

RAKWANE

Clive Moore

Clive Moore standing at the entrance to the Rakwane sacred ancestral shrine deep in the mountains at the old village site, 1976.

RAKWANE IS THE NAME of a descent group and their territory on the east coast of central Malaita, within the Fataleka language area. They are the descendants of a dominant extended Pacific Islands family, the fortunes of which have altered much over the last two centuries. Consisting of several hundred individuals, the Rakwane live on Malaita, in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands, and work on plantations in other areas of the Solomons. One branch of the family now lives in Queensland, Australia, transported there during the nineteenth-century labor trade.

Rakwane the territory—heavily forested land on steep mountain slopes—is centered on an ancestral shrine used for worship over many generations. The shrine is now overgrown, not used since the 1950s. Rakwane the people now hardly live at Rakwane at all, having moved over the last fifty years to territory closer to the coast, gained through marriage and war in the nineteenth century. In many ways they are typical of the Pacific diaspora that has reshaped the boundaries of territories and peoples, while continuing the ancestral unity of both land and people—a sense of place, space, and belonging. My relationship with the Rakwane dates back to 1974 in Australia and 1976 in the islands.

Every few months my phone rings early in the morning. Invariably the call is from an international operator asking if I will accept a reverse-charge call from the Solomon Islands. The conversations are slow and circumlocutory, full of polite meanderings conveying news of family and events, but eventually get to the same point—a problem that can only be solved with dollars. At the end of May 2001, a call came at 7:00 A.M. from Ringi, my adopted brother and closest friend in the Solomon Islands since the 1970s. He had called a few weeks earlier requesting money for a return fare from Honiara to east Malaita, where he had been asked to attend a family meeting. Occasionally I refuse, from shortage of funds or because the request seems not important enough. Over many years Ringi has gained more thousands of dollars from me than I care to think about. I am sure that my Australian friends and family wonder at my munificence. We have developed an interesting international banking arrangement. I phone a Chinese Solomon Islands friend in Brisbane, who e-mails his brother in Honiara, and a few hours later Ringi walks into their shop and collects Solomon dollars, which I repay in Australian dollars back in Brisbane. Sometimes I regret the ease with which the money flows, but there is more to Pacific reciprocity and family relations than just the gift of money, or the ability to exact timely repayment. What I provide in return for being part of a Malaitan family can never equal what I have gained in terms of career and personal fulfillment over the last quarter century.

A fortnight earlier I had become exasperated when Ringi's oldest son, my namesake (because he was named Clive Moore, the first of four Rakwane boys to share that dubious honor), wanted new Nike soccer shoes. Only twenty-one years old, late last year he left the Malaita Eagles, the paramilitary group from his island that had been one side in the civil strife between the peoples of Malaita and Guadalcanal, and joined the Royal Solomon Islands Constabulary. In February he requested police boots, which I readily provided, knowing that the Solomon Islands government could not afford to equip its police force properly, believing that he was safer wearing a heavy pair of boots. But in my mind soccer shoes do not deserve the same priority, and I was less than pleased a week later to receive a reminder call that there was a big game coming up for which the sports gear was needed quickly.

When Ringi made his second call in three weeks I was bleary-eyed in the early morning. I know that he only calls for something important, and the noises I heard in the background signaled that there was

a good reason. I could hear women wailing, the eerie sound that is typical in many cultures when death has occurred and is an unmistakable sign of mourning in the Solomon Islands. Unusually and very soberly Ringi got straight to the point. Peter, his second son, had just died from malaria. I gasped in disbelief, but in a country in chronic disarray with a free-falling economy, its social fabric slashed by the civil unrest and its hospitals empty of drugs, malaria remains a killer disease. What can you say to your brother, a father whose son is dead? All words seem too weak in the agony over the death of a child, a teenager cut down before he became a man.

