

JOHNSON F. KAONI

SE 103 : MAJOR ASSIGNMENT

"The Land Rights of 'Salt-Water' People -
The Case of Makita."

TUTOR : Prof. R. Crocombe

TIME (TUTORIAL) : Tues. 11-12 noon.

Due. 13th June '84

CONTENT :

- A. Introduction
- B. Why Are There 'Salt-Water' People ?
- C. Who Are The 'Salt-Water' People ?
- D. Land Rights :
 - a) Rights to land
 - b) Water Rights
- E. Population Growth
- F. Recommendations
- G. Conclusion
- H. Bibliography

A. Introduction:

In a way this paper is a search to understand better the livelihood of my own people. The concern is with the land rights of the 'salt-water' (sea-dwelling) people of Malaita, Solomon Islands. The paper looks at the land rights of the occupants of the natural islets and the numerous artificial (man-made) islands in the lagoons of Malaita. The history of the occupance of the natural islets will be considered generally as well as the factor leading to the construction of the artificial islands; what the land rights of these sea-dwelling, non-agriculturalists are and were traditionally, and what some of the problems are that are associated with their migration as the islands got crowded and people are inevitably forced to migrate.

Be they natural or artificial island dwellers, the 'salt-water' men of Malaita are still coastal people in the Pacific and the world context. Seen in this context their problems in relation to land and rights to settlement are similar to the coastal Hula people in Papua New Guinea for example. So they are not alone. Comparisons could be made elsewhere to see the problem from a wider perspective. If the claim is true that these people own very little land on the mainland then what is their situation now since not all the land on Malaita now is not customary land. Or, how do these 'sea-dwellers' try to solve this problem? These are the questions which this paper will try to tackle.

B. Why Are There 'Salt-Water' People?

The suggestion by archaeologists and linguists "that the Solomons has been inhabited for at least 6000 years" (Solomon Islands Handbook 1980, p15) gives us the period within which to speculate and suggest why there are coastal people on Malaita. Within these thousands of years the society has not been stagnant but rather alive and dynamic. Migration was one the factors that is almost certain about the Malaita society then. In Malaita there could have been three phases of migration from the mainland hills to the coast. Again, the concern here is simply with the 'salt-water' people and their land rights as 'salt-water' people and not with what their land rights were before they migrated. Since the first inhabitants were basically hunters and gatherers and agriculturalists, there was a higher preference to the mainland than the coast. The first lot of migrants to the coast

were those who migrated to the natural islets. The natural islets of Kwai and Ngongosila of East Malaita for example fall into this category. The only acceptable reason for this is that the first migrants to these islands did so knowing that these islands were there and that they wanted to live and adapt themselves to the new environment.

Migrations to the coast may not have been for permanent residence. This seems true for the second phase which included those on the artificial islands. Let's consider first of all Laulasi Island in the Lango Lango lagoon. The island started (Pacific Tourism; p115) simply as a resting place for a mainland Kwara'ae man who had to find some place to rest after his fishing trips. He gathered some rocks together on the lagoon reef and used this as his resting place. However the more he rested on that site the more stones he slowly added until the resting place turned into an island and a permanent resting place. By permanently residing on that island he was able to start bartering with the 'bush-men' exchanging his fish for their dalo and other agricultural produces.

