

On Being a Stranger in a Hospitable Land

Standing on the rugged coast and gazing from the cliffs westward to the vast open sea, the island of Ranongga feels a bit like the end of the earth. At the far western edge of the New Georgia Group of the Western Province of Solomon Islands (Figures 0.1, 0.2), this narrow mountainous island has long served as a last refuge for people fleeing trouble. Yet Ranonggan communities have long been integrated into a larger regional world, and residents have long traveled across the sea and welcomed ashore foreign things, ideas, and persons.

The following chapters track Ranonggan engagements with a wide range of strangers: captives taken in nineteenth-century warfare, men and women from other islands living with Ranonggan spouses, Christian missions and their foreign god, conservation projects and multinational logging companies, migrant laborers, and others. By way of introduction and to provide a sense of the context in which the research for this book was carried out, I begin with my own experience of being welcomed ashore to the village of Pienuna, the place I lived for much of my research on Ranongga. Although it has now been several years since I have returned, this book is not based on a snapshot of local life taken from a single period; my engagement has stretched over nearly two decades. Over the years, I have watched as friends moved from early adulthood into middle age; I have seen kids turn into young adults; I have mourned the deaths of people I came to know and love. Yet, despite those long-term relationships, I have not really fully taken up the welcome that has been extended to me. Like many anthropologists, I have remained “stranger and friend” rather than really becoming a person of the place in the way that my hosts have invited me to be.¹

Arrival

I arrived in Pienuna in October 1998, hoping that this large village on the populous eastern shores of Ranongga would be a good base for research (Figure 0.3). I lived there until November 1999; after a short trip home to the United States and to New Zealand and Australia for archival work, I returned to Ranongga for a second period of research lasting from April

2000 to February 2001. In the nearly two years I spent living in Pienuna, I traveled extensively around the island and stayed in most major settlements for at least a few days. After completing my doctorate, I returned to Pienuna in 2005, 2006/7, and 2010 as part of four visits ranging from three weeks to four months. During these later research trips, I have also interviewed Ranonggans and non-Ranonggans in Gizo and Honiara, coming to urban research like many Solomon Islanders come to town—with the sense of having a rural home to which I might return.

In 1996, two years before settling in Pienuna to begin research, I had visited Guadalcanal and Western Province to find a site for research I planned on local courts. Since the late 1980s, local courts (informal courts with limited jurisdiction) and local area councils (the third tier of government) had been overwhelmed by disputes arising from logging on customary land. By the mid-1990s, national politicians were in the process of dismantling these institutions. Area councils were defunded in 1993 and disbanded in 1996–97; local courts continued to exist and were minimally funded, but heard cases only when logging companies funded hearings (see Allen et al. 2013; McDougall 2014a). After this initial trip, I reformulated my project to focus more broadly on the gendered dynamics of land tenure in the western Solomons, a region with matrilineal kinship but with a male-dominated political economy. I decided to focus on Ranongga because it was on the margins of the logging economy, and thus seemed like the sort of place where an outsider could learn something about land without stumbling into the middle of bitter disputes. By 1998, WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) had begun a conservation and development project in Kubokota. The WWF project raised many of the issues that concerned me, so I decided to try to work in a community involved in the project.

As the site of a school, clinic, and frequent canoe journeys between Gizo and Ranongga, Pienuna was a hub of activity and seemed like a good place to be based. By the time I began research, the dismantling of local government had led to a breakdown of formal processes for negotiating access and permissions for research and other activities undertaken in rural areas. I had received permission to undertake research in Ranongga and had paid research fees to the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development in Honiara before I traveled to Western Province. I was also in touch with some individuals on Ranongga, but no local representative body had approved my research because no such body existed. Kenneth Roga, officer for the Western Province Culture Office, as well as Cherry and Veronica Tanito, field officers for the WWF project, helped me to organize visits to villages within the WWF project in Ranongga. I was invited to live in Pienuna by village chief John Pavukera, Nulu clan chief Samuel Samata, and United Church catechist Giblin Lapo. Later, I would explain my research and seek permission from the community

at large during announcements following a church service, something I did whenever I visited new places over the years.

