary, as would be a fairly proportioned emphasis on women's entries. Medical Dressers, Native Medical Practitioners, District Headmen, teachers, nurses, clergy, and traditional leaders of all sorts have made the nation what it is today and deserve fair mention. My suggestion of a way to achieve this balance and spread has three essentials: local autonomy; local involvement and agency; and incorporation of and assistance from the local media.

Committee

There needs to be a local committee to oversee the process. I suggest that the committee should be chaired by the University of the South Pacific (USP) Centre Director or his nominee. The committee would be responsible for organising the local collection of material, and ensuring standards and accuracy of the pieces that are published in the *Solomon Star* or aired over the radio. The committee would include representatives of USP, the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education, churches, some NGOs, the national government, all provinces, as well as the *Solomon Star* and the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC). This would not be a paid committee, and I am presuming that all members would be Honiara-based, which would allow easy communication. Much of the minor communication could be via email. Members would take on the task for love of their nation, not love of money.

Solomon Star and SIBC

The cooperation of the *Solomon Star* and the government radio stations will be a crucial part of the project. At the beginning, to get the project rolling, public interest could be gained by publishing a weekly column in the *Solomon Star* that included draft entries from Volume One. This would enable trialling of the entries and correction of any errors through public responses. Then, I envisage a national competition, the best material from which would be published in the *Solomon Star*. Each week for a year or two, a biographical or historical place or event entry could be published in the paper in a regular column. These would vary in size from 200 to 700 words, depending of the importance of the subject.

Once the Volume Two series has begun, there would be a prize offered for each new entry published, probably of about SI\$150 to SI\$300, as it has to be worth winning, but not so large as to be too expensive for donors. Fifty historical columns paid for at SI\$300 each would cost SI\$15,000, which is less than A\$3,000 for a year, or A\$6,000 for two years. Publishing about 50-100 pieces in the *Solomon Star* would generate many more, which might not be of sufficient standard to publish, but would also contain valuable historical information which could be followed up to make other entries. Perhaps the committee would end up with 500 entries, of various standards, which would all be deposited in the National Library as a record for the future. The committee and the newspaper would have the final veto over publication of any entry, to ensure standards are met and defamation avoided. The *Solomon Star* would benefit from free copy every week, and presumably through sales.

At the same time, a wider coverage could be achieved by using the SIBC. The newspapers really only reach the urban areas, but the medium wave and short wave radio stations reach out to all parts of Solomon Islands. There are also FM stations, which can be heard over quite surprising distances (the east coast of Malaita, for instance), but generally the SIBC and commercial FM stations only tap the urban population. Radio is the premier media in the Pacific and would need to be used to supplement the newspaper.

National Competition

Hopefully, these first pieces would generate the interest of the newspaper's readers, and prepare them for a bigger, national competition. The Committee could offer different types of prizes for entries on national, provincial, area council, business, church leaders, village and customary leaders, and teachers and health workers etc. Women's biographies would be a special, lucrative category to encourage as many entries as possible. There could also be a section for places and events: cathedrals and major church buildings, sports, institutions, towns, companies, schools, and industries etc. The committee could offer prizes in many different categories, making sure that all provinces are covered and that as many women as possible are included. The prizes could vary in size: SI\$1,000 for the best entry; SI\$500 for the next 10 best, down to SI\$200 for worthy entries. SI\$20,000 worth of prizes would only cost A\$4,000.

Funding

So far, the suggested costs are no more than A\$10,000. The Committee could approach the various High Commissions and Embassies for supporting funds to an initial level of about A\$25,000, which should be easy to obtain for a nation-building exercise that has spin-offs for education. One problem will be that many of the entries will be handwritten, not typed. The *Solomon Star* and the SIBC are going to need their material typed up and on computer disk,

and there will be expenses involved in this. All entries should be typed up for posterity and possible use in the Historical Dictionary. The Committee would have to decide on the level of funding necessary. Permanent secretarial staff are not envisaged in the early stages, but this would become a cost in final preparation stages.

