

**COUNTING COCONUTS:
PATROL REPORTS FROM THE TROBRIAND ISLANDS
PART I: 1907-1934**

Andrew James Connelly
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ii

COUNTING COCONUTS:
PATROL REPORTS FROM THE TROBRIAND ISLANDS
PART I: 1907-1934

A Thesis

by

Andrew James Connelly

Approved by:

_____, Committee Chair
Liam D. Murphy, Ph.D.

_____, Second Reader
Jay B. Crain, Ph.D.

_____, Third Reader
Allan C. Darrah, Ph.D.

David W. Zeanah, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Anthropology

Date: _____

Student: Andrew James Connelly

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

Michael Delacorte, Ph.D., Graduate Coordinator

Date

Department of Anthropology

Abstract
of
Counting Coconuts:
Patrol Reports from the Trobriand Islands
Part I: 1907-1934

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Andrew James Connelly

The Trobriand Islands were governed by Australia from 1904 to 1975, as a part of the Australian Territory of Papua, in what is now Papua New Guinea. Throughout this period, government patrols were the main tool for local administration.

This study is an exercise in historical anthropology, providing an analytical review of the surviving patrol reports, station journals and other government documents relating to the administration of the Trobriands from 1907 through 1934. The methodology used was archival research, mainly focused on the corpus of government documents and digital texts housed in the Digital Ethnography Project (DEPTH), Anthropology Department, CSU, Sacramento.

After a brief introduction to the Trobriand Islands, people and history, with a primer on relevant colonial theory, the study charts the trajectory of the colonial experience on the islands, with sections devoted to general history, health, economic development and anthropology. This investigation also informs, and is informed by, a wider view of colonialism around the world.

_____, Committee Chair
Liam D. Murphy, Ph.D.

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Of great value to this study have been the comments and viewpoints provided by retired patrol officers, foremost among these being Malcolm “Chips” MacKellar.

Mr. MacKellar was in the Australian colonial service from 1953 to 1980, serving in the Trobriands as a Patrol Officer from 1964 to 1969, the last three years of which he was Assistant District Commissioner, the senior government officer on the islands. In touch by e-mail from his home in Australia, Mr. MacKellar has been kind enough to review this work and continues to supply invaluable commentary. Thanks, Chips!

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	vi
List of Figures	ix
Chapter	
1. Introduction	2
“Why We Write”.....	3
On Naming.....	4
The Setting.....	5
Traditional Trobriand Culture in a (Betel) Nutshell.....	5
Colonial History.....	11
Sir Hubert Murray.....	12
World War II.....	17
A “New Colonialism”.....	18
Relevant Theory.....	20
The African Connection.....	22
Decolonization and Deconstruction.....	23
Other Work on Patrol Reports.....	25
Materials and Methods.....	27
Notes on Usage.....	31
List of Abbreviations.....	31
2. General History: 1891-1934	32
Prelude.....	32
Warfare.....	36
The Life of an ARM.....	41
Geographical Challenges.....	46
R .L. Bellamy, ARM.....	50
Ernest Whitehouse, ARM.....	60
Alex Rentoul, ARM.....	71
A.C. Hall, ARM.....	74
Leo Austen, ARM.....	76
Ivan Champion, ARM.....	78
3. Health	80
Venereal Disease.....	80
Other Diseases.....	85
Sanitation.....	88
Dysentery.....	88
Village Hygiene.....	90

Housing.....	92
Latrines.....	94
Infanticide.....	96
Traditional Healing.....	97
4. Economic Development.....	99
Pearls.....	99
Coconuts.....	100
The Census.....	112
Taxation.....	113
Plantations.....	119
Carving.....	125
5. Anthropology.....	128
Kula.....	132
Tuma.....	135
To'uluwa.....	136
Mitakata.....	140
6. Conclusion.....	143
Refereeing at the Center of the Edge.....	143
Murray's Mold.....	144
When the Government Comes to Town.....	146
The Truth about "Lies".....	147
A World Turned Upside-Down.....	149
A Matter of Priorities.....	150
"An Intelligent Conception".....	152
Are You My Father?.....	152
A Penchant for Paperwork.....	152
Counting Coconuts.....	153
A Place for Progress.....	154
In Their Own Words.....	155
Future Prospects.....	158
References Cited.....	160

List of Figures	Page
Figure 1. Village scene by Ernest Whitehouse, ARM.....	1
Figure 2. Map of the Trobriand Islands.....	6
Figure 3. Map of the Massim.....	7
Figure 4. The Kula Ring.....	10
Figure 5. Patrol Report cover page, 1913	15
Figure 6. Annual Report cover page (handwritten), 1907.....	28
Figure 7. Illegible report page	29
Figure 8. Patrol Report opening page, 1914	43
Figure 9. Station Journal opening page, 1911	44
Figure 10. Hand drawn patrol map by ARM Bellamy, 1915	51
Figure 11. Hand drawn patrol map by ARM Campbell, 1916.....	52
Figure 12. Captain R.L. Bellamy, A.A.M.C., 1917.....	59
Figure 13. Sketches by ARM Whitehouse, 1919.....	63
Figure 14. “Special Patrol” report by ARM Whitehouse, 1920.....	67
Figure 15. Coconut census by ARM Bellamy, 1913.....	103
Figure 16. Patrol report excerpt, 1913.....	104
Figure 17. Patrol report excerpt (Tuma), 1922.....	137
Figure 18. Papuan stamps by Ernest Whitehouse, 1932.....	146

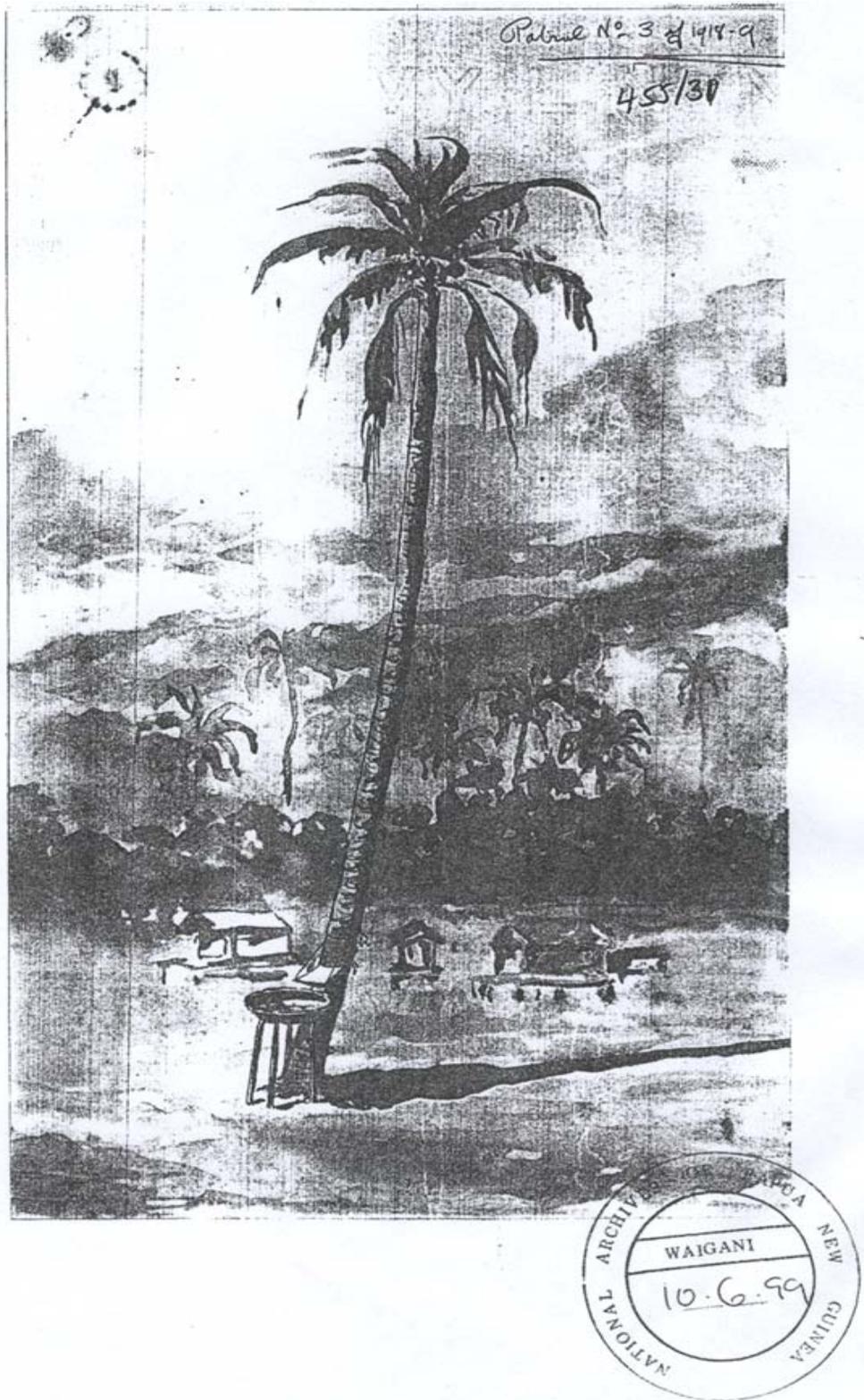


Figure 1. Village scene by Ernest Whitehouse, ARM.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is late afternoon in the village. The slanting rays of the sun warm cleanly swept ground and cause steam to rise from the thatched roofs of huts arranged in a semicircle, still wet from the rains earlier in the day. Coconut palms at the fringes of the village waft lazily in a light breeze blowing in from the lagoon. Children play in the mottled shade behind the huts, and a few pigs root indolently under the small yam houses set in front of each hut. The children's laughter mingles with the songs of men returning from gardens in the forest, and the lilt of women's voices as they busy themselves around the village. A short distance away, along a rocky coral beach lining the tranquil lagoon, beyond the palms and screened by flowering frangipani bushes that dot neatly cut lawns, sits a whitewashed wooden house, its red roof contrasting vividly with the tall green bamboo overhanging it.

The house is large compared to the huts of the village, and is raised a few feet off the ground on stilts and surrounded on all sides by a shady verandah. The window shutters are flung wide to allow the cooling breeze to ease the stifling heat of the day. From the windows, punctuated by long periods of pregnant silence, comes the staccato rat-a-tat-tat of a typewriter.

A tall, spindly Australian with blonde handlebar moustaches and a pale forehead contrasting sharply with the deep brown skin of his arms, has returned just this morning after a week visiting the surrounding villages. Smoking pensively, he alternates between gazing out the window, deep in thought, and typing feverishly. The Assistant Resident Magistrate, Losuia subdistrict, is preparing his Patrol Report.

Patrol reports and station journals of Australian colonial officers in the Losuia subdistrict (Trobriand and neighboring island groups) of what is now Papua New Guinea provide a unique look into the colonial process at the smallest scale: the face-to-face interactions of colonizers and colonized. Reports dating from 1907 through 1969 (with some gaps) give us quotidian detail of these interactions over a long period of time, and chart the changes in colonial attitudes and concerns over much of the 20th century. This study will examine these reports in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between the Trobriand islanders and their colonial "masters," and the functions, formalities and culture of the colonial administration itself. These reports will also give us a point of entry into a wider discussion of the colonial experience around the world. We will examine a range of other sources in order to situate these reports in a wider context, and to help us "read between the lines" set down by colonial officers.

Along the way we will consider various issues, including:

- The changing focus of colonial government over time, as well as aspects and attitudes that remained unchanged throughout the colonial era.
- How the Australian administration in New Guinea paralleled other colonial governments, as well as how it was unique.
- How the personalities and practices of individual colonial officers colored the work of the colonial government, and how certain men and women left their mark on the history of the region.

- How colonial officers acted alternately as representatives of the administration, and as caretakers of the interests of the people, and how these two roles conflicted and/or complemented each other.

“Why We Write”

To study the history of colonialism is to study the history of anthropology itself. In our age of reflexive self-examination, any attempt to understand anthropology’s origins must be rooted in an understanding of the colonial era within which it was fostered, and its intimate relationship with the aims and activities of the colonial experience. While at the extreme, anthropology has been called “colonialism’s handmaiden” (Asad 1973:16), we must at least acknowledge that anthropology, while inwardly taking its inspiration from the ideals of secular humanism, helped along the way the efforts of colonialism to subjugate, control and reorganize indigenous societies in order to more easily extract the riches that were its goal.

Colonialism has too often been conceived of, or represented as, a monolithic and unidirectional enterprise, with a powerful and technically advanced European “center” moving outward to contact and influence a primitive non-western “periphery,” with all the ensuing changes and developments moving in the same direction. One of the aims of this study will be to illuminate ways in which the colonial experience was multi-faceted, with numerous players motivated by numerous and sometimes conflicting goals and aspirations, and with as many effects and transformations taking place among the colonizers as the colonized. We will see how various colonial powers began their exploits not only for different reasons, employing different strategies along the way, but also how competing interests and aims existed within each colonial society, and how differing goals and motivations can be traced down to the level of individual players. We will also see that various indigenous societies apprehended their colonizers in different ways, and that these societies can also be teased apart to reveal differing and at times competing aims with regard to accommodating, resisting or re-forming the colonial encounter, from the level of the regional group, down to the village, and again right down to the individual. It is within this “complexity of colonialisms” (Jaarsma 2001:27) that we site our study.

By acknowledging the “less-than-monolithic nature of the colonial context of ethnographic writing” (Jaarsma 2001: 27), we can perceive that while the grand sweeps of political, cultural and economic forces acting over time to transform our world are still a cogent arena for analysis, they are grounded in many smaller events, processes and interactions taking place on smaller scales of time and space. In light of this, historical anthropologists find the roots of great and unified narratives in the smallest settings of village, hut and garden, and at the smallest of time scales, that of the everyday and day-to-day. Lacking a time machine that can take us into the past to do face-to-face fieldwork, the historical anthropologist must seek out those records, at times seemingly mundane and inconsequential, that describe events at this personal and quotidian scale. With the correct backgrounding and an understanding of the contexts in which they are written, these everyday records can speak volumes for the true nature of the colonial experience “on the ground,” that is, at the scale of person-to-person contact and conversation.

The patrol reports that inform the core of our study are perhaps the prime example of this type of record. By reading them, not only are we allowed to “ride-along” with a colonial representative that is the flesh-and-blood manifestation of colonial control and conduct, but are also able to observe the motivations and concerns of this officer as they change over time. Furthermore, a closer reading will enable us to some degree to elicit the motivations and concerns of the indigenous people on the other side of the exchange.

As we carry out our investigation, we will sample various disciplinary approaches. Conventional historiography, economics and political science will allow us to flesh out a wide-angle view of the history surrounding the colonial Trobriands. Our topic will be informed by the corpus of colonial studies developed in the past fifty years. Ours will be an historical anthropology in that it will be devoted to an application of current anthropological theory to historical texts (Silverman and Gulliver 1992:16), as well as an anthropology of colonialism in that it will attempt to draw upon a specific and local historical trajectory in order to inform a wider discussion of the colonial experience.

On Naming

It was (and is) a practice of the western notion of governmentality to identify or create bounded groups and categories of things, places and people. This classificatory form of knowledge was fostered by and exerted influence upon the apprehension of “the Other,” or nonwestern colonial subject, throughout the colonial experience (Cohn 1996:16). To name a thing is to control it (Mcgrane 1989:48; Foucault 1972:89). It was a French explorer less than 150 years ago who gathered a group of islands together and called them “The Trobriands,” and other white men who circled larger areas on maps and called them “The Massim,” and “Melanesia,” et cetera. This was perhaps 20 to 35 thousand years after humans first took up residence in the region (Summerhayes 2000:109). The local inhabitants have/had a much more nuanced view of the geography of the area, and probably didn’t conceive of this particular grouping of islands as a meaningful set until the idea was introduced with the first white men. A local man in 1850 would not reply when asked that he was a resident of these islands, instead he would identify himself as from an individual island, or perhaps even a single village. There is great variety in culture and language between islands, and within the larger island of Kiriwina itself. Moreover, two adjacent villages, one coastal and one inland, may not hold much in common, but two villages on different islands might feel a substantial affinity due to *kula* and other ties.

While recognizing the arbitrary, self-serving or even oppressive (as some might argue) nature of these kinds of colonial categories, we will continue to use them here. While possible, it would be difficult to write or read this study without adhering to the western names and groupings. To do so would distance us from the language of the archival material that will form the core of our discourse. Therefore the group of islands will be called “the Trobriands,” and the main island will be referred to as “Kiriwina,” instead of the more indigenously correct “Kilivila,” or locally preferred “Boyowa.”

The Setting

The Trobriands are a collection of generally low-lying coral islands situated north of the eastern tip of New Guinea in the Solomon Sea (Figure 2). Of the main islands, Kiriwina is by far the largest. Irregularly shaped, it is approximately 40 kilometers long and from 3 to 13 miles wide. The other main islands, in descending order of size, are Kaileuna, a few kilometers west of Kiriwina across a central lagoon; Kitava, east of Kiriwina, and unlike the others possessing high coastal cliffs; and the boomerang-shaped Vakuta, just south of Kiriwina, separated by a narrow strait. These islands consist of mixed terrain, including coral scrubland, mangrove swamps and pockets of rich soil. Due to the porosity of the underlying coral, fresh water can be obtained from springs along coral outcroppings, from wells, and in the many caves that dot the islands. Numerous smaller islands complete the group, some uninhabited, but some with one or two small villages (one notable smaller islet is Tuma, lying to the northwest of the group, said to be the resting place of departed souls). These islands, together with a scattering of even smaller islets to the west called the Lusancays, comprise the Losuia Subdistrict.

A population of about 8,500 in 1900 grew to 20,000 by 1990, the bulk of which live in some sixty villages and hamlets on the northern part of Kiriwina (Weiner 1988:11). Other islands are home to no more than 1,000 in a handful of villages each.

The only “town” in the group is Losuia, the administrative center and port, situated on the western lagoon of Kiriwina.

The Trobriands comprise the northern quadrant of a larger collection of islands known as the Massim, lying roughly in a ring north of Milne Bay, which share some aspects of culture and make up the *kula* circuit. The Massim and the eastern tip of New Guinea comprise the Milne Bay Province of modern Papua New Guinea (Figure 3).

Traditional Trobriand Culture in a (Betel) Nutshell

While aware of the problematics of the “ethnological present” (Forster 1973:36), for ease of description we will describe elements of culture in the present tense, while acknowledging that these elements have undergone continual change before, during and after the colonial period. Furthermore, it is misleading to speak of a single, monolithic and all-encompassing “Trobriand culture,” as there is substantial cultural and linguistic variation between islands and even between villages. For ease of presenting a general synopsis, we will speak of “Trobriand culture” while acknowledging these differences.

Trobriand subsistence is based upon swidden cultivation of several types of yam. Yams, along with taro, are considered *kauna*, the only foods that truly sustain human bodies. As with most Melanesian societies, Trobrianders use pigs as a form of wealth and exchange, but the yam takes precedence as wealth, exchange item, and symbol of status. A dictionary of *Kilivila* (the language of the Trobriands, also known as *Boyowan*) lists 18 terms for different varieties of yam (Senft 1986:596). Other types of foods are grown, collected, or caught from the sea, but only the yam has such a central place in Trobriand identity.

Descent is matrilineal, with individuals belonging to a lineage or *dala* that is passed along from the mother’s line. Malinowski minimized the role of the father in Trobriand identity, but later researchers, notably Wiener (1988), have shown the importance of the

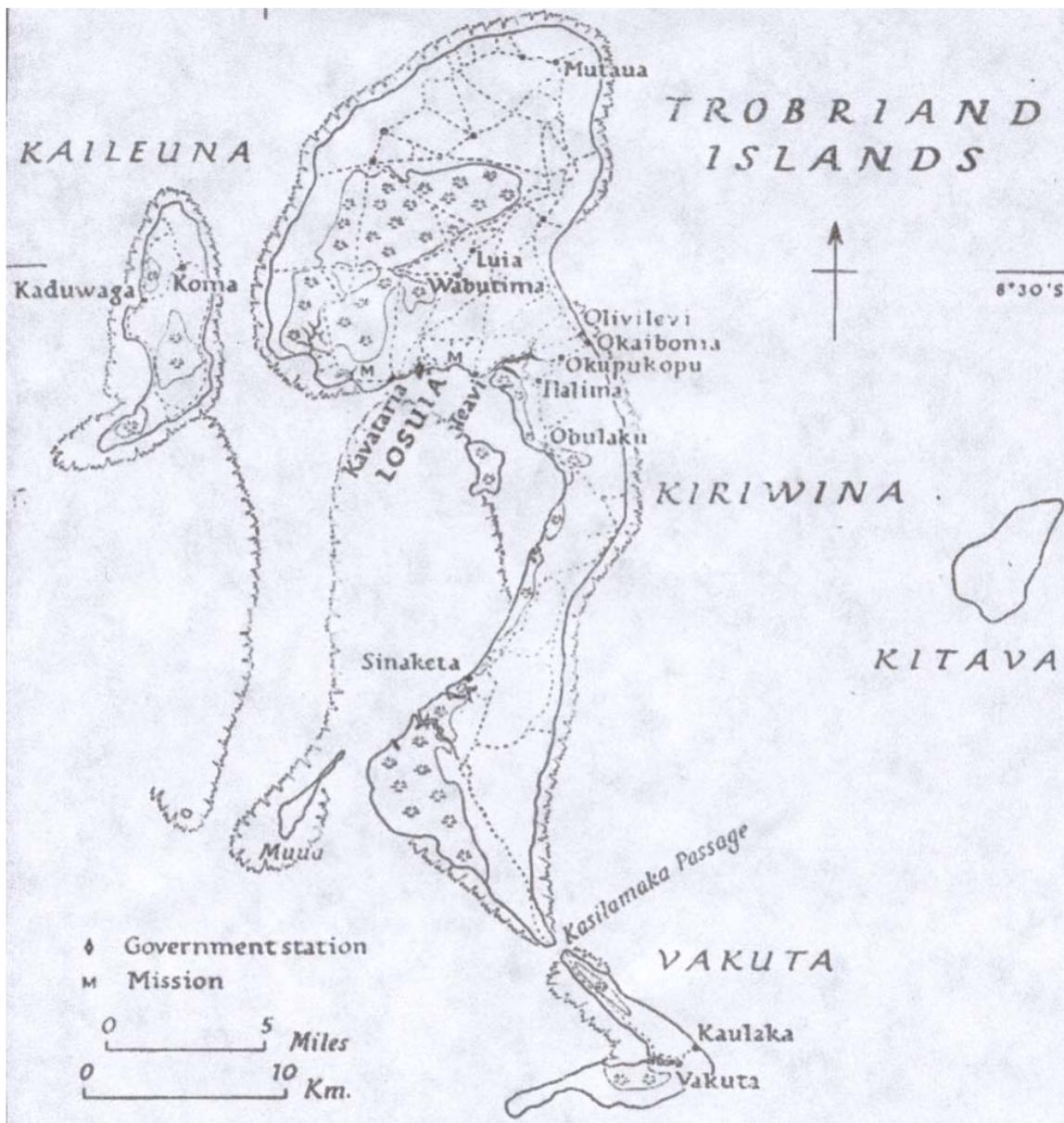


Figure 2. The Trobriand Islands.

father in both upbringing and access to political status in adulthood. As nearly all Trobriand belief systems are alimentary in nature, people literally are what they eat. Membership in a *dala* is conferred by mother's milk, and a father's nurturing (namely feeding *kauna* to the infant) strengthens ties to the larger society, hence a mother gives interior or familial identity and a father gives external or political identity. Matrilineal descent is further mediated by patrilocal residence, as a new wife will generally go to live in her husband's village.

All individuals are members of one of four clans, each with its own set of totems, origin myths, and proprietary magic. The magic held by each clan is determined by what

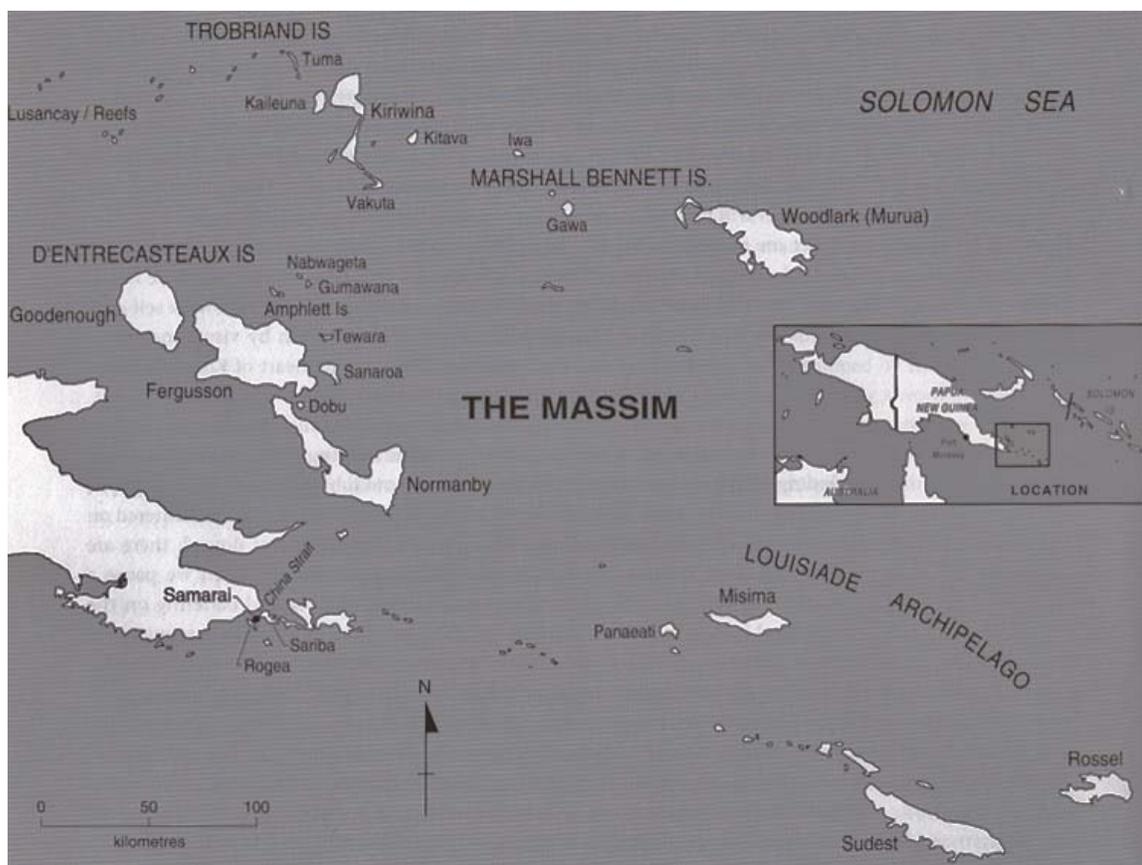


Figure 3. The Massim.

taboo foods were consumed by past members. Original members of all clans emerged with magic residing in their bellies, but different ancestors ate different taboo foods, which “killed” certain types of magic, thus the amount of magic possessed by each clan is dictated by what taboo foods its members managed to avoid eating. Even today Trobrianders will bring their own dishes and other implements when dining with others to avoid contamination. There is some argument as to whether these units are really “clans” at all in the classic sense used by anthropologists, or some other form of associative unit (Montague; pers. comm. 2005). These units take a back seat in importance to *dala* and other ties.

Unlike most Melanesian societies, which are truly acephalous or egalitarian, the Trobrianders operate under a hereditary chieftainship. Various local chiefs are inferior to a Paramount Chief, who resides in the village of Omarakana on Kiriwina, and who is always a member of the highest-ranking Tabalu *dala* (lineage). Local chiefs are either of the Tabalu or second-ranking Toliwaga lineage. Each village or hamlet has a headman who may or may not be a hereditary chief.

The notion of reciprocity lies at the heart of all Melanesian societies, and the Trobrianders are no exception. To eat food grown by oneself is considered extremely selfish and unacceptable. Each man grows food for his sister, or more accurately, his sister’s husband. Ideally, a man would plant one yam garden for each of his sisters, but this is not always the case as other considerations can complicate the social landscape.

Newly harvested yams are first neatly stacked in the garden, highlighting for a time the status and ability of the gardener, and then carried with much fanfare to the sister's village to be placed into a yam house, or *bwaima*, in front of her and her husband's house. This act of exchange confers status performatively to the giver and in wealth to the receiver. In theory, each man capable of gardening will be filling his brothers-in-law's *bwaimas* while his is being filled in turn. Yams properly stacked in a raised *bwaima* will keep for many months and serve as the basis of diet until the next harvest. Well-stocked *bwaimas* are the primary symbol of wealth and status in the Trobriands.

Monogamy is the rule with some important exceptions. Chiefs and a few other high ranking men, such as powerful sorcerers, were previously allowed multiple wives, and as each wife has her own house and *bwaima*, these men were in a position to accumulate extensive wealth, status, and due to their ability to display largesse, political power. Polygamy, with its attendant potential for accumulating wealth, was the principal vehicle for gaining and enhancing political power (Austen 1945:18). Before the arrival of Europeans, some Paramount Chiefs had dozens of wives, and their power was further enhanced by sole ownership of every coconut and betelnut tree on Kiriwina. Both these institutions were eventually curtailed, the former by efforts of missionaries and the latter by a massive program of coconut tree planting by the colonial government, who gave ownership of the trees to commoners.

Unlike other regions of New Guinea, especially the main island, where bloody intertribal warfare remained the norm well into the 20th century, warfare in the Trobriands had become somewhat stylized and ritualized by the time of European contact. This is not to say that violence did not exist, rather that most often it involved personal disputes that sometimes grow into intervillage brawls that could be bloody and even fatal. Judging from patrol reports over the years, most disputes resulted from instances of adultery or other sexual jealousies, accusations of sorcery, or disputes over ownership and use of land. Trobrianders must be very careful in what they say, as arguments can lead to "hard words," or insults that cannot be taken back, forgiven or forgotten (Weiner 1988:62). With a finely developed sense of honor and shame, individuals must eventually take action against such hard words. Fighting is often the result, but suicide is another way of escaping shame, the favored method being climbing a coconut tree and plunging head first to the ground. Some disputes can be resolved by a *Kayasa* or yam growing competition, wherein two men will try to out-garden each other. *Kayasa* can also be held as a healthy form of intervillage competition. Since its introduction in 1903s, the Trobrianders have adopted and adapted cricket as another competitive practice, one in which all villagers can take part, not just gardening men.

Magic and sorcery inhabit every corner of Trobriand life. Each facet of existence can be helped (or hindered) by accompanying magic. Magic is utilized in the form of verbal spells chanted into a physical vector of some sort. These spells are individually owned, hereditarily transmitted, and are closely guarded secrets. A good example of beneficent magic is that involved in gardening. Nearly all gardeners will employ the services of a garden magician who will visit a site under preparation in order to encourage the healthy growth of yams and taro. The gardening cycle is closely linked to human procreation and growth, and the spells employed by these men, as well as all language involving horticulture, abounds with appropriate metaphor. The earth is

encouraged to take up the seed of the plants and to gestate and give birth to healthy offspring. Monkton remarks that these magicians, along with those possessing other benevolent forms of magic such as fish-bringing, healing, et cetera, also have expert knowledge in their respective fields, in the case of gardening where and when to plant each type of crop, when to trim the sprouts, and the like. He also relates meeting an old garden magician laboriously carrying a large stone up a hill, in order to plant it to serve as an example to the yams as to how large to grow (1921:184). Other, more dangerous magic is held by high status men, including the power to dictate the weather.

The greatest fear of most Trobrianders is black magic. Only those dying of extremely old age are considered to have died a natural death, all other deaths are considered to be the result of sorcery. Sorcerers generally bewitch their victims through oral vectors imbued with incantations, the most convenient of which are betelnut and tobacco, both of which are freely shared and traded within and between communities. Bewitchment can also be effected by either literally or figuratively piercing the victim with an enchanted bone splinter, stingray spine or other sharp implement. This method introduces the likelihood that sorcerers, like their more benevolent counterparts, use practical knowledge along with spells, in this case poisons such as that derived from pufferfish. Villagers long resisted European attempts to have them raise their huts off the ground on stilts or coral boulders for health reasons, as this would give easy access to sorcerers armed with their pointed and decidedly unhealthy weapons.

Although most black magic is used by human sorcerers, there are some even more sinister figures stalking the psychic landscape of the Trobriands. Most notable of these are the *mulukwasi*, or flying witches, terrible creatures that inhabit the shadows of moonless nights, flying around or perching in trees. They swoop down to attack and kill by eating the entrails of their victims. As the gut is the seat of consciousness and being, the *mulukwasi* are literally soul-eaters. Most at risk are mariners caught at sea on moonless nights.

A practice unique to the Massim region is the *kula* ring. This trade circuit unites cultures otherwise dissimilar in language and other traits. The main goal of *kula* is to circulate native wealth items between partners in different locations, usually (but not always) on different islands, and eventually around the entire ring, in order to gain status and fame for the participants. Shell necklaces or *bagi* circulate clockwise and shell armbands or *mwali* circulate in the opposite direction. The older and/or more valuable items are named and the history of their ownership can be recited. The *kula* ring comprises the Trobriand group, Iwa, Gawa and Muyuw (Woodlark) Islands to the southeast, and the D'Entrecasteaux group to the south. Most participants travel by sailing canoe to their immediate neighbors in each direction once yearly, but have been known to venture further in order to coax the desired items along. Other trade often accompanies *kula* activities, and this is one explanation of its usefulness. Some researchers theorize that the *kula* originally involved the trade of stone implements and raw stone (not available on the coral islands of the Trobriands, and absolutely necessary to subsistence farming), until the advent of Europeans and their metal tools, when shell valuables gradually came to the fore.

The Trobriands have a long history of excellence in woodcarving, and this brings them renown throughout the area. Carvings were in demand by neighboring groups long

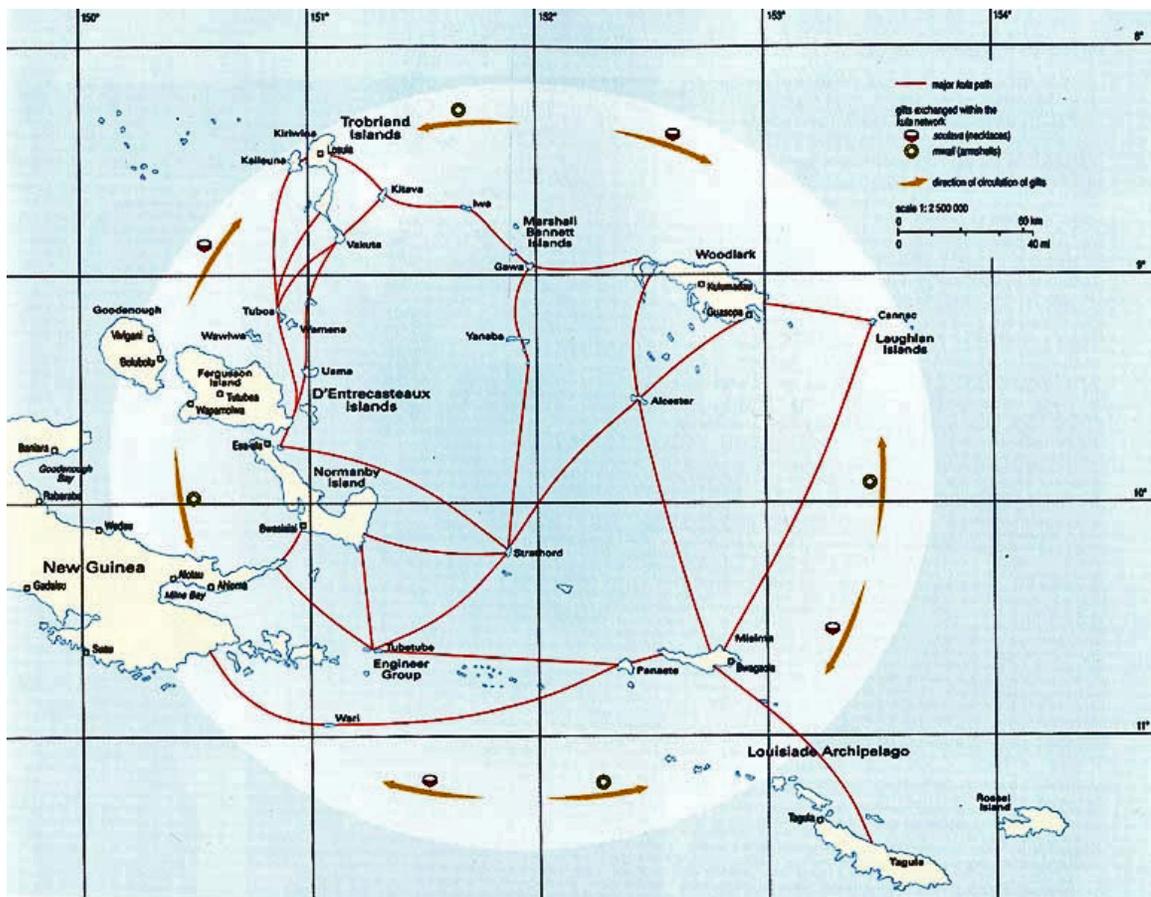


Figure 4. The Kula ring.

before European contact and have continued to play a major role in the economy of the islands. Most carving activity is concentrated in the Kuboma district of Kiriwina, especially in the village of Boitalu. It is interesting to note that Boitalu, other than its status as the center of carving, is considered a pariah village due to the inhabitants' taste for stingray or *vai*, which along with bushpig, is the strongest food taboo for all other Trobrianders.