A few weeks after my initial visit, I was deposited at the beachfront hamlet of Pienuna that gives the contemporary village its name (in the past, the settlement was called Kubokota and was located inland, while Pienuna referred only to the site where canoes were landed and housed). Pienuna was home to the family most accustomed to hosting foreigners: the children and grandchildren of postwar leader Simion Panakera and his wife Joyce Dunateko, whose lives are discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. I lived with Rosie Ekeru, her mother Liza Ekeru, Liza's other daughters and their families, and Liza's cousin Matiu Matepitu. A few months later, in February 1999, I moved into an unused teacher's house located near the Pienuna Primary School and the United Church building next to a hamlet known as Zion. Living semi-independently on the school compound meant that many people of Pienuna, not just the children of Panakera and Dunateko, took responsibility for me. They gave me food and assistance, took me along as they visited relatives and traveled to church, helped me make a garden, and shared their lives with me. In my second year of research, when the house was reoccupied by a teacher, I returned to stay with Rosie and her family in Pienuna, and I have stayed there on subsequent visits.

During the initial months of fieldwork, I spent a lot of time learning the local language, Kubokota. I carried out a village census that helped me understand basic social patterns. I participated in most activities of the church and school, and attended meetings for the WWF project. In Pienuna and villages around the island, I interviewed older people about their lives, often with the assistance of Rosie and other young women who traveled with me. I quickly learned that the best interviews were ones in which I said little and let people talk about what interested them. Later in 1999 and in 2000/1, I began to systematically visit villages around the island, tracing out webs of genealogical relationship that stretched across the island and recording histories of local places. Wherever I could, I followed Samuel Samata, John Pavukera, Jebede Toribule (John Pavukera's mother's brother's son and "spokesman"), Geoffrey Panakera and other leaders as they undertook the work of solving local disputes, mostly focused on sexual offenses and land (McDougall 2014b, 2015). Using what anthropologists call an "extended case study" method, I recorded information about disputes, especially those related to land, to see how they were solved and how histories of clans and people were narrated in such contexts. It proved impossible to understand any aspect of community life, not even issues around resource development or land use, without serious attention to Christianity. Local histories of Christianity, and changing forms of Christian faith, became a central focus of my PhD dissertation and subsequent postdoctoral research.

As I was settling into fieldwork on Ranongga in late 1998, news arrived of violent attacks on settlers in northern Guadalcanal. A troubled period of civil conflict that is known locally as “the Ethnic Tension” had begun. By the time I finished my second period of fieldwork, Solomon Islands was on the path to becoming what some observers called the Pacific’s first “failed state.” The only time I feared for my own safety was during trips to Gizo, when armed men from Bougainville arrived, ostensibly providing “security” to the people of Western Province. Yet, the crisis was a constant background to daily life. It curtailed my mobility and the mobility of the people I lived with. Few people traveled to Honiara. Fuel shortages made travel by motorized canoe around the island and up to Gizo difficult. The crisis inflected the ways that people told stories; it inspired church leaders to pray for the unity of the country; it increased the sense of insecurity experienced by migrants on the island. Over the years, I have struggled to make sense of how the research I conducted on Ranongga was related to these broader national events. The focus on relations with strangers in this book emerges from my dialogue with my hosts on Ranongga during this transformative period in Solomon Islands history.

Crying for Merika

Despite the warm welcome that I was accorded, during my first months of research I was intensely lonely and full of doubt. Sticking to the tried and true methods of the discipline, though, I continued to tag along as people went about their lives. So, one day, I accompanied Rosie and the village’s United Church youth group to their collective garden, which had been planted the previous month. (Youth in the Solomons is defined not by age but by marital status; anyone unmarried is “young” and the group was mainly men and women in their twenties like me at that time.) The group planned to sell produce from the garden at the market in Gizo to raise funds to attend a regional youth rally later in the year.