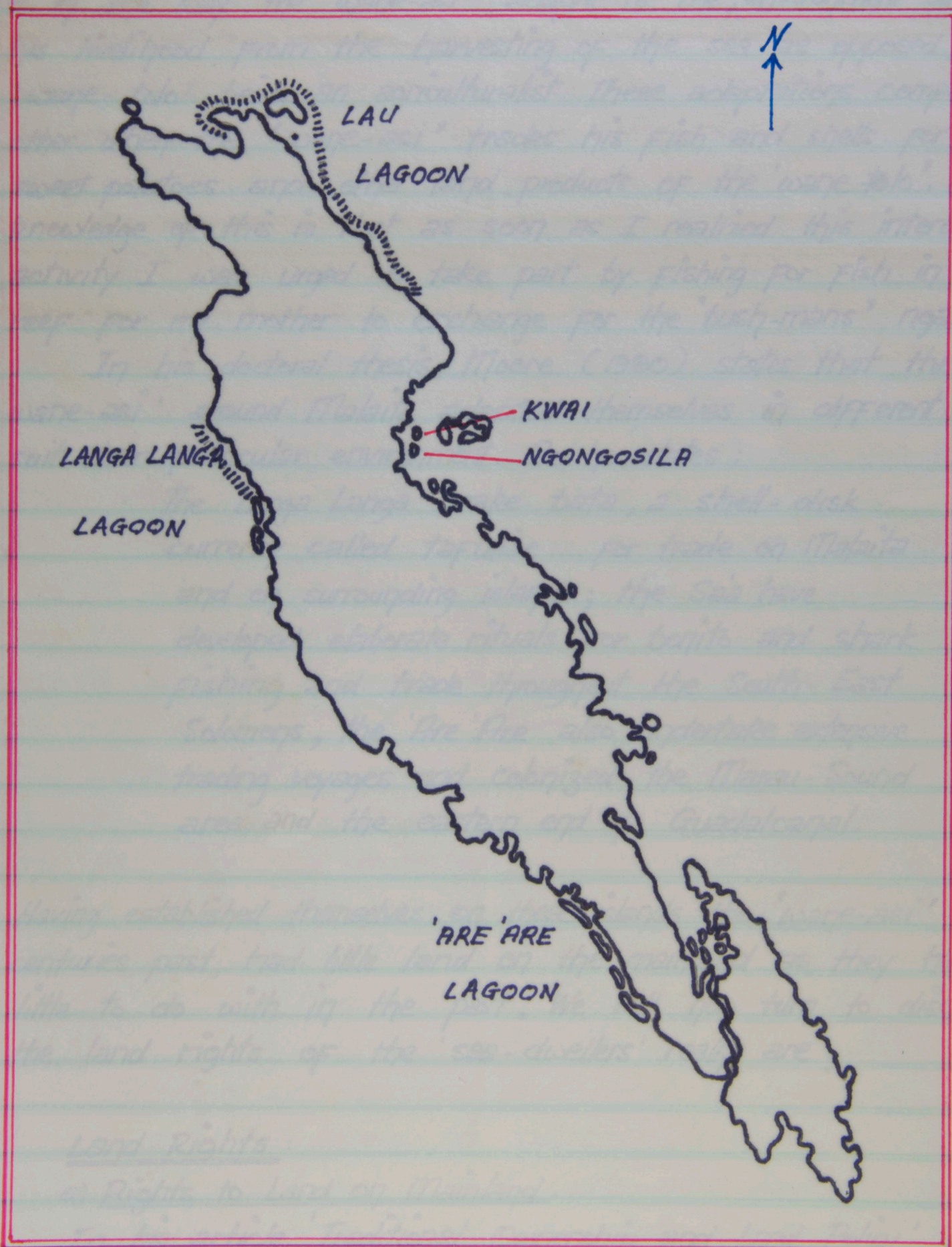
In the Lau Lagoon of North East Malaita, Sulufou artificial island was started by a Malaita 'bush-man', O'ona who was a worshipper of shark (Ivens, p56) and had control over the vicinity of his altars. He liked having fish with his taro and though not a good one, he attempted some fishing. In his fishing expeditions however he had to carry his money bag with him for fear that someone was going to steal it. Since the bag was heavy he gathered a few stones together planted a stick between them and left his money bag there where he could see it hanging while he was fishing. At his invitation Leo came with his four sons and built an island where they could provide fish for O'ona. The rest of the islands on both lagoons followed.

The third type of coastal people are those who live along the sea coast of the mainland. Prior to 1907 there were no coastal villages on Malaita (Ivens: p17). It was when the Kanaks returned from Queensland that converted Christians decided to build villages for themselves on the coasts. Then as missionaries came more and more villagers were built. Today as roads are built and clinics and hospitals available, more and more people are coming down from the hills to the coast.

