11. Solomon Islands' Biography

Editors, co-authors, and ghost writers

Clive Moore

Solomon Islands' biography

Editing the autobiographies of leading Pacific politicians and statesmen is an unusual exercise which involves maintaining the integrity of the editor while encouraging the personal expression and beliefs of the autobiographer. I came to Pacific biography and autobiography late in my academic career when between 2006 and 2008 I edited the autobiography of Sir Peter Kenilorea, the first Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands.¹ I am also undertaking a similar task for Sir Nathaniel Waena, an ex-public servant, Cabinet Minister and Governor-General. As well, in the course of preparing a *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia, 1893–1978*, I have written 395 short biographical entries on Solomon Islanders, Europeans and Chinese associated with the Solomons. I have also published reflections on the creative process involved.² Although this chapter concentrates on my work with Sir Nathaniel Waena, I will also cover some issues raised by my participation in the other work. I will reflect on the need to build personal relationships with the autobiographers and on the thin lines that differentiate an editor from a co-author and a ghost writer.

I must say that I feel a little uncomfortable even writing this paper. I don't want to appear to compare Sir Peter with Sir Nathaniel, or to be critical of either. And I have been dealing with the Solomon Islands' elite long enough to know that a modern 'Big Man syndrome' exists that is exacerbated by the expectations of ex-prime ministers, cabinet ministers and governors-general. Presumably this is not just a Solomon Islands characteristic and applies to dealing with other statesmen and leaders of renown. They are used to being looked after by 'minders' and, no matter how polite they may be, they have expectations that the rest of us are there to do their bidding. However, academic editors with professorial status are afflicted by their own version of the 'Big Man syndrome'

1 P. Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is: Autobiography of Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Kenilorea, KBE, PC, Solomon Islands' First Prime Minister* (Taipei 2008).

2 C. Moore, 'Biography of a Nation: Compiling a Historical Dictionary of the Solomon Islands', in B. Lal and V. Luker (eds), *Telling Pacific Lives: Prisms of Process* (Canberra 2011), 277–292; C. Moore, 'Pacific Islands Autobiography: Personal History, History and Diplomacy in Solomon Islands', *Journal of Historical Biography*, 10 (2011), 1–33.

and expect to be treated with the level of respect they receive in their own institutions. I see myself as an editor, and expect in other circumstances to become a co-author if the amount of work involved warrants the change in status. I certainly do not expect to be a ghost writer. The modern university system has no place for such acts of self-abasement and, anyway, most ghost writers get well paid to maintain their anonymity. The whole exercise of being an editor to *Big Men in the Pacific* is a financial drain on my institution and does not receive adequate recognition in academic circles. While I subscribe to the dictums of Ron Crocombe and Jim Davidson about responsibilities to assist Pacific Islanders to write their own histories, they both operated in a different era when universities were less corporate and funding oriented.

Solomon Islands' biographical entries for an historical encyclopaedia

Since the mid-2000s I have been chipping away at a *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia* based mainly on the Protectorate years, 1893–1978. When published as a website, it will have 284,350 words and 1,042 images. Of the 1,117 entries, 395 are biographical; the vast majority are of Solomon Islanders, along with the more important of the outsiders who shaped the history of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. The entries vary in size, from fragments to quite substantial lengths. The standard practice in similar national biographical publications is to include entries only on the dead, which is not possible in a young nation where many of the leaders who steered the Solomon Islands to independence are still alive. One of my aims was to restore as many Solomon Islanders to the historical record as possible and the website will encourage their families to add background and update their entries.

Important individuals have substantial entries: Solomon Mamaloni (1,400 words), Peter Kenilorea (846 words), Gideon Zoloveke (530 words) and Lilly Ogatina Poznanski (341 words). Because of the nature of the sources, the large entries are on individuals involved in politics or the churches. Traditional leaders who were prominent in regions are largely missing as I have no way to access information on them and, as is usual given the nature of the sources, female leaders are seldom mentioned. Some people, once they emerged, usually through receiving a modern education, remain prominent, but I have been amazed by the number of Solomon Islanders who left their islands for education overseas in the 1950s and 1960s, travelled to far-flung places but then returned and left no further mark on the public record. I suspect that many of them did leave significant marks on the young nation, although the sources available to me left them unrecorded.

This exercise in writing biographical sketches is a preliminary exercise in historical retrieval, based on sources easily available. It is vastly different from another project in which I am involved: helping Solomon Islands' leaders to write their autobiographies.