As we walked up the steeply sloped path that leads from the coastal village to hillside gardens, the young men climbed trees for drinking coconuts and the young women ducked off to their gardens along the path to gather cassava and greens to steam in bamboo containers for lunch. My friends were enjoying themselves, but I found myself growing increasingly homesick. I could communicate in rudimentary Solomon Islands Pijin and English with my companions, but I did not understand what they were saying to one other in Kubokota. I wondered why I had come here, and kept wishing that I was at my cousin’s wedding that day in far-away Pennsylvania. When we finally arrived at the garden, I wandered off from the group a bit, sat on the trunk of a felled tree, and looked out across the mirror-like sea toward Gizo, the wide hills of Vella Lavella, the steep craters of Kolombangara, and the dark line of distant



Figure 0.4. View from the gardens above Pienuna, looking out toward small Inuzauru Island and Vella Lavella. On clear days, Choiseul is visible on the horizon. The main clearing of Pienuna village is just inland from Leva Point on the shore on the right-hand side of the photo. Rai Mikolo cuts sugarcane in foreground. October 2007.

Choiseul on the horizon. I had a quiet little cry. I pulled myself together then joined in the work, feeling a bit silly that I had been so despondent.

That night, Rosie and others who were becoming close friends—Hazel Piqe, Mavin Vaikera, and Alaria Medosi—came by to keep me company and to help me learn Kubokota language. I turned on my tape recorder and Hazel narrated the events of the day, describing all of the places that we passed on the path to the garden, what we ate and how it was cooked . . . and how I went off and wept. We all laughed a bit about that. A couple of weeks later, I went with Rosie to her own garden, which is on the side of a valley and does not have a view of the ocean. As we rested, she reminded me of my tears up at the youth's garden. She said that she was glad that her own garden had no view across the sea, because looking out into the distance makes her think of the people who are absent. Views over the ocean on fine days, she told me, make her weep for her deceased father.

My feelings of melancholy did not last. Quite suddenly, in the fourth month of research, I began to enjoy myself. I am not exactly sure what triggered

the change. I had taken a trip to the village of Keara on the west coast of Ranongga and found myself homesick not for Pennsylvania, but for Pienuna. And—I am not sure if it was a coincidence or not—I got my first, and worst, episode of malaria. I felt like I was going to die, not only from the malaria, but also because in my delirium I had taken additional chloroquine thinking that it was paracetamol. Rosie and Hazel nursed me through both the malaria and the chloroquine overdose. When my fever broke, I felt better than I had for months. My language capability was improving and I was even starting to understand jokes. Some jokes were about the possibility of me staying on as an in-law rather than an anthropologist; women of my mother's generation grabbed me and pinched me, saying that they had better do this now before I became their daughter-in-law, when such intimate contact would be taboo.

My original arrival in Pienuna in 1998 was muddling and uncertain. When my parents came for a visit in 1999, however, we were all welcomed ashore in a dramatic fashion. Pienuna was the final stop in a tour of Ranongga and Simbo undertaken with Dr Michael, a Gizo-based dentist. (My father was then a practicing dentist and assisted Dr Michael, who expertly extracted scores of teeth at each rural clinic. Dental tours were supposed to happen yearly but lack of funds meant that they had not been undertaken for years; my parents brought dental supplies and purchased fuel for the tour.) As we approached Pienuna, the beach was uncharacteristically quiet. Suddenly, dozens of young men sprang from behind bushes and dropped down from trees; dressed in leaves, decorated with war paint, and brandishing axes and spears, they told us to go away from the shore. Village chief John Pavukera stepped forward, holding a shell valuable, and told the warriors to let us ashore. By this time, most of the other villagers had appeared and everyone lined up to welcome us and to shake hands with my parents before we sat down for a large feast. It was the first time I had witnessed a warrior welcome, which I would see in many different versions over the coming years, and which I have come to see as a key symbol of Ranonggan engagements with strangers.