The greatest claim to fame for the Trobrianders in western eyes is the freewheeling sexual mores enjoyed by unmarried youth, popularized by Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages* (1932). This book put the region on the map of popular consciousness as "The Islands of Love." Unmarried young men and women engage in rather promiscuous liaisons, and this activity is tolerated if not encouraged by the older members of society. These activities are usually carried on in private, but during the annual harvest festival of *Milamala* exuberant dancing can sometimes spill over into public sex, with even married individuals getting away with some indiscretions. Other than on this occasion, marital fidelity is strongly valued, and formerly uninhibited single men and women face severe penalty if caught adulterizing when married. Missionaries did their utmost to curb promiscuity, with success depending on the commitment of individuals to the missions' teachings, but these practices are known to persist. During most of the colonial era it was

an unwritten rule that young unmarried patrol officers were not to be posted to these islands (Mackellar 2005, pers. comm.)

Colonial History

While this study will concentrate on the early years of colonial administration of the Trobriands from 1891 to 1935, we will briefly examine the entire colonial period ending with national independence in 1975, in order to ground our story within a wider historical context.

Long before the appearance of Europeans in the southwestern Pacific, the Trobriands were home to a highly complex society possessing a well developed tradition of boatbuilding and sailcraft, in extensive contact with the outside world through trade relations with neighboring islands. The region was initially settled at least eight thousand years ago, likely in two main waves: first by Papuans and later by Austronesians (Brown 2001:15).

Being part of an interisland network of trade, first contact with Europeans was probably preceded by stories of these new people in their big ships, and therefore wasn't as earth-shattering an experience for the Trobrianders as it was for more isolated groups elsewhere in Melanesia. The very first visitors were probably whalers and itinerant traders, stopping to trade for fresh water and foodstuffs, and these initial contacts will most likely remain undocumented.

The first documented visit was by the French navigator Bruni D'Entrecasteaux in 1793, who named the island group after his first lieutenant, Denis De Trobriand. The ensuing years brought a steady stream of explorers, traders and the like, who left valuable trade goods such as iron tools, but also left their diseases to decimate the indigenous population. It has been posited by Montague that the islands were so decimated by disease in the early 19th century that society virtually broke down, only to be rebuilt by the chiefly Tabalu lineage, who arrived from the Philippines bringing today's familiar yam culture (pers. comm. 2005). It could be argued that this was the first and most successful colonial venture in the Trobriands.

Missionaries first entered the region around the mid 19th century, with failed missions established at nearby Woodlark Island in 1847, and at Dorei Bay in 1855. More enduring attempts were then made, with the London Missionary Society founding its first Mission at Port Moresby in 1874 and at Milne Bay in 1891 (Brown 2001:16). Several missions were founded in the Trobriands by the turn of the 20th century. Many of the missionaries were Christianized Pacific Islanders, with the bulk from Fiji.

Also by 1900, traders had set up shop at stations around the islands, exchanging tools and tobacco for coastal products such as *beche-de-mer* (sea cucumbers), pearls and pearl shell. Labor recruiters or "blackbirders" were also operating in the area by this time, taking men to work on plantations in Fiji, Samoa and Queensland, under conditions one step up from slavery, with contracts of indenture little understood by the workers (Brookfield 1972:31).

By 1883, the colony of Queensland in northern Australia had grown concerned about expansionist aims of various European powers, and acting in defiance of Great Britain, its own colonial master, claimed the southeastern portion of New Guinea and adjacent islands in order to create a "buffer zone" to its north (McPherson 2001:2). The

Dutch had already annexed the western portion of New Guinea and the Germans were busy developing a plantation system in the northeast. While the action taken by Queensland technically made the Trobriands part of an Australian colony early on, the islands did not see the arrival of resident colonial government for another twenty years.

The British, reluctant to take responsibility for a region so remote and seemingly inhospitable, finally succumbed to Queensland's pressure and declared southeast New Guinea a British protectorate in 1884, and in 1888 British New Guinea, or Papua, became a Crown possession. With the Papua Act of 1905 administration passed to the fledgling nation of Australia (Amarshi et al. 1979:15; Brown 2001:18).

Permanent colonial government arrived in the Trobriands in 1905 with the founding of a station at Losuia on the western lagoon of Kiriwina. With this event the "colonial triad" of missionary, trader and government official was complete. These three forces are too often viewed as complementary actors in a unified colonial front, while in reality they were often at odds in their philosophies, aims and practices.

The reasons behind the foundation of a colonial government are multiplex, and sometimes apparently conflicting. This conflict reveals the ambivalences and ambiguities inherent in what might be called the late colonial period.

One major role of government was to mediate the contacts and exchanges between the indigenous population and "non-governmental whites," mainly missionaries and traders. This meant, initially and publicly, the protection of Europeans from potentially murderous natives, but also, and to a greater extent in less violent places such as the Trobriands, the inverse: "[T]he government's task [was] policing the violent excesses of power of white entrepreneurs, missionaries and government officials" (Brown 2001:18).

Economically speaking, the foundation of colonial states in Melanesia is viewed as a way to secure a stable workforce for the labor-intensive plantation economies that supplanted the initial mercantile (coastal trade) exploitation in importance. After poor results with other crops, the production of copra (dried coconut meat, a raw material for the extraction of coconut oil, an important industrial commodity in the 19th and early 20th century) came to the forefront, spurring the establishment of extensive plantations in the region: "For the first time, Melanesians were affected by European demand for an *industrial* raw material, so that Melanesia's relations with Europe began to be guided by the development of industrial capitalism as opposed to the trade relationships of mercantile capitalism" (Amarshi et al. 1979:6; original italics). While Papua never achieved the plantation development of German New Guinea, the goal was the same.

Sir Hubert Murray

It would be difficult to find a place and time more affected by the hand of one man than the Territory of Papua in the first half of the 20th century. Hubert Murray served as Lieutenant Governor there from 1908 until his death in 1940, and shaped not only the colonial landscape, but also the nature of the government service.

Murray's philosophies were well ahead of his time in 1908, but gained credence and respect as time wore on. He decided at the outset that the welfare of the "native Papuan" was to overshadow all other goals in his domain. While the suppression of warfare and the establishment of rule of law were also prioritized, Murray felt strongly

that his administration first and foremost needed to protect the indigenous population from the excesses of white settlement and economic exploitation. Writing in 1913, he expressed his opinion of the dangers facing an unregulated Papua: “I am coming to the conclusion that any white community left with absolute power over ‘natives’ would resort to slavery within three generations” (Griffin et al 1979: 25).

World War I saw the addition of German New Guinea to Australia’s portfolio, granted as a League of Nations mandate. While initially supporting a merger until realizing that his policies would be jeopardized, Murray argued successfully against the amalgamation of the two territories, and they continued to be governed separately until after WWII. Australian New Guinea would always be Papua’s bigger, but younger brother, with a larger white population and greater economic output, but with less protection for indigenous ways of life.

Murray’s policies ensured him many enemies both in Papua and at home in Australia, who accused him of choking the economy and “mollycoddling the natives,” giving Papuans more freedom than their (perceived) limited faculties warranted. Murray was not opposed to development *per se*, but insisted that it proceed at a slow and steady pace, and that Papuans always retain the option of remaining as villagers and farmers. While not fully accepting Papuans as equal to whites, his views were far advanced from the racism endemic to much of the white community. Murray did allow discriminatory regulations known as “caste legislation” to be adopted, but only as an act of appeasement to his critics in Port Moresby, so that the greater welfare of indigenes could be preserved.¹

In truth, the economic fortunes of Papua did suffer as a result of Murray’s policies, and it remained a “backwater of empire,” understaffed and underfunded, throughout the colonial period. But nowhere has indigenous culture suffered less from the inroads of westernization (Griffin et al 1979:23-32). Murray’s stated philosophy was “association over assimilation” (Brown 2001:16).

Murray followed the practice of his predecessor William MacGregor, taking an active role in the exploration and patrolling of the territory. Murray spent much of his time touring and inspecting the various districts, and regularly accompanied his officers on lengthy foot patrols. He called the cadre of Resident and Assistant Resident Magistrates his “outside men,” and insisted that all be responsible for the personal inspection and patrol of their domains. All patrol reports were personally reviewed by Murray, who usually jotted notes on the cover page of each one, often simply a laconic “seen” or “read,” sometimes a question regarding an entry, and in rare instances a few words of praise or encouragement (Figure 5). His hands-on style of government, his understanding of the conditions in which his men worked, and the fact that, even into his seventies, he could appear at any time at remote government stations, earned him the respect of all his officers.

The Trobriands were governed from Losuia by the Australians from 1905 until independence in 1975, with patrols as the principal form of governance throughout this

¹ Murray also developed close personal friendships with many Papuans, and when visiting Australia sent postcards to many indigenous friends (Griffin et al 1979: 30). Upon his death he was mourned throughout the Territory, by indigenes and whites alike.

time. The colonial era can be roughly divided into 4 periods: pre-WWI, the interwar years, WWII, and postwar. Each of these periods can be characterized by the concerns and practices of the colonial government.

Prior to WWI, the administration was primarily concerned with the establishment of an infrastructure conducive to economic growth, as well as the alleviation of disease through programs of personal and community hygiene. Constant pressure was placed on locals to facilitate intervillage communication by improving the paths that linked them, and the government station at Losuia was developed through the use of convict labor. A jetty, gaol, storehouses, clinic and vegetable gardens were built. Locals were ordered to reserve Fridays as a day of work for the government, usually on track or road improvement or clearing land for, and maintenance of, government plantations. Numerous failures to do so provided a steady stream of minor infractors into the gaol, and therefore a ready supply of free labor for projects in and around Losuia.

High on the priority list in these early decades was the planting of coconut trees along all paths and also in government and village plantations. Early patrol reports stress the counting of trees and detailed accounts of their growth and state of health. The hope was that local production of copra would make the subdistrict self-supporting and provide a viable tax base for the chronically underfunded Papuan administration.

Starting in these early years and continuing throughout the colonial era, the Australians depended upon indigenous agents to assist in governance. A Village Constable (VC) was appointed for each major village and imbued with the authority to carry out government policy during the long periods between patrols. Like the Australian officers themselves, these men were chosen on the basis of perceived intelligence, resourcefulness and industry, but also on the basis of acceptance of, and compliance with, colonial authority. Village headmen were often, but not always, appointed as VC. Again like their white officers, the personal style and ability of these VCs often dictated the effectiveness of government. A well-chosen VC could assure an “orderly” village, while a poor one was often simply ignored by villagers. These men walked a delicate line between government authority and traditional structures of power. Most patrol reports include comments on the performance of the VC in villages visited.

A Village Council was also formed, consisting of all the elders, headmen and other influential members of the community. Not imbued with any administrative authority, these councils served as advisory bodies or a sort of “blue-ribbon panel” for each village, and served as the nucleus for later self-governance. These councils were a way to legitimize or officialize existing power structures on the islands, in an Australian version of “indirect rule,” a policy borrowed from the British who first experimented with it in Nigeria in the late 19th century (Afigbo 1972:6). Indirect rule was a loose term that encompassed any colonial effort that used pre-existing traditional systems of power to govern. The notion was to let the locals look after themselves under the eye of the colonial government, which would only exert direct power to correct abuses by local leaders. Technically, the colonial rulers were advisors to local government, and the Australians in Papua did all they could to implement policy without the use of force. “Indirect rule does not, in law, give orders; it gives advice” (Coen 1971:14). A primary quality of an effective ARM (Assistant Resident Magistrate, the normal title of the officer in charge at Losuia) was persuasiveness. Patrol officers often got things done through

143
Papua.
MINUTE PAPER.

450/160
JACKET NO. 1716
Minute No.

SUBJECT:

REPORT OF PATROLS BY R.L. BELLAMY A.R.M. TROBRIAND ISLANDS.

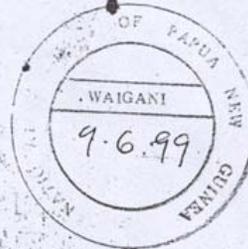
To H. E.,

The Lieut-Governor.

Encl.

Patrol reports referred to above forwarded herewith for Your Excellency's information, please.

10th September, 1913.



See. The Clerk is doing wonderfully well with his printing. What are the other assistants doing in this direction? We keep on reminding them of this repetition, but I don't know that there is much result.
J.N.M. 218 11-5-13

Note.—If there is a "Jacket File" relating to this subject this Minute must be filed therein. Nothing is to be written on the back of this sheet. The next Minute Paper (if any) is to be placed on the top of this one. If a Minute is not completed on this sheet it is to be continued on a new sheet. The distinguishing letter of the Jacket (if any) is to be noted thus, "Jacket No. A. 21," or as the case may be.

Figure 5. A typical patrol report cover page, with a handwritten comment by Lieutenant Governor Murray (discussed further below).

cajoling and exhortation, but in the end, everyone knew who was in charge. The façade often wore thin, and many reports simply state that the ARM visited a village, found something amiss, and ordered the residents to correct it on the spot.

The founding of the Government station at Losuia came at a time of an epidemic of venereal diseases brought by earlier foreign visitors. The stamping out of this epidemic was at the forefront of initial colonial efforts. A visit to each village along the route of a patrol included lining up all inhabitants for an inspection of genitalia, with the proper recording of occurrences of symptoms and ensuing treatment. Insides of dwellings and the area around the village were often searched to bring in anyone trying to avoid inspection. Advanced cases were ordered back to Losuia for quarantine and treatment at the clinic.

General village hygiene was also stressed, with orders given to clear away and burn trash, and a general exhortation to increase the space between huts in order to let fresh air flow between. Locals were also urged to raise huts a few feet off the ground on stilts, also to allow the healthful effects of fresh air. This met with mixed results as a raised hut was seen as vulnerable to attack by sorcerers. The emphasis on village hygiene tended to merge subtly from health issues into those of aesthetics, with many comments made in reports about good villages with well-built huts set in healthy, straight lines and poorer ones with shabby huts set more haphazardly. This reflects the British colonial attitude seen elsewhere that order, morality and health all go hand in hand (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:334). Thomas cites similar attitudes expressed in British Fiji, and suggests that geometry, hygiene and openness to surveillance were commingled in a British/Australian “paradigm of order” (1994:119). Issues of visibility, such as the ability to see under and between dwellings, were conflated with sometimes imaginary issues of hygiene. Also reflective of prevailing British attitudes were comments made by patrol officers regarding the morally uplifting effects of hard physical labor, for instance, R.L. Bellamy, the first ARM at Losuia, in describing the breaking up and moving of coral boulders for construction of the station jetty, writes: “This crowbar coral work is very heavy but its moral effect on the district is excellent.” (Station Journal 2/17/1911).

After WWI, German New Guinea was taken over by Australia and governed by the military until 1921, when it came under civilian rule under the auspices of a mandate of the newly formed League of Nations. The original colony of Papua and the new Australian New Guinea were governed separately through 1949, with the latter’s capital being set at Rabaul on New Britain. The new colony had seen much more capital investment under Germany than its Australian neighbor, and also contained extensive mineral deposits. It continued to overshadow Papua in terms of economic output and growth.

The interwar years brought some changes in local governance, but little in the way of additional economic development, due to a continued chronic lack of capital investment, as well as various protectionist policies put in place by Australia, both discussed below. Papua remained “a sleepy backwater of empire” (Schieffelin and Crittenden 1991:14). The Territory continued to be governed on a shoestring budget with minimal staffing. The colonial capital of Port Moresby contained a white population of “barely 700 in 1935, about half the total white population of Papua” (Schieffelin and Crittenden 1991:15), with another quarter living in the southeastern regional center of

Samarai. This left around 350 colonials scattered throughout a vast area. In the Trobriands, perhaps two dozen traders, missionaries and government officials comprised the entire non-native population. It was up to local government officers to take up the slack with individual resource, diligence and creativity. Their success in maintaining order is a testament to the efficacy of their methods and industry, as well as to the local population's acceptance of the colonial system.

Health and hygiene continued to be a priority for ARMs. The aggressive inspection and treatment program had effectively curtailed the VD epidemic, and village-wide genital inspections ceased to be a part of patrol visits by 1929. Other health issues continued to be addressed, and by this time patrols often included a Medical Officer who would treat minor ailments on the spot and send more serious cases back to Losuia for treatment at the clinic. Village cleanliness and order continued to be stressed, with a new focus on the digging of latrines and establishment of safe and convenient sources of water for each village.

In 1918 the Native Plantation Ordinance was enacted, enabling the government to designate various tracts of land as communal plantations. These plots were meant to be collectively planted with coconuts, with proceeds from the sale of copra to be divided equally between government and locals. This scheme remained in place for many years, but met with limited success.

The need for financial self-sufficiency within the colony entailed a complete annual census in the Trobriands, in order to collect a head tax. Villagers could choose between a variety of strategies to pay (or avoid paying): they could sell local produce to traders and pay cash, they could dive for pearls to trade for cash with which to pay, or produce wood carvings for cash, or they could donate labor to the government plantation. ARMs spent large amounts of time laboring over village tax rolls, cajoling locals to pay, and tracking down those in arrears. Substantial leeway appears to have been given to tardy taxpayers, and reports contain numerous descriptions of attempts to collect back taxes many months overdue. Ultimately, recalcitrant taxpayers were arrested and spent time in gaol, where their labor was rendered up for maintenance of the station, work in the government plantation, or as carriers or boat's crew for the next patrol.

World War II

Just seven weeks after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese army captured Rabaul, a large harbor and the capital of Australian New Guinea situated on the northern tip of New Britain, previously held by a small Australian garrison. Rabaul is situated just three hundred miles north of the Trobriands. The Japanese quickly poured in men and materiel, making Rabaul their main base for further expansion south into Australian Papua and New Guinea (Eichelberger 1950:90). By April of 1942, although never occupied by Japanese troops, the Trobriands were effectively surrounded by Japanese bases. With a few notable exceptions, all white government officials, missionaries and traders were evacuated, and the islands were set to become part of the nascent Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere. Ernest Whitehouse, previously ARM for ten years in the Trobriands, returned to Losuia to represent the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU), the military organization formed to govern areas not occupied by the Japanese, and remained in the Trobriands at risk of capture by any Japanese who might

have chosen to land. Other Australians in the area volunteered to take to the bush in order to act as coastwatchers, reporting on enemy movements.

1943 saw a massive invasion of Kiriwina by men and materiel of the US Army and Australian Air Force, as part of operations aimed at creating airstrips within range of Rabaul for fighter aircraft tasked with protecting bombers from more distant bases as they bombed the Japanese stronghold. Landings were made both at Losuia in the south and along the north coast, and two large airstrips were carved out of the swamps and coral scrubland of the interior. Major roads were built connecting these airstrips and other installations.

ARM Whitehouse proved invaluable to the allies as a liaison to the indigenous population. Most locals welcomed the American and Australian troops and helped the war effort in many ways.

This large operation left its mark on the island. The new roads helped intervillage communication, although they weren't always the most convenient routes. Large amounts of materiel were left behind to be salvaged and re-used locally. Conversely, the construction of airbases and connecting roads damaged large areas of already limited arable land, not all of which was recoverable. The colonial government attempted to identify and compensate those who had lost property, and this effort continued into the 1950s.

The newly created infrastructure and readily salvageable construction materials helped the colonial triad reestablish itself quickly, but things would never be quite the same. Local people had caught a glimpse of a modern world beyond the filtered view provided by their sparsely numbered and undersupplied colonial masters: "The war offered a vision of an undreamed-of world of plenty" (Brookfield 1972:93). Not only was the sheer number of men involved in the military effort an eye-opener, but their behavior toward locals was quite different from the colonial Australians as well: "the more friendly and less domineering attitudes, especially of the enlisted men, were both noted and appreciated by the Melanesians" (Brookfield 1972:94). Among these troops were large numbers of American blacks, and to see these men in the same uniform as whites must have changed local perceptions as well.

A "New Colonialism"

The postwar years brought a new emphasis: the preparation for independence. The dreams of colonial wealth and economic self-sufficiency of the pre-war years had never materialized, and the international political climate had begun to militate for independence of all colonized peoples, but Australia didn't want to pull out of Papua prematurely, leaving an unstable state as such a close neighbor. This reluctance was compounded by a persisting paternalism that perceived the indigenous population as not really able to govern themselves, linked to a progressivism that added "yet." The postwar focus on indigenous welfare and development is best summed up by the words of the charter of the newly formed United Nations:

...to recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote...the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants...and their progressive development towards self-government and independence. [Essai 1961:57]

A rededicated focus on the interests of the indigenous population was colored by persisting views of inferiority that had subtly shifted from racial terms into social and anthropological ones. Australian Minister for Territories Paul Hasluck's comments from 1958 echo sentiments little changed from the turn of the century: "[T]he advancement of a primitive people is gradual and is necessarily surrounded by some hesitations and many unforeseen complications" (Brookfield 1972:99). The hope was that a smooth and unhurried transition would foster a healthy and modern democracy, as well as allowing time for the necessary social and economic maturation that was entailed by the perceived evolution from "traditional" to "modern." The responsibility of the ruling society (Australia) was weighty, in that only its wisdom could bring about the necessary mix of development and stability that would ensure success for its colonial children: "[W]hile development is positively promoted, it is not permitted to be injurious to the native inhabitants, and ...a balance [must be] struck between the development of resources and the well-being of a dependent people." (Essai 1961:57).

While many colonial governments can clearly be judged to have put their economic interests ahead of the colonized population, it must be remembered that the Australians in Papua never realized much profit, and from early on attempted to balance economic exploitation with the interests of the indigenous population. However warped the perceptions of those interests may have been by racial or political views is a matter for interpretation. Furthermore, it should be noted that individual colonial officers, especially those "on the ground," never grew rich or famous through their careers, and must be viewed as having had a true love of service and a desire to help their indigenous charges.

Australians shared British fears of political instability in its colonies, brought about by rash moves toward independence: "[I]t was the duty of a colonial power to hold back self-government until the politically aware in the population reached a critical mass; otherwise an activist minority might gain control, and exercise power in its own interests" (Brookfield 1972:100). National independence came about in 1975 not as a conclusion of the Australian programme of political and economic development, but as a reaction to intense anticolonial pressure brought to bear in the UN, as well as through the actions of a new Labour government in Canberra.

Patrol reports from the postwar years began to include an analysis of the potential for self-governance for each area visited. These comments generally centered on the efficacy of the Village Councils. Town and District Councils were also formed, comprised of both Administration officials and "citizens" (indigenes) appointed by the administration. These councils, like the village councils, were advisory bodies without any real power, and the appointed native members were sure to be compliant with the philosophy of the territorial government. In 1951 a newly formed legislative council first met. Comprised of 28 members, it included 16 Administration officers, 6 mission or commercial representatives and 6 indigenous representatives, of which 3 were appointed and 3 were elected. Although these were important initial steps, the makeup of each body assured solidarity with the aims of the Administration, so both were, in reality, "practice" governments.

Paralleling a postwar economic boom in Australia was an expansion of government services, as well as the abandonment of the concern for financial self-

sufficiency for the Territory. From a pre-war total of around 500 Europeans, the Administration grew to 800 in 1949, and to 3500 in 1961, plus some 250 indigenous Auxiliary Officers (Essai 1961:63). The Auxiliary was created as a training division in order to allow Papuans to gradually begin to fill the ranks of the administration. This period also saw the spin-off of specialized divisions responsible for health, education, agricultural development, et cetera.

This postwar expansion of government services and personnel was apparently not evenly spread. It seems that the Losuia subdistrict, as a relatively small, isolated and economically unimportant region, was neglected administratively, at least into the mid-fifties. In a memo to the Director of Native Affairs in Port Moresby, the District Commissioner in Samarai, after commenting on recent disturbances in the Trobriands, bemoans a continued chronic lack of staffing: “[H]ad this station been adequately staffed, both matters would have been quickly dealt with...The administrative history of the Trobriands in the post-war years is most unfortunate” (Memo 14/3/1/1659: 3/3/1954). He goes on to point out that the station had been staffed by a lone junior cadet officer for the past eighteen months.

The policy of gradual development and preparation for self-rule continued until independence in 1975, but this did not entail the complete withdrawal of all colonial officers from the country. Many stayed on to assist in the new government, in similar capacities as before independence.

Relevant Theory

The histories of anthropology, colonialism, western governmentality, and modernity are all inextricably linked. Not only did anthropology prove instrumental to the development and governance of Europe’s colonies, but the securing of colonial territories enabled anthropological studies to safely proceed. An anthropology of colonialism must by definition also be an “anthropology of anthropology” (Pels 1997:165), one in which the anthropologist must eschew any notions of true objectivity, as if we must gaze into a mirror and past our reflected image in order to view the object of study over our own shoulder.

Perhaps the most commonplace view of colonialism is one of a strong Europe, secure in its notions of supremacy and moral righteousness, moving out into a more “primitive” world to impose its culture and economy on the less powerful or technically developed. Missing from this view is the fact that European identity was, from the earliest voyages of discovery, formed and informed by a dialogue with “the Other,” that is, the non-European colonial subject. European constructions of alterity, or “otherness” were based upon changing paradigms over time, and are discussed below. Thomas writes that the historical contingency of these constructions renders them “less as actual visions of real others, but instead as discursive forms that are distinctive to epochs and epistemes” (1994:68). The important qualification here is that while conceptions of otherness arose from historically contingent factors and ideas, later conceptions rarely replaced earlier ones, but were simply overlaid. The latest ideas may operate at the forefront of discourse, but older ones continue to thrive in the background. The epoch may pass, but the episteme endures.

Before the emergence of anthropology as a scientific profession, European views of nonwestern peoples were informed by the accounts of explorers, missionaries and travelers. The early colonial period was influenced mainly by a religious worldview, one in which the world was divided into Christian and heathen, moral and immoral spheres. Missionaries often formed the vanguard of western intrusion into native societies, and the propagation of a “Christian cosmology” paved the way for organized colonial endeavors. This missionizing has been called a “colonization of consciousness” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:8) that won the hearts and minds of indigenes and made them ready to become willing colonial subjects.

The Christian view of non-western societies characterized them mainly in terms of what they lacked, in this case religious and moral salvation. Indigenes were not seen in terms of what they were, but as potential Christians. Other conceptions of the nonwestern world, both much earlier and later, pictured indigenes based on other perceived deficiencies. A French writer in 1582 noted that savages were “*sans roi, sans loi, sans foi*” (without king, without law, without faith; Thomas 1994:72). It is interesting to note that while the influence of missionaries is often viewed as one of the most destructive forces in terms of non-western culture and belief, the missionaries, at least, viewed indigenes as fully capable of achieving equality with Europeans (at least morally) through salvation and education. Pels notes that “Missionaries are less prone to essentialize, because for them, otherness is already in the past” (1997:172)

Anthropology has from the start received its inspiration from the natural sciences, and the age of enlightenment saw the attempted taxonomic classification of mankind. This ordering of races along a great chain of being helped to justify the subjugation of perceived lesser races. This taxonomic paradigm also entailed the essentialization of racial types in terms of intellect, physical form, and temperament. Thus “the Bushman,” “the Papuan,” or “the Tongan” were seen as idealized typifications, and individuals were pigeonholed into these slots based on their similarity to a type specimen that was substantially a product of western imaginings (Thomas 1994:84). This essentialization rendered categories of people that were seen to be rather static and limited, unable to rise beyond their natural place in the scheme of things, and allowed the European to assume a perceived mastery. Essentialization also tended to funnel western perception into a singular view of national or racial types, wherein reference was made to “the Hottentot” or other typical specimens with little or no need to qualify descriptions to allow for individual variation.

The Victorian age saw the zenith of British imperialism and a shift from racial essentialization to evolutionary categorization. Unilineal evolutionism still placed societies along a hierarchy, but rather than basing their taxonomy on static traits, evolutionists spoke in terms of stages of cultural development, running from primitive savages to European civilization. This still placed Europeans, especially the British, at the top of the heap, but allowed for further development of “lesser” races, albeit at a rate that was determined by natural inclinations for progress, not to be unduly rushed. This potential for advancement was further qualified by the notion that climate dictated the limits of potential for cultural evolution, with the tropics being too oppressively hot and humid to allow for much industry of effort and ensuing civilization. This climactic

approach again placed native societies permanently below the level of Europeans in regards to ability for social, political and economic potential.

The end of the 19th century saw the flowering of anthropology as a professional science, one that matured at the height of the industrial revolution and the colonial age. Anthropology was from the start “devoted to a description and analysis – carried out by Europeans, for a European audience – of non-European societies dominated by European power” (Asad 1973:15). While the intimate connection between anthropology and the colonial era makes it simple to conclude that anthropology was a tool for imperialists, at the same time, ethnographers were from the start uniquely situated to play the part of indigenous advocate and colonial critic (James 1973:42). This is not an “either/or” situation, but rather a multifaceted relationship in which actions ranged from complicity to resistance, depending on the setting and players involved. Ambiguity and ambivalence were endemic to both sides of the equation, and this doubt was symptomatic of the colonial era as a whole, as over time economic imperatives became increasingly entangled by humanitarian concerns.

The African Connection

When studying the history of colonialism and anthropology in Melanesia, one must, strangely enough, look to Africa. The British were heavily involved in Africa during the imperial period, and much of what developed there was adopted by the Australians in New Guinea. While remaining carefully aware that Australia has had its own and unique historical trajectory, it can be generally said that Australia was a most loyal subject of the crown, a British colony in its own right, and looked to Britain for much of its direction and guidance. Australian administration in New Guinea was closely modeled on British efforts in places like Nigeria, Kenya and Rhodesia. Likewise, Melanesian anthropology was inspired by earlier works of British social anthropologists in the African colonies (McPherson 2001:203). While the link between Bronislaw Malinowski, the Trobriand Islands, and the foundation of professional ethnography looms large in the history of anthropology, it must be remembered that while Malinowski did not do most of his work in Africa, most of the students of his groundbreaking seminars went on to fieldwork there (James 1973:50).

The early decades of the 20th century saw the ascendancy of functionalist theory in social anthropology. Ethnologists of the time felt they had developed a general theory of culture that could explain the bewildering array of human cultural variation. They were also consumed with documenting as much of the world’s traditional cultures as possible before they were obliterated by modernization. Functionalism was later criticized for seeing cultures in terms of a timeless “ethnographic present” in which culture change or anything considered inauthentic was ignored or at least downplayed in order to highlight “primitive” traits and native authenticity. Indigenous societies were seen as generally static and unchanging until contacted by western modernity, and the colonial context in which studies were conducted was often absent from the equation (Forster 1973:36).

The period between World Wars I and II was a time of burgeoning growth and development of anthropology as a science, even as it remained an intrinsic part of the colonial world. This period saw the notion of “development” come to the forefront of colonial discourse. Indigenous societies were seen as in need of guidance and direction in

order to advance socially, technically and economically, in order to take their place among the “modern” nations of the world. Anthropologists were enlisted to facilitate development while preserving indigenous culture.

Anthropology is too often portrayed as blithely continuing along without much regard to its motives and practices in relation to colonialism until after World War II, when political and social changes brought about a critical revolution in the social sciences. Self-examination was actually beginning to take place between the wars. A dialogue began in 1929 in *Africa*, the journal of the fledgling International African Institute, in which Malinowski, while defending anthropology against attacks by colonial administrators, also called for an interrogation of the colonial situation, and showed prescience for issues that would come to the forefront of colonial discourse a half-century later:

[The anthropologist] must become more concerned in the anthropology of the changing African, and in the anthropology of the contact between white and coloured, of European culture and primitive tribal life... [1929:22]

Railing against the abuses of colonialism and the hypocrisy of white demonizing of Africans, he writes:

Let Mr. Mitchell read the report of the Goaribari massacres in new Guinea; the history of ‘blackbirding’ in the south seas ...or for that matter the antecedents of any of the numerous punitive expeditions in the south seas... [W]holesale massacres of natives by whites, strange retaliations in the names of “justice,” “prestige,” and “the white man’s honour” did also occur in the Dark Continent, and it is not only the coloured African there who deserves the title of “murderer,” nor is it the white European who should use such terms of abuse as marks of his own racial superiority. [1930:411]

In pointing out the competing interests and wide differences in outlook between various colonial forces, as well as between colonials and natives, he states:

Let us look more closely at the possibilities of team-work done by missionaries and settlers, administrators and journalists, engineers and recruiters. And... why not include among them the native African, “savage” and detribalized alike; or the West Coast lawyer; or the black expert in yellow journalism; and incidentally also the East Coast Indian? They are also actors in the play...[W]e know that these groups...are divided by profound, indeed irreconcilable, interests...To speak of a “community of interests” is a travesty of facts. [1930:421]

Note the early acknowledgment here of many hybridized and transcultural groups on the colonial scene.

The later indigenization of anthropology was also foreshadowed by the presence of Kenyan student Jomo Kenyatta at Malinowski’s seminars in the thirties, and Kenyatta’s 1938 ethnography *Facing Mount Kenya*, in which Malinowski writes an introduction touching on rising African nationalism and growing worldwide resistance to colonialism.

Decolonization and Deconstruction

The changing political climate of the 1960s was paralleled by the beginnings of wholesale decolonization by colonial powers, especially the British in Africa. Also at this

time developments in the academic world spurred a reexamination of the colonial experience and its relationship to anthropology. Ethnohistory began to challenge the artificial demarcation of anthropology and history. Marxism and feminism began to influence the field, as studies of the small-scale economics of peasant societies directed new interest to colonialism. Foucault's seminal work (1972) on the archaeology of knowledge inspired inquiries into the assumptions of objectivity at the heart of classical anthropology, and a critical evaluation of the relationship of power and knowledge. The increasing indigenization of social science, as more non-westerners gained access to The Academy, fueled a debate over the relevance of anthropology in the Third World. These trends continued into the 1970s and 1980s, with anthropology drawing on developments in other fields to inform its own reappraisals. Literary theorists highlighted the politics inherent to textual representation, and historians increasingly looked for alternate narratives that could illuminate histories of the non-empowered, culminating in the development of subaltern studies (Pels 1997:165-168).

Pels notes that anthropologists generally view colonialism in three ways, "as the universal, evolutionary progress of modernization; as a particular strategy in domination and exploitation; and as the unfinished business of struggle and negotiation" (1997:164). These three views, while generally following each other in terms of historical development, do not replace each other, and are all still operative in both positive and negative forms.

The progressive view of colonialism, in which nonwestern societies are seen as being in need of guidance and help in developing in order to improve life in one way or another, has been the dominant view of colonial governments since the late 1800s, and the role of anthropology in this paradigm is to provide understanding of specifics of culture that can help or hinder progress (Hoben 1982:350). While emphasis has moved over the years from cultural advancement to economic and technical improvements, the field of Development Anthropology is alive and well.

The perception of colonialism as mainly an arena of exploitation, while present in early critiques of European practices abroad, came to the fore during the upheavals of the 1960s. Increasing liberalization and radicalization saw many anthropologists reevaluating their place in the colonial equation, finding it their duty to become partisans on the side of marginalized indigenous groups, as colonial powers were replaced by westernized neocolonial governments bent on retaining old structures of exploitation and inequity. This view of the "colonial struggle" inverts assumed notions of anthropology as a tool of colonialism, placing anthropologists at odds with western governmentality.

The third view, which defines colonialism as a site of struggle and negotiation, is the most recent development, and frames most colonial studies of the past two decades. This paradigm opens up spaces that allow for views of colonialism(s) that are historically particular and culturally specific. It also allows the researcher to see beyond a landscape of dichotomy (colonizer/colonized, center/periphery, propagator/recipient, exploiter/victim, etc.) in order to approach the colonial experience as a more diverse field of analysis. Other dichotomies that lie closer to home are also exposed for deconstruction, such as western scientist/indigenous subject, and indigenous need/anthropologically-tailored help.