Pacific Islands' autobiographies

My first experience was with Sir Peter Kenilorea's autobiography which, although not unique, is rare. There are many biographies of Pacific leaders, ranging from Christian hagiographies to academic treatises attempting to understand the motivations of colonial governors, to studies of politicians, missionaries, traders and wartime leaders. Many colonists have turned their hand to memoirs, often based on diaries from the time. Although several politicians have written autobiographical accounts, and several prime ministers have published biographic works, reflections by Pacific leaders about themselves and the political process are rare. Kenilorea's autobiography is the most substantial by any indigenous Pacific head of government.³

The Pacific autobiography process has involved many editors, co-authors and ghost writers. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Prime Minister of Fiji (1970–1992) and President of the Republic of Fiji (1993–2000), published a memoir in 1997 which was ghosted unacknowledged by Sir Robert Saunders.⁴ Sitiveni Rabuka, Fijian coup leader and Prime Minister (1992–1999) told his story to Eddie Dean and Stan Ritova.⁵ At the time of Papua New Guinea's independence, Sir Michael Somare, Prime Minister during 1975–1980, 1982–1985 and 2007–2010, wrote an autobiography of his early years, heavily assisted by University of Papua New Guinea academic Ulli Beier.⁶ Walter Lini, Vanuatu's founding Prime Minister, also wrote an early biography; and, recently, Pastor Sethy Regenvanu, ex-Deputy Prime Minister of Vanuatu, published an autobiography.⁷ Two Papua New Guinea Governors-General, Sir Ignatius Kilage and Sir Paulias Matane, have published autobiographies, and others heads of governments have published speeches and writings.⁸ The closest equivalent to Sir Peter's book is probably

3 I am indebted to my colleagues Michael Goldsmith, Robert Kiste, Brij V. Lal, Adrian Muckle, Doug Munro and Edward Wolfers for their advice on the references in this paragraph.

4 K. Mara, *The Pacific Way: A Memoir* (Honolulu 1997).

5 S. Rabuka, *Rabuka: No Other Way. His Own Story of the Fijian Coup as told to Eddie Dean and Stan Ritova* (Sydney 1988).

6 M.T. Somare, *Sana: An Autobiography* (Port Moresby 1975).

7 W. Lini, *Beyond Pandemonium: From the New Hebrides to Vanuatu* (Wellington 1980); S.J. Regenvanu, *Laef Blong Mi: From Village to Nation: An Autobiography* (Suva 2004), available online at editorrips@usp.ac.fj.

8 I. Kilage, *My Mother Calls Me Yaltep* (Port Moresby 2000); P. Matane, *My Childhood in New Guinea* (New York 1972); P. Matane, *To Serve With Love* (Mount Waverley 1992); 'T. Bavadra', in A. Bain and T. Baba (eds), *Bavadra, Prime Minister, Statesman, Man of the People: Selection of Speeches and Writings, 1985–1989* (Nadi 1990).

a memoir by Sir Tom Davis, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands between 1978 and 1987 (with a break of a few months in 1983) and later High Commissioner to New Zealand.⁹ Several other Pacific politicians have published their speeches, journalism, and other writings and, recently, Ian Johnstone and Michael Powles published accounts of 19 Pacific leaders in the 1970s, accompanied by audio files of the interviews.¹⁰ Most of these accounts have been edited, usually by male non-Pacific Islanders, area specialists who saw it as their duty to assist prominent citizens of the newly emerging Pacific nations to spread their message to the widest possible public. I suspect there are more ghosts and editors involved than the title pages indicate.

Sir Peter Kenilorea's autobiography also sits within the small number of biographies and autobiographies written by and about Solomon Islanders. Many Solomon Islands politicians and leaders have talked about writing autobiographies, but few have actually done so. Three biographies have been written – two by missionary George Carter, one a booklet on Ranongga Island missionary David Voeta, and another more substantial one on Reverend Belshazzar Gina. Guadalcanal academic Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka wrote a fine book on his grandfather Dominiko Alebua.¹¹ Sir Frederick Osifelo, senior public servant, Chairman of the Governing Council and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, appears to be the only one who has written an autobiography unaided – or at least there is no acknowledgement of an editor. All other autobiographies have been written with the assistance of academic editors. Dr Gideon Zoleveke wrote with the help of political scientist John Chick. Anthropologist Roger Keesing assisted 'Elota and Jonathan Fifi'i from Kwaio in Malaita, and Noel Fatnowna, an Australian Solomon Islander, to write autobiographies.¹² Historians Judith Bennett and Khyla Russell assisted Sir Lloyd Maepeza Gina, first Speaker of the National Parliament, in the same way and anthropologist Ben Burt has similarly

9 T. Davis, *Island Boy: An Autobiography* (Suva 1954). Sir Tom and Lydia Davis also wrote *Doctor to the Islands*, Boston.