I left Ranongga in November 1999 and returned in April 2000. In my absence, Edi Ziro had started to call the place of the youth garden *Kabo Merika*: *kabo* means “cry” in the language of Roviana, where Edi is from, and *Merika* is a local rendering of America. That year, Samata gave me permission to make a garden there, and so I went to *Kabo Merika* many times during this second stint of field research, with Emarine Guavoja who was 15 at the time. Our gardening was not very productive, but I loved being in that place.

The story of *Kabo Merika* reveals something about how experiences and events become embedded in the landscape. Places have layers of names: old ones are sometimes forgotten and new ones do not always stick. To take another example, a hamlet just to the north of Pienuna was named *Kana Tapo*, a phrase meaning “enemy of the sun,” by old man Meka who cleared the

area in the 1970s. His wife Liso, a devout Christian, did not like the idea that they were enemies of something that God himself created. She called their new hamlet New Silas. But most people continued to call it by its older name, Kilisie. Like Kabo Merika, many place names point across the sea, named for home places of people who migrated to Ranongga or for places that people born and raised on the island have visited or read about. As early as the 1890s, there was a place on the west coast called Iqiladi (England), named by a local man Sadeboko who had worked for European sailors and reportedly visited England. Today, Ranonggan hamlets are named for settlements in Honiara and suburbs of Australia, as well as places all around the Western Solomons. Foreign places are thus present in the landscape, as are the traces of the people who have lived here, looked across the sea, and longed for distant homes and absent relatives.

Joy and Sadness

In 2006/7, I returned to Ranongga for another extended period of postdoctoral research. This time, my husband Mark Edele came to visit for a month in January 2007. Like my parents, he was greeted by spear-thrusting warriors as our canoe attempted to land. Before we disembarked, other villagers rushed out and threw both of us into the sea, the usual procedure for a newly married couple. Mark arrived in the middle of a week of New Year's celebrations, with soccer and netball competitions, running and swimming races, debates, and other activities. I had purchased a large pig, fuel for a fishing trip, a few bags of rice, and other store-bought food to contribute to a feast that would close the New Year's celebration, say farewell the village pastor who was moving to another post, and welcome Mark. My friends in Pienuna transformed the New Year's feast into a mock wedding, dividing the village into America and Germany (Mark is German). Each side constructed a platform in the shape of a ship to carry food and the two of us. My ship was the *MV MG Pie* (an acronym of my three places, Merika, Germany, Pienuna). To his bemusement, Mark's ship was the *MV Nazi* (quite innocently taken as a nickname for Germany), decorated with balloons, flowers, and swastikas. Disembarking from these ships, we sat with our ersatz parents for the marriage exchange. Samuel Samata, as spokesman for Mark's side, put down a pile of cash and three shell valuables (one each for my head, torso, and legs). He declared that he was buying this American woman for Germany. John Kadesi stood up for my side, put down another shell valuable and more cash, and said that while America allowed Germany to take their woman, they did not want her to be stuck there, so this money would open the path for us to travel back and forth. It was a mock exchange, and shell valuables and cash were returned to the original owners. Some visitors from other villages, however, thought that

Samata was vigorous and apparently immune to the malaria that plagued everyone else. He fell ill in late September and died quickly without passing on his knowledge of land and genealogy, or indicating who should replace him. Though Samata had been buried by the time I arrived, his siblings and families were still sleeping in a large room with Samata's widow Hakaness. On the evening I arrived, I slept there as well to mourn Samata with them.

In the morning, Samata's brother Luke Irapio called the family together to talk to me. Earlier that year, it seems, Samata told Luke and others that I had acted like a daughter and sister, not a stranger; I left the island but always returned and, in recent years, brought my family with me. Luke said that although Samata had not had time to make any plans, they had all decided to give me a little place (*ia*) in an area called Mokeru, just to the south of the main village and slightly inland. The small hamlet where they now lived was becoming too crowded as the children began founding their own households; the tsunami provided the extra impetus to establish a settlement on higher ground. Luke's children and the other cousins, young men and women of my generation, were planning to found a new hamlet there over the coming years.