The family was hiring a plane the next day to fly the body to Ato'ifi, the Seventh-Day Adventist hospital in the Kwaio area, from where they would go by canoe to Sango, the main home village of the Rakwane descent group. I readily understood that because of the civil dispute on Guadalcanal the family would never consider burying the boy in Honiara. There was also another reason, which I less clearly understood and which was unstated. This related to Malaitan concepts of place, space, and identity, which necessitated the body returning to Sango, remaining forever with his ancestors. I gave what I could to help with expenses and had a depressing day, angry that malaria could kill a young boy and that "Number Nine" (the central Honiara hospital) could allow this to happen. The death also caused me to think once more about my relationship with the extended family that has honored me by adoption into their midst over the last quarter century.

Earlier in 2001, at the request of Daniel de Coppet, since the 1960s anthropologist of the 'Are 'Are language group in southern Malaita, I gave a seminar in Paris on my writing and relationship with Malaitans in Australia and the Solomon Islands.¹ It was not until then, talking with de Coppet, that I realized how unique the relationship was, made possible only because of my Queensland connections with the Fatowna family from Mackay, who are from Rakwane, and the initial singular focus of my 1970s historical inquiries into the nineteenth-century labor trade between Malaita and Queensland. As de Coppet made clear to me, an ethnographer cannot afford the luxury of being totally allied to one family while maintaining interests in the wider community or the whole language-culture area. In 1982, when I was teaching at the University of Papua New Guinea, de Coppet passed through Port Moresby traveling with the respected 'Are 'Are leader Ariki Nono'ohimae Eerehau on their way to Paris. Wrongly, I had assumed that he had

the sort of close relationship with Ariki that I have with Ishmael Itea, Rakwane leader and at ninety-two years old still the most respected person in the Fataleka language district.

My relationship with Itea and Ringi, both Rakwane men, dates back to 1976, when I made my first visit to the Solomon Islands. I was attempting to gather oral testimony about the Queensland labor trade as well as get a sense of place and a feel for the culture from which the Melanesian laborers came. I was interested in the history of the Queensland sugar industry and the Melanesian labor trade during the final four decades of the nineteenth century. Realizing that documents generated by Queensland's European colonists could never reveal much about the lives of their Melanesian laborers, and based at the history department of James Cook University, where Brian Dalton, Henry Reynolds, and Noel Loos had pioneered the collection of indigenous oral history, it was a logical step to begin collecting oral testimony from Australia's South Sea Islanders. Gaining access to a community long marginalized by Eurocentric power structures was, however, not straightforward.

Fresh from an honors degree at James Cook University and working as a tutor in the history department, I spent all of my spare time in 1974–1975 collecting oral testimony among the South Sea Islander community in north Queensland. Born in Mackay, the home of the largest Islander community, and with my parents living there, it was natural that I used the town as my base, but it was luck that I got to know Noel Fatnowna and his family. Noel was well known as a paramedic, local historian, and spokesman for his people. He had little formal education but longed to write a history of his family, which was eventually accomplished through a fruitful collaboration with Roger Keesing, anthropologist of the Kwaio language area of Malaita.² Noel realized the importance of recording the stories of the aging second generation of Australian South Sea Islanders.

The Bobongie and Fatanowna families at Mackay had recently renewed the link between Queensland Malaitan descendants and their families back in the islands, after communications had lapsed for seventy years. Two Rakwane leaders, Charles Luiramo and his older brother Ishmael Itea, visited Mackay at the request of Noel, the leading force in Queensland's Malaitan community. When I met Itea in the Fatnowna home at Mackay, he invited me to spend time with his Rakwane people to do what I could to retrieve the fast-fading knowl-

edge of the participation of Malaitans in the Queensland labor trade. Looking back, I was incredibly lucky and naive, but with the innocence of youth on my side and a spirit of adventure I set out for the Solomons via a Russian ocean liner from Cairns to Honiara, where Itea was waiting. I knew not a word of Pidgin English and almost nothing about the culture of Malaita. Two weeks later Itea and I were rowed ashore from a small coastal ship to begin a four-month stay in his Ambe village, perched on a flat slope behind steep cliffs overlooking Fakanakafo Bay. I began my relationship with the people of Rakwane, living with them at Ambe and later at Itea's new village, Sango.