No one of these three views is the “right” one, as all are still operative, yet the last one can be seen to encompass the first two. It is within this view of struggle and negotiation, not only within colonialism but also within anthropology and western thought in general, in which we can take another step back to see a fuller picture, and also a step forward for a more intimate and informed look at our particular subject, that we site our study.

Benedict Anderson writes that the primary tools of colonialism are the census, the map, and the museum (1983:163). Others would add the clinic to this list (Arnold 1993: 4). Each one renders the unknown into knowable, bounded, and manageable groups. The rise of western modernity and governmentality were linked to a new set of “investigative modalities” that arose as the western worldview shifted from religion to science. This move changed imaginings of the exotic from a heathen wasteland to be Christianized into “a field to be observed” (Pels 1997:167). The process of establishing a colonial enterprise involved demarcating people, places and things into groups and categories which could be counted, analyzed and described at home. Thus the colonial project was an exercise in officialization using modalities such as “historiography, observation and travel, survey, enumeration, museology, and surveillance” (Cohn 1996:xiii). In grander settings such as India these projects would usually be divided between specialized departments, but in a smaller setting such as the Trobriands, a government officer might touch on all of these areas in a single patrol. Ethnography, as an investigative modality in its own right, can be viewed as “a specific offshoot of a wider field of colonial intelligence” (Pels 1997:167).

While traditional notions of colonialism are usually framed in terms of economic and political relationships, more recent studies have increasingly focused on colonialism as a cultural phenomenon, one which not only involves the meetings of European and indigenous cultures, but also one that has its own culture of government and administration, as well as one that creates new and hybrid structures of meaning at the sites of encounter (Thomas 1994:2). The study of the culture of colonialism is often pursued through colonial texts such as the patrol reports at the heart of this study.

Other Work on Patrol Reports

While no work on patrol reports from the Trobriands has been published, reports from other districts of Australian Papua and New Guinea have been incorporated into various studies, showing both the usefulness of these historical resources as well as some limitations.

Naomi McPherson provides a brief description of patrol reports and their place in the colonial administration (2001:5). She characterizes them as “written representations nicely complement[ing] those of indigenous oral history and ethnography.” She relates that reports are “highly descriptive and multifaceted, which make them invaluable as ethnographic documentation,” but they became more uniform in format and style after WWII. She also suggests that as archival texts they require more than merely a straightforward reading, but also require “an attempt to hear silent voices, submerged perspectives, and actions through the text. This is clearly another form of imagining” (2001:9). So the researcher must use an informed imagination in order to read between the lines and recover other views not clearly stated in the text. A solid backgrounding in

the local culture and a familiarity with events of the time are important to this exercise, as well as a conservative approach to interpretation.

Jill Nash expands on this exercise (2001:121). As an ethnographer who did fieldwork on Bougainville during the last years of Australian rule, she finds that the motives attributed to indigenes, and other interpretations found in patrol reports of the time, often did not correspond with her own impressions. She suggests the use of techniques developed in subaltern studies to “recover the voice of the colonized” from colonial records, namely, the “negative consciousness” approach offered by Guha. This approach states that “for each sign we have an antonym, a counter-message, in another code...it is possible to produce a chart with phrases that correspond to each other, one being the words of the colonizer, the other, the evaluation of the colonized. The phrases of one correspond to the phrases of the other, but they are opposites.” Bougainvillean concerns about the Panguma mine, characterized as “foolish” by the local District Officer, can now be seen as “wise” given the history of the mine and its effects on the people of the island. Indigenes characterized as “backward” or “recalcitrant” by colonial officers can be viewed as protective of custom and resistant to colonial meddling. While a word-for-word inversion of colonial accounts is obviously not realistic, this approach has some value for us, as there can often be “two lists of corresponding signifiers” in operation when two sides give their interpretations of events.

Nicholas Thomas suggests a more general alternate reading of colonial texts, in which the uses of reports are reinterpreted: “These would long have been interpreted...as innocent and pragmatic reports and plans, but can be alternately read as efforts that produce scope for surveillance as they describe and identify particular populations and social problems; that create charters for intervention as they express the omniscience of the colonial state” (1994:41).

Paula Brown notes the somewhat myopic and less than fully objective nature of many reports as officers stereotype people and places. Local people are seldom named unless they are special in some way to the administration: Officers “usually name their fellow officers and other white men, and sometimes even their dogs and horses; they occasionally name [indigenous] police officers and personal servants, but rarely do they name local people” (2001:24). While not defending any racist attitudes displayed in patrol reports, it is helpful to note that these texts were written with colonial administrators as the intended audience, and officers would include only that information they felt would be of interest to them for the sake of brevity. This kind of stereotyping points more to a systemic attitude common to the administration as a whole than to attitudes held by any individual officers. Furthermore, a review of reports from the Trobriands shows that, at least there, officers usually did refer by name to indigenes that were individually mentioned.

Perhaps the best display of the usefulness of patrol reports, as well as their drawbacks, is in Schieffelin and Crittenden’s account of the ill-fated Strickland-Purari patrol of 1935, in which two colonial officers, along with a detachment of indigenous Armed Papuan Constabulary and several dozen carriers, penetrated the southern Papuan highlands, “discovering” a previously unexpected large population. First contact with six societies there produced confusion, wonder and awe amongst the local inhabitants, as well as deadly violence. By interviewing eyewitnesses amongst the locals some years

later, the authors were able to crosscheck the official reports with indigenous sources. This illuminated the sometimes-complete divergence of accounts in regards to first contact and ensuing exchange. Local inhabitants often thought they were meeting spirits returned from the dead, and their decidedly ambivalent and hesitant behavior in light of this was often interpreted as “treachery” or dishonesty by the patrol officers. The attribution of motive to the local’s actions was nearly always divergent from their true feelings, and of the numerous perceived “attacks” upon the patrol that resulted in many indigenous deaths, only a few were probably actual assaults. The others were simply overcurious people jostling in too close to a bedraggled and exhausted patrol. The authors quote a local witness: “[T]hey surrounded the patrol to look at them and blocked the path. They were like a garden fence around them, and the strangers became worried and feared and attack. They shot many men” (1991:160). Also made clear is the unreliability of the facts of some reports, as the officers often contradicted themselves and confused details in the subsequent inquest.

The lessons we can bring to our study from these previous works is that patrol reports, while extremely useful in their detail, are only one view of the colonial encounter, a view filtered not only by the authors’ own cultural lens, but also by the tailoring of the reports to the intended audience of colonial administrators. Personal traits and styles of particular patrol officers also color the reports, and no officer was omniscient to the complete picture of a given situation.

Materials and Methods

The bulk of this study will involve description and analysis of surviving patrol reports and station journals from the Losuia subdistrict. These documents run from 1907 to 1969, but the present study will cover the years up to 1935.² Some gaps exist, but enough survive to give us a fairly consistent account of government activity throughout this period. These records are housed at the PNG archives in Port Moresby. Some early reports are illegible due to poor mimeographing of copies or from the typing of multiple carbon copies, and from the effects of time and humidity on paper and ink, and others are just barely readable (Figures 6 and 7). Interspersed with patrol reports are various interdepartmental memos from administrators, containing comments and recommendations for action. These memos help to give us a better picture of the culture of the colonial administration, as well as the mindset of those responding to events on the islands from their offices in Samarai and Port Moresby.

Not only do these reports detail government activity, but they also contain a rich store of description of Trobriand culture. Patrol officers regularly wrote such descriptive material for the edification of their superiors and other officers that might follow them later. As reports became more standardized there was a section included for anthropological information. After all, these islands were famous in anthropological circles for their prominent place in the development and popularization of the discipline, and colonial officers were conscious of the fact that they were living and writing in the shadow of Malinowski.

² Additional reports from before the foundation of the government station at Losuia push our period of study back to 1891.

Special
Hospital

July 1. 1907

Sir
I have the honor to acknowledge my annual
report upon the work of the Hospital for the
twelve months ending June 30th 1907.

It is the site upon which the hospital stands,
situated on the northern arm of the sheltered bay which
indents the western coastlines of Karsivik, the
largest island of the Seward Group.

The hospital dates from October 1905.

The buildings consist of ~~eight~~ quarters -
three male wards - two female wards -
dispensary - hospital orderly's house - boat
access house & various outbuildings for the storage
of marine food & other necessaries.

With the exception of the dispensary, which is
iron, all buildings are ^{constructed} entirely built of marine
material.

The hospital faces south & lies three quarters
of a mile due east of ~~Karsivik~~ one of the
largest villages in the Seward Group and

The Chief Medical Officer
F. H. M. M. M.

Figure 6. Cover Page, "Special Hospital" Annual Report: 1907. The first ARM's earliest reports are handwritten. This sample page shows the effects of time and humidity on paper and ink.

Page 2

each on at most 30 tons of coconuts in every two garden plots. If harvesting could be planted with rice there would be a series of rice crops throughout the year, not only rice and experiments will enter in the meantime one can just give along and after the same amount of time to time to suit local requirements.

V.G. IALAKA reported that the work of opening the old road from IALAKA to SIVIAGILA was almost completed, this will save having to go across the swamps and will make it much easier for the various villages west and northwest of IALAKA to bring in rice to IALAKA. Payment for this work will be made when the road is completed, where possible coconuts will be planted along this road but it is very broad.

In afternoon to KUBILA and on to rice plantation. The area has been cleared and sowed and I spent the afternoon marking out the positions for the rice plants. Rather backtracking work but I went to a lot of trouble in the instruction of the A.C.UFI as well as the people so that they would be able to get it well done and the correct distance between groups.

Sist Jenny A.C.UFI went on to rice plantation at 6 am. where the women and children gave him a hand and when I passed over 6 am the work was well in hand and UFI was supervising the planting and doing it well. From this KUBILA plantation went on to OKALOKA and garden (I am not calling them plantations to distinguish them from the coconut stations). Here the area had been cleared and planted and fenced (about 1/2 acres) but there were many small holes so arranged for UFI to come here after completing KUBILA. Taxes were collected from practically all tax boys on OKALOKA and WAGALUMA. Hence on to OKOBOLO. Coconut plantation and the people went on to KAWAKU round the V.G. had made the OKOBOLO people with the cleaning of the KAWAKU coconut (N.R.) plantation and I arranged that the KAWAKU people should all go down to the OKOBOLO and report to A.C.UFI to this effect and that the V.G. not to get the OKOBOLO working on the KAWAKU plantation. The people do not seem even on the rice scheme, and I wanted me to give orders to the people to plant, but that I could not do as I want to work up the scheme purely on a voluntary basis. I have it looked upon as just one more kind of Government work.

Figure 7. A patrol report page marred by both carbon copying at the time of writing and poor mimeographing at the archives in Port Moresby.

The main purpose of writing this study is to reveal the extent of information contained in these reports. Numerous small details and observations provided by patrol officers should prove to be of great interest to a small but enthusiastic group of Trobriand scholars. Hopefully this study will provide to others small strands that can be woven into their own work, or unraveled to reveal grander stories.

Important to this work is the DEPTH project at CSU Sacramento. The DEPTH database provides us with the ability to search thousands of pages of ethnographic text using key words or phrases, allowing research to take place in a matter of seconds rather than hours or even days using conventional means.

Notes on Usage

Patrol reports are cited by administrative serial numbers that were typed on the front page by the original authors, as well as actual date of entry. In the case of a lengthy entry, the original page number is also supplied. For instance, an entry from a patrol report dated June 2nd, 1914, will be cited as (PR 12/1913-14; 6/2/1914: p.2), with the administrative serial number “12/1913-14” taken from the top right of the cover page of the report. Serial numbers varied over the years, with some reports numbered oddly or out of sequence.

Entry dates have been transposed from English to American usage, for instance, an entry dated March 7th, 1924 will appear as 3/7/1924, instead of 7/3/1924. Quotes taken from commentary sections at the ends of reports will cite the title of the section, i.e. “summary”; “health”; “anthropological,” etc.

Station journals are cited by date of entry.

Memos are cited by administrative number and date of writing.

Most original spellings have been retained, other than obvious typographical errors, in order to preserve the originality and periodicity of the writing; for instance, “Haemorrhage” rather than “Hemorrhage,” et cetera. In the same spirit, little attempt has been made to correct numerous fragmentary sentences or other grammatical liberties taken by the original authors. Bracketed insertions [are] included only where the original meaning is at risk without them. Parentheses () within quotes are original to the text.

Readers will note that administratively, years are divided into periods from July 1st to June 31st, rather than January 1st to December 31st. This is due to the seasons in the southern hemisphere. In the population centers of southeastern Australia, June and July are the dead of winter, hence July 1st corresponds in some ways to our New Year’s Day.

While “Pidgin English” developed into a *lingua franca* in Australian New Guinea, eventually evolving into the *Tok Pisin* that is a national language of modern-day Papua New Guinea, in colonial Papua an indigenous tongue came to the fore. Motu (also at times termed “Motuan”) is the language of the prevailing cultural group around Port Moresby, and the enlistment of many of these people into the colonial service led to its adaptation as a *lingua franca* throughout the Territory of Papua. This adapted form is known as *Hiri Motu* or Police Motu.

Abbreviations used are listed below in Table 1.

List of Abbreviations

AC	Armed Constable (indigenous)
AR	Annual Report
ARM	Assistant Resident Magistrate
MP	Minute Paper
MR	Magisterial Report
PR	Patrol Report
PO	Patrol Officer
RM	Resident Magistrate
SJ	Station Journal
VC	Village Constable (indigenous)

Chapter 2: General History: 1891-1934

Prelude

The first colonial correspondence regarding the Trobriands comes in the form of a dispatch from Sir William MacGregor, Administrator of British New Guinea, to the Governor-General of Queensland, regarding a visit to the islands in August 1891. This was apparently his second time there, the first visit being a brief landing at a few coastal villages a year before, and he was engaged in the process of contacting all major villages and announcing the beginning of the *Pax Britannica*. Unlike most of New Guinea, including nearby Fergusson Island where people ran away at the sight of the government vessel *Merrie England* and had to be coaxed out with limited success, the Trobrianders were unafraid of the British visitors, and in fact had been expecting them. They had heard about the new government from the few traders that visited the island to buy *beche-de-mer*, and from their contacts on neighboring islands, so had been on the lookout for strange vessels.

Landing at the village of Kaduwaga on Kaileuna Island, MacGregor was greeted by chief Tosieru along with a young man, Puluaiwa, “who knew about a score of words of English slang.” Tosieru appointed himself ambassador and tour guide, and “accompanied me all over the group up to the moment I left in the steamer.” Many of MacGregor’s observations and comments foreshadow themes that would re-occur perpetually over the next century, such as the sometimes-duplicitous nature of the islanders and the soon-to-be renowned licentiousness of the women:

These chiefs assured me that their people never fight with any other tribes. We saw nothing reprehensible in their conduct, save perhaps that their women are allowed too much freedom with strangers.³ [Dispatch #51; 8/4/1891:3]

Rowing over to Kiriwina the next day, the party camped on the beach near Kavataria (adjacent to the future site of Losuia), and soon met with the principle threat they were to face on the trip: suffocating crowds of welcoming and curious locals:

When we reached that bay we saw two or three canoes drawn up on the sandy beach there, but no native was present...but there were 500 or 600 round us before sunset.

The party passes an uneasy night, not from fear of attack by warriors lurking in the bush, but from the unceasing chatter of what turned into a gigantic slumber party:

Some 200 or 300 natives camped all night near us; and as at least half of the whole number were ever talking at once, there was not much sleep to be had in our camp.

MacGregor’s visit coincided with the harvest celebrations of *Milamala*, so people would have already been socializing away from their villages and staying out through the night.

Touring the island, MacGregor is welcomed at every stop with lavish gifts of cooked food, most of which he redistributes to the crowds. The food consisted mostly of large bowls of yams, with coconuts, sugar cane and bananas. At Kaibola the party is given roasted cobs of corn, “an article of food which seems to be quite common in that Island.” He notices a curious tendency among the chiefs of each village; “in most, if not

³ MacGregor refers to people from various village clusters as “tribes” but acknowledges them to be “all one people.”

in all cases, the largest man in the tribe is chief...such is not the case in any other part of the possession.” Similarly, upon meeting Paramount Chief Enamakala’s brother and eventual successor To’uluwa⁴ and two other Tabalu chiefs: “...all large men, and two of them with a decided tendency to obesity – a great rarity among Papuan men.”⁵

To’uluwa and his companions evince a ready willingness to submit to the new government, and assure MacGregor of their peaceful ways:

When it was pointed out to them that the Government would interfere in future and punish any tribe that molested its neighbors, they protested that they would not fight; that they had no desire to fight, and that they were prepared at once to sell me all their spears. They said that they understood the position of the government. It was quite plain that social matters are in Kiriwina on a footing quite different from that of any other part of British New Guinea. [Dispatch #51; 8/4/1891:4]

MacGregor at once puts into play the strategy towards chiefs that would become long-term policy:

Of course the chief in every instance received special consideration at my hands, but there was no difficulty in putting them in the position of inferior chief towards the administrator. Good opportunities occurred several times for doing this publicly.

An example of this public display of the new order came at Kavataria, in view of a crowd of 1,200 to 1,500 onlookers:

When we arrived there a small number of leading men were seated in front of the village on a small platform, apparently erected there for that purpose. On landing, I took possession of this, turning them all off, and allowing no one there save the two principal chiefs. This was not regarded at all with ill-humour, as would be the case in many parts of the possession, but was amongst this people at once recognised as the proper course for me to take. [Dispatch #51; 8/4/1891:4]

Thus the chiefs became first among colonial subjects. MacGregor remarks that the Trobrianders were “very keen on trading,” welcoming the government as a boost to commerce, and their willingness to forgo fighting was summed up by one chief: “If I were to fight, where would I get my tobacco?”

The party finds the Trobrianders already deeply addicted to nicotine:

They are all passionately fond of tobacco, and their use of it is more thorough than I have ever observed elsewhere. They seem to swallow the smoke, and learn to retain it for a considerable time, and then emit it through the nostrils.

⁴ Like many Trobriand names, “To’uluwa” has several variants: Toulu, Toulua, Toulu’a, etc. Malinowski’s spelling is used here. ARM Whitehouse had special difficulty with the name, spelling it five different ways over the years.

⁵ This tendency could be most easily explained by a greater nutritional intake by these high status men during childhood, but also perhaps by genetic factors, if the Tabalu are recent arrivals on the island as suggested by Montague. At any rate, large chiefs, especially “obese” ones, puts the Trobrianders closer culturally to Polynesia than Melanesia, and MacGregor comments on the group’s Polynesian affinities, as will be seen. A “tendency to obesity” must have been relative, in a society that frowned upon an overweight body, and could not have been in reference to To’uluwa, who is shown in Malinowski’s photographs to be, like most Trobriand men, very lean.

Touring the island, MacGregor finds the yam harvest in full swing, and observes as yams are pulled from the ground and taro is immediately planted. He remarks on the thinness of the soil in places and the prevalence of old coral:

There appears to be very little soil in which to grow root crops. But they collect all the pieces of loose coral limestone into heaps, and till and clean the soil between them. The heaps of stone thus collected and piled up often cover about two-thirds of the surface; the earth between them is sufficient to grow yams three or four feet long, and sometimes weighing over 20 lb.

MacGregor is at times warned to be on guard at the next village, but whereas elsewhere in Papua he might be warned of aggressive or even cannibalistic neighbors, here the chief threat was greed:

They did not, as is usual elsewhere, represent to us that if we went on the next tribe would kill us; but the prominent feature of the Papuan character – covetousness – was so well developed that I would be quietly told to look after the tobacco at the next place because “the people were not good, and I ought not give them much tobacco.” [Dispatch #51; 8/4/1891:5]

With an astute eye towards the future, MacGregor evaluates the islands’ prospects as a colonial arena. He carefully scans the coastlines for suitable anchorages (finding few), and places where a boat might safely negotiate the shoals. He finds that the “superior qualities” of the Trobrianders render them well suited to salvation:

In all probability it will be found that the missionary will make more way and produce a deeper impression in Kiriwina than elsewhere in the possession...As a mission field it could be hardly surpassed. [Dispatch #51; 8/4/1891:7]

The industriousness of the islanders suggests economic potential:

If some new industry could be introduced which would create something for export, there can be no doubt that Kiriwina would become an important trading centre.

MacGregor immediately recognizes the uniqueness of the Trobrianders, and the features of the people, their seagoing ways, and the prominence of the chieftainship puts him in mind of Polynesia: “[The Trobriand group] is the point of contact between Papua and the Pacific, tintured of both.” Writing six years later, he cites the occurrence of wavy hair (a distinct departure from the usual “frizzly” Papuan), and a propensity for suicide in stating that “the Kiriwina people more nearly resemble the line islander than any other tribes in this part of the world” (Dispatch #44, 7/8/1897:38). Although the islands are to his eyes more peaceful, civilized, refined, and ready for the yoke of government than the rest of Papua, he characterizes them as a final frontier: “The last really unknown important group of islands in the possession” (Dispatch #51; 8/4/1891:7).

In 1897 MacGregor comes to Omarakana to confront Paramount Chief Enamakala, who until then has been lukewarm at best towards the new power on his island:

I did not intend to make my visit to Enamakala one of complacent politeness, as he has done but little to further Government work. As I approached the chief’s quarters I was met by one of his brothers [most likely To’uluwa, a much-feared sorcerer], who spat all around me to preserve them or us from

sorcery. The chief was seated on a high bench in the small porch of a small house, with three or four of his principle men sitting in front of him. These I at once turned out and took the high bench, while Enamakala was seated on the ground below. He was warned not to interfere with the villages that belonged to the province of Pulitari.⁶ He denied that he had sent to certain villages for further additions to his stock of wives. I knew he was lying, but was satisfied by informing him in the presence of the other natives, that I had ordered the several villages to refuse to let him have any more women, because the domestic life he leads is already a discredit to a chief. He was so alarmed that the perspiration came streaming down his face.

Having put Enamakala at a disadvantage, MacGregor goes to bat for Reverend S.B. Fellows of the Wesleyan mission at Kavataria, who has been unable to get the chief to allow a mission station at Omarakana:

He [Enamakala] is the nearest approach the Kiriwina people have to a sacred being; and he has an instinctive idea that his importance and tastes would receive a check by the development of a mission...I informed him frankly that I would not support any chief that kept aloof from the mission of his district, but that I would not hesitate to aid the mission to overcome any difficulty he might try to create. When the question was then put to him as to whether he would grant a mission site at Emarakana [sic] he faltered, and endeavored to put me off with an evasive answer; I insisted on a clear declaration of yes or no, and at last he said "yes, the mission shall have land here." I requested him to proceed at once to show the land to the Rev. Mr. Fellowes [sic], which he did. It was fully explained to him that it is not desired to diminish his authority as a great chief, but rather to maintain it and enforce it, provided that his own conduct is such as to merit support. [Dispatch #44, 7/8/1897:38]

Under British colonial law MacGregor couldn't simply commandeer land for the mission, but by arriving unannounced and subjecting Enamakala to a tirade the likes of which no one had ever been bold enough to address to him before, he succeeds in bullying the unnerved chief to "voluntarily" grant the land.

A year later, MacGregor returns to find the mission firmly established and Enamakala a changed man:

The teacher, an excellent Fijian minister, is now securely established, and the chief takes some pride in his mission.⁷ I found a decided change in his attitude. He is now most desirous of ruling as a Government Chief, and wishes very strongly to know what is the right thing, and to do it...He showed a proper degree of pride in his uniform as a government chief, and in displaying his ebony truncheon of office as such. [Dispatch #43; 10/6/1898:47]

⁶ Head chief of the Kuboma district around Kavataria, and an early and enthusiastic supporter of the British. Pulitari was another of Enamakala's brothers, and Enamakala's status above him as "Paramount Chief" may have been solely due to his greater wealth, but was cemented in place by the British (Seligman 1910:694; Bellamy AR 1914-15:46). Many intricacies of Trobriand society, especially concerning chiefly powers, were never fully understood by the British and Australians (as noted, for instance, by Seligman 1910: pp 692 and 698).

⁷ Enthusiastic Fijian Christian converts made up the bulk of missionary teachers, and were admired and imitated by Papuans in every respect. MacGregor notes: "[T]he Fijian teacher is the best liked and most respected of all the coloured teachers in the colony. They are taken as the mirror of fashion by all the young men of Dobu and that neighborhood. The Papuans try to imitate the Fijians in gait, manner, dress and cut of their hair. The Fijians are therefore naturally very successful teachers, being, as they are, absorbed in their work" (Dispatch # 43; 10/6/1898).

This last comment shows how the colonial government created its own regalia in order to indulge cooperative chiefs' love of ceremony. No record is evident of the uniform or truncheon.

Warfare

Despite the assurances of various chiefs in 1891, and MacGregor's view of the refined nature of the inhabitants, the Trobriands were still far from a peaceful island group. It would take another decade and several serious shows of force by the government before the islands were relatively free from warfare and large-scale intervillage violence.

In 1897 MacGregor writes of another visit to the islands (Dispatch #44; 7/8/1897:37). By this time Resident Magistrate Moreton is visiting the Trobriands regularly from his headquarters at Samarai, staying at Kavataria for several weeks at a time. Three incidences of violence are detailed in MacGregor's dispatch.

A dispute between Oburaku and a neighboring village had recently ended in bloodshed:

At first they went at night and cut down each the bananas of the other village, then they met and fought with spears. Oburaku is numerically the stronger tribe, and they killed two of their opponents... On our arrival in Oburaku only a few people were visible. The chief had absented himself, but he was eventually induced to come in. Of course he wished me to understand that the fault lay exclusively with the other village, and that he and his people were blameless. In a hesitating way he promised to procure and deliver up the two men of his tribe that were said to have killed the two that fell in the fight.

Another intervillage battle is described in detail:

Latterly there had been a serious quarrel between the villages of Kadukwaikera and Gumilababa. It arose out of the ownership of a piece of planting ground which both sides claimed. No accommodation could be arrived at by diplomatic means, so it was finally determined to leave the solution to the arbitrament of the spear. A field was accordingly selected and cleared for combat. They fight always in the afternoon, and it was found before it was too late that the rays of the afternoon sun would be in the eyes of one side. A new field was thereupon cleared, which the rays of the declining sun would traverse obliquely. There the warriors of the two tribes met and did their duty in Homeric style, but unfortunately two men of Kadukwaikera were killed and several more were wounded. Some of these latter I saw; all the wounds were from spears and on the leg; presumably the shield protected the upper part of the person, but left the legs exposed, but numbers of shields were split by the spears hurled against them, and this of course left a few men more defenseless than others.

The government's aim was to get villages to refer their disputes to the RM for mediation, and the first step was to discourage fighting by prosecuting those that happened to kill an opponent during the melee:

No doubt the two men that killed an enemy were greatly admired and envied at first, but a demand was soon made by the Resident Magistrate for the surrender of these two heroes to be punished for their exploits. The chiefs at the village concerned professed to be desirous of complying, but set about it in a peculiar manner. They brought in and surrendered two men who were not implicated. These were released; others were then substituted, and this was repeated several times. Strangely enough these

vicarious victims did not seem to raise any objection to their being substituted for the two homicides. [Dispatch #44; 7/8/1897:37]

Eventually one pair of men contained one of the guilty parties. Several explanations present themselves for this substitution game; the most likely being that the chief was unable to immediately procure the two men in question, and desiring to satisfy the government, felt that any two of his warriors would do. Perhaps an implicit message here was that all were equally at fault. Another possibility is that the men who achieved valor in the battle were too valuable to the village's status to be rendered up, and more humble men were enlisted as stand-ins. Moreton informs the two villages that he will return soon to settle the matter based on the merits of the opposing cases for ownership, regardless of who got the upper hand in the fight.

MacGregor notes that Reverend Fellows had prevented further violence by visiting the two villages after the initial battle, and could have headed off the whole affair had he been able to arrive in time. Fellows, head of a growing organization on the islands, was a long-time resident, spoke the language, and had considerable influence in Kuboma, the district around Kavataria. While much of his ability to intervene in conflicts could have come from his personal status and power as a European, the fact that a completely independent third party was available for mediation, regardless of race or occupation, was also helpful.

The third fracas was entered into by the RM himself:

On the 6th...the Resident Magistrate went to the village of Kaipapu... to arrest some men that had risen against and killed a reputed sorcerer. A struggle ensued, and some of those seized by the police had to be let go while the latter had recourse to their rifles. They succeeded in arresting and bringing off three men, and it is said that four were wounded, but not mortally, by the shots fired at them. [Dispatch #44; 7/8/1897:39]

One or two incidents like this generally took place during the process of "pacification" in every area of Papua, with the locals attacking a government party and several being shot, usually by the indigenous Armed Constabulary. While the colonial officers always professed to do their utmost to prevent bloodshed, it seemed to be part of the process of showing the people the power of the new government and their guns.

MacGregor and Moreton had planned to depart for Samarai the next day, but felt that they had better stay on to optimize the effect of "a scrimmage of that kind":

I sent all the constabulary present to Kavataria [sic], and instructed the magistrate to proceed again to Kaipapu, and to visit also some of the neighboring villages, to show the natives that when necessary a strong force can be brought to bear upon them at any place on the island. The party visited Kaipapu, which they found deserted, and then proceeded to certain other villages, where they found the people all very greatly frightened.

MacGregor's final comment on the matter seems to erase his earlier impressions of the Trobriands as somehow more civilized, and places the islands with other areas of Papua: "Fear will diminish and finally put to an end these crimes on Kiriwina; nothing else will" (Dispatch #44; 7/8/1897:39). Fear, and the knowledge that the government

would never back down, and if repelled by hostile locals would invariably return with overwhelming force, formed the cornerstone of colonial power.

In October 1899, a conflict erupted involving nearly the entire northern section of Kiriwina, accounts of which give a glimpse into what used to occur regularly before the advent of the colonial government. The men of a dozen villages had risen up against Paramount Chief Enamakala, driving him out of Omarakana. Moreton writes of the men:

...Burning it [Omarakana] down, destroying gardens, coconut trees, betel palms, and killing and driving away pigs and fowls. They also looted the [year-old] mission station there and destroyed the [Fijian] teacher's garden, killing his pigs and fowls, but they did not burn the church nor his dwelling house. Eleven other villages were treated in the same way...Many houses full of yams were burnt at the same time, causing great loss.

Arriving at Kavataria from Samarai on November 8th, Moreton sets out for Omarakana the next morning⁸ with a handful of ACs and some carriers. Along the way,

Half of us had gotten over a garden fence into the bush, I halted to allow the tail to get over. Whilst waiting I heard a great commotion in our rear, and on doubling back found that it was being attacked. There was a large number of natives with shields and spears hanging about our rear, and some had approached to within about thirty yards. However, twenty-five shots sent them scattering with the police at their heels, but the coral was too much for the police, and no captures were made...the police returned, bringing a shield bespattered with blood, and a bullet hole through it, together with a few spears. [Dispatch #98; 12/2/1899:9]

This event is strangely familiar to the experiences of the Strickland-Purari patrol of the 1930s (see p. 26), not only in the details of the “attack” and response, but in the hair’s breadth avoidance of a larger encounter and possible massacre of one side or the other. Moreton continues:

On continuing our route, we found where a large party had been lying in ambush about 60 to 80 yards ahead of where I turned back from...I was told afterward there had been four parties around us – one in ambush, one in the bush on either side, and the one that had attacked us...who must have been spoiling for a fight. So it seems that they had laid their plans fairly well, had it not been for the impetuosity of the [rear party].

The single volley of gunfire was enough to rattle the aggressors, and the ensuing settlement of the matter went fairly smoothly.

Arriving at Enamakala’s temporary encampment-in-exile, Moreton is surprised to find so many people there, which impressed upon him the scale of the disturbance: “[I]t must have been a strong force to have driven them back three times, as they were.” He arranges a meeting of all involved parties at Gumilababa, with Rev. Fellows translating. At the meeting Moreton is impressed by the leader of the uprising, Moliasi of Kwabaku, who is not an hereditary chief but a *Toliwaga* or village headman, and also a natural leader by initiative and strength of character: “[H]e stood up like a man...There was no cringing about Moliasi or any of his followers to Enamakala as in former days.”⁹

⁸ At exactly 9:40 am, as Moreton is careful to note.

⁹ While the differences between *Toligawa* and *Guyau* are distinct, and technically the *Toligawa* are not chiefs per se, they are sometimes referred to as chiefs in the record. A more appropriate term would be “headman”.

Enamakala explains his position as a peaceful chief set upon by covetous youths and commoners:

I did nothing...I have no desire to fight, simply working in my garden...those who fought against me were angry on account of the yams and the pigs I had, and wanted to eat them. They began the fighting. The chiefs of those villages that came against me are good, namely [seven chiefs, including Moliasi]. The commoners and young men were the fighting people.¹⁰ [Dispatch #98; 12/2/1899:9]

Moliasi speaks for the rebellious villages, outlining two recent grievances and one very old one:

Enamakala is a good man, but his brother Tauulu [To'uluwa] is a bad man. We are angry because Enamakala kept the food and did not divide it out to us. He did not perform his proper duties as a chief, and distribute the food. A long time ago Tauulu burnt down the village of Kwabaku, and this is the revenge for it - the mapula.

Apparently Enamakala's shortcomings, coupled with his brother's continued sorcery, caused hard feelings to brew in Kwabaku, which refreshed Moliasi's memory of the burning of his own village over 15 years before, and led him to whip up the anger of his followers.

Moreton privately agrees with Moliasi:

I am quite satisfied that Enamakala was the cause of all these troubles in the Trobriands. He has a greedy, grabbing nature, making those under his rule give more than he has a right to demand; and having got it, he did not act as became a big chief, and distribute the food out as it should be done; also his brother Tauulu, who is his right-hand man, is, as the natives complain, a bad man. I am hoping to get a definite charge against him shortly [for sorcery], as a twelve month's residence in Samarai would do him good.

Moliasi, being questioned as to the reason why the Government party had been attacked, states: "We had heard so much about the fighting with rifles that we were curious to know what it really was like. We are satisfied, and do not want any more; we have had enough."

The terms of the settlement are laid down by Moreton, including the rebuilding of all burned structures, the replanting of gardens and double the number of destroyed trees, replacement of all killed pigs and fowl, and the feeding of all aggrieved parties until their restored gardens can once again provide for them. On top of this, a fine of sixty baskets of yams is levied, and interestingly, "...the handing over to Government, as hostages, as a guarantee of good faith, six young natives of consequence – one from each of the six main villages implicated." These hostages included Moliasi's own nephew, and the six were first taken to Samarai as wards of the state, and then later handed over to a missionary on nearby Dobu for the rest of their term.

This disturbance was so large, and the Government's intervention was so timely, forceful and effective, that the final two stipulations in the settlement were to have lasting effect: "To keep the peace from this time out;" and "all disputes be referred to Government for arbitration." (Dispatch #98; 12/2/1899:9).

¹⁰ Note that Enamakala adjusts events and Moliasi's status in order to be diplomatic, allowing space for rapprochement by blaming youths and commoners.

Despite Moliasi's role as initiator of this latest round of destruction, he is seen as promising material for government work. G.R. Le Hunte, MacGregor's successor as Lieutenant Governor, who visited Kiriwina shortly after the settlement, wrote:

He will probably make an excellent Government constable, and I hope to appoint him on my next visit. I told him that his having saved the Wesleyan church and teacher's house from the general destruction of Omarakana would be remembered to his credit [AR 1899:9].

Moliasi does become a Village Constable (VC), and with his dual status as *Toliwaga* of Kwabaku and constable he is a valuable asset to the government.

While the 1899 battle was the last open act of war, the long simmering feud between the *Guyau* of Omarakana and Moliasi's people would continue, with To'uluwa taking up the cause of his predecessor Enamakala, who died "in exile" before returning to Omarakana. To'uluwa's enmity towards Moliasi earns him a stay in gaol in 1911. R.L. Bellamy, the first ARM at Losuia, writes:

Toulu, a chief, with seventeen wives, the head chief and most feared native in this district, after a period of obedience to law and order, met with some unpleasantness and a term in gaol during the year. The immediate cause was sorcery. There is a long-standing feud between Moliasi, chief of Kwabaku, and Toulu. It dates from years back, and existed between the ancestors of Toulu and those of Moliasi. These two have simply carried it on. Tradition says that the quarrel originated over a woman. Ten years ago, before there was a government station here, Moliasi drove Toulu out of his village, and burnt it and other villages belonging to Toulu's people. Peace was eventually made, and Toulu returned and rebuilt his village. Then came the establishment of a government station in the district, and further fighting was prevented. This crystallization of the circumstances...left Moliasi one up on the round. The position, from Toulu's point of view, was aggravated by the fact that Moliasi is not really a chief. Moliasi is a common commoner, but the head commoner of his clan. This did not alter the fact that Toulu had been beaten by a man not of chiefly rank. Now, Moliasi is a village policeman, and as such, reports to me weekly on the affairs of the villages "on his beat." On many occasions he reported alleged conspiracies on the part of Toulu and his friends to murder him. I made every endeavor to unravel the mystery, but could never get sufficient proof to convict. It was not until last December that Moliasi came with information upon which it was possible to take action. Toulu was arrested on a warrant charging him with having made certain payments to a native for the purpose of "putting Moliasi out of the way." The native to whom the payment was made turned King's evidence. Toulu was convicted, and sentenced under the Native regulation which deals with sorcery [AR 1910-11; 7/1/1911].