10 J. Cazaumayou and T. De Dekker (eds), *Gabriel Païta: Témoignage Kanak. D'Opao au Pays de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 1929–1999* (Paris 2000); V.R. Singh, *Speaking Out: Commentary on Political, Social and Economic Issues in Fiji during the Decade 1995–2005* (Brisbane 2006); T.R. Vakatora, *From the Mangrove Swamps* (Suva 1998); A. Siaguru, *In-house in Papua New Guinea with Anthony Siaguru* (Canberra 2001); I. Johnstone and M. Powles (eds), *New Flags Flying: Pacific Leadership* (Wellington 2012).

11 G.G. Carter, 'David Voeta: The Story of a Pioneer Missionary', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, New Zealand*, 28: 5 (Auckland 1973); G.G. Carter, in E. Tuza (ed.), *Yours in Service: A Reflection on the Life and Times of Reverend Belshazzar Gina of Solomon Islands* (Honiara 1990); T.T. Kabutaulaka, *Footprints in the Tasimauri Sea: A Biography of Dominiko Alebua* (Suva 2002).

12 M. Moore, 'Noel Fatnowna and His Book: The Making of Fragments of a Lost Heritage', *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 18 (1994/95), 137–150.

helped Samuel Alasa'a and Michael Kwa'ioloa to write autobiographies.¹³ Two more biographies are under preparation: one on Solomon Mamaloni by Christopher Chevalier and one of Francis Aqorau Talasasa by his son Transform Aqorau.

I knew how much work had been involved when Bennett and Russell laboriously taped interviews with Sir Lloyd Maepeza Gina and turned them into a book. The same occurred when Keesing edited self-recorded tapes by Noel Fatnowna in the 1980s. Kenilorea was different: he taught himself to type for the occasion and produced the most substantial and genuinely self-authored book ever written by a Pacific Islands' head of government or state. Sir Peter's contribution is unique because he is the father of the modern nation and because he prepared the draft himself. He is immensely proud of his book, which is readily available in the Solomons and has entered the local literature. Copies can be found in many Solomon Islands' homes because the book was distributed free or at low cost, courtesy of the Embassy of the Republic of Taiwan.

Nathaniel Rahumaea Waena

This brings us to my latest project, the autobiography of Nathaniel Rahumaea Waena. He was born on 1 November 1945 at Su'utaluhia on Ulawa Island, son of Joseph Talo and Matilda Tahalata. He attended Ripo village elementary school (1954–1955) until January 1956 when, at the age of eleven, his parents sent him to St Barnabas' Primary School at Alangaula on Ugi Island, which he attended until 1959. From 1960 to 1964 he completed his upper primary and secondary education at All Hallows' School at Pawa, also on Ugi Island. In January 1965 the BSIP Chamber of Commerce sponsored him to attend a year-long course in commercial training at Lae Technical Institute in Papua New Guinea. When he returned to the Solomons he worked at the Mobil Oil Company from January 1966 until 1971, when he joined the public service.

His first posting, on 15 September 1971, was at Kirakira on Makira as Executive Officer to the District Commissioner. In 1972 he served with the first Solomon Islander District Commissioner, Frederick Osifelo, and in 1973 he moved to Santa Cruz sub-headquarters. He returned to Kirakira in 1974 to serve under

13 F. Osifelo, *Kanaka Boy: An Autobiography* (Suva 1985); G. Zoleveke, in J. Chick (ed.), *Zoleveke: A Man from Choiseul* (Suva 1980); Elota, in R.M. Keesing (ed.), *'Elota's Story: The Life and Times of a Solomon Islands Big Man* (Brisbane 1978); J. Fifi'i, in R.M. Keesing (trans and ed.), *From Pig-Theft to Parliament: My Life Between Two Worlds* (Suva 1989); N. Fatnowna, in R.M. Keesing (ed.), *Fragments of a Lost Heritage* (Sydney 1989); B. Burt and M. Kwa'ioloa (eds), *A Solomon Islands Chronicle: As Told by Samuel Alasa'a* (London 2001); L.M. Gina, in J.A. Bennett and K.J. Russell (eds), *Journeys in a Small Canoe: The Life and Times of a Solomon Islander* (Canberra 2003); M. Kwa'ioloa and B. Burt, *The Chief's Country: Leadership and Politics in Honiara, Solomon Islands* (St Lucia 2012).