Being a guest in a village is very different from living there permanently. Food appears, clothes get washed, the rhythm of life continues around the visitor. Getting used to eating mountainous servings of sweet potato and taro, walking/sliding along muddy tracks, using latrines, and bathing in cold mountain streams takes some time. Social etiquette must be observed. On Malaita one learns never to step over a woman's legs, not to walk under women's clothes on a line, and to swim upstream from any women bathing. A male can befriend only males. Making friends among the onlookers who came to meet the first white man making a lengthy stay in the village was a slow process. I well remember my first venture from Itea's house to shake hands with the inquisitive male throng sitting in a nearby half-built house. They in turn got used to the strange young man who used an old hospital house as an office, constantly asking questions about the past. Perhaps most interesting were the late-night philosophical conversations about the nature of the universe, where my primitive scientific-cum-atheist explanations were met with disbelief by God-fearing Malaitans.

Now, after fifteen trips to the Solomon Islands, all involving the Rakwane people, I am looking back to see what the relationship means to me.

Research into the labor trade first drew me to Malaita, and over the last quarter century I have always tried to be academic and dispassionate in my published work on the topic, which is based on a wide range of sources, not just oral testimony. My continuing relationship with Malaita is, however, not through academic research or identification with place, but a personal sense of family and belonging. My first Malaitan adoption was in Honiara in 1976, by John Maetia Kaliuae and his wife Caroline, an Ysobel Islander. John Maetia, a businessman and

politician, ably assisted by Caroline, is from Kwara'ae language district, but his mother Ella is a senior Rakwane woman, creating the link that drew me to them. The humble Kaliuae home in suburban Vura was my first Solomons base in 1976. Over many subsequent visits to Honiara I have often stayed with John and Caroline, or with John's brother David and his wife Enta and family. John's years in the National Parliament as a minister, the family's fervent Seventh-Day Adventism, and their ram-bustious, vibrant Vura compound have shaped much of my time spent in Honiara.

My early research was facilitated primarily by the patriarch of Rakwane, whom I came to regard as my father. Quietly authoritative and of commanding presence, Ishmael Idumaoma Itea is a consummate politician, diplomat, and leader, a source of power and strength for his people. Although he modestly says that his knowledge is slight when compared with that of his grandfathers, he has no equal in Fataleka today. Born in Rakwane village in 1914, son of Lotaa of Rakwane and his wife Alide of Suraina, Itea was one of four boys. Because Alide was from Suraina, a coastal descent group at Ata'a, on the border between Fataleka, Baegu, and Lau language areas, Itea and his siblings grew up living at Rakwane and on the artificial islands of Lau Lagoon. After the family was converted to Christianity by the South Sea Evangelical Mission in the early 1930s, Itea went to work on the Lever Brothers' plantation at Tenaru on Guadalcanal in 1934, then joined the police force at Tulagi in 1938, which led to work with the British Solomon Islands Self-Defence Force in 1942–1943. Returning home in 1943, he was appointed government headman of Fataleka in 1946, a position he held until 1975, serving in the Malaita Council from 1957–1967, and as elected paramount chief from 1988 until 2000.

Itea married twice, to Peace Ataala from Kwara'ae in 1945, and a year after her death in 1948, he married Oruga from Baegu, thus creating family links with the language areas to the north and south, supplementing his mother's Lau origins. When the last Rakwane *fataābu* (pagan priest) died in 1952, Itea, concerned that the customary traditions would die out, took over the role, continuing ancestor worship until 1957, when he was converted to Seventh-Day Adventism and became literate. His Seventh-Day Adventist connections brought pastors and a clinic, which became the mainstay of health services in east Fataleka, first at Ambe and then at Sango, always under the care of Itea and his family.