The advent of the "Pax Australiana" suppressed large-scale warfare, although intervillage rivalries and fighting continued. Details of earlier warfare can be gleaned from comments in later records. For instance, Whitehouse comments in 1923 on refugees on Kaileuna returning to a village on Kiriwina that their parents were forced to flee when caught in previous crossfire:

Adjoining Koma is the village of Osiwasiwa with a population of 72 souls. During the present year removals of twenty two people to take up residence at Kuluvitu has been affected. The original migration of the parents of most of this number was more or less forced, owing to the constant war waging in Kiriwina between the Chief of Toboada "Gumakaisiga" (a village lying west of Kuluvitu) and the Tolewaga [sic], headman of the village of Mwataua lying north of Kuluvitu, by name Sikitawaga [PR 1/1922-23; 2/7/1923].

While the greatest danger of physical harm for a Trobriander remains another islander, other hazards exist. The sea presents all its usual risks, large crocodiles lurk in the creek beds, and wild bush pigs present a real threat. ARM Whitehouse records a mass pig attack in 1926, in which two people are killed and two more gravely injured (SJ 1/7/1926).

The Life of an ARM

An ARM at Losuia had to enjoy a busy schedule, and needed to have the kind of mind that could juggle priorities, make detailed plans, and yet have the flexibility to adjust when the realities of island life intruded. A typical day, while not out on patrol, would start at dawn, when the ARM might go over outgoing correspondence at breakfast, to add to the the mail that he hoped to send off with any trading vessel that might call at the station, or by canoe to catch a boat that he knew to be in the area and due to make for Samarai.

Next on the day's list, at least in the first few decades of Australian administration, would be organizing a work detail for the station, which would include prisoners in the gaol, convalescent patients from the hospital, and any policemen who had no more fitting assignment for the day. The prisoners would be assigned heavier work, such as breaking up coral boulders and carrying the pieces out to extend the jetty or improve the seawall, or working to reclaim the swampy area that made up the western part of the station grounds. The convalescents would be sent to cultivate the extensive gardens; weeding, trimming, planting or harvesting; or might be tasked with plaiting mats for building repairs. The police would assist or supervise the convalescents, or perhaps work on something that took a bit more skill or attention to detail, such as repairing or repainting the whaleboat. If at the station for the day, the ARM would closely oversee any work taking place. For much of the year a day's work could be interrupted or completely curtailed by heavy rains. Late in the dry season (January-February) people who had run out of food in their villages could join the work squad in exchange for rations of rice or corn (SJ 1/31/1912).

A tour of the station might be in order, to insure the smooth operation of whatever activities were in the offing for the day. The hospital would be inspected, ensuring its cleanliness, and to check on the progress of any patients not well enough to partake in the therapeutic aspects of work. In the dry season the handing out of government rations of rice or corn to villagers in need might be set up. Around harvest time the ARM would be seeing to the purchase of surplus food brought in from the villages, for the feeding of all persons attached to the station. Yams were stored in the government's own *bwaimas*.

The rest of the morning might be taken up dealing with problems brought to the ARM's attention by villagers who would come to the station with their complaints, which could run the gamut from a stolen pig or damaged fruit tree, to more serious matters such as a land dispute or accusations of adultery.

Lunch might be taken with a trader calling at the station to see about a new lease of land, a pearl buying permit, or to submit paperwork relating to his employment of natives, which was always overseen by the government to prevent abuses; or perhaps he was calling to report the "desertion" of a bonded worker (once being "signed on" for a set

period with a planter or trader, a worker who violated the terms of indenture was considered a fugitive from the law).

After lunch a session of native court might be in order. A partial list of charges mentioned in station journals includes: Stealing coconuts or eating nuts reserved to be processed into copra; adultery; careless use of fire resulting in damage to property; desertion from indentured employment; inciting to desert; sorcery; indecent assault; failure to clean roads and tracks; use of threatening or obscene language; destruction of economic plants; breach of VD regulations; loitering near the gaol; and theft. Those found guilty were usually given the choice of a fine or a sentence in the gaol. Many Trobrianders preferred a stint in the gaol to the handing over of scarce wealth, and it was apparently seen by some as an invigorating holiday away from the responsibilities of village life, with the added novelty of being fed by the government.

The rest of the afternoon might be spent inspecting villages within a short walk from the station, or perhaps examining people for VD who were summoned to the station for the purpose. The VCs of more remote villages journeyed to the station weekly to report on events in their villages, and the condition of roads and tracks in their jurisdictions, and five or ten might come in each day. After questioning by the ARM, they would return home carrying their salaries, often in the form of betelnut or tobacco.

Dinner would perhaps be spent with a reverend from the nearby Mission, or with the visiting trader staying overnight to catch a favorable tide in the morning.

After supper the ARM would probably be immersed in correspondence, and his typewriter would be heard well into the evening as he prepared his latest patrol report (Figure 8). The last thing might be to type up the day's entry for the station journal (Figure 9).

The only exception to this busy schedule was on Sundays, when the Sabbath was generally observed. The missions had long forbade their converts to do any work on Sundays, and in deference to their influence the government and most traders followed suit. Any departures from this practice were cause for friction, and often indigenous converts were more zealous than their western shepherds. In 1911 ARM Bellamy reports:

Complaint from S. Brudo [a trader] that the mission has been stopping boys who wished to go out diving [for pearls] on the Sunday. He accuses the Kavataria VC (who is a mission convert) of telling the natives that if they go diving on Sunday they will have to pay Mr. Holland [a missionary]. Noted the matter for enquiry tomorrow. [SJ 11/26/1911]

While indigenous government employees were given Sundays off, the ARM would often be kept busy catching up on paperwork, inspecting the station, or tending to patients in the hospital.

Once or twice a month, the ARM would embark on a patrol, gathering up a retinue of prisoners to carry his stores of food, trade tobacco and equipment, and an indigenous Armed Constable (AC) or two for security and to act as interpreters. These traveling government shows would last from two days to a week, depending on the area visited, and would see to a variety of affairs, from medical examinations and treatment, to tax collection, census taking, and whatever special projects were underway at the time. Ernest Whitehouse, ARM, encapsulates a typical early patrol in the first lines of a report from 1920:

480/2

The Assistant Resident Magistrates Office,

Losuia,

Trobriand Group.

June 11th 1914.



I81/I4.

The Hon.

The Government Secretary.



PATROL JUNE 2nd to 7th 1914.

June 2. Leaving Warden Gumakomauri in charge of station I left in whaleboat with Cpl. Bunagola and Constable Mikikafia and 16 carriers (prisoners) for a patrol of Luba district to inspect villages and tracks, to inspect and count coconuts planted on new tracks since my last visit, and to carry out certain inspections for venereal on hospital account in the five villages which remain to complete the annual inspection. Going east from Losuia with Cpl. Bunagola dropped off the boat at the village of Teavi, sending the camp gear to continue its way by water to Obulaku to fix camp there, and wait my coming. I walked from Teavi to Tokwauku half a mile further north east. Here I counted the nuts recently planted on the boundary of the village and for statistical purposes also counted the old bearing nuts in the same village. I am doing this in every

Figure 8. Opening page of a typical patrol report from 1914.

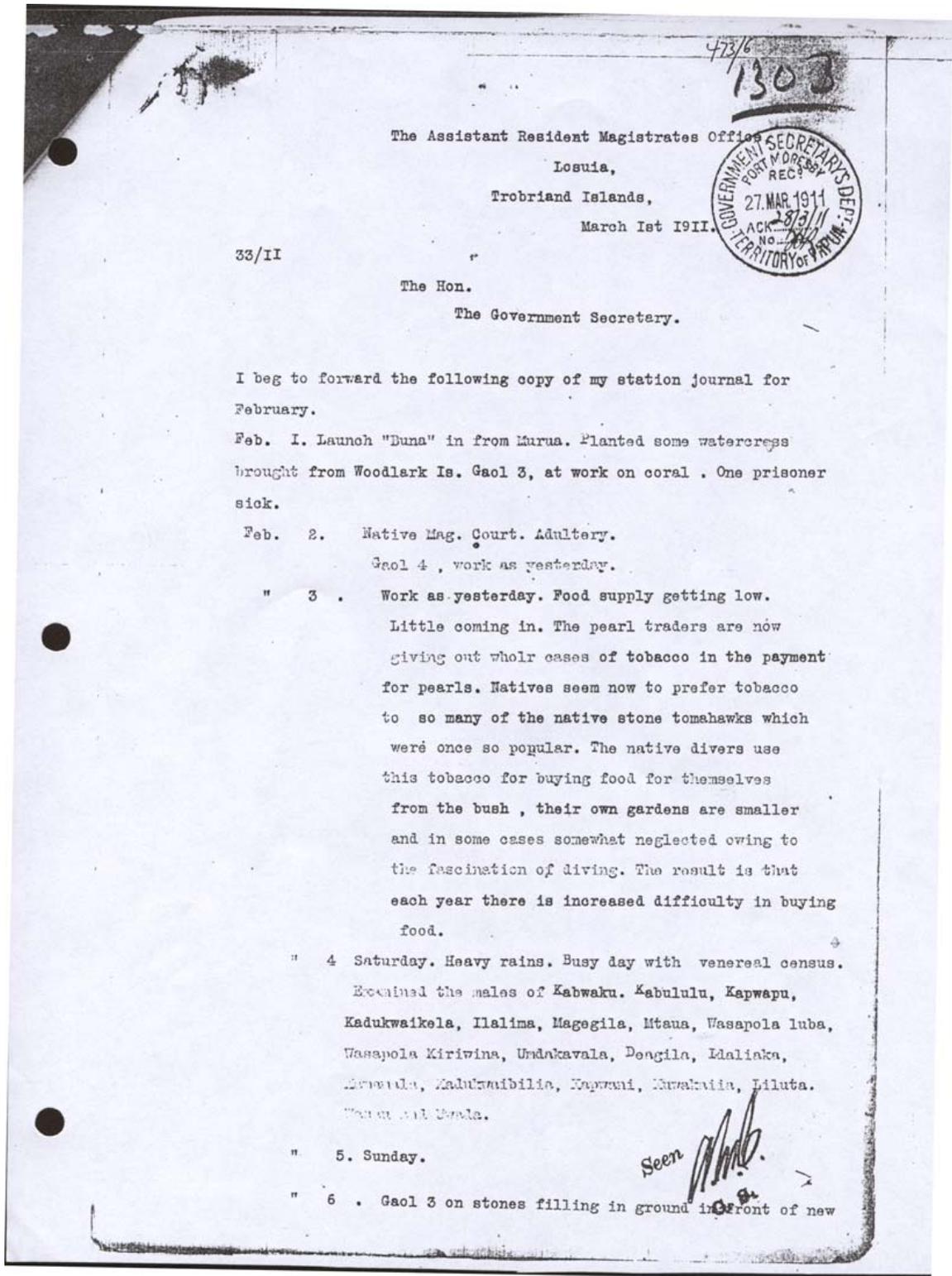


Figure 9. Opening page of a typical station journal from 1911.

Left Losuia Station with six prisoners, the gaol warden in charge, and 1 AC to patrol all the villages on the west of Losuia, to measure the tracks, count coconut palms and to make an examination of all the adults' genitalia. [PR 4/1920-21; 7/31/1920]

While always a busy man, the ARM at Losuia could enjoy some pleasant times while stationed in the Trobriands. When the weather was mild and no pressing crises loomed, the idyll of island life must have been its own reward. With traders calling regularly and the mission station nearby, there would have been no shortage of social time among friends and neighbors. A household staff of local servants made domestic life for the ARM and his wife rather luxurious in its own way. While on patrol during good weather, the friendly reception given at most villages was sure buoy the spirits of even the most footsore and bedraggled officer. The harvest festivities around *Milamala* offered exotic flavor, and the Methodist mission at Oiabia hosted a large sports festival at Christmas.

On the other hand, when the weather turned sour, sometimes for weeks on end, the struggle to keep the station in order and work moving along could turn into unmitigated drudgery. A prime example is the experience of ARM Zimmer, posted to Losuia to relieve Whitehouse for six months in 1925. A week after taking up residence, Zimmer notes the start of months of heavy weather, just in time for his first patrol: "Very heavy rains during last night, 3.1 inches recorded" (SJ 2/8/1925). Returning from a soggy patrol, Zimmer is struck ill:

2/19: ARM laid up with flu and gastric malaria... 2/20: As yesterday, ARM still in bed... 2/21: ARM still sick... 2/22: Sunday... 2/23: ARM in Office and Hospital on and off during the day, still very much off colour. A number of flu cases in the hospital. Heavy rain and thunder during the afternoon. [SJ 2/19-22/1925]

Zimmer's condition improves slowly over the next week, but the weather doesn't: "3/3: Heavy squalls and rain during the evening, which reached almost cyclone force, violent thunder storm from 9pm until mid-night." One month to the day after his first illness, Zimmer again falls ill: "3/19: ARM down with fever." Three days later he's off on another patrol.

In April Zimmer seems to get into the swing of things, but is still contending with the rains, making it impossible at times to keep track of events around the station:

4/8: Understand that a party came ashore and visited mission station. Continuous heavy rains all day... 4/9: ARM in office... weather still rough and boisterous, rain gauge showing 10 inches of rain during the last 5 days.

On the 14th he notes "Very heavy rain, gauge showing 3.05 inches during the last 24 hours, making 16.5 inches so far this month." Despite the weather, Zimmer makes headway on various projects such as re-roofing the gaol building and surveying land for new native plantations. The roofing project is put on hold when both of Zimmer's shingle knives are broken, but resumes thanks to the loan of a knife from the trader Mr. Lumley.

May and June see no break in the wet weather, with several inches falling in a day not an uncommon occurrence. The record is set on June 9th, with 7 inches falling in 24 hours. The next day Zimmer is even driven from the shelter of his office, which sits

underneath his residence at ground level, screened in by woven mats: “As yesterday, still raining heavily, wind driving in all directions, making work in Office impossible” (SJ 7/10/1925). It is a wonder how the machinery and paperwork of government could survive such long periods of damp conditions.

Near the end of June, Zimmer must perform one of the more solemn duties of a government officer, presiding over the burial of a deceased European who passed away far from home without family. He records the death of a trader named Jack Chesser (SJ 6/25/1925) of a sudden illness, having arrived from Misima Island only ten days earlier bearing a load of betelnut. Zimmer spends several weeks disposing of the man’s boat and belongings, signing off his laborers and arranging transport for them off the island.

In July, Zimmer meets with his own bit of misfortune:

7/21. ARM working on new hospital, while the boys were ramming a pile to carry the floor joist, one boy accidentally rammed my foot, taking off nearly all the top joint and splitting the toe along the bone. Am afraid it will be a long time before any patrol work can be done. [SJ 7/21/1925]

After a brief comment the next day, this major injury is not mentioned again, although it surely would take months to completely heal.

In August, with just one month to go before Whitehouse’s return, an unexpected responsibility falls into Zimmer’s lap, in the form of the *Nivani*, a disabled government launch that had “run for the Trobriands for help,” anchoring at Kaibola. It is Zimmer’s duty now to render assistance to the crew of indigenous government employees and speed them on their way. He borrows a magneto from the ever-helpful Mr. Lumley, but the *Nivani*’s engineer had guessed wrong as to the problem, so two days later another trader, Samuel Brudo, agrees to tow the *Nivani* around to Losuia. Zimmer and Brudo spend a day dismantling the engine, discovering that salt water has invaded the cylinders. Zimmer charts Lumley’s launch to take the cylinders to Samarai for repairs, leaving the station “in very dirty weather.” He returns two days later, “having made a non-stop run from East Cape” (about 200 miles). Zimmer reassembles the engine, but it fails to run, so he and Brudo spend six more days struggling over the problem before finally deciding that the job is beyond them. By this time Zimmer has spent two weeks laboring over a rusty engine in a cramped boat, in foul weather with a bad foot, only to find all his efforts are for naught, without overt complaint. Fortunately Whitehouse returns from leave a few days later and Zimmer is able to flee from Losuia (SJ 8/23-9/12/1925).

Geographical Challenges

In 1904 M.H. Moreton, Resident Magistrate of the Southeastern Division, made a telling comment in his annual report regarding the challenges of governing the area:

I am sorry that this South-Eastern Division is such an awkward one to handle; it seems that I am about half my time sailing about getting from one place to another, and I find it impossible to remain as long as I should wish in any one part. Much good could be done in the Trobriands were it possible for me to be amongst these natives for two or three months at a time. [in AR 1904 -1905:30]

All officers assigned to the Trobriands, prior to tackling the myriad issues and projects that they were tasked with, had to first overcome the difficulty in just getting from place to place. Interisland travel was time-consuming in the best of conditions and

nearly impossible when the wind was up and the weather was bad. Much planning and effort went into moving about on patrol, and an ARM had to have an astute weather eye, an intrepid streak, and the intuition of a lifelong sailor in order to successfully govern the outlying islands. Many reports mention these challenges, usually in much understated terms.

ARM Campbell's account of a brief patrol to Vakuta Island in 1916 shows the caution and foresight needed to make even a short trip by sea a success:

June 13: Left Losuia at 8 a.m. in whaleboat with crew of five prisoners and two ACs. Sailed south until 5 p.m. Being unsafe because of occasional rocks and reefs to proceed at night, made for the southern coast of Kiriwina Is. and camped a few miles east of Susua point... June 14: Left camp at 7 a.m. and reached Orkinai village on Vakuta Is. about noon.

After visiting the Vakutan villages on foot, he returns to Orkinai for the homeward journey:

Left about 9 a.m. for Losuia, steering westerly to call at the small island of Iaga. One man and one woman are living there. They have a good garden and 40-50 coconut trees. Left Iaga about 1 p.m. and with a stiff South-Easter behind us arrived at Losuia at 5 p.m. [PR 452/38; 6/13-16/1916]

Interisland patrols were conducted using the government whaleboat, a small but sturdy open craft with two small sails and oars for six rowers, or by either catching a ride with or borrowing a trader's vessel. Usually along for the ride were one or two indigenous Armed Constables (ACs), a native interpreter and up to 10 prisoners or sometimes convalescents from the hospital to act as crew. Whitehouse notes that prisoners drafted to crew the whaleboat "after a few trips become fairly reliable except when employed rowing" (in AR 1919-20:47).

In 1923 Whitehouse attempts to bring his wife in to Samarai to give birth:

3/16: Left station for Samarai at 5am. Aboard launch "Pilula" to convey Mrs. W. to Samarai Hospital. Reached Dobu... 3/17: Launch "Pilula" arrives East Cape and cannot proceed further owing to wife's condition and seas.

East Cape, a European settlement on the easternmost tip of New Guinea, will have to suffice for the occasion. Presumably some medically trained residents prevent Whitehouse the indignity of delivering his own child. The Whitehouses wait two days for the seas to abate and for "Mrs. W." to recover, and then attempt the homeward journey:

3/20: Left East Cape for Losuia, non stop run... 3/21: Landed at Losuia and resumed duties at 9am (Trip from East Cape to Losuia took 21 hrs 15 mins) [SJ 3/16-20/1923].

Perhaps Ernest saved the details of that voyage for his personal diary.

ARM Zimmer relates a rough trip west in 1925:

May 13: Left at 8:45 A.M. per launch Pilula, kindly loaned by Mr A.C. Lumley, for Sim-Sim, Kawa, Munuwata and Kuiaua Islands, a fresh South Easterly blowing. Arrived at Sim-Sim at 4 P.M. after a rough trip... the South East wind reaching almost to the strength of a gale at sundown and during the night... May 14: S.E. still blowing too strong to think of leaving in such a small launch. Prepared to leave at 1 A.M. by moonlight if weather moderates, but rain, wind and thunder continued until almost daylight... May 15: Wind having dropped slightly, left at 6:30 A.M. for Kuiaua and Munuwata having

to buck right into a big sea. Anchored at Kuiaua at 2:15 P.M... May 16: Left at 6:45 A.M. for Losuia, a big sea still running, arrived at the station at 10:45 A.M. Altogether a very rough and uncomfortable trip. [PR 15/24-25; 5/13-16/1925]

A mild comment, after braving windswept seas and large waves in a small craft for up to 8 hours at a stretch.

At times weather prevented travel by boat, and ARMs had to show flexibility, as well as a sense for when to call off or postpone a patrol. In 1916 Campbell writes: "April 5: Left Losuia for Kaileuna Is. patrol, but heavy weather drove whaleboat back" (SJ 4/5/1917). The patrol was carried out the next day. Another trip to Vakuta was called off in September after the whaler was turned back by rough weather.

M.C.W. Rich, ARM, writes of a "routine" run down to Sinaketa and Vakuta in 1930 (Sinaketa, although on the main island of Kiriwina, was most easily reached by boat, due to large areas of swamp and brush running down the southern half of the island). He doesn't mention any prisoners on this trip; instead "a local crew of 6 natives"¹¹ mans the boat:

Mr. E. Auerbach who was at the Station kindly towed the whaler as far as the head of the lagoon after which we pulled to Gusaweta where a call was made on Mr. Lumley. Moving on from Gusaweta, passed through Kiribi passage, between Bomapou Isl. and the main Island, on a falling tide which resulted in the crew having to wade most of the distance. As the bottom in this passage is either sand or mud and the sea is flat calm the whaler was not affected in any way.¹² Clearing the passage hoisted the sails to vicious S.E. squalls which brought with it blinding rain, and Sinaketa was reached at 4pm much to everybody's relief and satisfaction, the latter however was short lived as on landing the Rest House was found leaking in a number of places and the Police Barracks conspicuous by the few sticks and wisps of thatching which represented that structure.

The next day was spent inspecting the villages around Sinaketa and holding Native Court, while the AC supervised the repair of rest house and barracks. The next day: "Moving off in the whaler at noon, sailed and pulled to Muwo Island which was reached at 4 pm, Mr. Auerbach kindly putting me up".¹³ This five-mile journey would have been a tedious one. The fact that the crew was "pulling" or rowing tells us that there was little wind, and one can imagine the conditions in the boat in midday under the tropical sun. The next day:

As there was a heavy S.E. blowing accepted Mr Auerbach's kind offer of a passage to Vakuta in his launch the "Sophia", which was going to the Amphletts. Hauled the whaler ashore at Muwo and

¹¹ These men were most likely from Kavataria, and probably volunteered to crew the boat in exchange for tobacco. While this isn't reported in the record, the accounts page at the end of the patrol report lists 5 lbs of tobacco as part of the expenses for the trip, and while ARM Rich distributed some of this to the VCs and councilors of villages visited, that amount leaves plenty for the crew.

¹² This comment is to show that ARM Rich is not negligent in his duty to look after the precious government boat, not easily replaced, and was likely made because the boat was damaged later in the patrol. McPherson notes: "Kiaps [officers] were held responsible for the careful use and preservation of all Government property in their charge or possession" (2001:90).

¹³ Note that while there were 9 people on this trip, ARM Rich writes in the singular of the trader putting "him" up. This could be read as the white man ignoring his local companions, but more likely he is referring to his whole entourage as "me" in the sense discussed by Brown (2001:24; see p. 23 above). Rich would have certainly seen to the accommodations of his group.

covering the same with sails and fly, left in the Sophia at 9 am, and reached Vakuta some two hours later, "Sophia" proceeding to Amphletts.

Compare this passage, in which a trader's launch covers 12 miles into a stiff headwind in two hours, with the whaleboat's progress the previous day, making 5 miles in four hours in calm seas. The assistance of these traders made the government's job much easier. Auerbach returns from the Amphletts that evening, and the next morning takes ARM Rich to Giriba, and waits while he visits this small village at the southern tip of Kiriwina:

Moving on with a stiff S.E. astern, Muwo Isl. was reached at 11 am. After lunch with Mr. Auerbach off in the whaler at 1:30 pm. and hoisting the sails to the fresh S.E. reached the station at 4pm., in blinding rain which commenced to fall at 2 pm. and which continued on into the night.

One might imagine easy sailing despite the rain, back up to Losuia with the help of the "fresh" breeze, except for the final entry for this patrol:

On the run back to the station the port for'd chain-plate was pulled clean out when an extra vicious squall struck the vessel and will have to be replaced before the whaler can again be used for sailing. [PR 466/67; 4/22-27/1930]

Rich doesn't relate the scene in the small boat when the chain plate rips loose in a blinding squall, threatening to bring down the mast and swamp the vessel. All we know is that somehow the crisis was dealt with and skimmed over in the report. All in a day's work for an ARM.

By 1934 the government had a canoe at Losuia, giving another option for patrols. This vessel was probably of typical Trobriand design, propelled by both a sail and paddles and with an outrigger for stability. In calm weather the canoe was faster than the whaleboat, and ARM Ivan Champion uses it in January 1934 to head south for Vakuta. With six paddlers, he reaches Obulaku in two hours, and the next day he cruises down to Sinaketa in under three hours, with time for a stop at a trading post along the way. The next day he's off to Vakuta:

Hoisted sail and made good speed in some strong rain squalls but in a couple of hours it became dead calm. Poled along to Gilibu [Giriba] which was reached at 4:35 pm. [PR 8/33-34; 1/9/1934]

Champion continues on to Vakuta in the morning, and after spending the night and next day there writes: "To escape traveling in the heat of the day on the canoe I left Vakuta at 9pm. A fine clear night. Reached Sinaketa at 3:30am". Again much is left to the reader's imagination, but this time, instead of picturing a life-and-death struggle against high winds and a dangerous sea, we can imagine the scene as the party glides smoothly along a glassy lagoon under starlit skies, the only sound the rhythmic dipping of the paddles.

The waters immediately off Losuia are shallow and studded with reefs and coral outcrops, and navigation over the outer reef and through this lagoon is perilous. A safe passage was marked with buoys in the early years of colonial administration. We know this through a comment made by ARM Bellamy in 1911: "Sent Lce. Cpl. Ilavaka and three prisoners to rebuoy the Kavataria passage" (Kavataria is the village immediately

adjacent to the government station at Losuia; SJ 7/4/1911). The next year Bellamy improves the safety of the passage: “Went out this am to fix steel rail beacons to the Kavataria passage. Fixed three when it came on to blow and work became difficult” (SJ 3/21/1912). The understatement here is substantial, if one imagines several men trying to wrangle heavy sections of steel beam off a small whaleboat and into a vertical position while trying to steady the boat in a choppy sea and high winds. But by the next day “all the dangerous stones are now marked with a rail with kerosene tin on top” (SJ 3/22/1912).

Overland travel could be as difficult as seaborne patrols, with swamps, jagged coral ridges and dense brush barring the route. Often implicit in patrol reports is the great amount of planning and logistical forethought needed to move from village to village in a timely manner.

The relative isolation of the Trobriands from the colonial centers of Samarai and Port Moresby, and the general isolation of the entire territory added other challenges. Upon breaking a tooth, ARM Bellamy had to become his own dentist: “Bellamy stood in front of the mirror and removed the stump himself with forceps” (Black 1957:194).

Along with written accounts of their movements on patrol (written with great detail but understating the hardships involved), ARMs often attached hand-drawn maps to their reports, showing the route taken. The quality of these maps varied, from ARM Bellamy’s exceedingly crude examples (Figure 10), to the somewhat more carefully drawn ones of ARM Campbell (Figure 11). Although later ARMs sometimes used tracings taken from official maps, this practice of hand-rendered cartography became a tradition that endured into the 1960s.

R .L. Bellamy, ARM

Our record of government activity at Losuia begins with R.L. Bellamy as Assistant Resident Magistrate in 1907. He came to this assignment in 1905 as an experienced colonial officer with extensive time already served in other parts of Papua. Bellamy laid the groundwork for the governance of the Trobriands throughout the colonial era. Upon him fell the bulk of the initial description and quantification of the islands, their people, and the prospects for “improvement.” In 1907 he wrote an annual report detailing the status of the hospital, and an article, “Notes on the Customs of the Trobriand Islanders,” which is the earliest detailed ethnographic sketch of the Trobriands, in which he outlined the customs and attitudes of the people, a decade before Malinowski arrived. This article apparently came to the notice of anthropologist C.G. Seligman, sparking his interest in the islands (Black 1957:280). Seligman’s 1910 book, “Melanesians of British New Guinea,” drew heavily on Bellamy’s knowledge of Trobriand culture, extensively quoting him in the section dealing with the northern Massim, and the enclosed map of Kiriwina was drawn by Bellamy as well. It was Seligman who encouraged and supported Malinowski’s initial fieldwork in the Trobriands, and Malinowski stayed with Bellamy for a time at Losuia. The two men were initially friends, but had a falling out over the role of government in indigenous life. While Bellamy must have been of great assistance to Malinowski during his first months on Kiriwina, little mention is made of him in Malinowski’s published writings. His early article on Trobriand culture, and his seminal associations with these two pioneer

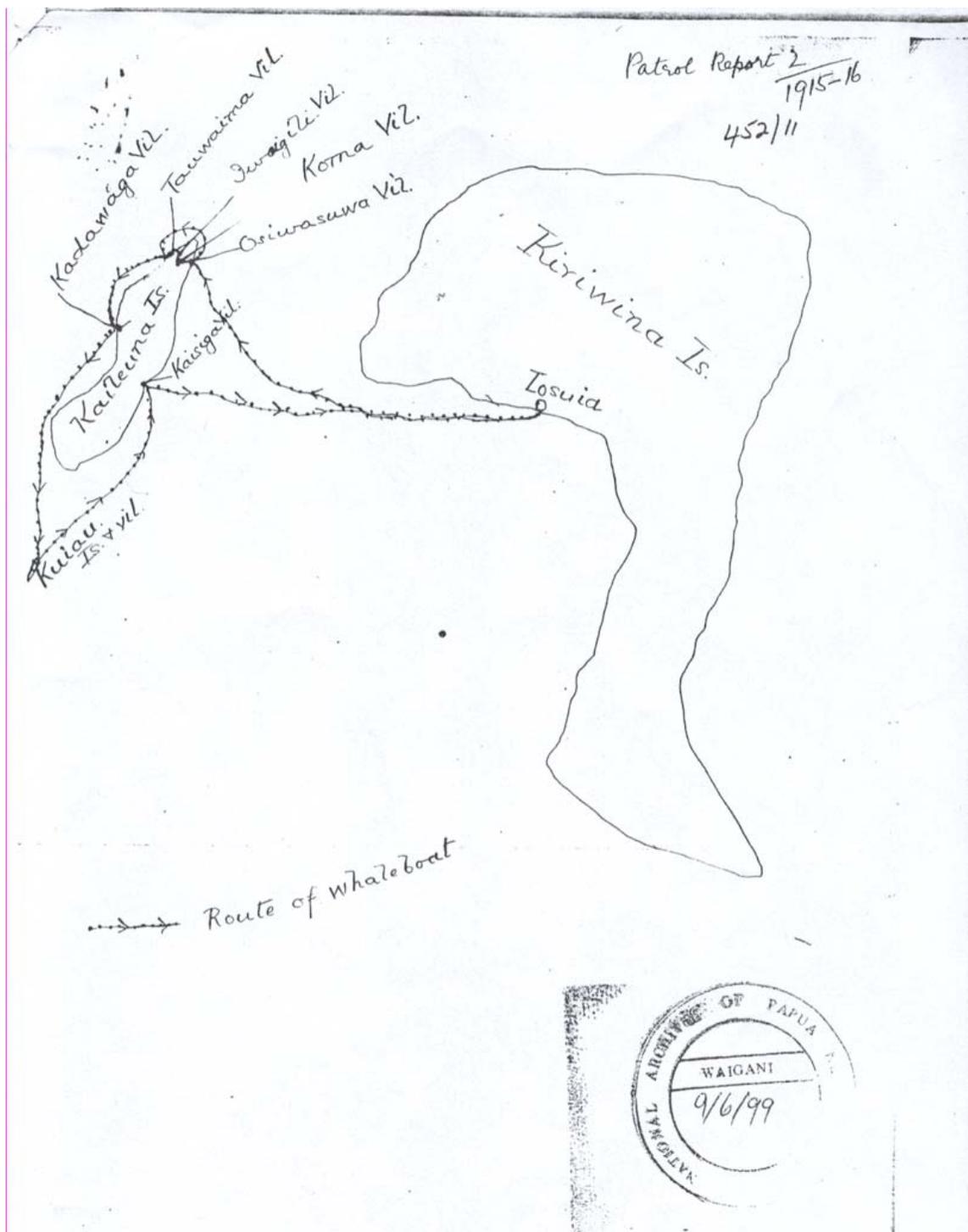


Figure 11. ARM Campbell's map depicting a patrol westward in 1916.

anthropologists lend weight to the argument that Bellamy could be called the father of Trobriand ethnography. Furthermore, the prominence of Malinowski and the Trobriands in the formation of the discipline of ethnography, and Bellamy's role in the story, makes him an important yet largely unrecognized figure in the history of the discipline.¹⁴

Bellamy's groundbreaking contributions to health services and administration in New Guinea are recognized in a biography published by R.H. Black in 1957, but its appearance in *The Medical Journal of Australia* ensured a limited readership. Black's article was meant perhaps as a tribute rather than as a critical look at Bellamy's role in the colonization of the islands.

Born in England, Bellamy studied medicine at Cambridge and Edinburgh, completing all areas of training except for his final exams, before moving to New Zealand to seek his fortune in 1901. After a short stint at a coal mine, he found local fame writing humorous pieces for a South Island newspaper, and also gained some notoriety for his skill in medical treatment. In New Zealand he heard about British New Guinea through relatives of C.A.W. Monckton, Resident Magistrate of the Northern Division at the time. Bellamy arrived in Samarai in late 1903 with a letter of introduction for Monckton, along with a tin of New Zealand cheese, the aroma of which, "was considerably exalted in the tropics and evoked suspicious comment from health and other authorities" (Black 1957:191).

Bellamy quickly became popular with the fledgling colonial government, as well as among the traders based in Samarai (at this time Samarai was the commercial center of the colony, and was substantially larger than Port Moresby). He accompanied Monckton and other magistrates on various adventures, becoming acquainted with the Territory and government service. He also befriended Dr. T. Hancock, the Government Medical Officer at Samarai, and was soon assisting in operations. During this time he continued to write lengthy articles as a traveling correspondent for *The Grey River Argus* back in New Zealand, and supported himself this way for his first year in New Guinea. These lengthy essays, humorously written yet insightful, covering myriad aspects of colonial and indigenous life, "form a large and valuable contribution to the knowledge of British New Guinea in the early years" (Black 1957:192). Bellamy once characterized Papua "as being chiefly noted for its export of dead missionaries and alligators" (Black 1957:191).

Dr. Hancock's death in August 1904 left the entire eastern half of the territory without a doctor, and Bellamy stepped in to act as health officer at Samarai for six weeks. He then decided to sign on for a six-month stint in the government service before returning to England to complete his medical exams. A career in colonial government was not in the cards, mainly due to poor prospects for remuneration.

Bellamy was posted to Kokoda, a remote inland station near the Yodda goldfields. Here he dealt with rambunctious gold miners and a largely unpacified local population. He was the sole medical practitioner in the district, and also helped with magisterial duties, quickly becoming popular among fellow officers, miners and indigenes alike. H.L. Griffin, his immediate superior, found him to be:

¹⁴ Bellamy quickly decided that he needed to learn the indigenous language in order to operate effectively, and Malinowski's experience at Losuia, where he was a witness to Bellamy's ability to work with the local population through years spent in the area and fluency in the language, may have led him to conclude that ethnographic researchers should follow a similar path.

...an ideal man to live with, a delightful companion, and always ready with very sound advice. He was absolutely imperturbable and never lost his temper...his dealings with the native people were remarkable for the sympathetic understanding which they displayed. [Black 1957:193]

After six months at Kokoda, Bellamy made ready to leave for England, but was lured into postponing his departure with an offer from the new Chief Medical Officer. His medical training and extensive field experience, along with glowing reviews of his magisterial ability from all who worked with him, made him the natural choice to run the newly planned "Native Hospital" in the Trobriands, founded to stamp out a VD epidemic there. Bellamy accepted the assignment, unknowingly postponing his return to England for a decade. While the challenges of the job were certainly a draw, his chief interest was a 60 per cent raise in pay, to £350 per year. Black notes Bellamy's exacting financial habits: "every item of expenditure was recorded in his note book and a tally was made at the end of the year" (1957:197). This thrift and attention to detail would come to the fore in his tireless bookkeeping and statistical exercises while at Losuia. A certain competitive ambition is also involved in his taking on the sole administration of his own subdistrict: "I fancy my district will show its heels to the rest" (Black 1957:282).