District Commissioners Francis Talasasa and Peter Kenilorea. Waena became Deputy Clerk to the Makira Local Council under the Clerk (later Prime Minister) Francis Billy Hilly. During these years he was involved in the amalgamation of local councils. In 1975 he qualified as a lay magistrate and was posted to the Guadalcanal Local Council as Deputy Clerk. The next year he moved again, this time to Isabel, as Clerk to the Local Council. In 1977 he was posted back to the Eastern Outer Islands District as Clerk to the Local Council there, and in 1980 he returned to Guadalcanal as Provincial Secretary (1980–1982). Next Waena was based in Honiara as Chief Administrative Officer in the Ministry of Transport, Works and Utilities (1983–1984). He then returned to his home area as Permanent Secretary with the Makira-Ulawa and Temotu Provincial Affairs Ministry, and subsequently served a term as Permanent Secretary of Western Province, during which he helped establish Choiseul Province. He also held Permanent Secretary positions in the ministries of Provincial Government and Rural Development; Natural Resources; Transport, Works and Utilities; and Agriculture, Lands and Surveys. At the direction of Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni, Waena was responsible for the capture in the 1980s of the vessel *Jeanette Diana*, which was illegally fishing in Solomon Islands waters. The ship's seizure sparked a major dispute with the United States, where the ship was registered.¹⁴

In 1970, Waena contested the election for the Makira constituency against Mamaloni (a former Pawa schoolmate) and Geoffrey Kuper, with Mamaloni the victor. In the 1973 election he stood for the West Makira electorate, receiving 446 votes against Mamaloni, who once again won, with 1,272 votes. Waena says that he did not campaign in either election. He maintained his interest in politics and in 1980 he joined Mamaloni's People's Alliance Party. In a by-election in December 1987, he entered National Parliament unopposed as the member for Ulawa-Uki constituency, serving until 6 July 2004. In 1989 he was appointed roving election manager for Mamaloni's People's Alliance Party. Both Waena and Mamaloni stood unopposed in that election. Waena served as Minister for Provincial Government and Rural Development in Mamaloni's one-party Government in 1989–1990, but he was sacked along with four other Ministers for supporting the party's President, Sir David Kausimae, in a dispute with Mamaloni. Waena remained as leader of the parliamentary wing of the People's Alliance Party and took part in the negotiations to form the Ulufa'alu government (1997–2000). He served as Deputy Speaker from 1997 until June 2000, when the Ulufa'alu government was overthrown.

Between 1999 and 2002, Waena became the Executive Committee Representative of the Pacific Region (including New Zealand) for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and travelled to Gibraltar, Jersey, London and

14 A.M. Kengalu, *Embargo: The Jeanette Diana Affair* (Bathurst 1988).

Edinburgh. In 2000 he became Minister for Provincial Government and Rural Development in the first Sogavare government, when he was responsible for brokering the ceasefire agreement with Harold Keke. He also served as Minister for National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation from 2001 to 2004 in Prime Minister Alan Kemakeza's government. Waena was elected as Governor-General on 7 July 2004 and remained in that position until 2009. He received a Cross of Solomon Islands in 2003 and was knighted in 2005 (GCMG and KStJ). In 2010 the Prime Minister appointed him as a member of the Eminent Persons Advisory Council within the Constitutional Congress to help develop a state government system. In the 2010 general elections he stood unsuccessfully for the Ulawa-Uki constituency. In 2011 he became Chairman of the College of Higher Education, tasked with converting the college into a national university. On Easter 1972 Waena married Alice Ole Unusu from Simbo, and over time they adopted six children: Reginald, Patricia, Raphael, Ian, Maureen and Alison.¹⁵

Sir Nathaniel Waena's autobiography: editor, co-author or ghost writer?

The Waena career should provide good material for life writing and I have been working with Sir Nathaniel since 2011, slowly turning his manuscript into a book. The manuscript arrived with its text in bold, with underlining of many sections and with a heavy border. I undid the 'shouting' and began to make the sentences read like a normal autobiography. None of the chapters were complete, all needed to be fleshed out and some were really just fragmentary notes. So far I have only completed editing his Ulawa and school years – the first 50 pages. The son of a typical Ulawa Anglican family, he was brought up by parents who were subsistence agriculturalists and his father sustained the family through his expertise in fishing. Anglicanism has pervaded Sir Nathaniel's life. He attended Anglican boarding schools and remains a staunch member of that denomination. I have been able to use sections of my *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia* to build up the early part of the Waena text. Much of the wider historical context for life on Ulawa, the introduction of Anglicanism in the Solomons, and the network of Anglican schools comes from the encyclopaedia and my own library. In this early section about half the writing is his and half is mine, although the style is his. Because the *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia* largely stops in 1978 I have less easily available supporting background to deal with the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, meaning that the later sections of the books must be substantially his.

¹⁵ *British Solomon Islands News Sheet*, 30 November 1965, 21 December 1965, 22 June 1973; information from Sir Nathaniel Waena, 22 March 2012.