Later in the week, Ziosi and Luke took me to the area for the new hamlet. As we walked up from the beach, it began to lightly rain. I started to dig around for plastic to cover my camera, remarking that it had not looked as though it would rain. The sky was clear blue and cloudless. "It isn't rain," Ziosi corrected me, "it is *resana*." *Resana* is a light mist mixed with sun, a sign that the ancestral dead are satisfied. "Samata is crying," she said. Sure enough, the rain lasted for a few seconds and stopped.

When I next returned to Pienuna three years later in 2010, I brought not only Mark but also our eighteen-month-old daughter, whom we had named Anna Dunateko after Joyce Dunateko, whose life is discussed in Chapter 4, and after my friend Rosie's daughter Virginia Dunateko, who was four years old on our previous visit and had charmed Mark. Mark and I went with Luke, Ziosi, and Luke's sister Mezi to Mokeru, where Mezi's son had been the first to build a house in the new settlement. Luke felled several trees and we all cleared the underbrush to plant fruit trees ("for Anna to eat"): pomelo, guava, star fruit, and rambutan. Ziosi planted crotons that would mark the boundary between our settlement and that of the family who was already living on the coast in a separate hamlet. A few people at the time suggested that we should *pajuku* the area, a transaction sometimes understood as a land purchase and that I discuss in Chapter 5. In my understanding, though, Luke and his family were not giving away land, but trying to attach me to the land. Having a place of my own could transform me from a guest into a person of the place, someone who can welcome others ashore.

It has been several years since we visited Pienuna. We live a sea and a continent away, and, with family on two other continents, much of our travel

is not to the Solomons. We have not yet built a house on the land that was cleared in 2010. In this tropical climate, it does not take long for a thicket of vegetation to erase the effort expended in clearing the land. After our last visit, Ziosi's daughter Gladys was going to make her garden there, look after our seedlings, and hold the area for us. By now, she will have planted several cycles of crops, and it is past time for the garden land to be left fallow or for a proper house to be built.

I lament my life is not more closely connected to this place and these people who are important to me. The expansion of the internet and mobile communication bridges some gaps, but globalization is uneven. At my last visit, Ranonggans could only get mobile phone reception if they climbed high into the hills. A few friends in town keep me informed via Facebook about deaths and other big events, but I no longer receive letters from my closest friends in the way that I did a decade ago. Even requests for money come infrequently. Yet, experience leads me to trust that one way or another, when we return, we will once again be welcomed ashore.

The Chapters

From the dramatic tales of the past to the routine work of the present, the history of Ranongga can be envisioned as a series of arrivals. On the one hand, strangers who arrive from distant lands are at the mercy of their local hosts who may welcome them as friends or repel them as enemies. On the other hand, strangers are often powerful and their arrival can radically transform the socio-spatial order. Engagements with strangers is a theme in stories told throughout Solomon Islands about foreigners who bring something essential to human thriving (such as ritual knowledge, shell valuables, military power, reproductive ability, or moral sense) to a local group that had previously lacked it. Foreigners and foreign institutions become attached to local land even as their foreign origins are continually remembered and emphasized.

This chapter has provided an introduction to Ranongga and some insight into my position as a researcher and guest in Pienuna village. In Chapter 1, I outline the ways that an ethnographic study of Ranongga may contribute to our understanding of what was a transformative period in Solomon Islands history. Ranongga was far from the violence on Guadalcanal, but residents shared many frustrations about uneven development and internal migration that motivated some Guadalcanal people to take up arms in 1998. The same political-economic transformations that set landowners and migrants against one another on Guadalcanal have also driven conflict on Ranongga, albeit in less dramatic form. Most studies of the Tension period in Solomon Islands have attempted to explain why violence erupted. This study seeks to answer

a different question: why was the violence so limited? Tens of thousands of people were displaced in the Tension and thousands feared for their lives, but only hundreds were killed; the mass violence that characterized other post-Cold War ethnic conflicts did not occur in Solomon Islands. The war was sometimes represented as the result of ancient tribal difference, but the fact is that people of Guadalcanal and Malaita, like the Ranonggans I write about here, have long engaged with people from distant places who speak different languages and do things in slightly different ways. In this book, I seek to call attention to understandings of the moral obligations of hospitality that are broadly shared by the diverse peoples of Solomon Islands. Even in situations where broader political and economic structures make it difficult to fulfill those obligations, Solomon Islanders often strive to act toward one another as good guests and good hosts.