Publication and Editing

Through its Institute for Pacific Studies, the University of the South Pacific has produced an extensive set of publications from its member countries. Although the nature of IPS has changed in recent years, I see the USP as the natural home for the publication, both as a book and in electronic form. The involvement of the Honiara USP Centre is crucial in planning, as the conduit back to the main campus, and with present plans to upgrade the Honiara campus into a central part of the USP hub, this project could become a focus of community outreach. At a later stage, the Committee would have to choose an editor/editors for Volume Two, and negotiate with the USP over methods of publication. Outside referees would ensure that standards were maintained.

Referees and Overseas Contributors

There is a large group of academics, church and NGO leaders, and tertiary educated Solomon Islanders who have material that can be used. Any anthropologists could easily provide several entries on traditional leaders and institutions, and historians, geographers and political scientists can also be asked to participate. A refereeing practice would be followed, using knowledgeable Solomon Islanders at home and abroad, and other experts. The bibliography for Volumes Two can be compiled with co-operation from the National Library, but essentially it will probably be an extended version of the one prepared for Volume One.

National Library

All of the project materials would be deposited in the National Library for long-term storage, preferably in digital and paper format. Photographs could also be gathered and copied at the same time. Digital cameras and computers now make copying much easier than back in the days of negative film. An accompanying part of the project could be to ask permission from institutions with photographic collections on the Solomon Islands, copies of many of which are held by the National Museum and Library, to allow these ethnographic and historical photographs to be made easily accessible on a webpage. The speed at which the electronic world is developing may make this quite easy within the next five years or so, and although I am not as naive as to envisage villagers using solar electricity and laptops to access this material, the resources could easily be made available in all towns and to many schools.

The Pitfalls of Writing Entries

Finally, let me discuss the pitfalls of writing entries. Writing entries for historical dictionaries of Pacific nations is fraught and an excellent test for the skills of any historian. I have become quite fascinated with the art of writing concise, accurate but interesting entries, and have been on a steep learning-curve when it comes to balancing entries and chasing contacts. The example of the major Christian denominations is the best. The Anglican Church of Melanesia produced a rich secondary literature during the colonial years, far better than that available on the Catholics, the South Seas Evangelical Mission, the Seventh Day Adventists or the United Church. There will be criticisms if the Anglicans dominate Volume One, but at the moment this certainly is the case. But sources have to be reasonably readily available, and I am not planning to brush up my school-boy French and head off to the Vatican archives to improve the Catholic entries. There are often no supporting rite of passage documents such as the birth, marriage and death certificates, on which other similar projects such as the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* or the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* rely. In the end, Volume One may have some flaws that can be improved upon in a second edition. There will be a fine line between delaying because there is not enough material, and going ahead, knowing there are still some problems with balance.

And as any historian knows, information in the public record can be misleading, even downright wrong. A good example would be any entry I began to write on Petero Ara'iasi, a traditional *ramo* (warrior and bounty-hunter) at Tarapaina in the 'Are'are language area, Hauvarivari Passage, Small Malaita. His age can only be estimated, based on the first written references to him when he was in his 20s. We can presume that he was born in the mid-1880s, the time when Malaita was the chief source of indentured labour for Queensland and Fiji sugar plantations.

When he died in died on 11 February 1963, at about 80 years of age, the *British Solomon Islands News Sheet* granted him a paragraph obituary, which is how he first caught my eye.¹⁸ In it there is a claim that in his youth he had killed 80 men while a *ramo*, which I must admit rather impressed me. The *News Sheet* said that Ara'iasi first met Father Jean Coicaud, a long-serving Catholic priest in the Solomon Islands, when Ara'iasi was exiled to Marau, Guadalcanal, and the two became friends. Ara'iasi is supposed to have invited the Catholic priest to return with him to begin missionary work at Tarapaina. Claire O'Brien believed this story, which she dated at 1911.¹⁹ Soon after Ara'iasi teamed up with Father Jean Coicaud, Ara'iasi is supposed to have killed a man from Rokera, was hunted by the police and captured but managed to escape. The *News Sheet* said that Coicaud made a deal with District Officer William Bell that he would hold Ara'iasi as his personal prisoner for at least 10 years, to which Bell