Bellamy found the Trobrianders an admirable people:

...naturally so industrious, comparing so favourably with other Papuans in their physical development, possessing an inherited contempt for idleness so pleasing as it is here in Papua. [in AR 472b/7; 7/1/1907]

As Bellamy begins to establish law and order in the island group, he isn't hampered by the lack of the usual detachment of Native Armed Constabulary that normally provides the muscle behind any Resident Magistrate. Another credit to his abilities is that his gaol was an unlocked facility for the first year of operation, but only two prisoners out of a total of 201 "escaped" by walking away (Black 1957:281).

One of Bellamy's duties is to observe the annual cycle of food production, and do what he can to ward off famine in bad years. He writes of the 1911 yam harvest with alarm:

There is now no doubt that the taitu crop is almost an entire failure throughout Kiriwina... I have never seen such poor looking stuff in the six years I have been here. The natives say they will all be hungry later on. I am urging the planting of sweet potatoes, but the native is one of the worst to get him to look ahead. [SJ 6/29/1911]

Bellamy misses his own contradiction, as he himself says that the natives *are* looking ahead - to hunger.

By October Bellamy reports thefts from the gardens of Kavataria, and by November most Kiriwinans have resorted to eating fruit, and to make matters worse the rains are late: "If no rain comes the food which should be ready by Xmas will be dead and then it will, I am afraid, be a matter of famine. About 4000 to 5000 natives will be affected" (SJ 11/28/1911).

The government's relief effort begins when the *Merrie England* arrives in October with corn. Unfortunately, there's an immediate problem:

The maize [sic] brought by M.E., for which I had requisitioned, to distribute to the different villages, I found to be absolutely full of weevils. I am afraid it is not of much use. I have given out a lot today. [SJ 10/18/1911]

While practically inedible, Bellamy still distributes the corn since nothing else can be done, and at least some of it might be used to avert absolute starvation. Some traders take advantage of the near famine to put villagers into their debt:

Both Hancock and Delaney had given out to the village [of Sinaketa] nearly 3 tons of rice, advances against pearls, so that there is rice in every household. [SJ 10/17/1911]

While this move could be seen as profiteering, at least no one would starve in Sinaketa. The villagers were probably happy to make the deal, and were not unfamiliar with taking loans against future income, as it was a common practice between themselves in the past known as *wasi*. The traders were in the islands solely to make money, and wouldn't be expected to give away rice.

His concern for the islanders notwithstanding, the crop failure poses a problem for the provisioning of the government station. In previous years Bellamy has been able to "buy" surplus food from the villages (meaning trade for tobacco), but this year not enough is coming in to fill the government yam houses. By August he is trying to fill the gap, but is also letting Samarai know that Losuia will fall short of self-sufficiency for the year:

Aug. 21. Planting Sweet Potatoes. I am making every effort to have the garden producing something as soon as possible. But even so the amount I can grow will fall short of actual station requirements. For the first time in six years I shall be compelled to requisition rice. [SJ 8/21/1911]

Since the Territory of Papua suffers from a chronic lack of funds, all precincts are expected to be self-sufficient apart from the standard supply of cheap tobacco, kerosene and the like, and Bellamy is experienced enough to know that an ARM who must resort to asking for rice without good reason could suffer damage to his career, so he is careful to note details of the crop failure well in advance of any food request. His mention of gardening efforts at the station, while not unusual for a station journal, are perhaps mainly aimed at showing his industry in trying to alleviate the shortage, since even in the best of times a large garden would never come close to supplying the one ton of food required by the station each week (as estimated by Bellamy in SJ 11/20/1911). Finally, Bellamy obliquely reminds his superiors that he's managed the station for five years without having to ask for food.

Another cause is also contributing to the villagers' unwillingness to sell food to the station:

The pearl traders now buy so many of their pearls with tobacco that the bush villages are so well supplied by their diving coast village relatives that they are under no necessity to sell food. [SJ 3/8/1911]

This comment highlights the preeminence of tobacco in the life of the islanders, its importance as an item of trade, and the fact that if villagers have plenty of tobacco they don't need much else from the white men on the islands.

In December the *Mindoro* arrives with both rice and corn, and the rains arrive as well:

Have about a month's native food left so shall not immediately be on rice rations. The arrival of rain has for the present lifted the shadow of famine from this district... The new maize brought by the *Mindoro* in place of that so full of weevils...is a splendid sample. I am distributing it to the district. [SJ 12/18-20/1911]

Despite some rain, persistent dry weather continued into the 1912 growing season.

1915 brings another drought, but indigenous pride makes judging the extent of food shortages a challenge. Bellamy gives an example from a visit to Tuma:

Tolosavalu, the chief is blind and a cripple and I questioned him as to their food supply. He assured me they had ample and to impress me with the fact his wife about an hour later presented me with a cooked yam. Now I am pretty certain it was the only yam in the village. I sent him a feed of rice but he was anxious to tell me later that while at this time of year there was always a certain scarcity in some villages and especially so after the late drought, still Tuma was well off. These people right through the Trobriands are very peculiar in that way. They will cook you their last remnants of food and willingly starve themselves rather than you should go away thinking they were short. This fact always renders a calculation as to the prospect of an actual dangerous shortage very hard to make because this peculiar feeling of shame prevents them from speaking out. This characteristic is exhibited in their dealings with each other just the same as in their dealings with foreigners. [PR 38/15; 2/5/1915]

The Trobriand concern for “keeping up appearances” has been documented elsewhere. Yam houses are always filled with the best yams placed carefully within view in the gaps between the logs, and in times of shortage the yams are stacked high around the edges, with a hole in the middle, lending the impression of a full load. ARM Rentoul writes in 1928 of *bwaimas*:

...exhibiting a front layer of taitu backed by a framework of rattan, which of course fails to deceive anyone, but merely preserves the self respect of those in authority. [PR 4/1928-29; 12/22/1928]

While Bellamy could be stern with indigenes under his care, and relies heavily on the white traders around the islands for transportation, he nonetheless could also deal strictly with Europeans if he finds them in violation of the law. In 1912 he hears of some delinquent holidaymakers:

Have received information that some white men, Trotter from Murua and Roche from Port Moresby, camped for a holiday on Kaileuna Is., have been using dynamite for the purpose of taking fish. I sent V.C. Maimai out to make enquiries and if true to bring in the witnesses.

Maimai returns the very next day, and the whole episode is wrapped up by that afternoon; “Summonses issued. Petty sessions court. Two whites fined £5 and 4/6 [4 shillings sixpence] costs each. Fines paid” (SJ 9/5-6/1912).¹⁵

¹⁵ A dependable VC could be used for investigations amongst other indigenes, but never to confront whites. Maimai was probably assigned to serve the summons, but only in the capacity of a messenger. The errant vacationers would have known to come in on their own upon receiving the summons.

Just as he maintains the “Pax Australiana” by serving as a judge and arbitrator in disputes between indigenes, Bellamy will also step in to referee problems between traders:

S. Brudo complains that M. George is anchored on a lapi (pearl oyster) patch and feeding and sleeping boys on his launch, boys, that is, engaged in pearl shell diving. Enquiry into this matter. Action to be taken against George. [SJ 11/24/1911]

It was illegal for white traders to engage in pearling themselves or to employ natives to do so (pearls could only be bought from unindentured natives).

Bellamy shows an unexpected sympathy for local thieves, when the Brudo brothers’ trade store in Sinaketa is broken into and a quantity of rice is taken. He opines that the shop wasn’t properly secured and poorly looked after:

I found that while the main door was locked there were two windows with drop shutters, only fastened by a wooden peg turning on a screw. All a thief had to do was to insert a knife from the outside and push over a peg. [Also, the brothers]... had not visited the Sinaketa store for 8 weeks... I pointed out to the Brudos the unfairness to the natives of leaving stores so insecurely guarded. Of course a boy had been left in charge, but evidence was forthcoming that he spent most of his time in the village.

He then points out another mitigating circumstance, that the bulk of goods were left untouched:

I should say that there were stores to the value of three hundred pounds in Brudo’s store. How long I wonder would such a poorly guarded store have remained intact in either Paris or London? And yet why should men expect greater honesty in a Papuan?¹⁶

Later, Bellamy begins to doubt whether a theft ever took place:

While I believe Brudo honestly believes he has been robbed, still I am not absolutely sure there has been a robbery. The store was in such an untidy state that it must have been difficult to know what was there originally.

In Bellamy’s judgment, the Brudos are guilty of irresponsibly tempting villagers with a poorly secured and unguarded shop, and are so “untidy” as to be at pains to prove a theft even took place. Implicit here may be the fact that the Brudos are “foreigners” operating with a decidedly un-British lack of discipline, but over time Samuel becomes a steadfast and helpful member of the European community.

While Bellamy minimizes the seriousness of a crime that may not even have taken place, he knows a strong government reaction toward the village involved is still

¹⁶Rafael Brudo and his brother, Samuel, were not French natives but had ties to France, and apparently came to Papua from a home in Paris. They became good friends of Malinowski, who refers to Rafael in his diary as the “Turkish Jew” who was a pleasant fellow and good source of information (in Young 1984:17). Young characterizes him as “a cultivated ex-Parisian” and an astute pearl merchant. Bellamy refers to the pair as “Brudo and his brother,” and in April 1912 mentions Brudo asking to take an indigene to Paris with him. We don’t know the outcome of this request, but apparently Rafael left the Trobriands for good, with Samuel staying on for many years. Some confusion exists, as Bellamy records that Rafael applied to transfer his pearling license to “Emma,” his indigenous wife, but later refers to Emma as Samuel’s wife (SJ 1/21/1921).

required. He travels down to Sinaketa, offers a case of tobacco as a reward for information, and calls in the five chiefs of the immediate area to point out that:

A thief in any village community was always a source of danger and that while today it was a case of stolen white man's goods tomorrow it might be their coconuts and their betelnuts and their native money. Nothing was safe. It was their interest therefore to assist in the capture of the thief...I pointed out their responsibility as chiefs... [and] gave them an hour for further search and enquiry.

Called away by the sudden appearance of the government vessel *Merrie England*, he leaves the investigation in the hands of two VCs, but likely felt that the most important part of the exercise was complete. A few days later several suspects are brought into Losuia by one of the VCs, but are released due to lack of evidence. A week later Bellamy sends a constable back to Sinaketa to make a full report, but is probably just going through the motions in deference to good form, as no more mention is made of the incident (SJ 10/17-11/4/1911).

Despite Bellamy's no-nonsense style of administration, the veteran humorist regularly makes an appearance in his official writings: "Enquiry into an alleged case of premature burial at Omarakana. This enquiry included the evidence of the 'corpse'" (SJ 4/12/1911).

While writing government correspondence, it does not seem to be beyond decorum to entertain one's self as well as one's superiors with funny stories. Bellamy relates this anecdote about Paramount Chief To'uluwa's stay in gaol on a sorcery charge:

Now, Toulu [sic] at home goes for a lot of court ceremonial. Every native approaching or passing him has to bend double. There were about a dozen other prisoners in gaol at that time. I was considerably surprised on visiting the gang the morning of Toulu's arrival to find them all working in a huddled up position. No man can use a crowbar properly while lying on his stomach. I have more than a shrewd suspicion that the prison warder was bending at the moment of my approach. He, however, professed to be looking for something on the ground. I told Toulu that ceremonial must be in abeyance until he was discharged. He said nothing, but the expression of his face said, "It is your fault for putting me here." The other prisoners straightened themselves with relief, but, half an hour later, on looking furtively around a corner, I saw that they were all on their stomachs again. The gaoler had compromised with a Gibson Girl bend. I have an idea that any prisoner showing a tendency to straighten himself got a glare from Toulu's right eye – the blind one – and straightaway fell on his crouching position again. Thenceforward, Toulu worked by himself, and not with the regular gang. [AR 1910-11; 7/1/1911]

Bellamy spent ten years governing from Losuia, with one six-month leave in Sydney and a handful of short trips to Samarai. During his tenure he created practically all the traditions that would define colonial government in the Trobriands. He made the station at Losuia as self-sufficient as possible, and stocked his larder with surplus native foods. He broke the chiefly monopoly on coconut and betelnut trees, and oversaw the planting of over 100,000 coconuts along every track on the main islands (discussed below). He ordered the construction of government rest houses in every major village, so that officers would not have to rely on the hospitality of missionaries, planters and traders while on patrol (although all would be indispensable to government for decades). Bellamy was also the first of several ARMs to lament the effects of his Methodist neighbors down the beach at Oiabia, complaining that Kiriwina was "suffering from too much missionary" (Black 1957:237).

ARM Bellamy left the Trobriands in July, 1915 to join the war effort. Sir Hubert Murray, Lieutenant Governor of Papua, reportedly spotted him picking up trash at an army base in Australia, and suggested to his commanding officer that perhaps his abilities would be of better service in another capacity (Black 1957:194). He went on to officer's training and the trenches of France (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Captain R.L. Bellamy, A.A.M.C. (Australian Army Medical Corps, 1916).

J. Campbell, Bellamy's successor, had a more relaxed style of governance. Campbell was a stopgap wartime appointment, and while his writings show him to be far from incompetent, he lacked the attention to detail and drive of his predecessor, and apparently received little orientation. His first patrol report to northern Kiriwina ends with a casual handwritten apology: "I regret I omitted to count the houses in each village" (PR 1/1916; 2/14/1916).

Finding dirty villages on Vakuta while patrolling in 1916, Campbell orders them cleaned up on the spot but makes no arrests, giving warnings and instructions to the VCs instead: "The VC was told to bring in to Losuia any of the people who neglected to do their part of this work, in the future"; and similarly: "The VC was instructed to arrest villagers who failed to keep the ground around their houses clean, in future" (PR 452/38; 6/14/1916). While it was unlikely that these VCs would drag their neighbors into Losuia over village neatness, these instructions at least gave more teeth to their attempts to see the government's orders carried out.

Campbell is somewhat looser in his sheriffing than Bellamy, and has a mind to the priorities of the villagers. Near Gumilababa:

The track required cleaning up in places. The natives are busy planting their gardens just now, but the VC was instructed to have the work done when the garden-planting was finished. [PR 5/1916-17; 12/7/1916]

In January 1918, Campbell's lack of zeal in prosecutions results in a labor shortage at the station: "1/8: One prisoner only and he being sick was not put to work... Native court held." Despite holding court, no convictions are made resulting in gaol sentences, so Campbell spends the week monitoring the health of his prospective laborer: "1/9: Prisoner still sick...1/10: Prisoner still sick...1/11: Prisoner still sick... 1/12: Prisoner still sick... 1/13: Sunday." Monday brings no change, but a chance for new blood: "Prisoner still sick...Native court held." This session produced results, as the next day, "Prisoners...cutting grass and weeding station grounds" (SJ 1/8-15/1916).

Ernest Whitehouse, ARM

During the war Bellamy completes his medical training, becoming an MD. After the war he returns to Papua and is appointed Acting Chief Medical Officer for the entire territory. Taking advantage of this temporary position, he appoints Ernest Whitehouse, his handpicked man from the medical department at Port Moresby, to carry on at Losuia. Like Bellamy, Whitehouse is medically trained, and will fill the same dual official role, both as Officer in Charge, Native Hospital, Losuia; and Assistant Resident Magistrate. Whitehouse arrives on the *Merrie England* and immediately takes over from ARM Campbell on New Year's Day, 1919. Campbell remains at Losuia for another month, but no mention is made of him or any duties he may have had during that time.¹⁷

Bellamy returns with the Commissioner for Native Affairs (a top level administrator from Port Moresby) at the end of January. The Commissioner leaves the next day accompanied by Campbell, but Bellamy remains to see how Whitehouse is settling in. The two men go on patrol together, with Bellamy checking the medical situation after 4 years away, and Whitehouse getting a feel for his new domain. These two men, similar in training and temperament, must have had a meeting of minds during this time together that helped to cement a smooth transition (PR 455/13; 2/4-2/7/1919). Bellamy examines 1000 natives before being called back to Port Moresby (Black 1957: 245).

Whitehouse will administer the Trobriands for ten years and return repeatedly as a medical officer for many more, leaving his mark more deeply than any other colonial officer, with the exception of Bellamy himself. While Whitehouse was a fair and capable officer, and did much to improve the lot of his charges, he was possessed of an outlook

¹⁷ Campbell's status in the administration, his relationship with his peers, and his experiences after leaving the Trobriands is unclear. The amount of information available today regarding Bellamy is largely due to research done by Black (1957), and the ensuing biography written in Australia in the 1950s. Many other men in the story of the colonial Trobriands appear in the official record, and then depart without details of their personal lives becoming known. What little personal information we find must be gleaned from asides and oblique comments in other writings. Black's access to Bellamy's personal papers was essential to the fleshing out of his personal story, and shows the potential for further research into other officers' lives. Campbell is mentioned rather disparagingly in Malinowski's diary, along with his superior, RM Symons: "I shudder at the thought of how life looks from their point of view...these fellows have such fabulous opportunities...[and] power over the natives, and don't do a thing!" (1967:166), but his patrol reports and station journals appear to indicate at least a basic competency in the job of governing the islands. Campbell's bad luck may have been to replace a man with extraordinary talent and drive, along with perhaps an excessive zeal, and then to be replaced by a similar personality.

towards indigenous people more fitting of an earlier time, and was not shy in expressing his opinions. After praising the ability of two VCs, he writes:

Of course, like all natives, if they are not watched and kept moving they become indolent and lose all control of the natives, but if the Magistrate will only move about, they have more confidence in themselves and keep things moving. [PR 3/1919-20; 8/5/1919:3]

This comment reveals a facet of Whitehouse's philosophy of government: that his new charges are like lazy children who need constant checking-up on, and the more visits of inspection he can make, the more results he will see. Unannounced appearances are the most effective:

This makes my third visit to Vakuta in six months and I have seen a big improvement in that time, consequently one would deduct that by surprise visits one can expect a great deal. [PR 3/1919-20:2]

Elsewhere Whitehouse puts a more positive spin on regular patrols, highlighting their encouraging effect on villagers:

I find that frequent incursions to various points of the group to be very effective, as the natives realize that their work is appreciated and that a lively interest is being exercised on their behalf. [in AR 1918:39]

While Bellamy quickly perceived the Trobrianders' "natural industriousness" and "contempt for idleness," Whitehouse is more skeptical of their work ethic. Referring to Vakuta village:

What this large number of people find to do during the year I do not know, certainly they require large gardens for food raising but beyond this it is a puzzle to me. [PR 3/1919-20:1]

Comments made by Whitehouse show his own contempt for idleness, especially in those in his employ. Any VC who falls short of expectations can expect a serious drubbing. Leaving the village of Buduilaka:

The track was so dirty that I feel obliged to return and find out the reason why! And was told that the Village Constable rarely ever visits them and if it were not for the Chief the track would never be cleaned at all, hence on my return to Ialaka the home of VC Igibutu, a brisk interview seemed to instill fresh vigor into his bones.

Igibutu compounds his predicament by offering an excuse that is Whitehouse's overriding and abiding irritant, and for which he has no patience:

He trotted out the usual excuse, one of which I am absolutely tired of; that is one of fearing sorcery, and the one excuse which always makes me decide that the Constable is useless. [PR 3/1920-21; 10/12/1920]

Whitehouse laid out this opinion in an earlier general comment:

Some of the constables are not keen or alive to their duties, whilst some are afraid to exercise their authority, fearing sorcery. Such men are hopeless and absolutely useless. [AR 1917-1918:39]

While a central tenet behind the founding of a hospital and government station at Losuia was education of the islanders regarding the causes of disease, Whitehouse's prejudice toward "the native mind" at times renders him a pessimist. Commenting on the abandonment of a village too near to the swamp, he writes:

The natives talk of "evil spirits" and very strong Puri-Puri [sorcery] being exercised in this area but the man who could explain to them that it is the mere environments and nothing more, that is responsible for the wasting diseases and various spirochetic ailments, has not yet been born. [PR 4/1920-21; 8/31/1920]

Whitehouse's philosophy concerning Trobriand life is revealed in these comments. He feels that the advancements that the administration wishes to bring about in areas such as housing, health, and economic development are limited by the "mental advancement" of the people. People are placed along a continuum from "native mind" to "modern mind". The native mind is fearful of sorcery and resistant to change, and has an inherent inability to understand rational thought. The modern mind is progressive, pragmatic, and open to intellectual discourse. Some villages are more advanced than others, and it is mental development that drives technical development. Whitehouse finds Vakuta to be one of the most advanced villages. Referring to housing, he comments: "Possibly the outstanding feature is the development of the building craft to meet the mental advancement of the individual" (PR 1/1923-24; 9/11/1923). This includes not only enlarged and improved huts with better workmanship, but also the modification of the decorations on the chief's hut, as well as the discarding of certain magical rites to guard the hut from evil spirits. Whitehouse exhibits some ambivalence towards this:

With this advancement of the individual the ancient custom of procuring sorcery...has been discarded and [it] is in my estimation somewhat regrettable that the primitive idea of "blessing the edifice" should have been discontinued since it has not been placed on record.

The Vakutans' more advanced mentality allows Whitehouse to rely more upon logical argument than the usual more draconian means:

What I am trying to bring about in this community, whose general ideas are far advanced of the average Kiriwinian, is the development of the natives' land and resources more by the power of suggestion and argument, rather than by the forced ideas of the government. [PR 1/1923-24; 9/14/1923]

Although Whitehouse clearly chafes at times at the hindrance traditional beliefs present to development, at the same time he is an enthusiastic observer of indigenous culture, and enjoys describing island life (Figure 13), as well as documenting various myths and magical practices. He details these in an "emic" tone, without a hint of sarcasm.¹⁸ An example is his description of the flying witches of Wawela:

The women of this village also possess extraordinary powers of being able to cause their souls to become disembodied and fly through the air, attacking and endangering the crews of natives working their way from point to point in these waters. Such women are called Yoyovas and the disembodied

¹⁸ An emic point of view perceives reality in the context of a particular culture; an etic view presumes an "objective" and "scientific" point of view "above" any local beliefs and practices.

S I M S I M :- Type of house at Sim-sim. Built of coconut leaves, and having two separate rooms. Kitchen, where the food is prepared during bad weather, and sleeping room or living quarters.

456/5



Lean to's are also built on the sea-shore, and the womenfolk usually gather here to talk and bake food in earthen ovens.

They appear very fragile and light but will stand quite a lot of wind.



PATROL No I (a) of 1919
- 1920.

Whitehouse
a.d.p.m.

Figure 13. Whitehouse included these sketches of Sim Sim architecture at the end of a 1919 patrol report.

spirit Milukwaisi¹⁹ and confine their operations, fortunately to the eastern section of this division. I had the pleasure of seeing one such woman...She was sleeping under an overhanging coral ridge...Her domicile was very clean and well kept...In appearance she was a wizened up, toothless old lady, and obviously demented, but I was assured that her spirit had just returned and that she was awaking from her slumber. [PR 3/1923; 6/14/1923]

Whitehouse obliquely criticizes his predecessor (Campbell), without naming names. On his third patrol to Vakuta, he finds a section of track so overgrown that it obviously hasn't been tended to for some time, and the young coconut trees along it are buried in vegetation:

Why the track has never been or attempted to be kept clean remains for the Magistrate and Village Constable to prove...I've spoken to the VC...and he tells me that the government never walks that way and consequently... it can't matter [PR 3/1919-20:2]

In the same paragraph, Whitehouse admits that the track doesn't lead to any villages, is little used by the locals, and runs over swampy ground ill-suited to coconuts, so is apparently one of Bellamy's add-on tracks cut only to provide more space for coconut planting (see below). Whitehouse here displays ambivalence between the plain fact that the track is basically useless, and the need to show "good form" by keeping it maintained since it now exists. On another occasion, Whitehouse again disparages Campbell, but apparently thinks better of it and marks the passage for deletion. The problem is that the passage remains in the report with a line drawn through it, still clearly readable:

As a community, [the villagers of Bulakwa on Kaileuna] are inferior to the average Kiriwinian and seem to resent Magisterial interference, *but from what I learn from the Village Constable, this is due to the attitude of my predecessor.* [PR 1/1922-23; 2/8/1923; italics indicate passage in question]

Whether this is a rare case of carelessness on Whitehouse's part, or a way for him to complain while not fully "owning" the remark, is unknown.

While Whitehouse could be seen as Bellamy's protégé, he could also use his own sense of fair play to disagree with his mentor. Equally exacting, he nevertheless found Bellamy's emphasis on track cleaning to be excessive in places. Commenting on a problematic area of lengthy tracks over swampy ground:

The tracks from the south of the creek to the village of Okaiaula were very bad owing to the fact that they are made on swampy ground, also owing to the fact that there is too much track to be kept clean by the total number of inhabitants of the whole group of villages in the vicinity. I do not know what arrangements Dr Bellamy made with these people, but I am of the honest opinion that it would be very unfair to punish them for dirty tracks, when it would take the whole inhabitants working at least four days every week to keep them clear of weeds and the coconut trees from becoming overgrown. [PR 5/1918-19; 3/25/1919]

In a similar vein, Whitehouse shows some leniency in track cleaning during harvest and *milamala*:

¹⁹ Normally spelled "*Mulukwaisi*."

All the tracks throughout this group of villages were what I call dirty, but as the natives have had a strenuous time this month in gathering in the harvest and stowing it for the coming year, coupled together with the fact that it is customary to entertain by dancing, singing and feasting the “spirits” of the departed, I think that a little discretion and laxity is wise treatment. [PR 4/1920-21; 7/31/1920]

Conversely, Whitehouse can issue severe punishment if he feels that his directives are being met with willful disregard. A diseased coconut tree outside Gumilababa, downed for two years, finally nets its owner a month’s hard labor for not burning it as ordered (PR 3/1925-26; 11/18/1925).

Bellamy returns to Losuia near the end of Whitehouse’s second year (1921), in the capacity of Traveling Medical Officer. He and his wife are guests at the station for three weeks, and then Bellamy takes charge as Whitehouse goes on leave for ten weeks. During this time Bellamy begins the collection of taxes from indigenes (discussed below).

While standing in for Whitehouse, Bellamy makes good use of the expanded gaol facility. On March 14th he has a paltry four prisoners working to reclaim swampy areas on the station grounds. Whether his chief motivation is to get more labor or to teach villagers to pay more attention to their assigned stretches of track, he convicts 47 men to five days’ hard labor for “Neglect to keep tracks and coconuts planted on tracks clean.” Now he can get things done:

3/15: Prisoners 51. Filling swamp on sea front... 3/16: Prisoners the same as yesterday... 3/17: Prisoners as yesterday clearing all loose stones off station and reclaiming foreshore... 3/18: Prisoners repairing stone walls surrounding women’s wards native hospital... 3/19: Saturday. Forty eight prisoners discharged. [SJ 3/14-19/1921]

Upon Whitehouse’s return Bellamy goes on one final solo patrol of northern Kiriwina, and then leaves for Port Moresby. Indigenous admiration and respect for Bellamy are reflected during another visit made in 1926. Whitehouse relates:

Special interest has been taken in privies since Dr. Bellamy is now in the district, in a few instances the old conveniences have been filled in and the house burned, new ones having been constructed because “the old ones stink too much for Doketa [Doctor] to see.” (PR 5/1925-26; 10/21/1926)

Bellamy would revisit the islands again for more medical inspections and treatment in the capacity of Traveling Government Medical Officer in 1930 (PR 3/1930-31; 8/26/1930). Bellamy’s abiding attachment to the Trobriands is evidenced by his remark to an old friend during his retirement in Australia: “...he would have preferred Kaibola to Manly [a suburb of Sydney] – he would have been happy there with his shotgun” (Black 1957:197).

In 1921, Losuia’s large gaol facility prompts an importation of prisoners from elsewhere in the district:

8/9: The RM [Resident Magistrate, South-Eastern Division] sent corporal Jorega of Bwagaioia Detachment and 40 prisoners for Losuia gaol. Corp. Jorega to remain here and assist. Prisoners work on gaol extension and swamp.

ARM Whitehouse at this point has a huge labor detachment at his disposal:

8/13: 80 prisoners work on swamp. Remainder clean station grounds...8/15: 159 prisoners clearing Station Plantation... 8/16: 161 prisoners clearing Station Plantation.

The all-time record for available prison labor is set August 27th: “166 prisoners clean Station Grounds and water-holes.” With this many laborers, a season’s work can be done in a day, and the Government station undergoes extensive improvements:

8/29: 100 Prisoners collect timber for new hospital. 66 work on swamp” [SJ 8/9-29/1921]... 9/5: 150 Prisoners collect grass for roof of hospital. [SJ 9/5/1921]

The prison population remains at around 150 until the imported prisoners are released and shipped back to Bwagaoia in October.

Whitehouse was a businesslike administrator, but was not averse to sharing his personal impressions of people and places with his superiors. His initial patrol reports include a description of all villages. Visiting Boitalu, he writes:

It is a weird place and the inhabitants are also of a curious turn of mind. Their methods of diet shock all the other natives as these niggs²⁰ eat everything and all such foods as are “Tabu” to other sections of the community. At intervals the crying of dogs and the echo resounding through the trees completes an atmosphere which would prompt an able writer to compose some stirring drama. [PR 2b/1919-20; 10/22/1919]

Returning a year later, Whitehouse expands his impressions of this pariah village:

Over a rough stony track lies the weird village of Boitalu. Here we have a real democratic community known among the other natives for its wood-carving, and the bad reputation of being a place of sorcery, so much so that no native will undertake of any hospitality extended to him by the inhabitants. [PR 4/1920-21; 8/31/1920]

Whitehouse can adopt a touristic tone when describing some pleasing setting or discovery:

During a recent patrol...I had the pleasure of viewing what I consider a real beauty spot of the Trobriands. Within easy reach of the villages of Bodella, Loia and Sinaketa are the “Tobudauwa Lagi” or caves. These are extensive limestone caverns, hitherto unvisited by any white-man. The natural formation affords easy access to visitors who may comfortably examine the weird marvels of stalactite formations by indirect lighting, through the apertures in the roof...I have procured two photographs which portray some indication of their beauty, but the majestic proportions are not suggested. [PR 3/1919-20; 3/10/1920]

Whitehouse artfully laid out this one-page “Special Patrol” report, with his small photos tucked into the text, lending the effect of a page in a travel magazine (Figure 14). Writing elsewhere of the coast near Kaulaga, he shows his appreciation of the area:

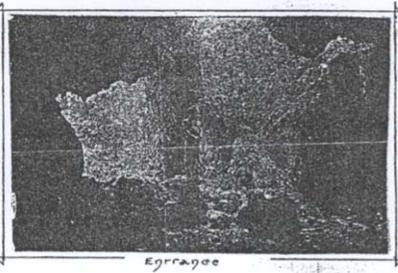
The village’s fish is caught from the sea by descending the face of the cliff some 150 feet onto a small ledge of reef where a canoe is housed in a small cavern. For wild scenery and picturesque coves, I think that this spot is absolutely the prettiest in Kiriwina. [PR 3/1920-21; 10/14/1921]

²⁰ This was a common term for indigenes in the early part of the century, but this is the only instance of its usage in the surviving colonial documents from the Trobriands.

TROBRIAND ISLANDS, South Eastern Division. } Patrol of General Inspector
To counter check Map of Kiriwina Island, etc.-----

During a recent Patrol occupying five days, during which period I visited Iaga Island, Muwo Island, Okaicoula, Bwaga, Leia, Bodella, Sinaketa, Kanabaluka, Korpila and Kaulas (all Kiwriwina Isld), I had the pleasure of viewing, what I consider, a real beauty spot of the Trobriands.

Within easy reach of the villages of Bodella, Leia and Sinaketa are the "TOBUDAUWA LAGI" or caves. These are extensive limestone caverns, hitherto unvisited by any white-man.



The natural formation affords easy access to visitors who may comfortably examine the weird marvels of stalactite and stalagmite formations by indirect lighting, through the apertures (Blow-holes ?) in the roof.

The general direction is from East to West and a certain number of passages leading from the main chamber have not yet been explored by me or any native but I hope to satisfy myself in this respect at an early date.

Unlike the average hole called a cavern, of which there are many throughout Kiriwina, no strange blood-curdling stories are associated with "TOBUDAUWA LAGI", but as far as natural beauty is concerned, any such story could not make these caverns any more attractive.

I have procured two photographs which portray some indication of their beauty, but the magestic proportions are not suggested.

I may, however, at some future date be able to satisfy myself as to the hidden passages and also procure some larger photographs which may be of some use to the department; further my theory concerning the stunted growths of vegetation at Kamulabwaga (in 1919) will probably be confirmed; that the village is situated on the roof of the cavern which underlines the surrounding country in this area.



I am very pleased to say that the villages visited where found to be clean and tidy, and the natives only trouble was "when shall we have to pay the tax!"

Typeset - shall a certain amount of trouble will always be experienced in the paper particularly between Bwaga & Kamulabwaga, where only a few natives reside

C. A. R. M.
Actg. A. R. M.

To the Honourable,
The Government Secretary,
PORT MORESBY.

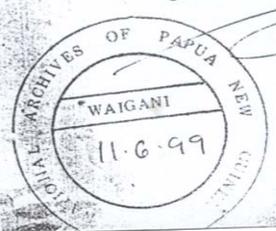


Figure 14. Whitehouse's "Special Patrol" report of 1920. His tools for laying out this page were a typewriter, scissors and glue.