His public service career is fairly typical of the late colonial and early independence officials who had limited formal education and were plucked out of obscurity by British civil servants to be trained to serve their new nations. Having dealt with Sir Peter's public service years, I am aware of many issues that would be typical for any young public servant working on the cusp between the colonial and early independence eras. Clearly, he had a close relationship with Solomon Mamaloni, and there is much to say about this remarkable man, but Waena offers no depth or insight. Waena's public service and parliamentary career has interesting highlights as he was in charge of the early years of provincial government as a Permanent Secretary, and again in the 2000s as a Cabinet Minister when most provinces were threatening to secede. He says very little about his parliamentary career, nor the relationship between parliamentarians, political parties and constituents, or between ministers and public servants. He was in charge of the peace and reconciliation process at the most volatile time in the history of the nation,¹⁶ yet once more he is guarded and not informative. He became Governor-General during the initial Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, or RAMSI years, which included the fascinating prime ministership of Manasseh Sogavare (2006–2007) and the 2006 Chinatown riots, yet there is no detail on this period.¹⁷

Initially I expected to be able to proceed at the same speed I managed with Sir Peter, but I have discovered that the process is quite different. There was a sense of urgency with Sir Peter's autobiography: 7 July 2008 was the 30th anniversary of Solomon Islands' independence and our absolute deadline, which we managed to meet with less than a week to spare. There is less urgency with Sir Nathaniel's manuscript and it is in far less of a final form. I also find myself in more of a predicament than I did with Sir Peter: am I an editor, or should I be a co-writer, or should I allow myself to become a ghost writer taking minimal credit?

With Sir Peter's manuscript I really was an editor. The manuscript was informative but far too long and my major task was to cut out repetition: with Sir Peter's permission I edited out about 60,000 words. This was not difficult as he combines the qualities of a Melanesian orator, a lay preacher and a modern politician: all rather verbose professions which use repetition to achieve their goals. I edited his sentences to make them flow better, a very usual exercise for any editor. I also suggested some alterations in the ordering of chapters, as

16 C. Moore, *Happy Isles In Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands, 1998–2004* (Canberra 2004).

17 C. Moore, 'Uncharted Pacific Waters: The Solomon Islands Constitution and the Government of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, 2006–2007', *History Compass*, 6: 2 (2008), 488–509; C. Moore, 'Pacific View: The Meaning of Governance and Politics in the Solomon Islands', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 62: 3 (2008), 386–407; C. Moore, 'No More Walkabout Long Chinatown: Asian Involvement in the Solomon Islands Economic and Political Processes', in S. Dinnen and S. Firth (eds), *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands* (Canberra 2008), 64–95.

well as lifting out family genealogy into an appendix. However, the final book is closely based on the original manuscript. I am not at all sure that the Waena book will be said to be the same.

Most of the Waena manuscript often has no more than a few pages for each chapter. It lacks bulk and consistency and is far too formal; some sections are put together from a scrapbook of invitations. To give some examples, during his years as Governor-General Sir Nathaniel made trips to Australia, New Zealand, England, Singapore, Italy and Israel. In Singapore he made a formal visit to the President, S.R. Nathan, but overall Singapore rates only one paragraph. In Israel he visited the President (unnamed) and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and 'his dear wife', but neither is named. Often all that is recorded is a diary list of places visited: for instance, the Lake of Galilee, Nazareth, Mount of Transfiguration, Jerusalem etc., with no accompanying details. Sir Nathaniel and Lady Waena also visited the tomb of King David, the room of the Last Supper, and the Wailing Wall etc. I have tried to elicit from Sir Nathaniel his feelings as a strong Christian when visiting these holy places, with little success. Do I take over and provide descriptive information, easily gained from reference books and the Internet, thus fleshing out his brief notes, using my own imagination? Although I have never been to Israel I could create an interesting chapter, but do I ghost write for him and accept that he does not have the literary skills to describe what he saw?

In Italy he had a private audience with the Pope, something few of us will ever accomplish. He was impressed by the direct representative of St Peter and by the Papal Basilica of St Peter, but there is no detail provided. Do I read travel books and create a moving word picture, using my own experience of visiting the Vatican? The lack of depth is frustrating but not an insurmountable problem.

The historian versus the author and politician

Some of Sir Nathaniel's beliefs are at odds with my own academic understanding of historical events. The beginnings of my academic career were in research about the labour trade and I think it is fair to say that I have a reasonable understanding of the process. In a second draft of his manuscript Sir Nathaniel has used some statistics I provided, but then went ahead to describe the labour trade as slavery. I have modified his words so that there is a meeting of minds, but am I interfering in a Melanesian interpretation of events that is valuable in its own right? Significantly, perhaps, he has made no comment about my editing of the slave/recruit issue.