What rights this third category have to use land is another paper requirement and is not covered here.

c. Who Are the 'Salt Water' People?

Present day usage of the word associates it with those people living on natural islets and artificial ones on the Lau Lagoon of North East Malaita, the two natural islets of Kwai and Ngongosila, the Sa'a people of South Malaita, the lagoon dwellers of Are Are and the artificial island dwellers of Langa Langa lagoon of West Malaita. The map below shows the locations of these people.



Map of Malaita showing the locations of 'Salt-Water' people.

The Malaita 'hill-man' (wane-tob) differs very little from the 'sea-dweller' (wane-asi). For both the social organization was (as it very much still is) similar. Inheritance is associated with the male but more so the first born son of the father. On marriage the man takes the wife to reside on his father's village often in the father's household. Then again for both the 'wane-asi' and the 'wane-tob' the religion is greatly ancestral worship. The only area of profound distinction between the two is in the way the 'wane-asi' adapts to the ^{water} environment and perpetuates his livelihood from the harvesting of the sea as opposed to the 'wane-tob' being an agriculturalist. These adaptations complement each other when the 'wane-asi' trades his fish and shells for the dalo, sweet potatoes and other land products of the 'wane-tob'. My personal knowledge of this is that as soon as I realized this interdependent activity I was urged to take part by fishing for fish in the nearby reef for my mother to exchange for the 'bush-man's' ngali-nut.

In his doctoral thesis, Moore (1980) states that the different 'wane-asi' around Malaita adapted themselves in different ways to suit their particular environment. As he states:

The Langa Langa make bata, a shell-disk currency called tafuliae for trade on Malaita and on surrounding islands; the Saa have developed elaborate rituals for bonito and shark fishing and trade throughout the South-East Solomons, the 'Are Are' also undertake extensive trading voyages and colonized the Marau-Sound area and the eastern end of Guadalcanal.

Having established themselves on these islands the 'wane-asi' have for centuries past, had little land on the mainland as they have had little to do with in the past. We will now turn to discussing what the land rights of the 'sea-dwellers' really are.

D. Land Rights:

a) Rights to Land on Mainland.

In his article 'Traditional Ownership and Land Policy' Dr. Gideon Zoleveke (1979:6) mentions that "In the customary system, land rights depended on occupation and use of land, and on membership of a line, tribe or clan." This seems to have a clear effect on the 'wane-asi' who first of all was not occupying any of the land.

Secondly, though it is sound to say that right to land depended traditionally on membership of a line or clan, how effective one uses his membership rights to land depended very much ^{on} how far one lived from the land of his clan. What this therefore is that all those who migrated to the coast and because of their isolation could not fulfill the requirements to use land had to forget about the land and perpetuate their livelihood as fishermen. Over the years the rights of their descendants simply diminished. This however is not totally true. At least all the families in my village for example could trace their origins to some place in the main land. This however is merely a tool for identification and comfort. Given the chance, none would easily choose to return.

The opposite case is also true and that is that few of 'ware-asi' are descendants of heads of tribal land which they do not live on themselves. So it is with the Lau artificial islanders that while the 'ware-asi' head of tribal land might have sacrificial altars on the islands, the main altar remains in his 'place of origin' and in major ceremonies he has to take his pig to the main altar. This maintains his right to the land and also legalizes it. In other cases those who initially migrated chose to because they had an elder brother (the first born). Seeing their chances to 'ownership' very slim they migrated. I will here give a personal example. My first ancestor who was a second son migrated and established himself at the islet of Leli which neighbours the 'salt-water' islands of Kwai and Ngongosila (see map). By establishing himself on that islet he became not only the founder but also the head. It is about 600 years ago now since that migration took place yet today the descendants of the elderly brother of my first ancestor still remind us that my family has land somewhere up in the hills of Kwaraae. Although they tell us we have land they know fully well that we cannot now go back to the hills and relive life as agriculturalists.