Even now, with failing eyesight and a little unsteady on his feet, Itea is still quietly in command of Rakwane, although he has relinquished his elected position as paramount chief of East Fataleka to one of his younger relatives, a schoolteacher with strong interest in customary ways. I have learned from and respect Itea more than I can say. He is part of a transitional generation in Malaita, a man who was a teenager at the time of William Bell, the government officer killed by the Kwaio in 1927 during a tax-collecting expedition,³ and who knew the men and women who had returned to the island after work in Queensland and Fiji in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Himself an integral part of the colonial administration, Itea lived to watch and wonder with despair as his young people joined the Malaita Eagles during the ethnic tensions in recent years. His memory for names and genealogies is phenomenal, presumably because he was trained to remember complex details before becoming literate, never needing to write them down. Itea is responsible for the largest part of my knowledge of individual labor recruits who traveled to Queensland and Fiji, and he always knew whom to ask for supporting information among the older generation still alive in the 1970s. The double alliance of Noel Fatnowna in Queensland and Ishmael Itea in Malaita made my research possible. They were, in quite different ways, learned Bigmen who could open doors to a young researcher seeking knowledge. The trust that I received from other Rakwane people, and other Malaitans, came through their sponsorship.

I made friends among the men of my age, particularly with Fred Talo in 1976 and Rex Ringi Angofia in 1978, friendships that have survived for many years. What I learned from them was very different, more brotherly than the relationship with Itea, which is clearly a father-son relationship. The Fataleka have a classificatory kinship system. The brothers of one's father and the sisters of one's mother are treated as parents, and parallel cousins are treated as siblings. As Itea's nephews, Fred and Ringi were integral members of Rakwane, and as the old man declined in vigor, I have watched them become leaders in their own right. Talo, after a varied career mainly working as a laborer on the Commonwealth Development Corporation's oil palm plantations near Honiara on Guadalcanal, has returned home to become a Seventh-Day Adventist evangelist. Ringi worked for the Honiara Water Board, then after a few small ventures joined his wife Ellen in a small screen-printing business. Briefly forced back to Auki (Malaita's urban center) dur-

ing the height of the civil tensions, the family has now returned to the largely Malaitan settlement at White River, Honiara. Both family men, very different in temperament, Talo and Ringi provided me with an anchor in the now middle-aged Rakwane generation. Both have visited me in Australia, and Ringi is my shadow whenever I am in Honiara or Malaita. Through them I have learned about Malaitan families, and from them I can obtain honest explanations of what I see around me but cannot always understand. Their sons named after me will always provide a connection to the next generation.

Having four namesakes is an interesting phenomenon. It must be a frightening experience to have your "name" fleetingly turn up in your life every few years, then disappear again. The naming is quite a usual practice, which passes names down from generation to generation. New events and people become indigenized into the Malaitan scene. Even one nineteenth-century labor trade captain has become a Fataleka family name, cloaked as "Misituna" (Master Turnaris). Other Australian names, from their family in Mackay, have also joined the Rakwane genealogies.

My adopted family cuts through three generations and is as binding as my own blood relationships back in Australia and Britain, but what else has this association taught me? How has it informed my academic life? When I first went to Malaita I was trained as a document-based historian of Southeast Asia and Australia, with no background in Pacific anthropology or history. I survived through a process of total immersion. I lived with Malaitans, ate with them, and existed as part of their world. Slowly I came to realize how that world functioned and was able to make educated guesses about the manner in which it might have operated in the nineteenth century, when the labor recruiters came to their island.

Looking back, twenty years later, there are several assumptions underpinning my doctoral thesis (1981), the book that grew out of it (*Kanaka: A History of Melanesian Mackay* [1985]),⁴ and my later writings on the labor trade, which all owe much of their reasoning to my initial time spent in Malaita in 1976 and 1978. My research methodology was new in Pacific labor trade studies. Research of the 1960s and 1970s on the Queensland labor trade reassessed the earlier emphasis on kidnapping and began to restore agency to the Pacific Islanders who provided their labor, showing that there was a gradation of reasons why they