Chapter 1 also begins to sketch out my approach to Ranonggan sociality. An analysis of stranger sociality in rural villages runs against dominant tendencies in Western social theory to depict small-scale or non-state societies as held together through face-to-face relationships among kin and neighbors. Yet my analysis resonates with tropes common throughout the Austronesian-speaking world and in many other places that figure power and value as arriving from outside of a local social world. Moreover, strangers are a focus of moral reflection in all societies and, as anthropologist Andrew Shryock (2012) has observed, this makes the idea of hospitality a compelling focus for comparison across scales of organization, ranging from the household to the nation-state. From Kant onward, Western political theory and international law conceives of the cosmopolitan right of strangers as existing in a neutral space where all citizens are equal in front of the law. Yet for people like Ranonggans, who live and work on land inherited from ancestors, there is no neutral space of mere tolerance. Strangers may be repelled as enemies or welcomed as friends, but they cannot remain merely strangers for long.

Chapter 2 tracks socio-spatial and political-economic transformations of the twentieth century. Throughout the geologically active Pacific Islands region, physical terrain is not a mere backdrop to social life, but has actively shaped possibilities of settlement and engagement in regional political and economic networks—a point that was driven home in 2007, when a massive earthquake lifted the entire island meters out of the water and transformed the physical and social terrain of the island. Settlement patterns changed markedly with pacification, Christianization, and incorporation into a plantation economy in the first decades of the twentieth century. Like others in the relatively commercially developed western Solomons, Ranonggans were heavily engaged in the production of copra, the main export of the Solomons until the 1970s. From the 1980s onward, the explosion of logging on customary land brought many residents of Western Province into more intensive connections

with agents of multinational capitalism, but it increased a sense of marginality among Ranongans, whose narrow mountainous island was unattractive to logging companies. By the 1990s, market gardening was the major source of income for most families in Pienuna and surrounding villages, who traveled regularly to Gizo to sell their produce.

Despite all of these changes, people of Ranongga—like their counterparts all around the country—have a powerful sense of continuity because they live and work on land inherited from ancestors who lived and worked on the land before them. This sense of continuity is encapsulated in the idea of *kastom*, a neo-Melanesian Pijin word that evokes ways of doing things that adhere to indigenous rather than exogenous values. The core of *kastom* in Ranongga is the idea that land is vested in *butubutu*, a term I gloss as clan, and that both *butubutu* identity and landownership is inherited through matrilineal ties. This emphasis on continuity can divert attention from significant changes in land tenure and social organization that occurred during the twentieth century. Prior to the expansion of the colonial state, *butubutu* identities linked people to places of origin, but there is little evidence that they were corporate descent groups in the way anthropologists since the 1960s have described them. Drawing on Ian Scales's (2004) analysis of frontier-era New Georgia, I suggest that pre-colonial polities were centered on canoe houses and ancestral shrines, not descent groups per se. Arguably, this spatially focused orientation continues, for even today, the most important collectivities in modern New Georgia are not descent-based clans but church-centered communities.

Chapter 3 steps back to an era Ranongans and other Solomon islanders speak of as “the time before” or “the time of darkness” that preceded conversion to Christianity. In a range of genres—folk tales, myths, and accounts of the movements of *butubutu* ancestors—quasi-human ancestral beings are depicted as stupid or crazy. They gained sense and true humanity only through engagements with foreigners. People today also speak of their closer ancestors in similar terms when they describe the crazy or stupid violence of nineteenth-century headhunting. Their great-grandparents were ignorant of Christianity and its message of universal peace and harmony. In speaking of the pre-pacification past, my Ranongan interlocutors had little to say about victims of warfare who were killed, but they recounted the stories of their own ancestors who were taken as captives and adopted by local clans. Like folk tales and myths of origin, these tales of pre-pacification warfare reveal an oscillation between brutality and kindness that is characteristic of engagements with strangers more broadly.