supposedly agreed, but impounded Ara'iasi's large collection of shell money and kept it at Auki as security. After some years, Ara'iasi was said to have captured a South Malaitan who had escaped from Tulagi, and was rewarded with release from detention, returning to Tarapaina, where he became a Christian. Not able to stop his old *ramo* ways, he murdered another man, but as he was now a Christian, he went to Auki to report his crime. At the same time he brought with him another man who had shot his own sister, after which Ara'iasi was supposedly pardoned. The *News Sheet* also said that after the death of Bell at Sinerango in 1927, Ara'iasi was appointed Headman of Tarapaina for three years, and thereafter lived a Christian life, much respected as a hereditary chief and *ex-ramo*.

My further explorations have not confirmed this tale, which had obviously been gleaned from Catholic sources on Malaita when Ara'iasi died. He was the son of a *ramo*, and was also the spokesman for Iava'o, the hereditary *araha* (paramount chief) for the area. Hugh Laracy, using church sources, records that in 1909 Ara'iasi was offended by Florence Young, founder of the SSEM, who wanted to establish a base in 'Are'are, but he and Iava'o recognised that there were benefits from having a missionary presence, and invited the Marists to begin a station. The Catholics chose Tarapaina as the site in 1910, but due to poor soils, moved to Rohinari in 1912, where Ara'iasi had arranged a contact with the local *ramo* Aris'imaē.²⁰ Catholic records contain the following explanation by Father Raucaz:

The old man-eater had already met him [Aris'imaē] at Marau. But he wanted details about his generosity: the quality of tobacco, pipes and matches that he would bring with him. Religion was of no account to him; he would not touch it at any price; what would his spirits think of such an idea? He therefore questioned the crew and also Ara'iasi, his rival from the south isle. The report must have been favourable, for the old bandit immediately agreed to sell the small isle of Rohinari with a good portion of ground on the mainland.²¹

Father Bertreux purchased the Tarapaina land in 1910. Florence Young made another attempt to establish the SSEM in the area in 1911, but once more managed to insult the local people. Certainly, a relationship of mutual benefit developed between the Bigmen and the Catholic mission: Ara'iasi extended his power through access to medical aid and European goods and the missionaries received protection. In 1916 Ara'iasi was accused of another murder and was paroled for four years to Rohinari and Visale on Guadalcanal, where he was baptised in 1922. Aris'imaē was less beholden to the mission, but was also baptised on his deathbed in 1947.²²

Another complication is working out which Father Coicaud one is talking about? There were two brothers from Le Regrippiere, Loire Infoieure, France,

in the Marist order on Malaita, Jean-Baptiste (born 1878) and Donatien Joseph Pierre (born 1881), both bearded, and both worked on Malaita. It would be very easy for memories of the brothers to get mixed up over decades. Father Jean Coicaud was in BSIP from at least 1902 and stationed at Marau, Guadalcanal from 1905.²³ He arrived at Tarapaiana in 1911, after the second SSEM fiasco. His older brother, Father Donatien, came to the Pacific from France in 1910 and was first appointed to New Caledonia. In 1912 he was transferred to BSIP, first posted to Rua Sura and Visale on Guadalcanal. One 1913 record suggests that he was sent to Rohinari Mission on Malaita, but all other evidence suggests that this was his brother Jean. That year the Coicaud surname appeared in a list of the 32 foreigners on Malaita, and there is another unnamed Marist priest as well, which presumably means both brothers were present.²⁴ In 1914 Donatien was posted to Buma mission station on the west coast of Malaita where he remained until the time of his death on 11 January 1957. From 1914 until the early 1930s, Father Donatien made frequent journeys along the Malaita coast, north of Buma in the Mission ketch *Hambia*, and later on a smaller vessel. He established a reputation for his medical work and for his knowledge of Malaitan custom and languages. In 1918 he was in Auki, trying to obtain a lease on land at the mouth of the Kwareuna River in north Malaita. In 1917 'Jean-Baptiste Coicaud' was at Auki, the headquarters for Malaita District, wanting to purchase land at Bira River, at the head of Su'u Harbour, for the site of a mission. They were certainly both on the island in 1918 when a census of foreign residents was held: a 'Jean-Marie Coicaud' was at Rohinari and 'Donatien Joseph Pierre Coicaud' was living at a mission base in Langalanga Lagoon [Buma].²⁵ Donatien Coicaud spent 39 years in BSIP, broken only by four years in Australia during the war. Jean Coicaud remained at Rohinara from 1912 to 1942.²⁶