participated, from various degrees of illegality on the part of the recruiters to different shades of voluntarism. Labor trade historians had mainly used primary documents or book-based knowledge of Melanesian society, not oral testimony or participant observation. Typical was Deryck Scarr's *Fragments of Empire* and his editing of W. E. Giles' 1870s cruise on the *Bobtail Nag*, which were based on documents but wise in their interpretation of the labor trade. Scarr's assessment of the labor trade still rings true today.⁵ Kay Saunders' section in *Race Relations in Queensland* and her *Workers in Bondage*, the core of which came from a doctoral thesis comparing indenture in Queensland with slavery in America, falls into the same category as Scarr. Brisbane based, Saunders was anthropologically informed but owed her real craft to assiduous archival research, circumstances preventing her from conducting any interviews with the indentured laborers' descendants in Queensland.⁶ Peter Corris' *Port, Passage and Plantation* was the first real breakthrough, showing the influence of Scarr, Jim Davidson, and the Canberra school, combining archival research in Australia and Fiji with 1968 fieldwork on Malaita, during which he was able to interview seventeen of the remaining labor recruits to Queensland and Fiji. However, Corris' fieldwork lacked intensive involvement, and his stress on individual agency, then a welcome corrective to earlier views, in some ways failed to comprehend the communal decision-making processes of Melanesia. Corris also failed to understand Melanesian religious beliefs and their importance in explaining the laborers' abilities to maintain their culture in Queensland.⁷ Adrian Graves' more recent *Cane and Labour* was actually a light revision of a totally documentary 1979 political economy doctoral thesis.⁸ Two more theses became books. While Patricia Mercer's *White Australia Defied* and Carol Gistitin's *Quite a Colony* have an extensive basis in oral testimony, they were totally Queensland oriented and thus dealt only with an Australian immigrant community, predominantly in the twentieth century.⁹ The differences between all of these and *Kanaka* was my extensive use of oral testimony from Queensland, gathered at much the same time as Mercer's interviews, my concentrated time spent with the Rakwane people, and the cross-checking of European documentary sources with Malaitans and Australian South Sea Islanders. I also had created a computer program to compile integrated Mackay Islander birth, marriage, and death records, which created a sixty-year chronology. From

2002 this sounds a normal enough procedure, but in the late 1970s it involved borrowing a computer programmer from the engineering faculty and using James Cook University's mainframe computer.

Based on my observation of life in Malaita and among Malaitans in Australia, I made several basic assumptions that guided my analysis. The first was that Malaitans continued to operate their concepts of place and space when they were absent from their island, far away in Queensland. I was guided initially by the writing of Daniel de Coppet,¹⁰ but more recently anthropologist David Welchman Gegeo from the Kwara'ae language area, bordering Fataleka, has confirmed these 1970s assumptions. Gegeo has written about what it means to be Malaitan, listing physical and genealogical place, access to land and position in society, fluency in informal and high language, knowledge of history and participation in custom, and worldview as the key factors to their indigenous identity.¹¹ Importantly to Malaitans like the Kwara'ae and the Fataleka, "place" is portable, and indigenous space can operate during a temporary or long-term absence, even among those born elsewhere.

The next assumption was that the physical and spirit worlds are one, not separable into two parts. I argued, in line with the place/space concept, that Malaitan participation in the Fiji and Queensland labor trades was possible only because they were able to appease their ancestral spirits, continuing the propitiation of their spirit world on the plantations. When Corris interviewed several of the last of the Fiji and Queensland labor recruits, he believed them when they said that they did not practice their pagan religions in the colonies. This was puzzling, because interviews conducted by Mercer and myself with Australian South Sea Islanders in 1974–1975 showed that pre-Christian religious and magical practices had survived in Queensland into the 1940s.¹² This information and my experiences on Malaita, where the *akalo* (ancestors) are still part of everyday existence, led me to realize that seemingly unrelated physical actions could be closely linked and be part of adaptation of Malaitan identity to the process of circular migration.¹³

I also appreciated that Malaitan society operates collectively. Any individual, regardless of whether he or she is part of the nineteenth-century labor trade or the Malaita Eagles at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is part of a descent group—an extended family. In many matters the individuals will act for the collective good, not

because of individual motivations. Since the European Enlightenment fostered individualism, capitalism turned us into wage earners and the state became our major organizing institution, Western individuals have largely been released from communal and extended-family social obligations, and in the case of settler societies have undergone a process of social atomization through migration. Earlier revisionist studies of the labor trade had sought to see Melanesians as active but individual agents in the processes, explaining that they were not all kidnapped, many having good reasons to participate voluntarily in what we can clearly see was an unfair and discriminatory circular migration, but one that provided clear advantages for the laborers and their families. While more recent studies such as Dorothy Shineberg's *The People Trade*¹⁴ present a more rounded picture, for its time, *Kanaka* offered a new perspective.