The colonial government was always wary of any “outside” influence on the Trobriands, unless it was part of white development, missionization or administration. Papuans from other regions, even nearby islands, were actively discouraged from going beyond the occasional setting-up of household in an indigenous village. The colonial triad imported many off-island Papuans for various types of work, but frowned upon them staying on in any numbers. In 1919, Whitehouse reins in one of his own employees:

Much to my surprise I learnt that my Gaol Warder (Menagai), a native of Dobu, was building a new village for himself and friends (who now reside at Lobour) and that he was to be the chief. I have since issued instructions that if he continues his buildings I shall go along with a fire-stick and burn down the places and put him in gaol for disobedience. [PR 2b/1919-20; 10/22/1919]

Four years later, Menagai hasn't given up his chiefly aspirations, and Whitehouse intercedes on behalf of his erstwhile counterpart, Paramount Chief To'uluwa, to protect the chief's symbols of power:

At Wagaluma, made inspection of a house, the decorations of which called for protest from Toulua of Omarakana. The owner, my ex-gaol warder, had Buna-shells hanging from the ridging and carving on his food house together with buna-shells, embellished with “Marakana”, a red paint used exclusively by chiefs. Instructed him that if he desired to be a chief the only thing left for him to do was to return to his native island [of] Dobu. [SJ 7/11/1923]

Similarly, Whitehouse's successor laments the bad behavior of “outsiders,” and contrasts them with his polite Trobrianders:

Much dissatisfaction is expressed at the action of several “foreign” natives, e.g. those from Siau or Dobu Island – in operating on the kula for their own interest and not through the recognized channels. It is a pity the Native Regulation affecting “foreign natives” could not be made operative throughout the Trobriands, as these unattached and unemployed natives by their uncouth and unorthodox behavior are a continual source of trouble to the decorous natives of the group. [Rentoul in PR 10/1928-29; 6/12/1929]

After a few years in residence, Whitehouse comes to find that the traditional belief system is the chief obstacle to his efforts to improve the life of the islanders. His frustration is palpable as he launches into a parenthetical diatribe in the midst of a patrol report:

All these things seem insignificant in themselves, but are fraught with difficulties which one might reasonably expect would have been overcome years ago: I refer to superstition. In spite of the fact that some member of each village have received medical or surgical treatment at one of the native hospitals, have seen cures brought about etc, it is very surprising to note the unshaken faith these natives have in their “Toiuvisa” (native doctor). The same inborn superstition is responsible for the lack of advancement in every respect, it is responsible for the small diminutive hut and also for the non-adoption of the many suggestions which the Government has to offer in their welfare. [PR 1 1921-22; 5/9/1922]

Whitehouse is a prolific writer who finds patrol reports a fitting place to share at length his thoughts on administration with his superiors, and many reports are quite lengthy. The introductory paragraph of a 1922 report details his priorities:

This patrol, like all the other patrols conducted throughout the present year, has had many duties of importance attached to it: 1st. There is the most important of all duties; the medical-examination of the natives, both sexes, of each village, and the administration of Oil of Chenopodium and Salts, a routine treatment for Ankylostomiasis and other helminthes [intestinal parasites]. 2ndly, the sanitary arrangements of the villages; the selection of suitable sites for latrines, the enlargement and alteration of the type adopted. 3rdly, the living huts of the natives, which are gradually being enlarged in dimensions and height. .4thly, there are the tracks to be considered, and the coconuts planted along these tracks, and again, that spare piece of land, lying dormant, growing nothing of a useful nature, but can be made to do so by clearing away the bush and undergrowth and planting coconuts. In this respect, it appears to me, after three years observation, that the only land which really lies dormant, is the land near the salt-water, which, owing to its sandy and stony nature will not grow any article of native diet – and here again, coconuts must be planted, and would have been planted years ago, except that superstition and custom, always evident, rules that these would be, if planted, the property of the chief's. [PR 1921-22; 5/9/1922]

Whitehouse makes a laconic entry in July 1922: “Married at Oiabia. Left for Kaibola Plantation” (SJ 7/4/1922). His new wife is never mentioned by name, in fact not mentioned at all in future writings except when death or illness intrudes on Ernest’s official duties. The story of this couple’s courtship, and the forming and raising of European families in the Trobriands, is an unknown chapter that would be an interesting topic for future investigation.²¹ Two previous station journal entries give clues to the identity of Mrs. Whitehouse. Three days before the wedding, Whitehouse records the arrival at Losuia of the mission launch *A.K. Bromilow* bearing the Reverend and Mrs. Bromilow, Mrs. Gilford, “and Miss Tyford for Convention at Oiabia.” While this single lady traveling with missionaries is a possible candidate as Whitehouse’s intended bride, an even likelier subject is mentioned back in November of the previous year, in another typically laconic entry: “A.K. Kiribi returns to Samarai, Miss M. Inman calls at Losuia” (SJ 11/8/1921). The fact that Whitehouse records the visit of Miss Inman indicates that it is significant for him, and his mention of her first initial may be a subtle hint that she is more than just a casual visitor. The fact that her visit does not coincide with any inbound vessels shows that she arrived at Losuia overland, and must have come from quite close by as she was unaccompanied (white women, especially unmarried ones, would rarely go anywhere “alone” in colonial New Guinea, that is, unaccompanied by other whites), and her arrival alone indicates she couldn’t have had any business other than that of a personal nature with Mr. Whitehouse, as Whitehouse would have detailed the nature of any other business she had there. The likely conclusion is that Miss Inman was a lay teacher attached to the Methodist mission at Oiabia, and pursued a courtship with a likely match in the form of the young ARM stationed just down the beach at Losuia (missionary documents or other public records might confirm this as fact).²²

The marriage comes at a busy time for Whitehouse, who is immersed in the founding of a large copra plantation at Kaibola. The “Convention” at Oiabia was a fitting occasion to tie the knot, offering a rare European gathering of any decent size, but duty

²¹ Of a total “white” population of 32 in 1921, 11 are children.

²² A paragraph in the Sydney publication *Pacific Islands Monthly*, in a section devoted to the comings and goings of people associated with government and commerce in the Pacific, notes: “Mrs. Whitehouse was at one time a missionary sister in the service of the Methodist Church in Papua” (Anonymous 1937:14).

calls, and Whitehouse leaves the same day to spend a week in the northern part of the island.

After four years in residence, Whitehouse gives his opinion of the Trobrianders in a carefully thought out summary:

The people in this section have had among them Europeans for the last thirty odd years and, if considered as a body might be considered very industrious and law abiding. I feel however...that we are apt to over estimate these people's degree of civilization, and place them on the same level as ourselves, which unfortunately at present cannot be done.

Referring to the continued reliance on weather-making magic by the people of Mulosaida, despite having been under the instruction of missionaries living right next to their village for many years, and to statements made repeatedly by villagers that later turned out to be unreliable, he continues:

And so I conclude that too much reliance has been placed upon these people and that they are not so advanced as is generally stated, but that gentle and careful encouragement must be offered at all times and a careful watch kept on all their proceedings when engaged in work of a serious nature. [PR 2/1923-24; 10/30/1923]

So while Trobrianders are perceived as more advanced than other groups in the territory, they are still more like precocious children than adults relative to European culture, and are not to be fully trusted to think logically and to tell the truth. A watchful parent figure in the form of the ARM is still needed to help them along.

At the village of Tukwaukwa, not far from Losuia, Whitehouse encounters two law-breakers:

Two women were seen wearing calicoes [bolts of western printed cloth] on the upper part of their bodies, these were taken and burnt and the wearers cautioned that a repetition of this breach would result in their being imprisoned. [PR 2/1923-24, 6/9/1923]

These women were in violation of a 1906 law that forbade Papuans from wearing clothing on the upper body. Ostensibly designed to protect indigenes from the unhealthy effects of seldom-washed western style garments, Schieffelin and Crittenden note that the law "also had the effect of keeping Papuans bare chested (and the women bare breasted) and so distinctly 'native' and unsophisticated in appearance" (1991:31). This encounter is a rare mention in Trobriand government documents of local enforcement of "caste legislation," laws mostly enacted for use around Port Moresby (other laws involved curfews, travel restrictions in and around the town, prohibition of indigenous use of alcohol, and proper deference to white colonials). In another case, Whitehouse makes a brief entry that poses more questions than it answers: "AC Waro prosecutes a female native for wearing clothes without permission" (SJ 5/17/1926). What kind of clothes? Whose permission must be sought, and why would (or wouldn't) it be granted? How does Waro "prosecute" the woman? (All promising questions for further research.)

Another instance suggests a difference in enforcement of clothing regulations between subdistricts:

Counted eighteen Dobu and Dum-Dum canoes in Trobriand waters all “Kula” and trading bent. A large percentage of these men were reprimanded for wearing cotton singlets [tank tops], much to the amusement of local natives. ²³ [PR 12:25: 1927; 5/18/1927]

This strengthens the notion that Whitehouse ran a very “tight” district, that is, he followed the letter of the law down to the last detail, whereas other district officers may have chosen a looser interpretation of certain ordinances, or were stretched so thin that they had neither the time, resources nor energy to fully police their districts.

Although Whitehouse ruled the Trobriands for ten years, he was at heart a medical man. He was drafted into the position of ARM from the medical service, and ended up as a magistrate only because the position at Losuia was seen as a dual one of administrator of both the hospital and government station. After leaving the Trobriands he returned to a strictly medical job on the island of Misima (Anonymous 1937:14), but would continue to revisit and work in the Trobriands, both as a medical officer and as a soldier in WWII.

Alex Rentoul, ARM

Whitehouse was relieved as ARM in 1928 by Alex Rentoul, another career officer. Rentoul first came to Papua in 1916 as an employee of Burns & Philp, the primary shipping company in the territory, but soon found his way into the government service. He was perhaps a bit more open minded than Whitehouse, with a relaxed style of governance more in keeping with Lieutenant Governor Murray’s philosophies. While maintaining the discipline of the government station and flexing his muscle where needed, Rentoul leaned towards a “hands-off” style in dealing with indigenous matters, a sharp contrast to Whitehouse’s focus on development. For Rentoul, “Native custom” was a thing to be cherished and protected. This view could put him at odds with the resident missionaries, and he gives his opinion of them in his very first patrol report:

Passed on to the fine village of Lobua (pop 66) the most picturesque and also the cleanest I have seen this trip. This is an old fashion place away from missionary influence, and seems to have benefited by the latter fact. [PR 1/1928-29; 11/8/1928]

In the same report he faults the missions for not supporting the vital institution of chieftainship, thereby hamstringing the government’s Indirect Rule:

I think that in this particular district no better way can be found of governing the people than by taking advantage of their already established feudal administration. The Mission apparently gives the chiefs very little sympathy or support, and the economic fabric suffers accordingly. [PR 1/1928-29; 11/9/1928]

Whereas Whitehouse discounted sorcery and cast dispersions on those that feared it, Rentoul lent credence to local concerns. Writing on the relative merits of houses flush with the ground and those raised one or two feet on stilts or lumps of coral, he writes:

²³ While “Dobu” canoes are clearly from the neighboring island of that name, it is not clear what Whitehouse’s reference is when using the word “Dum-Dum,” which doesn’t correspond to any nearby island. *Dumdum* can be translated from Kilivilan slang to mean “heavy seas” or “surf,” also “the playing of a porpoise,” so he may be referring to a certain type of canoe.

All seemed to me to favor the raised house until I was presently informed by the chief that the danger...was that at night time opportunity was given for wicked old men to light their small fires [under the house] and poison the inmates with the fumes of a plant procured from the bush. I of course assured the chief that whatever type of house the people preferred, that should be the one to follow. [PR 1/1928-29, 11/8/1928]

Reprising this opinion in the summary of this report, Rentoul's brief statement reclassifies Trobrianders, from Whitehouse's benighted natives in need of guidance in all things, to people with more wisdom relating to their way of life than a visiting European: "They should certainly know their own needs best."

Rentoul returns to the issue of sorcery on his next patrol which includes a visit to Omarakana, and laments the heavy hand used by the government early on, which undermined the chieftainship:

Now there is beneficent as well as malignant sorcery, and it seems a pity that more discrimination was not used during the first impact between the government and this intricately system of chieftainship founded not altogether, but to a certain extent on the power of the sorcerer. [PR 2/1928-29; 11/15/1928]

Rentoul's liberal view of governance was relative, and he was by no means ready to do away with time-tested practices. Village order and cleanliness was still a priority, and he wasted no time in using the gaol to encourage those that let slip:

Inspected the villages of Oiweoa and Teavi. The extreme cleanliness of these two villages was in contrast to their dirty appearance a week ago, when I convicted a number of males of neglect on N. Reg. 90(4). Fishing villages are notoriously difficult to keep clean, but now a genuine attempt is being made to keep both villages in some semblance of order. [PR 4/1928-29; 12/20/1928]

Rentoul comments on the wide variation of conditions and attitudes between villages in the Trobriands:

On to Idaliaka, a rather miserable village with a small population. It is a fact that these villages have differing temperaments and personalities just as in the case of individuals. One can sense a happy and contented village before a question is asked. [PR 9/1928-29; 5/8/1929]

Later the same day Rentoul reports an unexpected encounter as he continues his patrol:

Shortly after leaving Mwatua heavy rain began to fall, and on the verge of the big swamp came on a party of ten men who had a log chair or stretcher waiting to bear me across the ocean of green to isolated Kuluvitu. I did not like the idea of being carried, not ever having experienced that kind of thing before, but as I saw that the party would be genuinely disappointed at my refusal I allowed them to bear me across the two miles of swamp. By making constant changes of bearers they managed almost to trot along through knee deep ooze, singing out lustily the while.

This anecdote provides enough questions for a multi-page analysis. Briefly; the first impression is that while it is possible that these men had quickly built a litter on their own initiative for this particular occasion, it is much more likely that they were in the habit of conveying the ARM in this manner on a regular basis, and that Whitehouse must have

arranged this service. No other mention is made of being carried like royalty over swampy ground, and this goes against the usual image of ARMs as intrepid “outside men” (hence Rentoul’s unease). This raises questions regarding Whitehouse’s attitude towards his position and his charges, and highlights the fact that colonial administrators working in remote areas had nearly unlimited powers, and needed to police themselves. Whitehouse was assuredly a dedicated and hard-working officer, and perhaps this was one small indulgence for the sake of comfort and perhaps ego. The remaining issue is the men’s enthusiasm for the job, which reflects the acceptance and perhaps reverence given to the administration by the late 1920s.

New leadership can mean a shakeup in the order of things not only for indigenes, but for Europeans as well. During Whitehouse’s reign, the trader Mr. Lumley was often mentioned in a helpful light, loaning tools, giving lifts on his launch, and frequently visiting the government station. While Whitehouse was diligent in his capacity as overseer of all native labor and frequently visited planters and traders to inspect working conditions, perhaps his friendship with Lumley prevented him from recognizing problems. Rentoul writes:

Went on and reached Mr. Lumley’s Pearling and Trading Station at 10:15 am...Both these people [Lumley and his wife] are rather “difficult” from a native labor standpoint, but since I convicted both of them of assault on native labourers in October last, no further complaints have come from their direction, and everybody appears to be happy. I shall make an inspection again early in the new year. [PR 4/1928-29; 12/20/1928]

A later comment suggests that Mrs. Lumley’s demeanor is one root of the problem, especially when Mr. Lumley is called away and she is in charge of the station:

Called at the trading station of Mr A.C. Lumley finding him away in Samarai...enquired into various complaints by natives that they had not been paid for services rendered etc. Mrs. Lumley is very impatient with complainants and requires very tactful handling to prevent her from assaulting the complainant. [PR 5/1928-29; 2/23/1929]

Rentoul also reports that Mrs. Lumley buys local food at only a third of the normal price for resale “on the mainland”; he offers to pay a fairer price at Losuia but this means the sellers would have to carry their produce down from Kaibola (PR 5/1928-29; 2/24/1929).

Rentoul also acts to protect villagers from the excessive zeal of certain missionaries. While most locals honored the Sabbath, it was not a crime to work on Sunday, and Rentoul traveled to Omarakana to confront a newly arrived Fijian teacher who apparently felt it was:

It appears that on occasion he chased people from their gardens, confiscated their tools and held them until Monday. Several times his actions had amounted to common assault. In conversation with this man, he cheerfully admitted the facts, and stated that he was following out the custom of teachers in his own country. As he was a new arrival I contented myself by explaining to him that such methods would not be tolerated in this Territory. I do not think he will offend again. [PR 8/1929-30; 11/27/1929]

While his predecessors all seemed to appreciate their charges in different ways, Rentoul’s writing displays a special fondness for Trobrianders. His loving eye opened a

new window into the world of the people, and added a sentimental twist to scenes of everyday life. On the Trobriand love of gardening:

Agriculture is a passion with these people, and one will often see a man with his wife and child, having finished every possible task they can find in the garden, sitting for hours just watching it grow. [PR 11/1929-30; 2/19/1930]

Rentoul's tenure as ARM signaled the end of an era. Gone were the days of Bellamy and Whitehouse, when Trobrianders could become intimately familiar with the habits and expectations of an ARM who held the post for a decade. Starting with Rentoul, ARMs were generally posted to Losuia for only two years (with the exception of ARM Austen who held the post for five years, see below). While longer postings were possibly more favorable for the locals, the territorial government prioritized the career development of its officers by giving them as much experience of the entire territory as possible, which meant a string of postings to various districts over time. Offsetting the detriment of shorter postings was the increasing professionalization of officers. While by no means interchangeable, the men that followed Rentoul were all well-educated and trained for magisterial work, and wrote similarly detailed reports. All took an active interest in the cultural life of the Trobriands and wrote at length of the doings in the villages. While showing sensitivity and leniency where fitting, they did not hesitate to use their powers to the fullest to ensure that orders were followed.

A. C. Hall, ARM

Rentoul is promoted and leaves Losuia in 1930 to head up the Southeastern Division, becoming A.C. Hall's (the new ARM) direct supervisor. Typically, Hall could be a harsh disciplinarian one minute and a caring patriarch the next. Visiting the small western island of Kawa, Hall orders immediate action: "Turned these people out and made them clean up the village and ordered them to clean up the road immediately and to keep it clean in the future" (PR 8/1930-31; 12/17/1930). Hall then plants a mandarin tree for the villagers and hands out seed-corn.²⁴

The government's continued dependence on local traders for transportation is evidenced by a brief patrol to Muwo Island and Sinaketa in which Hall, accompanied by RM Rentoul and Dr. Bellamy, makes use of four different launches "kindly loaned" by various traders (PR 3/1930-31; 8/26-28/1930). While traders apparently conveyed patrolling officers short distances as a favor, on longer journeys, such as trips to Sim Sim, the word "loan" really means "rent," as Hall records paying "Tobacco for loan of aux. cutter 'Sofia' @ £1 per day plus cost of fuel used: £8/15/9" (PR 11/1930-31; expenses sheet). At £1 per day, launch rentals to the government was very good business.

Hall encounters the same varied conditions that his predecessors did. Some villages do everything expected of them, others need constant supervision to keep their grounds and assigned roads clean, and some ignore repeated orders until hauled into Losuia for prosecution. Siviagila is a model village: "This is a very clean village and the

²⁴ The small and fairly remote western islands of the Sim Sim group were not patrolled as much as other parts of the Losuia subdistrict, and suffered from a lack of services on top of their perennial lack of natural resources such as fresh water and housing materials. They also had little or no warning of the approach of the ARM, so could not hastily tidy up as villages on the main islands often did.

houses are in good order. A nice lot of industrious people”; but nearby Wabutima gets a failing grade:

Instructed the VC to bring these people to Losuia for prosecution re dirty road – no attempt has been made to clean this section although they knew I was visiting their village today. [PR 6/1930-31; 10/30-31/1930]

This comment reveals Hall’s attitude that villagers should know to tidy up before he arrives. In contrast to Whitehouse, who often tried to appear unannounced for maximum effect, Hall seems to view patrolling as something of a game, in which all participants should know the rules. Villagers should know he’s coming, and should make the appropriate preparations. This belies a somewhat cynical attitude, where the notion that while on patrol the ARM is inspecting conditions that should always prevail is replaced by a system where villagers must go through certain motions in order to present a certain appearance to the ARM, who knows that these conditions do not prevail in his absence.

A typical sentence for dirty roads is seven days hard labor, handed out to a large section of the male population of an offending village. A later entry shows the priorities of the locals: around Omarakana, Hall finds “flourishing gardens” but “dirty roads” (PR 9/1930-31; 2/4-5/1931).

In 1931 Hall reports on a cluster of alleged poisoning cases in southern Kiriwina, as modern substances abet the traditional penchant for “sorcery”:

Inquiring into poison cases at Sinaketa. It is alleged that several natives of this district have cyanide or other poison in their possession. I was successful in finding one bottle only and it is hoped that when a Regulation is made against anyone having poison in their possession to take action [sic]... Previously three bottles were found in the possession of different natives. [PR 2/1931-32; 8/13/1931]

The next day, at Kiribi (elsewhere spelled as Giribu, Gilibwa, etc.) more poison is in the air:

Continued inquiry into poisoning charge against Mrs. Marion Hancock (half-caste Greek-Papuan). The main witness in this case seems to be Jack Parascos who is at present serving 4 years i.h.l. [imprisonment with hard labor] in the Port Moresby gaol for manslaughter. [PR 2/1931-32; 8/14/1931]

The same day, just down the road at Wawela: “Inquiry into alleged poisoning case against one Carpenter, a Suau man, but although I get many allegations in these cases I am unable to get any real proof.” Whether these are real poisoning cases, or just a new fad in accusations and paranoia (from fears of sorcery to fears of poisoning), is not known.

Poisoning fears are not confined to southern Kiriwina, but are shared by the new Paramount Chief:

The spear pump²⁵ which was recently erected near the Rest House is working well and is used by all the villagers of Omarakana and Kasanai except Mitakata, his brother and immediate relatives. I am informed that Mitakata and his relatives do not drink this water because they are afraid of poison; they obtain their drinking water from a place near the beach. [PR 4/1931-32; 9/21/1931]

²⁵ A new means of drawing well water introduced throughout the Trobriands in the early 1930s.

While some Trobrianders continue a traditional way of life and adhere to indigenous beliefs, others amend their lifestyles under the influence of missionaries, and displays of affection for colonial culture are often self-styled interpretations. Visiting Tobaada, Hall is treated to an unexpected performance:

Just before leaving a few natives, including a Missionary teacher, formed up in front of the Rest House and sang God Save the King and then the Missionary teacher made a short speech and presented me with 2 fowls, yams and pineapples and bananas. This little affair was something new to me and I just mention it by the way. [PR 4/1931-32; 9/24/1931]

Leo Austen, ARM

Hall is succeeded by Leo Austen, an avid student of anthropology. After a five-year stint as ARM, he will go on to author numerous scholarly works on Trobriand society. Having obviously done his homework by reading Malinowski, his first order of business is to travel up to Omarakana to meet the new Paramount Chief, Mitakata. Austen is well prepared for the meeting, and is mindful of the intricacies of rank and privilege: "Spent the afternoon talking to Mitakata and others through Interpreter Pilolu, who fortunately is also of the Tabalu subclan." This initial report includes a lengthy discussion of the prospects for chiefly succession, the relative rank of Mitakata's kin, and the stiff relationship and comparative prestige of Mitakata and Uwailasi, Moliiasi's successor as Toliwaga of Kaisanai (PR 5/1931-32; 11/30-12/2/1931).

In the same entry, Austen mentions the spear pump previously noted by Hall, but fails to make the poisoning connection when he writes:

At present the women of high rank will not draw their water from there, but that is on account of its innovation and I think they will eventually fall into line with the others. I spoke to them on the subject.

Like Malinowski, Austen's focus on rank may blind him to other factors at work on the Trobriand social landscape, or perhaps his academic readings still lack the augmentation of time spent on the ground and in the villages. Hall and Rentoul may both be correct in regards to the hesitancy of the Tabalu to use this new pump, as fears of poisoning and fears of contamination through contact with lesser lineages are both likely.

Patrol officers at times tend to omit certain facets of life, especially negative observations beyond their control to remedy. Not much detail is given about life on the smaller western islands of the Sim Sim and Lusancay groups, until Austen arrives on the scene to give us a slice of the sometimes-grim reality of life in the threadbare villages of these windswept specks of land. Visiting Kawa, he writes of entering the village:

Men and women busily trying to tidy a wretched collection of hovels... A poor looking lot – a mixture of Kiriwina and Goodenough [Island]. Very little garden land and trade with Goodenough and Ferguson is for garden produce giving in exchange mostly tortoise shell. There was practically nothing I could do for them.

Austen finds the villagers particularly depressed due to an outbreak of influenza, and the low mood infects the patrol:

Walked back to the launch and spent a bad night. A guba²⁶ came up and we moved to shelter off the S.E. end of the island only to find the wind had veered by the time we reached it. Back we went to our old anchorage and bobbed like a cork the rest of the night. [PR 6/1931-32; 1/8/1932]

Austen's knack for understanding Trobriand culture serves him well, when indigenous pride prevents him from helping Sinaketa after a flu-induced bad harvest:

Offered the people 500 baskets of Taitu but it was refused as the people stated they could not accept a present of food as it reflected on their pride as gardeners. Told them they could pay for the food if they wished later on, but they still refused. No argument of mine could get them to accept the food until late in the afternoon I had a brain wave and asked them if I could make a Sagali (ceremonial distribution of food) for the late big chief Todawada. Yes, I could do that so they have agreed to accept the 500 baskets as Sagali. [PR 2/1932-33; 8/31/1932]

In the same entry, Austen mentions another custom that he is curtailing after the bad harvest:

I told all the villages they were not to make "simukai" or usual presentation of food to the mission...Perhaps I should not have interfered...but I did not want to take any chances of the people handing out food they could ill afford to part with, and each would vie with the other to make as big a present as they could so as to not feel ashamed.

This comment reveals a relatively new practice that has become customary, and shows how the mission exacted more than just a moral tribute from its converts. The intercession of the ARM places him as an indigenous advocate and ombudsman.

While Austen was mindful of the importance of preserving indigenous custom, he worked to weaken some traditions that perpetuated inequalities between "commoners" and high-ranking lineages. His methods were often carefully thought out but indirect, seeking to use economic means to alter social relations. This contrasts with the simple use of decrees:

I have divided the prize for best general gardening... into three parts. One part of £4 to go to the best all round garden. 10/- to the man winning the largest crop from individual effort in the inland villages and 10/- to the individual winner from the salt water villages. This was done to break down the old custom which prohibited commoners from gaining more food from their efforts than the relations of the chiefs. It is having a good effect. [PR 1/1933-34; 7/24/1933]

Austen viewed himself as something of a social engineer. Despite placing emphasis on the preservation of tradition, he was still committed to development and "advancement," but felt that this must proceed with caution. He perhaps saw himself as an engineer carefully adjusting the dials of a gigantic and complex engine, as opposed to someone like Whitehouse who perhaps viewed himself as a carpenter tearing down an old and dilapidated building in order to replace it with a better version. Austen notes: "My work here is a matter of slow growth and I am merely scraping on the surface of things" (PR 4/1933-34; 9/25/1933). This comment is made while arguing for the establishment of an agricultural school. Austen wants the Mission to staff such a school with Fijian teachers who would teach the Kiriwinans the finer points of crop rotation,

²⁶ Motu for "wind."

which would relieve the demand for more land to cultivate. His closing remark discounts the Trobrianders' legendary skills as horticulturalists:

After all, though Kiriwina is noted for its yams and taitu, one cannot say that it is due to good gardening, but more due to richness of the pockets of soil which lie between the heaps of collected coral.

Ivan Champion, ARM

Leo Austen was stationed at Losuia until 1936, but took an extended leave from December 1933 to June 1934, during which time Ivan Champion stepped in as ARM at Losuia.²⁷ Champion is a legendary figure in Papuan colonial history, and came from a family devoted to the territorial service. Born and raised in Papua, Ivan and his brother Claude joined the government service as young men, and both proved to among Murray's hardiest "outside men." In 1926-27, along with Charles Karius, Ivan spent nearly a year forcing a crossing of mainland New Guinea at its widest point, discovering along the way the source of the great Fly River (Champion 1966; Souter 1966:159). This expedition won acclaim not only for the difficulty of the country through which it passed but also for the fact that it passed through the lands of many warlike and unpacified tribes without firing a single shot in anger. Ivan was 22 at the time. His father, H.W. Champion, spent four decades in the government, as Treasurer, Government Secretary, and finally as Acting Lieutenant Governor upon Murray's death in 1940 (Souter 1966:101n).

Champion's patrol reports are terse but cover all the usual points of village inspection, tax collection and health. He is sure, however, to point out anything interesting to be heard in the villages, often on topics regarding domestic life. At Bwadela he comments on the large number of girls who had married laborers brought from the D'Entrecasteaux islands to work at Muwo plantation, only to be deserted when the men returned home:

The people seemed very angry. I told the councillors [sic] that the matter was in their hands. This may be the reason why nearly all the youths in these villages were married to women from 38 to 45 years of age. [PR 8/1933-34; 1/6/1934]

Some of Champion's entries seem to be an effort to spice up otherwise dull reports, for the entertainment of his superiors. At Sinaketa he finds a man suffering from a long succession of runaway brides:

This is Gomaia's seventh wife and apparently most of them had left him because he was so lazy. His present wife refused to come back to him for the same reason. Gomaia got no sympathy from the villagers. [PR 8/1933-34; 1/7/1934]

Champion finds both the village of Sinaketa and its chief to be lacking in the charm and enthusiasm for government typical of most other villages:

²⁷ The patrol reports from the Trobriands between May 1934 and June 1941 are missing. Austen's last extant report dates from October 1933, and Champion's reports run from December 1933 right up to the break in the record. No mention is made in these reports of a leave of absence, but Austen writes elsewhere that he served at Losuia into 1936 (1945a:17). The obvious inference is that Champion relieved him for the standard six-month furlough given to other ARMs after roughly two years on the job.

Chief Lalasi did not impress me at all. At present he has not got a wife as the women do not like him. Why, I don't know. I got the impression that the Sinaketans have not much deference for authority at all. On two occasions they have even refused to supply a canoe and crew to Government officers. [PR 8/1933-34; 1/10/1934]

Champion peppers his reports with brief impressions of other villages. At Gilibwa: "This was the cleanest village I had seen on this visit but the people do not seem very bright" (PR 8/1933-34; 1/7/1934). At Kaisiga on Kaileuna island: "These people do not look very bright on account of the depressing environment I suppose – swamps and mosquitoes" (PR 9/1933-34; 1/29/1934). At Boitalu: "Though the Boitalu people are despised by the Kiriwinans they impress me as being more energetic than their neighbors and rather good looking natives" (PR 10/1933-34; 2/9/1934).

At Moligilagi on the east coast of Kiriwina, Champion fields a query regarding customary activity during *kula*:

Here the councillor asked me if there was a law preventing single boys and girls sleeping together, as when his people went to Kitava the native missionary had chased the girls away from the beach where the Trobrianders were camped. I told him there was no law preventing it. [PR 12/1933-34; 3/29/1934]

This is an incident that Champion would have chosen to avoid involvement in for two reasons. Firstly, while the preservation of native custom, especially against the inroads of over-zealous "native missionaries," was certainly a government priority by this time, the fact that the custom here was premarital sexual adventure made it unsavory for the ARM to defend. Secondly, the island of Kitava was not a part of the Trobriand subdistrict before WWII, so the incident took place outside of Champion's jurisdiction. He could have written to the RM in Bwagaoia, who was technically in charge of Kitava, but again the nature of the complaint made this unlikely. But at least Champion did see fit to mention the episode in his report.

On another occasion Champion shows that he is not willing to allow the missionaries free reign. At Koma:

Inquired into an assault case in which Inosi, son of the Mission teacher had assaulted his wife...The councillors pretended they knew nothing about it and then admitted that they did but thought it was the business of the Mission. I told them that the Government was responsible for law and order and not the Mission. [PR 14/1933-34; 5/4/1934]

The councilors' reticence is understandable, as they wouldn't have wanted to get caught in a conflict between the government and mission. While the government was technically the supreme power in the territory, when the ARM sailed away in his whaleboat the people had to deal with the missionaries who remained in their midst.

Chapter 3: Health

In 1905, hospitals for the European populations of Samarai and Port Moresby were just getting off the ground, and one small “Native Hospital” had just been built at Samarai. There was no quantitative information on indigenous populations anywhere in the territory:

The recording of disease incidence was qualitative. Populations were estimated and there was no census. There was no recording of native births and deaths apart from those in gaol or in government employment. [Black 1957:234]

In the Trobriands, a handful of European missionaries and traders were in residence, but government consisted of occasional visits by the Resident Magistrate of the South-eastern Division headquartered at Woodlark Island. Reports by RM Moreton and the Chief Medical Officer of the Territory suggested that the population of the Trobriands was declining, perhaps due to Syphilis or some other venereal disease. Reports also stated that “Manilamen” (Filipinos) and Malays were frequenting the islands in some numbers to collect *beche-de-mer*, and were spreading disease through contacts with local women well known for their promiscuity.

Venereal Disease

Captain F.R. Barton, Administrator of British New Guinea, visited the islands with Moreton and instructed him to build a special hospital at Losuia for the eradication of venereal disease, not only as a humanitarian project, but also to prevent a spreading epidemic that might jeopardize the well-being of the entire Territory. R.L. Bellamy was chosen to run the hospital, a natural choice not only for his medical training, but also for his administrative experience elsewhere in the territory. Bellamy would have to govern the subdistrict and police the Asian visitors thought to be largely responsible for disease, while implementing a sound program for eradicating VD.

The fact that the founding of resident government at Losuia was ancillary to the opening of the hospital ensured that a primary concern of the colonial government throughout its rule would be the health of the islanders. Bellamy wrote an annual report for the hospital in 1907 in which he gives an overview of the health situation of the subdistrict (see Cover Page: Figure 6, p.28). He did find that several types of VD were widespread and that they had taken a toll on the population: “...these, in all the complex of forms in which they are presented, have undoubtedly been the plague...of the island group.” He goes on to lament:

That a people naturally so industrious, comparing so favourably with other Papuans in their physical development, possessing an inherited contempt for idleness so pleasing as it is here in Papua, that such a community should be so cursed with the blight of venereal called loudly not only for expressions of regret but also for some administrative remedial action. [in AR 472b/7; 7/1/1907]

These comments set the stage for a vigorous program of treatment and prevention that would last 20 years.

Bellamy’s hospital opened for business in October 1905. The first order of business was to convince a skeptical population that VD was spread through sexual

contact, and that the white man at the new hospital offered effective treatment. Two months later Barton returned to find that Bellamy had been fairly successful in this, and that patients were beginning to present themselves at the hospital for treatment. The challenge was to get them to stay for the time required to effect a cure. Bellamy wrote that the villagers were willing to stay for about three days, but then felt the need to return to their villages and gardens.

After some time, Bellamy began to feel that he was not seeing all venereal patients at the hospital, only those with the time for an extended stay and faith in his efforts. He finally decided that more aggressive measures were required, and set out on January 1st, 1908, to examine every man, woman and child in the subdistrict for symptoms of VD. Thus arose the concept of the “medical patrol,” wherein the medical officer went out to actively seek disease. This concept would eventually be adopted throughout Papua and New Guinea.

As Bellamy set out on his first tour of inspection, he kept fastidious records, out of which arose the first comprehensive census to be undertaken anywhere in Papua. Upon finding people with symptoms, he was able to compel them by law to come to Losuia for treatment, armed with the Native Regulation Board’s Regulation Number 1, which required infected persons to present themselves for treatment at the nearest colonial hospital. This law also required VCs to report cases in their jurisdictions, but these men could not be expected to be able to seek out and identify all cases. Only the vigorous programme of inspection instituted by Bellamy could hope to expose each and every case.

Bellamy’s other chief foes at the time were malaria and dysentery. These two became problematic only in the rainy season, and while many cases were treated at the hospital, the main action taken against these were in the areas of village and household sanitation.

The prevalent types of venereal disease mentioned in the record are “granuloma,” and “chancres” or “venereal sores” (for instance, PR 1/1920-21: 7/20/1920). Granuloma Inguinale is a “mildly contagious venereal disease occurring predominantly in tropical areas and more frequently affecting dark-skinned people, characterized by deep, purulent ulcers on or near the genital organs” (Mabey & Richens 2003:450). Chancres are “a primary sore or ulcer at the site of entry of a pathogen, especially the initial lesion of syphilis” (Mabey & Richens 2003:443). So the risks for indigenes were twofold: a disfiguring and potentially life-threatening tropical condition, and a debilitating and possibly fatal syphilitic infection. In his 1907 report, Bellamy roughly classifies the VD cases seen during the previous twelve months (July 1906 – June 1907) as:

Chancres	148
Syphilis	21
Ulcerating Granuloma	15
Other Conditions	26

Ever the exacting statistician, Bellamy explains why he calls this list a rough classification:

The exact classification of these 205 cases is well-nigh impossible because only a few cases can be solely described as coming under the heading of one type of disease. The majority of cases are complicated by a variety of pathological conditions.

A perusal of photos in a current encyclopedia of tropical diseases will illustrate the gruesome reality of advanced cases of these diseases, as encountered by Bellamy. Of a total of six deaths reported at the hospital that year, four were from advanced VD.

From 1908 until 1929, a large chunk of officers' time was taken up with vigorous surveillance and documentation of VD cases. This entailed village "inspections," where people were lined up to have their genitalia examined by the ARM. The first mention of these in existing records is in Bellamy's station journal (see Figure 9; p.44), from early 1911:

Feb 4: Saturday. Heavy rains. Busy day with venereal census. Examined the males of [19 villages listed]... "Feb 11: Saturday. Examined the males of [20 villages listed]. All these brought to Losuia by their respective VCs" ...March 3: Busy day in hospital. Examined the women from the following villages: [10 listed]. [SJ 2/1911; 3/1911]

Bellamy was in the habit of calling in either the males or females of villages within walking distance of the station on Saturdays for this practice.²⁸ Villages further away or on neighboring islands were inspected during patrol visits. The use of the word "census" demonstrates the importance of quantification of the problem for the government, as is these comments:

Since January 1st...2701 men and women have passed through my hands for the purpose of examining for venereal. Out of this number only 15 cases were found needing treatment. I might mention that included in these 2701 were 315 old venereal patients. [SJ 2/28/1911]

Bellamy's comments here indicate his feeling that the situation is improving, at least for the time being.²⁹

No one was allowed to "slip through the cracks" of VD inspection. Any missing persons were diligently tracked down: "Sent Los. Cpl. Iivakai to Gumilababa this a.m. to inquire into the causes of the absence of several males from this village from the annual examination census" (SJ 3/1/1911). Some people were leery of these examinations, and made themselves scarce by retreating into the bush on the appointed day. Bellamy doesn't seem to understand why someone would object to his ministrations, and assures that all will eventually be examined. This entry concerns a visit to Laleia village on Kitava:

²⁸ We see that by this time the government had firm control of the populace of at least Kiriwina, and could direct people through their Village Constables to give up a day of their time in order to walk to Losuia (even in heavy rain) and have their privates examined by a westerner. Whether these people did this willingly, with a good understanding of the benefit, or begrudgingly, with knowledge of the penalties for disobeying, is not a part of our record, but judging from Bellamy's reports over the years, locals at first were compelled by force, but over time accepted the logic behind these practices and complied quite willingly. This was the case with many (but not all) of the government's programmes.

²⁹ Implicit is his demonstration of diligence in examining so many cases. Comments like these are common throughout the colonial period, in which the writer appears to use large numbers to show his superiors how hard he works.