The original text

Two major changes occurred on Ulawa, in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ulawan men began recruiting on labour trade ships to Queensland and Fiji, and when the Anglican missionaries arrived. Before that, Ulawa had only been visited by passing vessels, such as the one in 1869 which passed on dysentery. The overseas labour trade began in the early 1870s and continued until the 1910s, by which time Ulawans were also recruiting to work as labourers within the Protectorate. Statistics from colonial records suggest that Queensland ships 'recruited' 147 Ulawans, mainly males between 1870 and 1904, and Fiji ships carried away another nineteen. In such a small population, these were significant numbers, and others left Ulawa through the Anglican Melanesian Mission.

I first visited Bundaberg, in Queensland State, Australia, in 2005 on a State Visit to Australia, on the invitation by the Governor General of Australia, and again in 2008, on the invitation of the South Sea Evangelical Church of Solomon Islands, when the Church commemorated the founding of the Mission by Miss Florence Young, among the Kanakas in the Sugarcane Farms at Bundaberg, in Queensland, Australia. I was able to see the historic sites, where South Sea Islanders worked as slave recruiters, and were kept as Slave-labourers on the Sugarcane Plantations. The remains of the old jetty, along the Bundaberg River, where the slave-Recruits were off-loaded, and the dormitory-like shelters in which the labourers lived, still remained when I went there again in 2008.

My edited version

I first visited Bundaberg, in Queensland, Australia, in 2005 on a State Visit on the invitation by the Governor-General of Australia, and again in 2008, on the invitation of the South Sea Evangelical Church of Solomon Islands, when the Church commemorated the founding of the Mission by Miss Florence Young among the Kanakas on the sugarcane plantations at Bundaberg. I was able to see the historic sites where South Sea Islanders worked as labourers, and were kept in what I would describe as slave-like conditions on the sugarcane plantations. I was shown the remains of the old jetty along the Bundaberg River, where my kinsmen were off-loaded and the dormitory-like shelters in which the labourers lived. Others left Ulawa through the Anglican Melanesian Mission, taken to Norfolk Island to become Christian missionaries in a process very similar to the taking of indentured labour.

This relatively small issue also points to another problem I am facing: communications. I travel to the Solomons about once every 12 months, usually only for a week. Sir Nathaniel does not use email and Solomons' international telephone calls are among the most expensive in the world. While editing Sir Peter's manuscript I was able to send emails to one of his daughters who dutifully printed them out, consulted her father and got back to me the next day. I also stayed with the Keniloreas while I was in Honiara working on the book. The Waena home is always full of Ulawans and there is, to speak, no room at the inn. A couple of days spent visiting him every year are not enough to push along editing of the manuscript. There is no way to discuss small issues as they arise.

Premonitions, dreams and interpretation

One thing that I have not edited out, and have encouraged, is an unusual feature of the manuscript: the inclusion of dreams and premonitions, and their analysis. Sir Nathaniel is more forthcoming with his dreams and strange experiences than with his public life. His explanation of their importance is in terms of a Christian context and their effect on his own personal decision making. He attributes most important decisions in his life to guidance from dreams.

God has graciously revealed in my dreams certain important future events to which he wanted me to bear witness in my public and private life. Some of my dreams have related to important political leadership changes in the political affairs of the government of the Solomon Islands nation, which determined certain major political events of historic significance. Others of my dreams have related to significant events and leadership changes, in the Anglican Church of the Province of Melanesia. Yet others have revealed matters related to particular members of my own extended family, whose sad future misfortunes or impending disappointment and sorrow became real when the time set in the dreams unfolded. There were other dreams which related to my own personal and community leadership responsibilities and authority. These affected me as a national, island and family leader within my own extended family circle.

My favourite incident is not actually a dream at all but an unusual experience in 1971, which he entitled 'A Quiet and Gentle Voice, Which Called Me, Over Ten Days'. His first job was at the Mobil Oil Depot in Honiara as a clerk. He recounts receiving anonymous phone calls over 10 days, which led, according to his analysis, to his first public service position.

Each day I would receive such a call by a person, whose voice was very gentle, and which sounded as if it came from a far away distance.

The voice said to me on the first day, upon my saying good morning: 'Ten more days'. The count-down then went to: Nine more days; Eight more days; Seven more days; Six more days; Five more days, and so forth, to the last day of the process. I asked the voice on a number of those calls, as to whom it was who was talking, but I would not be given an answer at all. When the count-down, however, reached 'Five more days' I became extremely trouble-minded with the whole matter.