Another assumption, and one that made *Kanaka* quite different, was that while there are generalizations that can be made, the more one has to do with Island Melanesia, the more it becomes obvious that classifying such diverse peoples as one cultural unit is fraught with problems. Malaita provided around 9,000 recruits (14 percent) to Queensland (1871–1904) and 2,700 (15.5 percent) to Fiji (1870–1914), by far the largest participation from any one island. Even though there are ten language areas, there is also a modern, overriding Malaitan identity, which has become stronger through participation in labor migration, externally to Queensland and Fiji and internally in the islands, and as part of the British Protectorate from 1893 and the independent Solomon Islands from 1978.

Finally, I assumed, correctly, that with Malaitan help I could reconstruct the nature of Malaitan migration. Although Queensland's government archives are incomplete, I was able to locate 2,815 names (30.64 percent), along with details of the ship's voyages on which they left for Queensland and often the name of the bay or passage at which they boarded the vessel. With the assistance of Itea, Charles Luiramo, and other Malaitans I was able to find information about 2,023 recruits (22 percent of the total), locating the dialect or coastal area from which they came and in a few cases biographical data of their lives on Malaita and in Queensland. This enabled me to reach conclusions about recruiting in each language area, revealing beach/inland patterns, as well as descent group and clan linkages that were unknown to earlier researchers, creating the only detailed history of circular migration from one

island. Presumably the same patterns could have been reconstructed for other islands, but what was possible to piece together by combining documentary and oral testimony in the 1970s is probably now beyond retrieval. Centering research on one major island provided a picture of the labor trade, both in the recruiting process and subsequent life on the plantations and small farms, that has more consistency than the generalizations that have marked studies of the labor trade before and since. Although there are unresolved tensions in the book between the Malaitan example and the wider scene, there is no other similar attempt to present the view from one major island.

Beginning in the 1870s, Malaitans participated in the Pacific labor trade, at once attracted to the new technology and material possessions that came with selling their labor, while also conservatively holding to their own values. In the 1900s, when the circular migration to Fiji and Queensland was ending, Malaitans became the main migratory labor group within the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. Between 1913 and 1940, 68 percent of indentured laborers within the Solomons originated from Malaita. The introduction of head tax in the early 1920s, and the consequent need to earn cash, locked Malaitans into exploitative labor conditions on plantations until World War II, when their labor was redirected into the Allied war effort. Accumulated grievances against foreign domination culminated in Maasina Rule, 1944–1952, a labor resistance and protonationalist movement that helped pave the road to self-government and independence for the Solomons in 1978.¹⁵ My research on the island began in 1976, at the end of a hundred years of harnessing Malaitan labor to colonial economies. Although very aware that I was collecting oral testimony after a period of great change, I never really recognized the full complexity.

My understanding of Fataleka *falafala* (*kastom*, or shared cultural meanings), leadership, and the dynamics of power was limited, but I learned fast, not least because when I arrived in the Solomons, unknowingly I became embroiled in a long-standing political dispute, local jealousies, and descent group politics. Rereading my 1976 diary, I was brim full of anger and frustration that having government permission to complete my labor trade research project meant nothing in the face of the determined opposition of a local politician. Looking back on the trouble, with the hindsight of many years, it taught me a lot about Malaitan leadership and political intrigue that has stood me in good stead ever since, but it was learned the hard way. Even though

the machinations of modern-day Bigmen are far removed from the leadership patterns of pre-labor trade and colonial days, I witnessed new Malaitan politics and opportunism defeated by the exercise of old-style leadership.