For some reason these people were shy of the examination and I was only able to examine a small number. I left word that I should return the following morning and wait until they did answer to their names. [SJ 6/24/1912]

Return visits the next day or two, after making it clear that all would eventually have to be examined, usually sufficed to complete the task, as was the case here:

A large number of the missing ones turned up. It appears that they were afraid that I should find the cleanliness of their village unsatisfactory...at the end of the day I found that there were about 20 still missing. I camped the night at Laleia. [SJ 6/25/1912]

Most villagers eventually realized that their white visitor would not grow discouraged and go away, but would doggedly persist until all were examined. It was possible to stay away from the village for a day, but two or three would present a hardship. So by the third morning at Laleia: "All the missing with the exception of two married couples came in and were examined today." Married couples were a rare exception to "zero tolerance," when time constraints forced the officer to move on, as they were assumed (at least officially) to be at low risk for transmission, despite the prevalence of adultery charges in the record.

Knowing that word would spread of his movements and intentions, Bellamy sought to head off a repeat of his three-day effort at Laleia by sending word to the next village:

I pushed on to Okabulula, having sent them a message by Gumakosa, their VC that I was coming and did not wish to find any of them missing in the bush...I found the men of each hamlet lined up on the tracks...and all were easily examined. [SJ 6/26/1912]

The women were collected in a central hamlet and also easily examined. Again, one married couple was missing, and Bellamy left Ilavatanna, a female hospital attendant, and her husband to await their return (this couple apparently accompanied Bellamy throughout this patrol but were not mentioned previously).

During this patrol 13 active cases of venereal sores were taken from their villages for transport to Losuia for quarantine and treatment, but two women thought better of it and disappeared while camped on the beach: "Sent V.C. after her [sic]. Brought back at daybreak."

Meanwhile, Ilavatanna had fallen ill and couldn't walk, so Bellamy ordered her to be carried for the remainder of the patrol. He comments on a prevalent situation:

I am always sorry when anything goes wrong with any of my assistants during the examination of people for venereal as the relatives always put the sickness down to sorcery on the part of some of the discovered venereals. This was Bunwagela's opinion about the sickness of his wife. [SJ 6/27/1912]

Similar descriptions of venereal examinations are a regular part of the record for over twenty years, as villages are called out, lined up, counted and checked. Some go smoothly, and others require a bit more time and persistence.

Bellamy relates a bizarre episode in June of 1914:

At Okaiboma I saw chief Tomainua. It has always been a rather sore point with chiefs this medical inspection, and I remember Tomianua's indignation when I said he would have to come to Losuia. That night Tomainua, to further mark his displeasure, sharpened his knife on a stone and going to the back of the sick quarters hacked and sawed off his prepuce [foreskin]. He then sat down to let matters take their course. Later on I had to deal with a collapse due to haemorrhage. [SJ 6/2/1914]

This story, left off without further comment, leads to speculation as to Tomainua's motive in committing such an act of self-mutilation. It could be seen as an act of resistance to the usurpation of his chiefly power, turned inward. Just as shame often leads to suicide in the Trobriands, this chief's shame at being rendered as just another common venereal patient perhaps led him to attempt a form of genital suicide.

During the same patrol of June 1914, the line between medical work and law enforcement becomes hazy. Bellamy is given the names of three men who are alleged to have persistently avoided inspection, having escaped attention by not appearing for the census. He sends a VC to their village to arrest these "venereal suspects," who are brought to Losuia and "dealt with in the Court for Native Matters." A series of regulations had been enacted early on regarding VD, so anyone who avoided inspection, or knowingly spread VD through improper sexual liaisons was considered a criminal (SJ 5/15/1911). In 1918 ARM Campbell, Bellamy's successor, writes of similar problems, and of his diligence in assuring a complete inspection at Kuiaua:

One boy ...did not present himself...and I remained on the island all day and that night endeavoring to get him in, but without success. During the week I shall send a number of VCs to arrest him. I can only conclude, in the circumstances, that he is suffering from venereal disease. [PR 1/1918; 8/10/1918]

This final comment points out the importance of apprehending "VD fugitives," beyond the need to prove the futility of defying the administration: those that avoid inspection are the most likely to have active cases, and so the most likely to spread these diseases, negating all the work of inspection and treatment.

In the 1920's, ARM Ernest Whitehouse showed a rare (for the time) sensitivity to the feelings of the indigenes by conducting his examinations in the privacy of a tent he would bring along on patrol and erect in each village (PR 2/1923-24; 10/30/1924).

Granulomas, chancroids and other genital ulcers were treated "with large doses of potassium iodide combined with ordinary antiseptics and a calomel dusting" (in AR 1914-1915:55). Bellamy, and later Whitehouse, performed surgery to remove larger ulcerations: "...I made arrangements with the VCs to collect all venereals found for return to Losuia...four require operating upon" (PR 315/14; 11/18/1914)... "Eighteen of the venereal cases required surgical interference" (in AR 1914-1915:148). Whitehouse writes in 1920 of visiting Kitava for the sole purpose of venereal exams "in view of the prevalence of Granuloma," and brings 33 "serious cases" back to Losuia for "surgical treatment" (PR 1/1920-21; 7/20/1920). Black notes that Bellamy won respect from local "sorcerers" or traditional healers, by removing 67 ulcerations from a single patient (1957:62).

While by this time these diseases were endemic to the Trobriands, ARM Whitehouse faults the annual *kula* for bringing new cases to the villages: "I find that there is a slight increase...which occurs among those members of the Kula expeditions who visit the neighboring islands" (PR 7/1925-26; 1/30/1926).

By 1929 the efforts of inspection, quarantine and treatment had apparently paid off, and the VD epidemic was brought under control, at least for the time being. In the final report of that year ARM Rentoul declared that “The routine inspections for VD are a thing of the past,” but described continuing medical inspections at each village visited:

As soon as I arrive in a village kibis³⁰ are blown and those in the gardens and plantations hurry to the village, and in a short time there is a good muster... Then the writer passes along the line passing his eye up and down each person, and questioning those not in an apparently robust condition. In this way superficial troubles such as ulcers, kuhi-kuhi [scabies] and yaws are soon identified, and the patient advised to proceed to Losuia for injection and treatment... While I go down the front of the lines, the native Medical Asst. goes down the rear, and at the same time a constable peers into each dwelling to report any cases that are too ill to appear or are in hiding. [PR 8/1929-30; 11/30/1929]

Rentoul reports that these continuing inspections resulted in excellent health and low incidence of these customary ailments in most villages visited.

Rentoul seems to have perfected the art of the “soft touch,” as opposed to earlier officers who found themselves beating the bush to find and arrest medical fugitives. Granted, the seriousness of the VD epidemic, and its ability to defeat efforts at control if just one patient escaped treatment, encouraged draconian measures, but Rentoul’s approach, using “tact, commonsense and method” seems to have encouraged the Trobrianders to voluntarily come forth for inspection with good humor:

So used to these inspections have the people become, that as soon as they see a patrol coming, they now sound the kibis for a muster parade, and the whole thing is looked upon as a pleasant interlude in the monotony of a long day.

While Rentoul was a gifted writer and clearly enjoyed producing highly descriptive and entertaining reports for his superiors, the detailed descriptions of inspections given here are in response to a directive from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in Port Moresby instructing officers not to force treatment on anyone who was not willing to receive it (CMO 50/90; 7/23/1929).³¹ After reading the report, the CMO sends Rentoul a memo, heartily agreeing with his methods:

Medical treatment in the main cannot be successful without one first acquires the confidence of the patient. If such is obtained questions of compulsion hardly arise. [CMO 555/90; 12/21/1929]

Other Diseases

Along with the campaign against venereal diseases, the administration waged war against several other health threats during the period between the World Wars. Most patrols of this period freely administered remedies against hookworm and other intestinal parasites, which were prevalent throughout the islands: either “Oil of Chenopodium” or carbon tetrachloride. These two remedies were somewhat interchangeable as supply allowed, despite the fact that one was an herbal remedy and the other a chemical compound, although Whitehouse writes of a preference for the latter, because “...with the oil, there is always a tendency towards vomiting, irrespective of whether the oil is given

³⁰ Motu for “shell trumpet,” or conch.

³¹ Not extant in the record but mentioned by Rentoul in PR 8/1919-30; 11/30/1929.

with sugar or any other compound” (PR 2/1922-23; 12/19/1922). Villagers came to accept these doses as something of a panacea, and swallowed them with gusto. Such was the enthusiasm for the *dim-dim* (white man) elixirs that Whitehouse notes one village where a child, born while he was there giving out doses, was named “Obukumum,” or “Come and drink the medicine!” (PR 2/1923-24; 10/25/1923).

During the early 1920s doses of “Chenopodium and Salts” were given to all members of each village visited over the age of five. Whitehouse relates a 1922 visit to M’tau on the northeast coast of Kiriwina:

The people were given a short lecture concerning the efficiency of Oil [of] Chenopodium in the matter of internal worms. Of course they receive this information as they receive other things of which the “Dim-dim” tells them... without any look or expression of surprise! At first, one is rather apt to misunderstand them but when, as one becomes more acquainted with them, he begins to realize that these natives possess a lot of knowledge concerning their ailments; cause and effect. As soon as the Oil is produced and the measuring glasses placed upon the table, there is a marked hush! And a few boys disappear and return carrying a quantity of sugar cane. I would not say that the natives of any of the villages object, on principle, to the taking of the oil, providing they have a piece of cane or other sweet fruit to chew immediately afterwards! On the contrary I have had repeated applications at Losuia for a second dose by some natives from every village that I have administered the Oil. [PR 4/1921-22; 3/8/1921]

Later, carbon tetrachloride given in conjunction with “Oil of Croton” replaces the herbal oil and Epsom salts (as supplies allowed).³² In 1925 Whitehouse waits at several villages after giving out doses so that he can study the effects first-hand, and then report satisfying statistics, for instance at Kavataria: “Gave Carbon Tetrachloride x croton oil and had excellent results, eight percent passing ascarides [a type of roundworm]” (SJ 10/30/1925). Later Whitehouse witnesses more dramatic results as a woman receives the treatment and shortly vomits up a six-inch worm (SJ 1/25/1926).

Frequently mentioned in reports are “ulcers” of varying severity, and their treatment. In tropical climes, the smallest scratch or cut can slowly fester without immediate cleaning and treatment, and in time can become a large ulceration bearing no resemblance to the original wound, and a threat to life and limb. The establishment of village medical attendants, with basic training in primary care of small injuries, was largely aimed at curtailing the large numbers of these runaway infections. In 1923 Whitehouse writes of a visit to Vakuta:

Here commences a vigorous campaign against ulcerative diseases, with the best available medical requisites and attention, together with the assistance of the ‘peoples’ native medical advisor... Thirty cases came voluntarily for treatment, and I anticipate that on the last day here, such progress will have been made that the minor cases will be sufficiently advanced [to allow self treatment with ointment until healed], whilst the more serious cases will have formed such a favourable conception of the ultimate results that they will be desirous of proceeding to the native hospital at Losuia. [PR 1/1923-24; 9/11/1923]

³² Epsom salts were given with the Chenopodium oil, as a laxative to help pass the parasites that the oil killed. Later, doses of anti-parasitic carbon tetrachloride were mixed with “Oil of Croton” for the same purpose. Ironically, both carbon tetrachloride and croton oil were later banned due to their toxic nature.

Here we see how Whitehouse views his work in the villages as not only aimed at achieving his immediate ends, but also at persuading the inhabitants of the efficacy of western medicine, and of the value of journeying to Losuia for treatment if needed.

Apart from these “common” ulcers, Yaws was also prevalent, being an infectious condition producing swelling of the joints and ulceration. Until the 1920s, Yaws was treated by cauterization, dressing, and medicines given orally. By 1923, Whitehouse had begun to treat Yaws with injections of Salvarsan, an arsenic-based compound. He notes that intravenous treatment was met with great interest, as the Trobrianders understood the power of “spearing” a patient since their own sorcerers had long employed sharp objects to introduce substances into the blood of their victims (PR 3/1923; 11/28/1923). Five years later, Whitehouse again comments on the power of injections in the minds of Trobrianders, this time as a weapon against the fear of sorcery:

I am confident these injections with their obvious results are dispelling the recognised and inherited belief in the power of the sorcerer (black magic) who must be at his wits end to inflict ailments that defy the efficacy of the “spear” (intravenous needle) and his living must surely be in jeopardy? [PR II:25:28; 3/5/1928]

Similarly, Austen reports enthusiasm for injections of bismuth salicylic as a general tonic, given out by his medical assistant:

During the morning Pilolu gave 51 injections of Bismuth Salicylic to those that came in from surrounding villages. The people take very kindly to injections and some come along to have an injection when there is nothing much the matter, but they have great faith in this medicine. [PR 3/1932-33; 10/2/1932]

Leprosy, while not rampant, was present in the islands at this time. While treatment with sodium hydrocarbate was extremely effective in controlling progression, and even healing facial lesions, sufferers were still forced to live in exile beyond the confines of their villages (PR 2/1923, 1/23/1923).

While dysentery could be contained by aggressive measures (see below), not much could be done when other western diseases swept through the islands. Austen records an influenza outbreak in the western islands of the Lusancay and Sim Sim groups:

Arrived at Kawa Island...People all look very ill. They say they have all been ill for two months...I gave out a fair amount of quinine, not that it would do much good medicinally, but it has a good effect on native morale, and this wanted raising as they were very down in the dumps. Even so there has been only one death since the outbreak.

Moving on to Sim Sim:

People just left village on Simsim for the other island – Wagalasa. ‘Flu is still raging here and the first three deaths took place some days ago, so people decided to vacate the island until epidemic had abated. They are wise as Simsim is very windblown and is probably cold at night. [PR 6/1931-32; 1/8-9/1932]

Austen records another epidemic the next season, and his remarks show how deadly the imported flu virus can be to indigenous populations with little or no resistance:

The 'flu is now gradually abating and within a week or two should have disappeared. Total deaths since the 'flu began about middle June is somewhere around 120. A fair proportion of these are over 38 or have been on the sick list for many months, still there is no doubt that numbers of strapping youths have passed out in this epidemic... I was hoping to show a slight increase when the final census sheets are typed, but I fear there is little hope now. [PR 2/1932-33; 9/3/1933]

Sanitation

From the very outset of colonial administration, a foremost concern in regard to health was village and personal hygiene. Building design, water supply, and general sanitation were seen as the main culprits behind the prevalence of disease. One of the earliest correspondences we have from colonial Kiriwina, a dispatch dated July 1897 from Sir William MacGregor, the first Governor-General of British New Guinea, during a visit on the government yacht *Merrie England*, describes the prevalence of dysentery, and efforts to remove a suspected cause: "... over a score of dead bodies from graves in the villages to places in the cemeteries..." The English had established these cemeteries away from village sites and forbade the customary practice of keeping the dead near at hand by burying them right outside (or sometimes directly underneath) relatives' huts. The reasoning was that, apart from western revulsion at having dead bodies underfoot, the corpses were in porous ground that allowed ready seepage into nearby water supplies. The people were uncomfortable with this new arrangement, as to them it amounted to exiling their loved ones to the bush, where anything could happen to them. This is an early example of the perennial conflict between Trobriand custom and western health concerns, which continued throughout the colonial period. The fact that the British and Australians never attempted to quash local culture on general grounds (unlike some missionaries), but instead always had some reasonable health concern, did not make it easier for the locals to comply. MacGregor continues:

During the first few years of my residency in this country no case of dysentery became known, but lately there has been an epidemic of this disease in these villages, probably caused...by village burial. [Dispatch #44; 7/8/1897:38]

The fact that village burial had been taking place long before the outbreak of dysentery was not considered.

The fact that cultural beliefs and practices tend to die hard, and often creep back into use, is shown by comments made over three decades later by A.C. Hall, ARM, regarding burials moving closer to villages over time:

It was noticed that in a good many places the people have been burying their deceased relatives quite close to the villages...In several places I personally pointed out suitable places for burying grounds [PR 1/1930-31: notes; p.6]

Dysentery

The seriousness and recurrence of dysentery epidemics is evidenced by ARM Bellamy's comments in station journals of 1911: "Still a lot [of dysentery] about. 85% infants and very young children and almost invariably fatal." In the same entry Bellamy mentions an interesting opinion regarding prevention: "Two Manilla men's boats in. Glad

of this because it means betelnut and betel means less dysentery” (SJ 6/7/1911). Another entry of that year indicates a specific cause of an outbreak at Obulaku:

As a result of a close enquiry the outbreak appears to be connected with the eating of a diseased pig by the villagers. The pig was suffering from a “cough and scouring.” Ten people have died...Pigs and dogs had died wholesale. [SJ 4/9/1911]

Also noted in this entry is a visit to an “isolation camp” on the beach, presumably for quarantining the victims. One year later this practice is confirmed: “VC Kumlosiu reports one case of dysentery at Mwataua. Ordered him to isolate the case on sand beach. Arranged for treatment” (SJ 4/9/1912).

Along with local quarantines, Bellamy tries to stem outbreaks of dysentery by interrupting travel to and from affected sites. In 1912, after writing of the death of a Muwo Islander who had recently returned from Dobu, he reports: “All visiting between Kiriwina villages and Muwo Is. has been stopped. As rigid a quarantine as possible will be observed” (SJ 3/19/1912). One month later:

The second death occurred today on Muwo Is. One of the three remaining cases. Have written to R.M. E.D. [Resident Magistrate, Eastern Division] to tell him not to sign on any more boys for work on this Is. until I report it clear.³³ [SJ 4/15/1912]

While the annual *kula* expedition ranks among the top priorities of participating villages, the prevention of dysenteric outbreaks was an overriding concern for the colonial administration. When these two came into conflict in 1924, a rare instance of wholesale disobedience of a government order ensued. ARM J.G. Fowler (standing in for Whitehouse during a three-month leave) reports:

As an outbreak of dysentery at Dobu had been reported... I forbade the Sinaketa natives to go to Dobu. They went in defiance of my order, the night of the same day the order was issued. [Memo 519/Staff/24; 7/3/1924]

Upon his return, Whitehouse sentences 66 Sinaketans to a month’s hard labor for this willful disobedience (SJ 5/24/1924). All parties’ hands were tied, in that the Sinaketans could probably not conceive of canceling the *kula* for the year (but went immediately and at night in their discomfort at having to go against the ARM’s orders), and Whitehouse could not let such a transgression go unpunished.

Later in 1924, Whitehouse gives a detailed daily account of his efforts to contain a virulent outbreak of dysentery. He hears of symptoms at Mulosaida and Kavataria on a Sunday, and the next day admits twelve cases into his hospital. He immediately asks that the mission school be closed indefinitely. Within 48 hours of the first signs, he has confirmed “bacillary dysentery” and the machinery of public health swings into high gear. A circular is sent out to all Europeans “asking for assistance in detection and isolation of cases in their respective locality.” The two affected villages are ordered “closed,” barring anyone from visiting or leaving. Prisoners are tasked with preparing the hospital for an influx of cases and constructing extra commodes. Whitehouse visits the affected villages to seek the cause: “Villages exceedingly clean and latrines all in order.

³³ Men in colonial Papua who were not clearly elderly were commonly called “boys”.

Suspected a waterhole on the foreshore of Kavataria and had this filled in.” Both villages are requested to use only the waterhole at Losuia for their drinking water. More cases are brought to the hospital, all children except for one adult. As treatment takes place (no details are given except for an entry which states that Whitehouse “spent the whole day giving injections”), prisoners are kept busy “destroying dysenteric faeces [presumably by burning] and sanitary work.” A crew is also sent to the affected villages to burn all bedding and mats in the patients’ huts, and then “the floors and walls of the dwellings received a good washing down with a strong Lysol solution.” Other villagers, impressed by these industrious “slush-downs,” and perhaps by the strong aroma of Lysol, asked that their huts be disinfected as well. The grass around the hospital is scorched with flaming coconut fronds.

Whitehouse drops all other work to spend three weeks tending to patients and supervising sanitary work. As new cases begin to tail off, he gradually resumes other duties.

While sixty-four cases were admitted to the hospital and fifteen children died, Whitehouse managed to confine the outbreak to the two initial villages. Mulosaida and Kavataria remained closed to outsiders for six weeks, and thirteen women were arrested and fined for leaving the infected villages. A nervous eye is kept on a few new cases of diarrhea, but all are found to be the usual problems from eating new yams from the gardens. As a final precaution, Whitehouse burns down the two hospital buildings used to house the dysenteric patients (SJ 9/14-11/1/1924).

Village Hygiene

Throughout the colonial era, Papuans were urged to keep their villages and hamlets clean and tidy by picking up all refuse, animal droppings, and other debris. So important was this goal to the Australians that a regulation was enacted in 1905 that made it unlawful to reside in a “dirty village” (“Reg. 31, Sec. 4”; SJ 5/29/1911). In 1911 Bellamy tries numerous Trobrianders for this offence on different occasions, and keeps his gaol full of laborers. Most sessions of his “Native Magistrate Court,” held twice or thrice weekly, and in which he is the judge, jury and reporter, result in convictions for this offense. Most entries are terse and without specifics, but in June we are told that he has charged and convicted 16 offenders in one session (SJ 6/5/1911). ARM Bellamy takes his village hygiene seriously, and wastes no time in attempting to cajole residents into compliance, especially when a conviction not only sends a clearer message to the offending village, but also supplies ready labor for the extensive construction and improvement projects taking place in and around the government station at Losuia (building coral walls, filling in nearby swampland, extending the wharf, pruning fruit trees, etc.), not to mention the “morally uplifting” effect of hard labor on the islanders, as previously mentioned (see p.16). Missionaries are also taken to task for not looking after their leases, sending a bad message to nearby residents:

The only really abominably dirty village places that I saw [during this patrol] were the mission leases at Koma and Kaduwaga. Both in charge of native converts. I am calling the attention of the Rev. G.R. Holland to the matter. The reg. I of 1905 is strictly carried out in my district and I have already spoken to the mission about the same matter of their uncut untrimmed sections in the midst of a clean village. I only wish that I had the power to arrest some of their [illegible] but as the section is leased to them I cannot. [SJ 5/29/1911]

The source of Bellamy's frustration is the fact that native ordinances do not apply to lands leased either by missions or white traders. Note here that Bellamy appears to conflate hygiene and aesthetics, as "uncut" and "untrimmed" grass and vegetation are his specific complaints, which in his mind amount to an "abominably dirty" situation.

Occasionally an officer will find a village that captures the ideal of hygiene and aesthetics so cherished by the colonials. ARM Campbell writes of one such village, and notes the relationship of capable and intelligent leadership to order:

Boitavaia is the model village of this part of Kiriwina. It is situated on ground a little higher than the surrounding country. Houses are kept well apart, and there is an oval space in the middle, and the place was scrupulously clean. The chief is an intelligent man, and was evidently much pleased to hear his village complimented upon. VC Towakaiwa is in charge. [PR 1/1916; 2/13/1916]

Sometimes a village will take the government's suggestions so completely to heart that even the ARM is surprised at the result:

The people of Wawela appear to have gone to extremes in their house-building. Find that all their dwellings have been rebuilt since my last patrol to this vicinity with sago leaves as thatch and walls, an area well-kept below and a clear five feet from the floor to the ground, surely the native mind is a complex matter, four years ago they were afraid to open the sides of their houses for ventilation as the evil spirits would enter, now, without any encouragement or instructions they go to the extreme? [Whitehouse: SJ 6/11/1926]

The fact that Wawela was known to house powerful witches may have made them feel secure enough to raise their dwellings off the ground.

Having worked hard to instill the precepts of village hygiene, in 1925 Whitehouse feels that sufficient progress has been made to allow a further step in aesthetic improvement, one that was previously thought to endanger general cleanliness:

I explained to the natives that grass could now be allowed to grow on the village dancing greens and roads, as I believed that they had absorbed the principles of sanitation. [PR 2/1925; 3/11/1925]

What better addition to a tidy village's cleanly swept grounds than extensive lawns? But so diligent was Whitehouse's efforts at instilling the habits of village cleaning that some effort was required to get people to let the grass grow. Summarizing a tour of northern Kiriwina, he writes:

Village grounds are as yet bare, grass is religiously uprooted by the women and every effort is exercised to instill in their minds that if it is allowed to grow it will not only minimize work but will prevent the dust nuisance. [PR 9:25:27; Summary]

Housing

House accommodation is, in Kiriwina, for the numbers of people, extremely limited.

Sir W.M. MacGregor, 8/4/1891.

The traditional Trobriand house is a small hut built low to the ground, with a dirt floor, constructed of woven palm mats with pandanus or sago thatch roofing. These huts were generally small affairs, roughly saddle-shaped, with little attention paid to uniformity, comfort or permanence, as they were essentially places to sleep and little more. Most of life's activity would take place outside, on a small porch or in and around the village. Early colonialists were of the opinion that these dank, dark "hovels" were decidedly unhealthy, and efforts to improve the situation continued throughout much of the early colonial era. Such close contact encouraged the transmission of disease, namely dysentery, hookworm, and later tuberculosis, so the construction of larger huts with more "airspace" was encouraged, as well as the use of standardized design and construction, resulting in a dwelling with straighter dimensions that were comforting the European eye.³⁴ All patrols included inspections of huts, and those deemed to be the worst were ordered pulled down and rebuilt. In 1922 ARM Whitehouse commenced a more general rebuilding: "VCs...are instructed to cause men of each village to collect poles and material for building standard houses in every village" (SJ 7/3/1922).

Whitehouse comments in 1924 on the results of his effort in this respect:

The houses having increased both in size and workmanship must be a blessing to the occupiers since they have added room – more air space and greater comfort. A glance into the interiors is sufficient to convey the degree of comfort and the pride taken in the houses by the inmates who have now a clean woven mat and mats of native materials spread out on the floors instead of the dirt floors and its unpleasant odour so common a few years ago. [PR 9/1924-25; 12/7/1924]

New huts were built on a "rectangular plan with span roofs and a much larger size than those previously erected" (PR 2/1923; 1/23/1923). Whitehouse characteristically quantifies the improvement: "[T]he cubic capacity of air space has been doubled by the invention of this type of house in the last four years" (1/25/1923), but elsewhere the aesthetic motivation for these efforts is apparent: "I had to remonstrate with the natives for not complying with the Govt. Orders concerning the building of *respectable* houses" (PR 2/1921-22; 5/9/1922, italics mine).

While an increase in airspace and the introduction of flooring probably did improve health, the desire to increase the distance between huts is perhaps more suspect:

The tendency to "huddle up" the houses together has been modified and one now finds between them intervals of between four to six feet, a condition which will considerably add to the general health of the people. [PR 2/1925-26; P.3: Summary]

As noted previously (p.16) with regard to the British in Fiji, the spacing out of huts, ostensibly for hygienic purposes, served as an aid to greater surveillance by colonial masters.

³⁴ For a discussion of the British penchant for straight lines and squares in an African colonial landscape, see Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:280-1.

Another factor of concern to the colonial administration was the adverse effects of huts being at ground level, making drainage poor and putting sleeping bodies in contact with the damp earth. From very early on efforts were made to get Trobrianders to raise their huts a few feet off the ground on stilts or blocks of coral. ARM Campbell writes in 1915 of the peoples' objection to this: "[T]hey were afraid of the 'devil-devil' coming at night if space were allowed under the floors of their houses." Campbell thinks of an easy remedy:

I then suggested that the space could be filled in with stones, in which case the unwelcome visitor would find the accommodation limited. The suggestion was received with quiet smiles, expressive probably of pity for my ignorance. [PR 2/1915-16; General Remarks, p.2]

Persistent fears of sorcery would hamper efforts to raise houses for the entire colonial era.

Most Trobriand villages are ensconced in a grove of coconut, betelnut and shade trees. While these trees provide shade and some protection from wind and rain, the colonial predilection for airspace, order and openness was sometimes expanded from individual dwellings to entire villages in the form of cutting back overhanging limbs and felling senescent palms. Whitehouse writes of a visit to Sinaketa:

A large quantity of overhanging foliage and trees has been cleared from the precincts of this village together with a goodly number of very old decaying coconut palms, resulting in a much cleaner village.

Similarly at Okaiaula:

The village...was clean but I cut down quite a number of shade trees and ancient coconut palms that had begun to rot which left the village grounds quite clear and open. [PR 8/1924; 6/23-24/1924]

In 1927, Whitehouse's housing improvement programme suffers a setback from an unexpected source. Writing of a visit to Ialaka, he states:

I have made a point of telling the chiefs in the hearing of the male population, H.E.'s desire in respect of their dwellings; that is the construction of their homes on the same model as their forefathers. [PR 9/1925-26; 3/22/1927]

Apparently "H.E" (His Excellency, Lieutenant Governor Murray) decided that the introduction of the "new" type of house conflicted with his emphasis on the preservation of indigenous culture (his specific correspondence with Whitehouse is not in our record).

With colonialism on such a small scale, policy often resided with individuals rather than institutions. Alex Rentoul, the next ARM, had a more liberal take on housing (in keeping with Murray's views), preferring to "live and let live" rather than remake villages for the sake of order and hygiene. He seems to celebrate the polyglot situation that had developed, especially on Vakuta:

The architecture of Vakuta village is a weird and wonderful thing. Besides the original native house shaped like a hayrick, there are types of the new rectangular house to be found, as well as a new departure in a kind of Fijian type of house built under the direction of the Fijian missionary. I assured all these people that their original type of house, if the most suitable for them, should not be departed

from, and that if they wished them to be flush with the ground to prevent the operations of sorcerers, that was their own business. [PR 3 1928-29; 11/28/1928]

This new attitude did not prevent him from maintaining some standards, as on this visit he did order three dilapidated houses demolished and rebuilt.

Rentoul approves of efforts to reverse Whitehouse's housing "improvement" program:

Noted that several of the houses which had been built in rectangular form, had now been rebuilt in the oval or original manner. This is a step in the right direction, and I mentioned my approval to the people. [PR 4/1929-30; 9/13/1930]

Similarly, on a visit to Gumilababa:

Met old chief Matakata who pointed out to me with much pride a row of six new houses recently completed, all in the old time oval roofed fashion which has proved so satisfactory in the past. [PR 10/1928-29; 6/13/1929]

In 1934, ARM Champion shows his preference for orderly housing hearkening back to Whitehouse during an inspection of Kuiaua island (elsewhere written as Kuyawa): "Village houses are in poor order and I told the councillor that I wished to see better houses on my next visit," and later that day on Munuwata: "Village in fair order but told villagers to try and get their houses more uniform" (PR 9/1933-34; 1/ 28/1934). For Champion, uniformity of house design is as important as upkeep: "Made an inspection of Wawela village. In fair order but houses are of various types" (PR 8/1933-34; 1/11/1934).

The colonial penchant for order was not confined to village life. Starting in the mid-twenties, prizes were given each year for the "best-kept" gardens and native plantations. Notable here is that the prize is given not for the most productive garden, but for the tidiest. This twist takes some time to explain to the locals, and in this quote from Whitehouse, order and productivity have completely parted ways:

Paid to Gliopela of Kulua the sum of £5 in the presence of most of his villagers for...the best kept garden. It is necessary to explain this in detail as it is liable to cause considerable trouble, the local men believing the best garden to be the one which produces the largest and most number of yams and taitu. A carefully weeded garden with well-built pig resisting fences for the past year resulted in the allocation of this prize to the men of Kulua. [SJ 6/8/1926]

Latrines

Before the arrival of colonial government, people in Trobriand villages would walk a short distance into the bush to relieve themselves. Freely roaming village pigs would dispose of most of the result. This system, while not perfectly hygienic, did keep the village and its environs relatively free of human waste. The planting of many young coconut trees around nearly all villages under Bellamy, the first ARM, soon upset this organic waste management system, as pigs now had to be kept penned lest they eat the vulnerable shoots.

The advent of white-owned copra plantations saw the beginning of a recognition that sanitation was a problem to be addressed. Plantation workers formed a concentrated

population that could not simply disperse its waste in the bush, but instead had to use latrines. These were at first simple pits, often not dug deeply enough to be hygienic, and were “poorly managed,” meaning that laborers often decided that defecating in the general vicinity of the latrine was good enough. Consequently, hookworm became endemic to these plantations.³⁵ The sanitation problem is fleshed out in March of 1919, in correspondence between ARM Whitehouse at Losuia, the Government Secretary, and W. M. Strong, the Acting Medical Officer in Port Moresby. The Secretary comments on the highlighting of sanitation at plantations:

I do not quite understand why so much care is taken to provide proper sanitation for native labourers when the total lack of any sanitation in villages is taken as a matter of course.

The Medical Officer replies:

“The prime reason is that Ancylostomiasis (hookworm) has been found to be very prevalent...on plantations and if precautions are not taken will probably get worse. I have never seen the fearful conditions in villages which I have seen on plantations around latrines (so called) improperly managed. The population of an ordinary village is usually sufficiently scattered not to cause much of a real nuisance – of course pigs act as scavengers in the villages although this has its own particular dangers should certain diseases reach the country. I think we should undoubtedly begin with the plantations. They are under white control – sanitation should be easier to enforce – and the government more directly responsible for the candidates on the plantations. [Memo and reply 455/24; 3/5/1919]

Whitehouse describes the situation in Okinai and Osikwea, typical villages on Vakuta:

[The] bush is used as a latrine. However the number of natives here and the denseness of vegetation will not result in any serious epidemic as the water supply is far away from contamination. [PR 455/28; 1/23/1919]

While at this time sanitation in the villages is not a problem, it would go against colonial sensibilities to allow the situation to be determined by mere luck and the efforts of a few village pigs. While village sanitation has not previously been recognized as an issue, now that the subject has been raised it behooves the men of government to take some control of the situation. The first recommendations are speculative and somewhat vague. Returning to Strong’s memo:

Something could perhaps be done by a discreet RM or ARM to encourage natives to use the sea, a beach below high water, or at least not to use the roads, to go not too close to the village, and above all to avoid [the] neighborhood of water holes and to protect these from surface water.³⁶

The subject of village sanitation is not raised again for some time, but by mid-1921 Whitehouse is beginning to arrange the construction of latrines, beginning at Losuia and its immediate environs:

³⁵ Hookworm is spread chiefly as infected fecal material is dispersed into the soil, and the parasite is picked up on the soles of bare feet.

³⁶ Strong is clearly passing on what has been suggested to him by Bellamy, who has recently returned to Port Moresby from Losuia.

Prisoners collect material for new latrine over creek for use of Station [SJ 8/22/1921]... Recommend that 2 latrines be erected over sea [at] Mission Station [and village of] Oiabia. [SJ 8/19/1921]

Soon all villages are requested to build latrines. The preference is for them to be built over the sea or over creeks where possible; failing that, pit latrines needed to be dug. Latrines are constructed in pairs, introducing villagers to the notion of separate facilities for men and women.

While pit latrines were ideally dug to a depth of at least twenty feet, this was usually impossible since the water table was struck at a much shallower level. Whitehouse's entry concerning the twin villages of Kaulaka and Loru on Vakuta gives a good example of the details of latrine construction:

The natives of the conjoint villages... decided to dig two privies and after a few attempts, succeeded in sinking them twelve feet deep without any water seepage. Over these holes they built a span roof and floored the privy with cane, leaving holes a foot square. These have been in use about six weeks before my inspection and at the time of my visit were clean and free from obnoxious smells. [PR 4/1922-23; 9/29/1922]

By this time Whitehouse includes details of latrines in each village visited on patrol, in a table at the end of each report (which also includes the number of houses and number of doses of Oil of Chenopodium administered at each village).

While latrine construction is half the battle, convincing people of the importance of using them is a more difficult step. Whitehouse incorporates a lecture on the subject into his village patrols:

The principles of re-infection [of hookworm are] carefully explained to the people with an exhortation to use the latrines and privies and not to wander into the bush as has been the custom hitherto. [PR 2/1922-23; Summary, p.7]

Results over the years are mixed, with some villages embracing the idea, while others simply pay lip service. Whitehouse comments after a visit to northern Kiriwina:

Several villages still adhere to the privy idea, inspection proving that these are utilized, I am sorry to state that in other instances the shelter over a hole is kept repaired but the building not used for the purpose which it was built [PR II:25:28; 5/8/1928]

Well-built latrines offer an aesthetic reward for the European visitor beyond the health benefit for residents. "The sanitary measures... have brought about a great change in the 'nasal tone' of the outskirts of the village" (PR 9/1924-25; Summary, p. 7).