The BSIP officers on Malaita had been trying to curb Ara'iasi's murderous ways for many years. William Bell said that at the time when the SSEM had first tried to establish a mission post at Tarapaina (when Florence Young insulted Ara'iasi), Ara'iasi had taken part in the murder of two men and maimed a woman at Pau. This was before there was a government station on Malaita, and although the SSEM's Dr Northcoat Deck had informed Resident Commissioner Woodford, the government as unable to do anything. At about this stage, probably in 1905, Ara'iasi turned against the SSEM mission and invited the Catholics to take their place.

In about March 1916, Manihuot was killed at Nusi by Ahau and Hoa from the inland village of Weisiala'ala, and the Administration thought that Ara'iasi was behind it all. Manihuot was from the same village as Ara'iasi, and in late 1915 he was accused of using sorcery to kill a man and his son, which caused him in mid-1916 to seek protection at the Catholic Mission at Tarapaina. While there he had an affair with a woman, which caused Ara'iasi to demand

compensation from the man's relatives, who refused to pay and gave Ara'iasi permission to kill Manihout. In fact they helped catch him and gave him to Ara'iasi, who told Ahau and Hoa to take him away in a canoe and kill him at Nusi. When the murder of Manihout occurred, Bell was on leave and F. M. Campbell and the Native Police went to Tarapaina to arrest Ara'iasi, but he eluded them. At the time Father Jean Coicaud just 'spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders', which Bell believed indicated that he thought it was the government's problem and that Ara'iasi was welcome to continue to live at the mission. In 1918 Bell had been talking to the other Coicaud, Father Donatien, who was in charge of Buma mission. Father Donatien indicated that Araiassa had been involved in at least 10 other murders.²⁷

In 1918 District Officer William Bell was still trying to get control of Ara'iasi. He reported to the acting Resident Commissioner:

On this occasion [1916] I passed through the Maramasike Passage at night with the police. We surrounded the house of Alaiasi before daybreak and demanded the surrender of Alaiasi, Kope and Lamamatawa. Two men from the house broke through the police to the bush. On my instructions the police broke in the doors and we entered the house and detained the people in it. We searched the house and collected the property above-stated, and also a Snider rifle, some native weapons which were destroyed, and some cooking utensils, which were handed back shortly after on the same day. The same day Lamamatawa was brought in by two natives and the people detained were released with the exception of a man named Kope. Later I found out that the Kope I had in custody was not the Kope I wanted. The man wanted is Kope (Pipiala). The people who saw the shooting at Pau told me that one of the men who did the shooting was Kope a piccaninny of Alaiasi. Kope Pipiala was adopted by Alaiasi when a child and brought up by Alaiasi at Tarapaina, which accounts for the natives considering him also as a piccaninny of Alaiasi. Since he has grown up I am informed Kope Pipiala has lived most of his time at Tarapaina and sometimes at Iorailamu. Alaiasi is not really a chief but he has acquired power through his murderous habits. The Tarapaina and the Iorailamu people are practically one and the same community. In my efforts to arrest the murderers of Hiruaru'se and Laokeni I have been handicapped by the natives being afraid to give information and other assistance, and the man they say they are most afraid of is Alaiasi of Tarapaina, not Ala'iasi of Iorailamu.