The Fataleka language area is divided into four senior-named exogamous clans: Bina, Kanole, Subea, and Kanoli. The east coast is dominated by Bina, which in turn is divided into eleven subclans and twenty-two descent groups, ranked as senior and junior to each other based on descent and genealogical depth. The Rakwane, descended directly from the main Bina genealogical line, through the Fere'elie subclan and Ngongore descent group, have been acknowledged as important leaders over several generations.¹⁶ The largest Rakwane village, Itea's Sango, is on Burara land, gained with Manarabu in the nineteenth century rather unusually through the female line when the patrilineage died out during internecine fighting. Pre-contact Malaitan leadership had both secular and religious functions, which could be assumed by one or different persons. Formal positions of power were held by adult males and revolved around a powerful triumvirate: a priest (*fataābu*), a war leader (*ramo*), and a secular political leader (*aofia*) as head of a clan or descent group. Fataleka leadership has much in common with that of Kwara'ae directly south, and Baegu, to the north.¹⁷ Gegeo describes the Kwara'ae *aofia* as never being self-proclaimed, always selected by the "senior male leaders of the previous *aofia*'s own clan." The leading Kwara'ae *aofia* in a clan was termed the *ara'i*.

A man must be in the correct senior male line to be considered, and preference goes to the previous *ara'i*'s first son. But the decision is ultimately made by the *gwaunga'i* men or "elders" of that kin line.¹⁸

In pre-contact times and into the early colonial years, the senior Bina male line ran through Rakwane, the last *aofia* being Fikui, Itea's grandfather. However, Itea, at various times combining the roles of *fataābu*, appointed government headman, member of the Malaita Council, and latterly elected paramount chief, was certainly the most important leader in east Fataleka between the 1950s and 1990s. His *mama-na'anga* (power) coming from both the spirit and human worlds, is charismatic and almost palpable.¹⁹

In the 1970s a National Parliament was superimposed onto this leadership structure, and regional paramount chiefs were elected, with

limited judicial and political powers but no religious significance. In gaining my research permit I used the support of Itea, rather than the parliamentary member for East Malaita, who had worked previously as an assistant for Italian anthropologist Remo Guidieri.²⁰ When I first met him in Honiara, the member for East Malaita was not happy that I was sponsored by Itea, claimed that the Fatnownas were not from Rakwane, and quite obviously wanted me to place myself under his care, which I politely refused to do. In retaliation, the politician had me taken off a ship by police just before it sailed to Malaita (in front of an inquisitive crowd of around one thousand down on the Honiara docks) and told the local airline not to sell me a ticket to Malaita. The next day, in the same breath as threatening to have me deported, he said he was doing this because I was with Itea, whom he saw as his political rival. Eventually I managed to get to Fataleka and carry out my research, but over some months the honorable member continued surreptitiously to speak against my research throughout the district. Itea remained unperturbed and aloof, content to list the many accusations of misappropriation and cargocultism made against the man.

In a meeting of the Area Council, which discussed my presence, I first realized what a consummate politician and leader Itea was. First the parliamentarian called a meeting of the Area Council (he was not a member) but failed to invite Itea (who was the chairman). Then he sent for Itea, who stood his ground and refused to appear. Eventually the meeting took place. The Council House had an open front section and an enclosed sleeping platform at the rear. During the meeting the parliamentarian sat in the open space, welcoming me but telling the council that I had no legal right to be there. The meeting got quite heated, and the Rakwane men were becoming angry. They remained outside, slashing at the grass with their bush knives, which made me rather glad that Itea had the only shotgun at the meeting. Most of the council members sat in the open section, but Itea conducted his entire “performance” from the dark of the back section, invisible but surrounded by the old men, some of whom were still pagans. It was there that I first witnessed his *mamana’anga*, as his powerful voice of reason floated ethereally from the dark, combating every verbal move made in the open front section. The debate was as controlled as that in any parliament and I experienced, as close as I was ever likely to, the devastating effectiveness of traditional Malaitan leadership. The parliamentarian was crushed, disparaged by one man as the honorable “Floating

Coconut”—signifying that he was a rootless, opportunistic “stranger” from another area.