I had to ring the Dean of the Saint Barnabas Cathedral, who was then the Very Reverend Father Norman Kitchener Palmer. I made an appointment to see him, which he was readily available to meet with me at his Office. We then met as agreed. He then prayed, before I was able to tell him of the strange telephone calls, I was receiving daily, which involved a count-down. I told him that the count-down was now on the fifth day. He advised me that, if it was a human being who was ringing, then I should not worry, because God will surely protect me from any physical harm. If however, it was some other matter, then, I would know what that might otherwise be, in due course. He prayed over me and reassured me of my personal safety and security.

The next morning, the count-down however still continued. When the count-down reached 'One more day', which was the Second to the last day, my sister Mrs Maria Talohoula, whom I was staying with at Vara Creek, sternly advised me to remain indoors. I readily accepted her advice for my safety. On the day which was the last day of the countdown, I have had to remain indoors at my sister's residence at Vara Creek for safety. The first day following the last day of the countdown, I returned to work, obviously with much uncertainty and fear. That day went by with no sign of any adverse situation and with no more strange telephone calls.

Perhaps the calls were from a practical joker, but Sir Nathaniel connects these strange phone calls to his first public service position, an offer made several weeks later, as Executive Officer of the Malaita District to be based at Auki. This never eventuated because the Mobil Oil Company persuaded him to stay by raising his salary. Then another public service vacancy arose at Kirakira on Makira, the main town in the central Solomons, which he accepted a few months later, glad to be in his home area. Not many of us would be as frank in revealing such a strange experience but why should it be a premonition about joining the public service?

His dreams are scattered through the text and I am unsure how to deal with them. I find them fascinating and insightful into the character of the man. They reach into a 'Pacific' core that most leaders prefer to ignore. Should they be

boxed off or included in the text? I am not qualified to analyse them (nor should I) but I can discern certain Christian and Ulawan characteristics, and a political undertone. My favourite dream title is 'The Best Dream I Ever Had, In My Entire Life Time'. Here is Sir Nathaniel in his own words:

Only once, in my life-time, have I had such a holy and pleasant dream, which may well have related most probably to my personal leadership. I dreamt on one occasion, that I was walking with one European friend, along the old Honiara Main road. We were at a scene which seemed somewhat, similar to that of the old Mendaña Avenue, and in the seeming vicinity of the now new main market, but in the old setting, although I could not be too sure, as to the precise location. While my friend and I were walking along the road, we saw above us certain floating objects which seemed like gabion baskets, full of stones, which were being loosened and were dropping to the ground, as the baskets were being let open, to allow the stones drop. Fortunately for us, although we were walking along the path of those falling stones, from the baskets, no single stone ever fell on us, as we walked along.

When we got to the point where the present main market facilities are now located, a voice came from above us, which was, in Ulawa language. The voice said this: 'Uure-mwamwanoto', 'Uuwelenga'; which means in English: 'Stand still and Raise your Head'. As soon as my concentration was directed towards the advice of the voice, I noticed at that point, that I was then left on my own. My eyes were fixed to the sky, and as I looked, an object which seemed like the moon, was descending towards me. When it came sufficiently closer to me, I recognised it, to being the moon indeed.

Upon it coming to a stop, an object came down the face of the moon, on completion of which, it formed into a Sword. As soon as the Sword became fully formed, it immediately turned into a Cross. There on that wonderful Cross, the Saviour of Mankind, hung crucified. The Holy Figure, which I dreamt of, was not a dead person. He was indeed real and alive, on the Cross, and had such most pleasant calmness and coolness on his face, as if without pain.

I have never before seen such a wonderful depiction of the crucified Lord and Saviour, the Redeemer of Mankind, and Judge of all Sinners. That particular presentation, which I was especially given in that dream, was so unique. At that point of the dream, I awoke, and immediately woke up my wife Alice, from her sleep, to tell her about that most wonderful dream. Like me, she too was unsure of what the dream meant, and the message it carried. We said a prayer and then went back to sleep. May be

the words of the psalmist which speak of: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help; My help cometh even from the Lord, who has made heaven and earth'. Psalm 121.

On numerous occasions thereafter, I earnestly sought an explanation to the meaning of my special dream, with a number of ordained Anglican Church leaders, whom I approached for their advice or opinion or interpretation, but they were so reluctant or unhelpful to share with me, any such interpretation, which could have helped my mind to settle. It was when I asked the Rev. Fr. George Tara from Uki, (before his death) for his opinion and an interpretation, that, he was able and kind, to give me an interpretation, which made my mind settle. He was an Anglican Priest, who was at the time, the Parish Priest of the Vura Parish. It was him who said to me: the dream was about 'my personal leadership'. He further said that, 'my political leadership was not going to be any easy'. He also said that: 'my own relatives', are going to be 'a difficulty to my leadership'. He then advised me to 'remain firm and closer to Christ', whose leadership quality is like that of the 'coolness of the moon'. He further advised me that, 'as long as I remained faithful to Christ, and solely depended on him: for guidance, inspiration and enlightenment, my leadership would be blessed and strengthened'. To God, be all the Glory and honour, forever and ever. Amen.