In the process Bell and his police confiscated a large amount of property: 48 strings of red money, 127 porpoise teeth, two cane knives, one sheath-knife and sheath, one *davi*, and 28 sticks of trade twist tobacco. These were held in pawn until Kope Pipiala was surrendered for the murder of Hiruatu'e and Laokeni,

and Ara'iasi was charged with being an accessory to the murder of Manihout in 1916. This seems to be the origin of the story that Bell confiscated Ara'iasi's wealth. However, the police appear to have been over-diligent in their seizures and had taken more than Bell knew. Constable Bera had a new waistcoat, Constable Abanakona had purloined a singlet and a pair of knickerbockers, and a complete case of trade tobacco belonging to Father Jean Coicaud had also gone missing from Ara'iasi's house. The police also insisted that Ara'iasi feed the patrol and had consumed about two hundredweight of yams.

Three weeks after his raid, Bell was back in Tarapaina, and reported to acting Resident Commissioner Workman that Ara'iasi had laid traps around his house at the mission—slanted bamboo stakes buried in the ground in hidden ditches. Workman advised Bell to pay for Ara'iasi's yams at the current price and to continue to pursue him.²⁸ My investigation is continuing, but at the least I have learnt not to put too much faith into obituaries written 50 years after the events being described.

Conclusion

This project is underway, but is a long way off completion. I sometimes think I am very foolhardy to even consider beginning it. But it seems to me that this method of creating a historical dictionary of the Solomon Islands holds lessons and implications for the history of other Pacific nations. As historians we have a responsibility to try to get away from monograph myopia, as Kerry Howe once advised. In recent years there have been several new general histories of the Pacific, and the Lal and Fortune encyclopaedia,²⁹ but we need more reference works that go in-depth into the history of individuals and events in Pacific nations. There have been other major biographical projects, such as the Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography, and Stewart Firth and Daryl Tarte's edited book on 20th century Fiji.³⁰ In past decades the USP produced the first national histories of many Pacific nations. Now we need to think about reference works, and perhaps a set of historical dictionaries for all Pacific Islands nations. Changes in publishing styles and finances, and the growth of electronic media may well mean a different approach from the old way of producing hardcover, expensive books. Any projects need to consider all of the possibilities, but I believe that we need to try.

ENDNOTES

¹ Clive Moore, 'Rakwane', in Brij V. Lal (ed.), *Pacific Places, Pacific Histories: essays in honour of Robert C. Kiste* (Honolulu 2004), 242-266.

² Published by Asia Pacific Press, Canberra.

³ Sally Edridge, *Solomon Islands Bibliography to 1980* (Suva, Wellington, and Honiara 1985).

⁴ Judith A. Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: a history of a Pacific archipelago, 1800-1978* (Honolulu 1987); Bennett, *Pacific Forest: a history of resource control and contest in Solomon Islands, c. 1800-1997* (Cambridge 2000); David Hilliard, *God's Gentleman: a history of the Melanesian Mission, 1849-1942* (St Lucia QLD 1978); Hugh M. Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians: a history of the Catholic Missions in the*

Solomon Islands (Canberra 1976); Claire O'Brien, *A Greater Than Solomon Here: a story of Catholic Church in Solomon Islands, 1567-1967* (Honiara 1995); Dennis Steley, 'Juapa Rane, 1914-1942', MA thesis, University of Auckland (Auckland 1983); Peter Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation: a history of Solomon Islands labour migration, 1870-1914* (Melbourne 1973); Clive Moore, *Kanaka: a history of Melanesian Mackay* (Port Moresby 1985).

⁵ Jackson Rannells, *PNG: a fact book on modern Papua New Guinea* (Melbourne 1990).

⁶ Ann Turner, *Historical Dictionary of Papua New Guinea* (Lanham, Maryland & London 2006).

⁷ Much of description comes from the PAMBU catalogue, which in turn comes from Dr Ian Frazer at Otago University, whose collection of Solomon newspapers is unsurpassed.