The final confrontation had its funny side. Back in Auki, about to leave Malaita, I lodged a written complaint with the district police commander, who called me into his office to discuss the matter. The office had a glass panel at the back, enabling him to see outside behind my back. I had not realized that the politician was outside beckoning the commander to come out. Not at all perturbed, the commander invited the cause of my grievance in and sat him down, sending one of his officers to the market to buy a pineapple. We sat there, with the politician asking solicitously about my progress with research. I said that I was aware that someone had been speaking against me in Fataleka, asking if he knew who it might be. Lacking self-control, I burst out that he was the culprit, to which there was no answer. Now I can laugh at the thought of that pineapple-aided conversation between the researcher, the politician, and the chief of police, but it was not so funny at the time.

A codicil is that after my next visit in 1978 the politician used his influence to have me made *persona non grata* in the Solomon Islands, a sad state that lasted a short time until the next elections. When circumstances altered I was met at the airport by his successor, none other than John Maetia’s cousin. Such are the entangled histories of families, research workers, and politics in the Pacific.

Many months over many years living on Malaita and with Malaitans in Honiara since 1976, plus contact with Australian South Sea Islanders, have been influential in forming my attitude toward research and interpretation of Pacific history. The personal associations and obligations have kept me going back and will eventually result in a second book—on British administration of Malaita up until 1942—that will be informed by understanding and interpretations gained since the 1970s. I was also co-opted into aiding Itea and his brother Charles Luiramo to record their version of the history of Fataleka for future generations, a saga about which I have written elsewhere.²¹ In the Australian context two recent developments have strengthened my connection to Rakwane descendants. There are now several accounts of the Queensland labor trade published by descendants of the original “Kanakas,” the most important of which is Noel Fatnowna’s *Fragments of a Lost Heritage*. Fatnowna’s is by far the best book, rooted in family

oral traditions from Queensland and Malaita, given strength by his own intimate participation in the relinking process and by close academic collaboration with Keesing and myself that facilitated but never directed his narrative. Fatnowna, a third-generation Australian, had a superb sense of place and space, maintaining an indigenous Malaitan identity against the odds of distance and isolation from the core culture.²²

The second associated development has been the slow process of relinking Australia's South Sea Islanders and their kin in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, along with the reconciliation processes between them and the Australian and Queensland governments during the 1990s, leading in 2000–2001 to Queensland's comprehensive statement of recognition and an action plan to repair more than a century of neglect. Watching and sometimes assisting the Islander community in its political struggle for recognition has been a rewarding experience, giving contemporary relevance to my academic research into the nineteenth-century Queensland labor trade.²³ There are also tensions in this relationship that relate to insider/outsider views of history and to academic versus descendant-ordained "truth" about the history of Australian South Sea Islanders.²⁴

My major connection with Australian South Sea Islanders has been through Rakwane—both people and place. The Australian Rakwane are not distinct from their Malaitan family. Malaitan "place" is portable; indigenous "space" can continue to exist in Australia. *Falafala* or *kastom* changes over time and in different ways in Australia and the islands—changes that are obvious over the last quarter century. As a historian of the Pacific and Australia I have learned lessons from Rakwane that I apply constantly to wider historical dimensions. But more than that, I gained an additional family, to whom I am forever grateful.

Notes

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12. P. M. Mercer and Clive Moore, "Melanesians in North Queensland: The Retention of Indigenous Religious and Magical Practices," 66–88.

13. Clive Moore, "The Counterculture of Survival: Melanesians in the Mackay District of Queensland, 1865–1906," in Brij V. Lal, Doug Munro, and Edward D. Beechert, eds., *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 69–99; Mark Finnane and Clive Moore, "Kanaka Slaves or Willing Workers? Melanesian Workers and the Queensland Criminal Justice System in the 1890s," *Criminal Justice History: An International Annual* 13 (1992):141–160.

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15. Ian Frazer, "Solomon Islands Labour History and Maasina Rule," in Clive Moore, Jacqueline Leckie, and Doug Munro, eds., *Labour in the South Pacific* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1990), 191–203.

16. This was also clear to the British government officer on Malaita in the 1940s. Refer to Tom Russell, "The Fataleka of Malaita," *Oceania* 21 (1950):1–13.

17. Harold M. Ross, *Baegu: Social and Ecological Organization in Malaita, Solomon Islands* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 134–153.

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19. *Ibid.*, 305–312.

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