Although we have been saying that the 'ware-asi' derives from the sea and the lagoons his means of livelihood, there are times a Lau 'big-man' for example needs some land or right to use it for gardening in order to put out feasts. The ordinary 'ware-asi' needs some garden land to have some reserve just in case his trade with the 'wane-tolo' fails. The 'ware-asi' needs to collect fresh water and the rivers are in the land of the 'bush-man'. To have access to these would mean a direct confrontation with the 'wane-tolo'. My

argument here is that no one 'owned' land (forest land) on Malaita prior to contact with the West. Often people look to altars as showing that they own the land that altar is in. What happens is often those who dispute over the same land claim the same altar and denying the other as having used it before. The fact is while one of them may have built the altar (the ancestors) and used it the other may have also used it. Each knowing where the altar was used it at different times separately since they were then just hunting and gathering and may be settling alone. Later on as people settled and started claiming the unoccupied areas around that they could defend. This is true of both the land and the fishing grounds. For the 'wane-asi' of Lau lagoon for example, access to garden grounds and water were possible through several means.

Briefly, the rights of the 'sea-people' comes through intermarriage with the hill people. Some of the land have been given as gifts to the 'salt water' man by heads of the 'hill-people' 'owning' lineage or clan. Besides Ivens (1930) also states how the 'sea-people' could use their bargaining power to use the land since they are the ones to provide fish for the 'wane-tolo'. The situation now is the 'wane-asi' especially the women are now subsistence agriculturalists on land previously used and on more land negotiated for gardening since with cash economy copra, cattle and other crops have put too much pressure on the land and the 'wane-tolo' can now no longer provide enough for trade with the 'wane-asi'. Too as the fertility of the land diminishes more and more people are turning to rice and canned foods.

b). Water Rights.

When it comes to the question who owns what fishing grounds, and reefs and what parts of the lagoons then the 'salt-water' people are directly involved. Once again the people of Laulasi already mentioned in the formation artificial islands 'own' almost all of the lagoons and surrounding reefs. To them the reefs are not only important as fishing grounds but also as the places where their gods the sharks live. Lately there has been a heated disagreement between the Langa Langa lagoon dwellers and the government over Alite Reef which is located in the Indispensable Strait between Guadalcanal and Malaita. The Government was going to carry out some survey of the reef but were met with disagreeing Langa Langa men who

claim right of ownership to the reef. The reef though well on its own is within their traditional fishing ground and was theirs. Other people who wanted access to that reef have always sought for their consent so the Government were not allowed to go ahead with their plans. The Government on the other hand did not try to consider anyone claiming rights to the reef. Negotiations are still being carried out

It's not only the Langa Langa people who worship sharks. The Saa people to the South did and so did the Ngongosila people on the East (Ivens: p162). This means therefore that along the coasts, somewhere on the reefs, there would be passages through which the sharks came when the people offered ^{them} pigs ^{when} making requests to the sharks or thanking the shark. No intruders must enter these areas let alone fish in them. The 'wane-tolo' kept completely out. Often the surrounding lagoons were divided up and the different artificial islands knew just how far their fishing grounds extend. These fishing grounds were respected and when canoes from other islands enter beyond their boundary they had to either stay close to the sea shore or go out into the open sea beyond the lagoon. Out in the open sea the bonito, the porpoise and the turtle belongs to anybody who has superior methods of getting them. Here a lot of the Lau lagoon dwellers owe a lot to the Saa people of Small Makita for their superior ways of getting the porpoise.

An exception to the monopoly of the 'wane-asi' control of the coast is what Ivens (1930: 268) mentioned:

The hull people of the neighbourhood (Lau) still descend to the beach and fish on their own account in the places where their ancestors were accustomed to fish, Some of the Bae Guu people ('wane-tolo' of Lau) have a landing-place and a canoe, and make occasional trips in the lagoon.

So in specific instances such as the fishing and the trips in the lagoon by the 'wane-tolo' memories of the ancestors legitimizes these acts by the 'wane-tolo' and the 'wane-asi' has little to say. Let us turn now to the modern changes to the land rights and to the

problem of growing populations within these man-made and natural islands of Makita.