⁸ Jonathon Fifi'i, *From Pig-Theft to Parliament: my life between two worlds*, trans. and ed. Roger M. Keesing (Honiara and Suva 1989); Roger M. Keesing, *'Elota's Story: the life and times of a Solomon Islands big man* (Brisbane 1978); Frederick Osifelo, *Kanaka Boy: an autobiography* (Suva 1985); Lloyd Maepeza Gina, *Journeys in a Small Canoe: the life and times of a Solomon Islander*, ed. Judith A. Bennett and Khylla J. Russell (Suva and Canberra 2003); George G. Carter, *Yours in His Service: a reflection on the life and times of Reverend Belshazzar Gina of Solomon Islands*, ed. Esa Tuza (Honiara 1990); Gideon Zoleveke, *Zoleveke: a man from Choiseul / an autobiography by Gideon A.P. Zoleveke*, ed. John Chick (Suva 1980); Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, *Footprints in the Tasimauri Sea: a biography of Dominiko Alebua* (Suva 2002).

⁹ British Solomon Islands Protectorate News Sheet (BSIPNS), January 1957; October 1957; email, John Roughan, 24 November 2005.

¹⁰ BSIPNS, May 1959; 30 September 1965.

¹¹ Biographical Summaries of the Anglican Clergy; *Pacific Islands Monthly*, May 1952; July 1956; BSIPNS, March 1962; Charles E. Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles: being the story of the Anglican Mission in Melanesia, 1849-1949* (London 1958); Charles E. Fox, *Kakamora* (London 1962).

¹² Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles*, 159.

¹³ Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles*, 198, and 31, 196.

¹⁴ Cecil Wilson, *The Wake of the Southern Cross: work and adventures in the South Seas* (London 1932), 228-31.

¹⁵ Henry H. Montgomery, *The Light of Melanesia: a record of thirty-five years mission work in the South Seas*, (London 1904), [1896 edition], ch. 21.

¹⁶ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, February, March 1950; D.C. Horton, *The Happy Isles: a diary of the Solomons* (London 1966), 25.

¹⁷ Fox, *Kakamora*, 22-23.

¹⁸ BSIPNS, 15 March 1963.

¹⁹ O'Brien, *A Greater Than Solomon Here*, 176.

²⁰ Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 48.

²¹ O'Brien, *A Greater Than Solomon Here*, 177.

²² Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 48-49; BSIPNS, 15 March 1963.

²³ Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians*, 76.

²⁴ Solomon Islands National Archives (SINA) BSIP 14/41, 15 April 1913, District Officer T.W. Edge-Partington to Resident Commissioner Charles M. Woodford.

²⁵ SINA BSIP 14/45, 26 August 1917, District Officer W.R. Bell to acting Resident Commissioner; BSIP 14/46, 25 February 1918, District Officer W. R. Bell to Acting Resident Commissioner Charles Workman.

²⁶ SINA BSIP, 1, 22 January 1917; BSIP 14/46, 5 January 1918, District Officer W. R. Bell to Acting Resident Commissioner Charles Workman.

²⁷ SINA BSIP 14/44, 11 September 1916, District Officer W.R. Bell to Acting Resident Commissioner F.J. Barnett.

²⁸ SINA BSIP 14/46, 23 September 1918, District Officer W.R. Bell to acting Resident Commissioner Charles Workman; 14/12, 10 October 1918, Acting Resident Commissioner Charles Workman to District Officer, W. R. Bell.

²⁹ Brij V. Lal and Kate Fortune (eds), *The Pacific Islands: an encyclopaedia* (Honolulu 2000).

³⁰ The Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography was begun by James Griffin in the 1980s when a considerable number of entries were generated. Refer to Sam Kaima, 'Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography', (paper written for but not presented at) 'Telling Pacific Lives' Workshop, Division of Pacific and Asian History, RSPAS, Australian National University, 5-7 December

Telling Pacific Lives

2005, Appendix Two for a list of the entries; Stewart Firth and Daryl Tarte (eds), *20th Century Fiji: people who shaped this nation* (Suva 2001).