Sir Nathaniel then goes on to cite the problems he has had in his political career when his close relatives have stood against him as candidates. In 1993 one of his cousins stood against him, in 1997 four of his nephews stood against him, and in 2001 two of his nephews stood against him. Ulawa's population is quite small: in the 1999 census there were only 31,006 people in Makira-Ulawa Province, only 4,535 of them in the Ulawa-Ugi constituency.¹⁸ It is not unusual for close relatives to stand against each other in the national and provincial electorates. However, clearly Sir Nathaniel feels that he has a prior right to the allegiance of his extended family. His dream, with its Christian overtones, seems to be a justification for his superior position. It is a statement that will be viewed with interest back on Ulawa. The political axe he has to grind has God-given sharpness as revealed his dreams.

Of all the General Elections I ever contested, the 2001 General Elections were the most difficult of all, and in particular, the one, with most nasty prejudicial experience. That was intentionally filled with unethical encounters, and so many unfounded allegations made against my

18 Solomon Islands Government, *Report on the 1999 Population and Housing Census: Analysis* (Honiara 2002), 24; Solomon Islands Government, *Statistical Bulletin 06/2011, Report on the 2009 Population & Housing Census, Basic Tables and Census Description* (Honiara 2011), 7.

entire political career. Much of the things said by the Campaigners for Candidate Chief John Douglas Teaitala, were purely, prejudicial overtures, against my leadership. Although I had achieved strategic major infrastructure projects, such as the Ulawa Circuminsular Road; the Arona Airfield; the Su'umoli Wharf; many Church Buildings; the Primary Schools' Projects; the initiation of establishment of the Pirupiru Community High School; and, the facilitation of the Pirupiru E-Mail Station, all of which got funded: most people on Ulawa, during the 2001 General Elections, denied the existence of all those achievements, despite their physical presence on Ulawa Island. The supporters of Candidate Chief John Douglas Teaitala, who owned vehicles, made certain that, I and my campaign team-members do not have access to hiring of any of their vehicles.

We however did our peaceful campaigns throughout Ulawa on foot. There had sadly been no feelings of appreciation whatsoever by those concerned, for the level of effort I had put into securing the necessary funds needed for the construction of the Ulawa Road Project, which was made possible even under very stiff opposition by persons who did not see value in such pivotal major infrastructure projects, which now wonderfully serve both vehicle-owners together with the general public, who now enjoy riding around Ulawa.

Conclusion

Clearly, I am experiencing some frustration in dealing with Sir Nathaniel's manuscript, and I am uncertain of how to proceed. But I also need to stress that I am enjoying my dealings with Sir Nathaniel. There is something refreshing about his humour, his upfront Melanesianness and his complex justifications of his actions in what most of us would regard as off-beat ways. Both he and Sir Peter are strong Christians, from their quite different denominational perspectives. As a long-time lapsed Christian I am outside this tradition, although from my decades of involvement with Solomon Islanders I have learnt to respect the centrality of religion to Solomon Islanders' worldviews.

There is something very revealing and endearing about Sir Nathaniel's honesty over what many would regard as private experiences and his obscuration of what could be fascinating public political observations. The problem is how to make a book out of all this. In *The Chief's Country* Ben Burt shared authorship with Michael Kwa'iola, but distanced himself a little in explanatory footnotes. This style would not be appropriate for Sir Nathaniel's book. I will have to be more involved than the usual editor and to become an invisible guide, or should

I say ghost? I am reticent to become a co-author, which to me would mean that I accept his interpretations. I would prefer to be the editor, which allows me some level of separation and scepticism. And how do I find time to be his editor given the difficult communications and my other responsibilities? If I was living in Honiara it might be easier, but then I would not have all of the other back-ups provided from living in Australia.

I am sure that *From Ulawa to the Big House: The Life and Times of Sir Nathaniel Rahumaea Waena, GCMG, CSI, KStJ* will be published and become an important addition to the autobiographical literature on the Solomon Islands. Along the way it has made me think deeply about the process involved in turning Pacific Islanders' manuscripts into books. Although the editors of the existing corpus of literature have not been revealing about the editorial processes involved, I suspect that I am not the first to face such problems.

This text is taken from *Political Life Writing in the Pacific:
Reflections on Practice*, edited by Jack Corbett and Brij V. Lal,
published 2015 by ANU Press, The Australian National University,
Canberra, Australia.