E. Population Growth.

The biggest question facing all 'salt-water' people more so in the Lau Lagoon, the Langa Langa and the islets of Kwai and Ngongosila than the 'Fire Fire' Lagoon dwellers and the Saa is where to go or what to do next when the islands get too crowded and may be overpopulated. Few steps have been taken so let us consider these.

(i) Extend the Islands:

This was a step taken in almost all of the artificial islands. The idea is to keep on building the islands as the population grows. The real problem is that it takes an awfully lot more time to build part of an ^{island} enough to hold a house than it is to produce a baby. Ivens recorded (1930:50) how in 1927 the artificial island of Sulufou in the Lau Lagoon, 290 yards in circumference already had a population of about 300 people. This means more than a problem of overcrowding. I can remember being told as a child how the whole island was burnt down in 1957 when fire started in one of the 'kitchens'. This shows how clustered together the leaf houses were and what a possible outcome could be. Walande, a Lau speaking artificial island in the South Makita is well beyond the Sulufou mark' in 1927. Over the years I have had to sadly watch the islands of Kwai and Ngongosila having to slowly build their houses closer and closer together.

(ii) Move To the Mainland:

Some people with longer eyesights have taken steps in preparation for this inevitable and unavoidable stage by moving to the mainland. This has been done in two ways: firstly the residents on the islands who have land through inheritance have move provided the piece of land was close to the sea where not much environmental adaptation is needed. Secondly, some people have been able to buy land from their landowners. These people too have been able to migrate and resettle on the mainland. The problem with moving to the mainland to ancestral land is that even after 200 years of grandparents being 'ware-asi' makes it almost impossible to really trace ones generation back to their place of origin on Makita mainland. Couple that to the fact that the

first ancestral migrants were not really 'important' in the family and one has the situation in which a lot cannot go back to the hills. With the buying and selling of land, this idea was introduced with the cash economy. Land could not be bought on Malaita prior to European intrusion into the society. However because of that policy a few wealthy 'wane-asi' are able to purchase land and to resettle on that land. However that land now becomes a private property. Obviously not a lot of island dwellers could purchase land and so the problem is still not remedied. Unfortunately this is where the rural to urban migration comes into the rescue scene.

My personal guess is that there are more Sulufou Islanders in Honiara than there are in Sulufou. There is a good number of these Malaita 'wane-asi' in Honiara and most of these are young men and a relatively lower number of women. A lot of these men and women have found some job and are working while a lot of them are unemployed but are living together with their 'wantoks'. The same is relatively true about all the other Pacific of the other artificial islands of Lau and Langa Langa. One of the examples which can be clearly seen by anyone who goes along to Honiara is the settlement of the Malaita 'wane-asi' of Lau in Kukum. The settlement started off with the invitation by the Government for few fishermen from Lau to fish and provide their catch to the people around Kukum area. Initially there were just those who officially signed the contract. Slowly however more and more fishermen arrived and built their own houses. Today there is a large 'Fishing Village' settlement at Kukum directly opposite the Honiara Technical Institute, of illegal squatterers. The village is now so well established that any move by the Government to resettle them at the back of town is going to end up in a loud out-cry by the villagers. There is no crude statement to back this up but I think the village is going to be there for a few more years or may be a hundred more years. The land they are squatting on is Government land and so is the land that they use for their gardens.

The above case relates very closely to the settlement of Dauga Island (May: 126) by the Hula in about 1953. Three years later another four Hula fishermen joined with their families. That year they were chased out of Dauga but returned again in 1958. In 1963 they were again ordered to leave for squatting on Crown land. Later on however

the Australian Administrators of Papua New Guinea gave in legalized their occupation of that island specifically to fish. Today the Solomon Island Government has probably agreed that the Lau Fishermen continue to occupy that land. They now have a big fishing cooperative which supplies fish to a lot of fish market shops in Honiara. The question to be asked next is what can be done to deal adequately with the problem?