Government pacification preceded Christian missionization by a decade or more, and involved the violent destruction of canoes, canoe houses, villages, and gardens. In explaining the transition from war to peace, however, people of the western Solomons today focus less on the aggressive campaign

of the government than on the moral and spiritual transformation of their own ancestors who embraced Christianity. In Chapter 4, I recount the dramas of conversion that are performed annually and function as the mythical charter for the contemporary social order. I also trace more subtle transformations of the landscape that occurred in the following decades. Missionary literature focuses on resistant human souls, but oral history from Ranongga tends to focus on the adventures of warrior-pastors who did battle with a recalcitrant landscape that reacted violently to foreign incursions. People today say that Christianity has made them free—free from threats of violence from human enemies, free from affliction from ancestral spirits, free to travel widely. Many describe this freedom as particularly significant for women because they were more constrained by ancestral taboos than men. The final section of the chapter tracks the arrival of women’s Christian fellowship on Ranongga, drawing out parallels with earlier narratives about the arrival of Christianity and tracking the paradoxical effects of Christianization on gender relationships.

In celebrating their conversion to Christianity, Ranonggans denigrate the past as a time of violence and ignorance, but in other contexts they are nostalgic for a time when people truly loved and cared for one another. Many lament that the rise of market relations have meant that even family members no longer share property. Chapter 5 tracks the ways that Ranonggans seek to assert individualized rights to property without alienating all of the relatives and neighbors who really ought to be living together as a single unified collectivity. Because people often live and work on land that does not belong to their own matrilineal *butubutu*, they may try to affirm rights to property through a range of ceremonial transactions in which they present food, money, and shell valuables to their father, their father’s clan, or to people of the original landholding clan. Yet these ritual transactions do not simply serve to delineate property rights. On the one hand, these transactions function like a purchase: money and food are exchanged for rights to landed property. On the other, when such transactions are done well, the givers also make speeches denying that they are buying anything: the gifts are described as sharing amongst kinspeople who should remember their relations to one another and their shared ancestral connections to the place. The process is paradoxical and ambivalent: many people feel they must assert property rights, but also feel that such assertions are antithetical to customary and Christian ethics of landownership.

Such careful attempts to assert differential rights without alienating relatives prove difficult in the contexts of outsider-driven development projects that require what I call the “tribalization” of land tenure. “Tribe” is a term rarely used by anthropologists, but it dominates popular and legal discourse about social organization and land tenure in Melanesia. When I use the term

in this book, it is in the context of these dominant discourses. In analyzing Ranonggan social organization, I seek to pay attention to different (but often overlapping) social formations, which include families linked together through networks of relationships, communities comprised of people living together or engaging in collective projects, and clan identities defined by shared descent from a putative ancestor. The term “tribe” refers primarily to clan identities. When local sociality or territoriality is described as tribal, other kinds of social formations like families or communities often fall out of view.

Chapter 6 juxtaposes two contrasting forms of development occurring in the 1990s and 2000s in Ranongga: large-scale logging undertaken by a multinational corporation, and community conservation undertaken by a large non-governmental organization. Despite their diametrically opposed aims, both projects assumed that local people belonged to tribes and that tribes owned the land, leading people to downplay broader community membership or family connections that crosscut matrilineal clan identities. In the case of logging, the opponents of the operations attempted initially to speak for a broader public interest, but were pushed by the High Court to define themselves as tribal landowners contesting the rights of their kinspeople who had contracted the company. In the case of the community conservation and development project, the conservation organization initially assumed that the “community” it was engaging with was really a tribe; inquiries into tribal leadership precipitated a dispute over chiefly succession that threatened to undermine the project until leaders subsumed activities within the broader civic structures of participating communities. These cases reveal both the pervasiveness of the tribal frame in contemporary development, but also the ways that this framing is subverted or at least challenged when people come together not as landowning clans but as neighbors and kinspeople managing the shared affairs of the village.