F. Recommendations:

1. Resettlement.

Statistics has it (1979 Statistical Yr. Bk.: 139) that of the total area of 4243 square kilometres, 4177 sq. km. is customary land on Malaita. Of the 66 sq. km. that does not fall into the customary land category 27 sq. km. is owned by Solomon Islanders (p.139). From that we know that 99.1 percent of the land is owned by Solomon Islanders. Thus with almost the whole of Malaita still Customary land the Government can help the landless 'wane-asi' by purchasing some of the unused Customary land and resettling the 'wane-asi' on that land. If it was able to accept the resettlement of the Gilbertese in the Solomons I see no real reason why Solomon Islanders should be overcrowding themselves in Sulufou or Walade or Ngongosila on Malaita. If this was done with great care and plan I believe the problematic rural to urban drift would ease.

2. Land 'Ownership'

Major steps should be taken in reviewing the colonial land policies. Land in the past was much more valuable to the religion and livelihood of all the people. Gone with the colonial administrators were the communal or tribal rights to land. Tribal rights delayed economic development so it was better to register land under the name of the heads of each lineage. This means that there was easy access to the use of land for farming and cash cropping. It also means however that the rights of all the members of the clan or lineage are now subservient to those of the head of the lineage. The head of the lineage could also transfer his rights to his son until son instead of a lineage 'owning' a land it is now an individual family.

3. Land Purchases:

When the Government does not do much like it is doing now, then the wise thing for the 'wane-asi' to do now is to negotiate for purchase of land from the 'wane-tolo'. A few have done so but many have not. For those who have not this should be a conscious idea that sooner or later they will have to buy their own land and start living on that land. It is up to the Government to help where it sees most needed to do so.

G. conclusions:

In trying to know more about the land rights of the people on the artificial islands of Malaita and generally the 'salt-water' people this paper first of all tried to show how there now exist these people on the lagoons of Malaita. We see there have been voluntary migrations to the natural islands as well as to the artificial islands. Then the rights of these 'salt-water' people were considered. Basically they had the rights to use land for gardening and to collect ^{fresh} water. Land rights were transferred from the 'bush-man' to the 'salt-water' man through marriages, gifts and through mutual negotiations.

However as the populations of these islands increased more and more children find out that they have no land. The islands get overcrowded and those with land titles had little difficulties in migrating to the mainland Malaita to resettle. Numerous other residents could not and so the inevitable rural to urban migration occurs. The Fishing Village of Kukum is an example of the lagoon people of Malaita squatting on Government land. If the Government does not take steps to solve the problem back in Malaita, greater problems will result. As it is individuals will have to take the initiative to purchase land either in Honiara or near their home villages to resettle. The natural and artificial islands of Malaita are getting fearfully smaller and smaller.

H.

BIBLIOGRAPHY / Reference :

1. Brookfield, H.; (Ed), The Pacific In transition, St. Martins Press, N.Y. 1973.
2. Hopkins, A.I.; In the Isles of King Solomon, Seeley, Service & Co., London, 1928.
3. Ivens, W.G.; The Island Builders of the Pac., Seeley, Service & Co., London, 1930.
5. Oram, 'The Hula in Port Moresby' in May (Ed), Change and Movement, ANU Press, Canberra, 1977.
4. 1979 Statistical Yr Bk. S.I., Bulletin No. 24/79, ^{Ministry of Finance,} ~~Solomon Islands~~ Honiara,
6. Lucian, Br., 'Laulasi Is. Welcomes Tourists' in Rajotte + Crocombe (Eds.), Pac. Tourism - as Islanders See It. IPS, Suva, 1980.
7. Solomon Island Handbk., Solomon Islands Information Services, Honiara 1980.
8. Zoleveke, Dr.; 'Traditional Ownership and Land Policy' in Larmour P. (Ed.), Land in Solomon Islands, IPS, Suva, 1979.

* All lectures relevant are used.

** 9. Moore, C.R., Kanaka Maratta; A Hist. of Melanesian Mackay, Ph.D Thesis, Capt. Cook Univ., 1980.