In Chapter 7, I turn to interethnic relationships in rural Ranongga and in urban and peri-urban locales in Solomon Islands. From the beginning of commercial development in the western Solomons, local people expressed hostility toward laborers from Malaita, the island that was home to the largest number of indentured laborers throughout the colonial period. Colonial stereotypes continue to color interethnic engagements in rural areas and on the national stage, and real cultural differences can make the resolution of ordinary conflicts more difficult. Yet, in rural Ranongga, relationships between local people and migrants from Malaita have usually been amicable—a point echoed in literature about Guadalcanal and peri-urban Honiara. In rural and in urban situations, migrants seek to attach themselves to local land and people, but such attachment may be more difficult to achieve in urban areas. In rural villages, migrants become local by living on local land, caring for local people, bearing children, clearing land, planting trees, or even dying and being buried on their

adoptive land. In urban areas, where people may be less dependent on local land and people than in rural areas, fluid and emergent place-based identities are likely to calcify into ethnic identity, understood as a fixed and unchanging quality of the person.

The civil conflict in Solomon Islands between 1998 and 2003 began when an indigenous militant movement on the island of Guadalcanal sought to evict settlers from the island of Malaita, many who had lived on Guadalcanal for decades or generations often at the invitation of local Guales (as people indigenous to Guadalcanal are sometimes called). Influential explanations attribute the conflict to a weak colonial and postcolonial state that failed to bring fragmented and small-scale polities into a unified nation. In Chapter 8, I argue that the violence had little to do with the failure of local people to transcend local bonds of kith and kin to embrace a more cosmopolitan national identity. Rather, it arose from a broadly shared frustration with a state that consistently failed to serve the common good, and political elites who seem more responsive to the agendas of diverse transnational actors than to the needs of the ordinary citizens they are supposed to serve. Studies of ordinary people's experiences of and involvement in Ethnic Tension-era violence reveal not incommensurable difference, but a shared set of understandings and commonly held grievances. Even Malaitan victims of Guadalcanal violence did not contest the moral right of Guales to ask them to leave. In his study of ex-militant perspectives on the conflict, Matthew Allen (2013a) found that most ordinary Guales and Malaitans who took up arms saw the government—not the ethnic “other”—as the ultimate target of their campaigns. When the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) put an end to the violence in 2003, the Australian government and Solomon Islanders alike hoped that the arrival of these new foreigners would open up the space for a radical transformation of political structures, a transformation that many Solomon Islanders seem to have conceived of in moral and spiritual terms that were at odds with the secular neoliberal state-building frameworks that guided RAMSI. When RAMSI concluded after a decade of operation, it is clear that the external intervention was aimed at stabilization and did little to foster the transformation that many people desired.

Throughout most of the history of modern Solomon Islands, the expansion of the state has drawn people together in situations where they were more likely to see one another as enemies and competitors than friends and allies. This study highlights what may be lost with the expansion of a state that has not historically been aimed at ensuring and enhancing the well being of its citizens. Solomon Islanders desire and deserve a better functioning state, but this study suggests that state building should be undertaken cautiously, lest it thwart the cosmopolitan impulses of ordinary people like my friends in Ranongga who have long welcomed strangers to their shore.

Note

1. “Stranger and friend” is how anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker (1966) characterized the position of an anthropologist. Virtually ignored by critics of anthropology who stereotyped the discipline for focusing exclusively on villages (see Chapter 1), Powdermaker worked in a village community in New Ireland (now Papua New Guinea) just a decade after Malinowski’s famous Trobriand fieldwork, but then conducted fieldwork in racially divided agrarian and urban societies in the American South and Southern Africa, as well as the Hollywood film industry.