Infanticide

While never proven, colonial administrators in the Trobriands held a long-standing suspicion that infanticide was practiced to limit family size, usually involving female babies. Whitehouse investigates a possible case and comments on the local attitude in the process. Conflicting statements are given by various parties, with the mother originally stating that she delivered the baby in the bush, but others swearing later that they witnessed a stillbirth in the woman's hut. Deeply suspicious, but limited by

jurisprudence, Whitehouse feels obligated to discard the case, “as no evidence can be obtained to lead to her conviction.”

Convinced that villagers are closing ranks to protect a dark secret, Whitehouse explains:

Probably the outstanding feature of such cases...is the deathlike silence of the natives in such matters as touching upon the death of new born babes. I find from experience that information on any other subject is volunteered, and in many instances...facts and figures are forced down one's throat, whilst in such cases as above, all the satisfaction one can obtain is a YES or NO to any question directed, which is most unsatisfactory. The longer I am associated with the natives the stronger my conviction becomes that abortive measures and infanticide is generally practiced, by what means – or what motive prompts such a pernicious custom still remains obscure. [PR 1/1922-23; 2/6/1923]

Traditional Healing

Bellamy's 1907 ethnographical report describes some indigenous medical practices:

In his practice of medicine and knowledge of surgery the native here is primitive in the extreme. For a bruise or headache, for localized body and limb pains his favourite method is to get some of his women folk to gash long lines with a sharp shell or bit of sharp coral in the surface of the skin and then bleed him freely. For a headache he chooses the forehead.

He has his own medicine-men but these would seem to depend more upon the superstition of their patients than on the remedial effect of any medicines given. Incantations – mysterious mumblings repetitions [sic] – blowing into a patient's ears – the inhaling of smoke from the burning of certain woods – spitting over the body certain substances chewed in the mouth – all these have their place in the native system of treatment. [MR 1074/07; 7/26/1907]

The common colonial opinion implicit in Bellamy's writing, that traditional medicines and healing practices constitute a roadblock to western medical intervention, is displayed more overtly by Whitehouse in 1925:

I am of the opinion that the time has arrived when the village doctors should be dealt with as sorcerers. In some instances...their offices bring about a large amount of good, but the attending evil which accrues from the attention given to patrons suffering from chest complaints, abscesses, yaws and the simpler ulcerations is lamentable.

He continues to describe the habit of afflicted persons going to stay in a healer's village, where these diseases may not exist, and spreading them through the agency of flies: “Of this source of infection I am convinced by close observation and frequent contact with these people.” He laments the fact that the hospital at Losuia is mostly used as a last resort by advanced and otherwise hopeless cases, instead of a primary care and treatment center as designed, and draws support for his claims from:

Local native mission teachers... [who] state that fully fifty percent of the deaths that occur could be prevented if the sufferers had no other alternative than that of visiting the native hospital for treatment... [PR 7/1925-26: Summary]

Whitehouse describes a more pragmatic indigenous practice in 1923. A mother's cries alert him to a child who has fallen into a waterhole and apparently drowned:

The gaol warder then rushed forward and seizing the child by the ankles threw it over his back, head downwards, face towards his back, and commenced to gallop for one hundred yards and then back again, on his return a second man caught the child and repeated the gallop again to be relieved by a third man and so on.

After twenty minutes “there were a few stifled cries,” but the process was continued for another twenty minutes, after which the child was fully revived and was taken home and put to bed. The next day Whitehouse reports seeing the child “walking about the station apparently quite well.” He is told that in the case of an adult, two men would each take a leg and would simply run a shorter distance before being relieved (SJ 2/28/1923).

Whitehouse is relieved in 1926 for six months by G.F.W. Zimmer, whose experience in other districts enables him to give an objective opinion of the state of the Trobriands after twenty years of colonial rule:

As a result of my first patrol in the Trobriand Islands I could not help noticing the absence of sores and the general good health of the natives, this is only natural I know with all the medical attention that it has been given for many years, but it forms a very strong contrast to the general health of the districts I have patrolled during the last 5 or 6 years. The cleanliness of the villages and roads is also very noticeable, showing the concentrated attention that it has been possible to give to a small district. [PR 12/1924-25; 2/13/1925]

Owing to the historical factors surrounding the foundation of the government station at Losuia (namely, the concurrent founding of the “Special Hospital” to curtail the VD epidemic), the Trobriands received preferential treatment in areas of health, relative to other districts of Papua. Due to the geography of the island group, the Trobriand subdistrict was unusually small, allowing the ARM to spend more time in each village. These two factors led to Zimmer’s “very strong contrast” in conditions relative to other districts. Here we can see one example of why the Trobriands were special to the colonial government, in a similar way in which they continue to be special to anthropology.

Chapter 4: Economic Development

The only indigenous commercial contact with westerners reported by MacGregor in 1891 was the small-scale sale of *beche-de-mer* to occasionally visiting traders, in exchange for hatchets and tobacco (Dispatch #51; 8/4/1891:5). His comment (see p.34) on the potential for the Trobriands to become “an important trading center,” given the development of an industry around an exportable product, set the stage for decades of attempts by the government to find and develop that product. That these attempts would never fully come to fruition was perhaps foreseen early on by ARM Bellamy when he discouraged his brother-in-law from investing in any Papuan ventures (Black 1957: 197).

Pearls

The black-lipped oyster *P. margaritifera*, known locally as *lapi*, is in the Trobriands confined to the large lagoon of Kiriwina. Malinowski notes that *lapi*:

...has been fished and collected from time immemorial, as providing the native with the most important edible mollusk. When in opening the shell the natives would find a large, beautifully rounded off pearl, they would throw it to their children to play with. [1935:18]

In his 1911 annual report, Bellamy also asserts that the Trobrianders had no interest in pearls until the arrival of western traders:

It is interesting to remember that less than 25 years ago the frizzy-haired Trobriand native, when taking his evening meal, was in the habit of disgustedly expectorating and, in all probability with much uncomplimentary language, ejecting from his mouth pearls similar to those which today are worth anything from £1 to £150. In those days he used to kick his wife for her carelessness in serving food from which she had failed to remove all the “stones.” And, later on, when the first white trader came along, he is credited with having filled a pickle-jar with pearls at the cost of two or three pounds of tobacco, and the native thought the white man a fool for buying such rubbish. [AR 1910-11; 7/1/1911]

The pearling industry would become the primary source of income for indigene, trader and government alike for the first 20 years of the century. Traders looking to cash in had to buy a government permit, and could only buy pearls from unindentured local residents. Bellamy explains:

The diving for “lapi” is confined by ordinance to unindentured native Papuans. These sell their pearls to duly licensed white pearl buyers. The cost of a license is £50 for twelve months. [AR 1913-14, 7/1/1914; p.44]

Bellamy reports a harvest of £4,000 to £5,000 per year by 1914. The sale of licenses constitutes practically all government income at Losuia until the institution of the native head tax in 1921 (see below). In 1911 pearling licenses account for £325 out of a total revenue of £354.

Buyers of pearls set up shop in and around Sinaketa, a large village on the lagoon south of Losuia. Together with the Vakutans, the Sinaketans were the ablest sailors in the Trobriands, building large canoes and voyaging over open seas southwest to Dobu and east to Kitava each year to engage in the *kula*. With the *lapi* fields confined to the lagoon, it was relatively easy for the government to oversee the industry. Nearly all pearl divers

were from villages on the lagoon, but the income generated by the industry trickled inland through family ties and trade, with coastal villagers regularly buying food from inland people with cash or tobacco from pearls (see Bellamy's comment on this; p.55).

In November of 1911, Bellamy prosecutes trader N. Campbell (no relation to J. Campbell, Bellamy's successor as ARM) for anchoring on a *lapi* patch and feeding and housing indigenous divers on site, a clear violation of the pearling ordinance. While no record of sentence exists, a safe assumption is that Campbell was fined and reminded of the rules (SJ 11/24/1911).

In August of 1912, trader Campbell must leave for Samarai, and asks Bellamy to transfer his license to a native while he is away. Bellamy does so, but notes, "Some of the pearl buyers objected to the transference of licenses to natives but there is nothing in the ordinance to prevent it" (SJ 8/1/1912). The white buyers felt threatened, and by the end of the month had lodged a formal complaint:

Received petition from certain traders and pearl buyers against granting pearl licenses to natives or Manila men. Petition to be forwarded to H.E. [His Excellency Sir Hubert Murray, Lieutenant Governor of the colony: SJ 8/27/1912]

The record does not mention the outcome of this petition, but a later series of station journal entries indicates that it was successful. In 1921 Bellamy (back in the islands for four months to relieve Whitehouse while he takes a leave of absence) notes: "C. Lumley, licensed pearl buyer, complains that Emma Brudo the native wife of Samuel Brudo (away at present in Europe) is dealing in pearls," and two days later: "C. Lumley lays formal complaint about Emma Brudo's alleged pearl trading and asks for summons" (SJ 1/29-31/1921). The next day Bellamy the magistrate issues a search warrant and Bellamy the constable searches the Brudo home, finding eight pearls which Emma admits to buying from villagers. In Petty Sessions Court Emma is found guilty, and the pearls are confiscated. A month later the pearls are sold to the highest bidder amongst the local traders, netting £70 for the government coffers.

Later in 1921 prices for pearls in Europe dropped enough for Whitehouse to report that traders were no longer buying pearls from locals (SJ 11/18/1921). This spelled the swan song of pearling as the primary industry in the Trobriands. The fall in prices for pearls coincided with a general depletion of the *Lapi* beds: "Natives say the pearls are very scarce and difficult to find" (SJ 3/2/1922). While pearl diving would continue to be a source of income, the heyday when a trader could get rich while keeping a whole village employed was over.

Coconuts

At the outset of colonial rule the Trobriand population was fairly stable at around 8,500 (as estimated by Bellamy in 1907), and notwithstanding droughts and associated famine from time to time, was self-sufficient in its food supply. As the colonial administration began to reduce the death rate through medical programmes, the administration foresaw a time when the food supply in the subdistrict would no longer be able to feed a growing population, and a more substantial trade system would be needed beyond the traditional small-scale interisland activities. In short, the Trobriands would have to join in the modern world economy in order to survive. Various schemes would be introduced over the years and some traditional activities like pearling and carving would

be encouraged to expand, but the first and always foremost project was the production of copra. Demand was high in the early part of the 20th century, and the projected surplus population would supply the man-hours needed for a labor-intensive production process. Furthermore, coconuts provided a stable supply of nutrition that could mitigate the ravaging effects of crop failures that occurred from time to time.

This thinking applied to all of Papua, and in the first decade of the century an ordinance was enacted (mentioned by Bellamy as “Reg. 84 P.6”: PR 219/13; 7/31/1913) requiring the planting of coconut trees along all roads and tracks with suitable conditions. Native plantations were also established, groves of coconut trees to be tended, harvested and processed communally on a village-by-village basis. Thus began a project that would take up much of the administration’s time and resources, and cause much frustration throughout the colonial era.

The first existing mention of the coconut scheme is in May 1912, as Bellamy explains his plans and also why there was a hitch the previous year:

Have given all villages I have visited 3 months to get coconuts planted on their tracks. One man to plant 8 coconuts. There are many coconuts on the island, but are used altogether for food purposes so that it is very hard to get the people to keep them. I should have made a move before this had it not been for the failure of crops last year. All coconuts were stripped for the food on them which they were quite hungry enough to require. I felt under the circumstances I could not force them to plant at that time.

Last time I put the ordinance in force I succeeded in getting 6000 nuts planted but I had to get the nuts myself from the Sim Sim group and then exchange with the natives for food. They ask me to do the same this time but I think they should be made to use their own nuts. [SJ 5/29/1912]

By October Bellamy is ready to personally oversee more planting:

All preparations well in hand for coconut planting campaign. Every native has been ordered to have 8 nuts for inspection, to remain in his village until ready for planting. I intend getting the sides of all tracks planted. [SJ 10/7/1912]

Apparently not much heed was initially taken of Bellamy’s orders, as a few weeks later he reports a full prison work detail at the station: “Gaol 19 [prisoners] stone walling on boundary. Majority of prisoners are in for breach of Coconut planting Reg.” It is common for Bellamy to issue orders without much initial effect, then arrest a dozen or so shirkers in order to let the word spread of the consequences of ignoring the government’s priorities. From an entry two days later:

Canoe comes in from Kuiaua with 250 coconuts which I bought to exchange for native food. Nearly all the coconuts gone by night. Great enthusiasm for planting locally since the gaol began to operate. [SJ 10/25-27/1912]

After an unfortunate seven-month gap in the record, we return to the story in late July of 1913. We can safely assume that Bellamy has been busy getting coconuts planted, as in August he produces his first exhaustive and precise census of all coconuts planted along each track in the Luba district (central Kiriwina), totaling 6111 (Figure 15). He stresses the importance of the precision of this exercise, as well as perhaps a little pride,

by commenting: “These numbers are not an estimate but an actual personal count by the ARM Trobriands” (PR 219/13; 8/10/1913).

During the patrols that produced the coconut census, Bellamy discovers that the villagers are trying to circumvent his efforts:

Many nuts were planted but there were many gaps along the tracks. Had an idea that the people were hiding their nuts on account of the approaching feast and dancing season. Suspicion proved correct, searched their houses and found hundreds of nuts hidden away. [PR 219/13; 7/30/1913]

House-to-house searches for hidden nuts become part of the routine (Figure 16), at least until word spreads that no coconut stashes were safe from the government: “I proceeded along the track to Okupukopu and unearthed many nuts from their hiding places” (PR 219/13; 8/3/1913). People were made to gather up the discovered nuts and plant them along gaps under the watchful eye of the ARM.

At Obulaku, Bellamy puts the cart before the horse in his zeal to get coconuts planted, requiring villagers to cut a new track so it can be lined with nuts:

I got all the natives together and started them cutting a track between Kwabula and Obulaku. The usual means of communication is by canoe up the creek but seeing so many nuts...and knowing they have only the Wawela track to plant it seemed essential to get them to cut another track. The track will be cut today and I can superintend the planting tomorrow. [PR 219/13; 7/31/1913]

This extra track cutting and planting at Obulaku serves another purpose for Bellamy. The village chief, Kadilaku, had been sentenced to a term in gaol (for unknown reasons due to the gap in the record) but had escaped and was hiding amongst the many coral caves around Obulaku. Feeling that the villagers were aiding him in his flight from the law, Bellamy ensures that they recognize a link between this extra work and their chief’s continued status as a fugitive:

By...giving the village a new track to cut every morning with coconut planting every afternoon I secured their moral assistance, because they saw an indefinite vista of track cutting and coconut planting ahead and they did so want to go fishing...After enthusiastic planting their one wish was to get him in. [PR 219/13; 8/7/1913]

By discouraging the village’s support with this punitive planting program, and by guarding Kadilaku’s gardens where he might get food, Bellamy managed to force him to surrender, “Hungry but otherwise alright.”

A showdown between the government and the chiefs over the coconut planting scheme was inevitable, as the Paramount Chief in Omarakana traditionally claimed supreme right of ownership over all coconut and betelnut trees on the island, with lesser chiefs deriving local ownership through him, and commoners gathered and ate these nuts at his discretion. Much of the chiefly power structure on Kiriwina rested on this monopoly. The opening shot came at Kwabula (see Figure 16; p.104):

I visited Kwabula a few months ago and the village was then full of sprouting coconuts. Today only a percentage appeared to have been planted and there were few nuts in the village. On pressing a keen inquiry I found that chief Vanoi Kiriwina of Olivilevi [nephew of Paramount Chief To’uluwa] claimed their nuts as overlord and had taken them away. [PR 219/13; 7/30/1913]

Pattel Ldba District with part of Sinaketa July 30th 31, Aug 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
and 8th. 1913.

Tracks and number of coconuts planted on each under Reg. 84 P. 6.

TRACK	Losuia to Oiweoa	217
	Oiweoa " Teavi.....	241
	Teavi " Tokwauku.....	262
	Tokwauku " Okupukopu....	330
	Okupukopu " Ilalima.....	257
	Ilalima to Creek Head.....	181
	Ilalima to Wasapola.....	238
	Wasapola to Kaituvi.....	500
	Wasapola to Creek Head.....	96
	Kaituvi to Kwabula.....	309
	Kwabula to Creek Hd.....	53
	Kaituvi to Creek Hd.....	325
	Kwabula to Dubwaga.....	212
	Kwabula to Obulaku.....	426
	Obulaku to Garden beach.....	76
	Obulaku to Wawela.....	421
	Wawela to Keribi.....	65
	Wawela to Kaulasi.....	125
	Kaulasi to Gumilabwaga.....	11
	Gumilabwaga to Kawola.....	450
	Kawola to Korpila.....	65
	Korpila to Kaulasi.....	517
	Kaulasi to Creek Hd.....	28
	Korpila to Kanabaluka.....	47
	Kanabaluka to Livakaiviaka.....	25
	Korpila to Kasietana.....	134.

.....
6111

Equivalent at 50 to the acre to a plantation of 128 acres.

These numbers are not an estimate but an actual personal count by
the A.R.M. Trobriands.

R. L. Bellamy
A.R.M. Trob. Aug 10 1913.



Figure 15. Excerpt from Bellamy's coconut census, 1913.

Patrol .Obulaku and Luba District, July 30th 31, Aug. 1 1913



Object to affect arrest of escaped prisoner Kadilaku and inspect
and count the recently planted coconuts along tracks of Districts:

July 30th. After hospital work this A.M. I sent Const Laiteli with a prison crew in cargo boat with my camp gear to Obulaku with instructions to fix my camp in that village. I also sent word to certain V.C.s to report themselves at once to me at the same village. Taking Cpl. Bunuagola and three V.C.s I set off east towards Teavi intending to count all nuts recently planted between this station and Obulaku. From Oiwesa I went to Teavi. Called at N. Ministers station at Teavi. Then on to Tokwauku. From Tokwauku I took a canoe up the creek to Ilalima landing. From this landing I went on to the village itself.

Many nuts were planted but there were many gaps along the tracks. Had an idea that the people were hiding their nuts on account of the approaching feast and dancing season. Suspicion proved correct, searched their houses and found hundreds of nuts hidden away.

From Ilalima I passed on to Wasapola, Kaituvi and Kwabula. Much the same routine at each village. I visited Kwabula a few months ago and the village then was full of sprouting coconuts. Today only a percentage appeared to have been planted and there were few nuts in the village. On pressing a keen enquiry I found that Chief Vanoi Kiriwina of Olivilevi claimed their nuts as overlord and had taken them away. From Kwabula I took a canoe down the creek and finally reached Obulaku at 6 P.M. The two V.C.s here had no news of the missing prisoner. He is supposed to be hiding in some of the coral holes of which there are thousands. Camped.

31st. Showery. V.C. s and police all out after the missing prisoner. I went along the Obulaku track to Wawela counting the nuts. Before starting from Obulaku I got all the natives

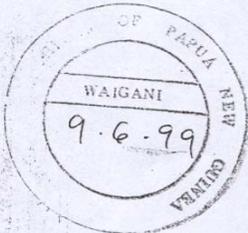


Figure 16. First page of Bellamy's 1913 patrol report, detailing counting of planted coconuts, house searches for hidden nuts, confiscation of nuts by Chief Vanoi Kiriwina, and the hunt for fugitive Chief Kadilaku.

A coconut summit was in order:

I now sent instructions...for a general assemblage of chiefs at Losuia to deal with certain complaints I had against them in respect of coconut planting (the chiefs are solidly against commoners planting nuts and require some plain speaking).

The results of this meeting are missing from the record, but we can safely assume that Bellamy's "plain speaking" amounted to a stern admonition to all chiefs not to interfere with planting, nor to confiscate nuts from villages, upon risk of the government's wrath coming down upon them. While the government preferred to uphold the status of the chiefly class, rebellious chiefs were treated like any other criminals. Visiting Kaduwaga on Kaileuna Island, Bellamy remarks: "I found 2010 nuts stored for planting, the chief Tobaiwaga having done 14 days H.L. [hard labor] for previous neglect" (PR 450/47; 12/6/1913). The eventual result was that chiefly ownership on principle of coconut and betelnut trees came to an end, although chiefs could own trees as individuals, based on the same rules that applied to commoners.

While most chiefs fell into line with government policy, not all remained quiet. In 1916 Campbell writes:

Unlike all other chiefs I met on this patrol, the chief of Kaibola has a dislike for the government. In former times, all chiefs on Kiriwina claimed all pigs, coconut trees and betel-nut trees. The chief of Kaibola has endeavored to retain these privileges, which of course are not allowed. I told him the law on the point. He replied, "Government gaga," which means that government is bad. No doubt it is from his view-point. [PR 2/1916; 3/15/1916]

To keep villagers from eating coconuts until all required for planting were gathered and either planted or set aside to sprout, Bellamy put another measure in force: "A strict tabu has been put on coconuts until all tracks are planted." At Gumilababa:

I gathered all the growing nuts I could in the village, unearthing them as usual from their houses and made the men plant them on the tracks. I also found about 200 nuts not yet sprouting and put a tabu on these and saw them placed on Kailobus [sticks or saplings with branches cut short onto which the coconuts are spiked] to sprout. From Gumilabwaga [sic] I went to Kawola near Sinaketa. Here too I found the planting slack and took certain names for the future. [PR 2/1913; 8/7/1913]

While in a few instances, during the early period of contact and pacification in Papua, patrol officers summoned up "government magic" to strike fear and awe into the locals, Bellamy's use of the term *tabu* simply means he forbade the eating of nuts upon threat of criminal proceedings. At any rate the *tabu* was effective, and pleasing results followed:

Here [at Kadukwekila] I found the natives had got the extra 200 nuts stored for planting and I was able to remove the tabu from the trees, much to everybody's delight... Obweria was clean and had a fair number of nuts stored, but it is a large village & I did not remove the tabu...The same routine in all the villages viz. counting the stored nuts. If sufficient the tabu on eating them was broken, if not the tabu remained. [PR 3/1913; 9/30/1913]

This patrol set a pattern for the future:

The routine today was much the same as yesterday. Counting nuts on the tracks and also nuts stored and allotting fresh tracks [to be cut and planted] and seeing that each village thoroughly understood what it had to do and the time within which I should expect it to be finished...I picked up certain prisoners in connection with Reg. 84. P. 6. [coconut planting regulation]. I also brought some with me from Uwada and Kapwani...Got home just at dark. I brought 15 prisoners with me. [PR 3/1913; 10/2/1913]

His immediate superior, the Resident Magistrate (RM) at Samarai, who was visiting Losuia at the time, accompanied Bellamy on the two patrols that produced the census, and wrote a glowing letter of praise to the Lieutenant Governor in Port Moresby:

When I visited the Trobriand islands, a month or two ago, I was simply astonished at the wonderful success of the ARM in carrying out the provisions of the Regulation regarding the planting of coconuts. He has also done remarkably good work in other directions. I am sending out a circular to the other magistrates asking what has been done in their districts regarding coconut planting by the natives. [Memo 450/59; 9/11/1913]

The Lieutenant Governor echoes the sentiment in a note (see Figure 5; p.15) jotted on the cover sheet of Bellamy's report:

This ARM is doing wonderfully well with his planting. What are the other Magistrates doing in this direction? We keep on reminding them of this regulation, but I don't know that there is much result. [PR 219/13; 9/11/1913]³⁷

Bellamy's efforts continue into 1914, and by June of that year he can report some impressive numbers:

It is 45 minutes from Kadukwaikela to Obweria. There are 1513 nuts between the two places [PR 188/14; 6/16/1914]... With the previous count this brings the total new nuts counted and inspected to 56,508 or equivalent at 50 to the acre to a planted area of ground of 1130 acres. [PR 181/14, summary; p. 15]

How Bellamy kept such precise track of his tallies while hiking these trails is not specifically stated, but he does relate that AC Corporal Bunuagola, who was assigned to count five percent of the planted nuts, was instructed as to how to proceed in order to arrive at a precise count:

He is a capable boy at counting, but in order to minimize the possibility of error I made him count in tens and mark each ten on a stick and then bring me the number of tens. [AR 1913-1914:47]

Bellamy either used his own tally stick, perhaps adding a notch for each 100 nuts counted, or traveled with pad and pencil in hand. With the many intersecting (and quite a

³⁷ The Trobriands were one of the most pacified areas in all of Papua, as well as an unusually small jurisdiction. Officers in charge of other, larger districts had to contend with active warfare, hostile inhabitants, fractious gold mining camps, and a host of other immediate problems that Bellamy did not. While Bellamy's industry and enthusiasm (bordering on the obsessive) toward coconut planting is remarkable, to say that other officers were less industrious would be unfair, but clearly he knew how to motivate his charges and please his superiors.

few newly-cut) trails, he spent much time doubling back and looping around while counting nuts, so his patrols became quite drawn out:

Omarakana is only 3hrs and three quarters from Losuia but with the to and fro work necessary in inspecting and counting nuts on the route it was dark before I reached Omarakana. I counted during the day 12350 nuts planted on the tracks of which 8488 had been put in since the previous inspection. [PR 188/14; 6/16/1914]

By this time Bellamy expected all to know how and where to plant their nuts, and brooking no irregularity, justice was swift: “Sent VC Moliassi to Bwatavaiia to make certain arrests in that village for faulty coconut planting and gaps in the planting of the tracks” (6/19/1914).³⁸

The island of Vakuta has always had a tendency to go its own way, so it is not surprising that it is the only area that Bellamy finds to be well behind in its coconut planting. Part of the problem is that he hasn’t been able to patrol there for six months, and obviously it is his presence on the scene that gets nuts into the ground in a timely manner. At Osikwea the chief tries to explain the lapse:

Migimagi said he was waiting for the men to return from [a *kula* expedition to] Kitava where they were held up by the strong blow. He pointed out that many of the nuts stored for planting were sprouting. I pointed out to him that the six months I had given him to plant up his tracks...were up. How was it that I found them unfinished?... In Vakuta the position was much the same. The absence of the men at Kitava had demoralized work and those who remained felt secure against a visit from me so long as the strong blow was then active. They had not supposed I would come overland...The same thing at all the villages of Vakuta...I arrested a few of the Aulaka and Vakuta men. Osikwea and Orkinai will be dealt with later. Back to Orkinai where I took a canoe back to Gilibu. Just as we opened out [to] Gilibu we met 10 or 11 big canoes, the returning natives from Kitava...Considering they had not seen their wives and families for at least a month I sent them all on quickly to their homes and to start first thing tomorrow morning to complete the tracks and clean those already planted. The VC to report to me in a week’s time. [PR 181/14; 6/5/1914]

Here we see a common strategy oft repeated by Trobrianders in dealing with the colonial administration. Firstly, given a deadline, the proper time to carry out a task is just before the deadline (much like students). Secondly, the movements of the ARM were discussed and predictions were made as to the possible timing of his arrival on the scene, and this was considered when scheduling time for different activities, since time spent planting nuts, clearing tracks, cleaning the village, etc. took away from time spent in the gardens. The unexpected appearance of a government patrol would often throw a village into disarray, and the reaction of villagers lends the impression that they saw these departures from routine as unfair.

In August 1914, Bellamy forwards his Annual Report to headquarters, and devotes a lengthy section to “Coconut Planting By Natives.” In it he presents the results of his “coconut census,” along with related figures:

³⁸The “fighting chief” Moliassi (see p.38) seems to have become Bellamy’s most trusted lieutenant, receiving frequent assignments involving independent action. During Kadilaku’s flight, Moliassi was assigned to oversee the search around Obulaku while Bellamy continued his coconut census.

Number of nuts planted.....	120,694
Number of tracks dealt with.....	325
Number of villages affected.....	156
Number of natives convicted for breach.....	217
Mileage of tracks planted.....	241

With this raw data, Bellamy can highlight his achievement in various ways:

At 50 nuts to the acre 120,694 are equal to a planted area of 2,413 $\frac{3}{4}$ acres. If planted in parallel lines...they would form an avenue from the mouth of the Mambare River to the post office in Samarai. At maturity in from eight to nine years' time they are capable of producing 1,206 tons of copra per annum...which, at £20 [per ton], is equal , approximately, to £24,000 annually, or equivalent to an annual income of £8 for every male adult in my district. [AR 1913-1914:47]

Note that Bellamy's numbers slide seamlessly from hard data to Malthusian speculation of future possibilities. While clearly grandstanding, with these hard numbers no one can dispute Bellamy's efforts. Significantly, he finishes his report with acknowledgements of assistance given by his indigenous aides:

I would like to call your attention to the good work done by Cpl. Bunuagola, of the Losuia detachment in connexion with the planting. The village constables, too, have done their best to bring the work to a satisfactory conclusion.

Bellamy also adds an explanation for those that might feel that 217 convictions for "breach of coconut planting regulation" might indicate draconian measures on his part, and also an assertion that villagers eventually became as enthusiastic about the project as he was:

I was always careful to apply its punishment clause only in cases where I was certain there was no sufficient cause for the breach, viz., that the man charged had bearing coconuts, and that the only reason his planting had not been completed was that he had eaten or otherwise disposed of his nuts. I mention this point because it does not diminish one's satisfaction...to feel that no undue pressure has been used, and that in not one single case have I asked a native to make bricks without straw.

As planting proceeded, the natives became themselves keen, not with the passive keenness of a man obeying a disagreeable order, but with the enthusiastic keenness of a peasant proprietor surveying the growth of nuts planted some months previously. Healthy rivalry sprang up between village and village, and spread in ever widening circles from twenty different centres.

Having all tracks lined with young coconut trees, the ideal would be to let them grow for several years while they were tended by weeding and otherwise keeping clear the areas around them, and then begin processing the tens of thousands of coconuts into copra. Unfortunately this ideal and seemingly simple plan was soon put into jeopardy. The first assault on the young trees came in the form of drought, killing off a few on some tracks, but all on others. Interestingly, Bellamy doesn't count dead trees, but only gives general descriptions of mortality rates, and couches these facts within more positive statements, seemingly to minimize the extent of the losses:

The nuts on the track between Losuia and Gumilababa had not suffered to any great extent from the drought. 5 per cent loss. I told the Gumilababa people that as their shortage of food was now over I had to re-impose the tabu on coconuts until the losses on account of the drought were made good. They

were quite agreeable to this, in fact they expected it...I turned off to visit a new and small village of Koia. The nuts along this short track are nearly all dead but those planted around the village are all there...Luckily those nuts which have survived the drought are now big enough to give the natives some idea of what the tracks will ultimately look like and all seem anxious on their own account to fill in the blank spots...On this last track there are not many dead and the others look very healthy. [PR 131/15; 5/15/1915]

Compounding the threat to young trees was the fact that this extremely dry time coincided with the routine burning off of fields after harvest:

Natives after burning off their gardens did not take the trouble to see the fire at the edge was out and the consequence was that in some cases the fire ran through the bush for miles leaping across tracks and everything. [PR 131/15; 5/11/1915]

Bellamy arrested “a goodly number of men” for carelessness. Despite these setbacks, the young sprouts on other sections of track were doing well, and Bellamy writes with satisfaction of traveling “avenues of palms” where the trees were already six feet high. The bright and leafy greenery lining the tracks, coming as it did as a product of order and industry, must have been very appealing to his sense of aesthetic morality as he journeyed on patrol.³⁹

During this dry spell, Bellamy finds it interesting that To’uluwa’s brother, the chief rainmaker of northern Kiriwina, suffered little loss of reputation even after six months with no rain. He visited Chief Umtabalu at his village of Kasanai, near Omarakana, where he was surrounded by gifts from villagers intended to encourage him to bring the rain. Passing the buck like a veteran politician, Umtabalu picks up a gift and asks the ARM, “How much rain could they expect for a thing like that?” (PR 131/15; 5/11/1915). Campbell notes that Umtabalu’s power tended more toward prediction than production of rain: “He was known as the ‘rain-maker,’ but I am told that he carefully studied the direction and force of the prevailing wind before promising rain” (PR 11/1916-17; 4/20/1917: p.2).

At Koma on Kaileuna, Bellamy finds that village pigs are biting the stems off the young trees, and orders a fence to be built around each tree within 100 yards of the village (PR 38/15; 2/3/1915). Finding the same trend on Vakuta, he orders that all trees be individually fenced, although he is ambivalent about making the owners of the young trees do this, as “the fault is [with] the owner of the pigs” (PR 160/15; 6/25/1915). Upon reading Bellamy’s report, Hubert Murray, the Lieutenant Governor, writes this note on the cover: “They should be made to keep their pigs shut up if they can’t control them.” This seems to be a simple and commonsensical solution, but it has wide-ranging consequences. Village pigs had always roamed freely about while performing a vital role in village sanitation. The introduction of young coconut trees around villages suddenly criminalized owners who failed to “control” their pigs, making roaming pigs a danger instead of an asset to the village, and shutting up the pigs contributed to the need for village latrines.

³⁹ A year later ARM Campbell, Bellamy’s successor, intimates his own associations with tree-lined tracks: “Some of these trees are well-grown on parts of the tracks, and the track has the appearance of an avenue leading to a white man’s residence” (PR 2/1916; Summary).

The next challenge to coconut cultivation was disease. In 1916 ARM Campbell writes:

Some of the coconut trees along the track from Madoia to Kabalulu had been attacked by some insect, portions of the leaves being destroyed. The native remedy is to singe the damaged leaf with a firestick. Trees which had been submitted to this treatment still looked strong. [PR 21916; 3/14/1916]

Three years later ARM Whitehouse mentions that most trees on Kiriwina are blighted by an apparently different condition, but Vakuta remains unscathed:

The trees here on the island [Vakuta] are absolutely free from the obscure disease that has affected many if not all the trees on the island of Kiriwina and other places. [PR 3/1918-19; 1/31/1919]

Without more specifics in the record it is difficult to know what the ailment was, but with only a 100-yard channel separating the two islands, a flying insect is unlikely. Affected trees display: “leaves turning golden yellow with burnt patches as though burnt with hot iron” (SJ 1/5/1919). Whitehouse attempts a time-consuming treatment of the trees on the government plantation at Losuia, using his ready supply of free labor: “Prisoners cleaning coconut cabbages [tops of young trees] with soap, kerosene and water, and cutting away all diseased leaves and nuts” (SJ 7/7/1919). A year later, Whitehouse identifies an insect responsible for a renewed attack, but whether it is the culprit in the earlier problem is unknown: “Prisoners cut out sugar cane weevils from coconuts on plantation” (SJ 8/12/1920). In another entry Whitehouse notes two fungal infections common to Kiriwina and Muwo, but absent on Vakuta: *Pestalozzia palmarum* (coconut gray leaf blight), and a “wax like fungus, having a black center” (PR 3/1919-29: p. 2). In his annual report for August 1st 1919 through July 31st 1920, Whitehouse lists 7 destructive insects he has identified, and states that some of the bacterial and fungal infestations will probably never be eradicated. He also mentions another threat to young coconut trees; villagers “cutting off the leaves at the butts to use for door-making and roofing materials” (AR 1919-1920:47).

Whitehouse assumes the role of advocate and protector of all coconut palms, and comes down hard upon men found to have defaced their own trees along the tracks:

Observed several palms that had been hacked about with the owner’s private mark, and holes so that he could climb aloft with a minimum amount of trouble. Interviewed the owners who state that people traveling along the roads do this damage, found sufficient evidence to convict these miscreants and sent them on to gaol. [PR 9/1925-26; 3/18/1926]

Drought, pigs, disease and home improvement notwithstanding, the chief threat to young coconut trees was lack of weeding. Vigorous tropical growth soon smothered the trees and threatened to kill them. Villages soon sorted themselves into those that cared properly for their nuts, and those that let them become overgrown. This generally coincided with villages’ overall enthusiasm for government programs, which itself coincided with the ability of the local VC, and the attitudes of himself and the village chief. ARM Campbell’s comments show the differences:

Proceeding from Kavataria, the first part of the track was found to be in a disgraceful condition, and the young coconut trees planted on it had been neglected for some time. VC Tonigai is responsible for

this state of affairs, and he will be dealt with. After traveling for half a mile a swamp was crossed for a distance of a mile, and then for two miles we had a good track, with weeded coconuts on each side, to Boitalu village. The village was clean, and it is well supplied with coconut trees. VC Matoia is in charge. [PR 1/1916; 2/11/1916]

By the mid-twenties the coconut trees along tracks were bearing plenty of nuts. With most men now owning at least eight trees, everyone could enjoy the benefit. Apart from simply eating them, the easiest thing was to sell the nuts locally. Whitehouse writes of a visit to Mr. Lumley's trading station east of Teavi:

Here one can see the material result of the trouble taken by Government officers in past years and the efforts of the natives to comply with regulations in the matter of coconut planting. Here one witnesses a constant stream of natives from adjacent villages carrying husked coconuts and offering them for sale at the rate of sixteen nuts for one stick of tobacco. [PR 6/1925-26; 11/23/1926]

This wasn't what the government had in mind for surplus nuts, and later Whitehouse vents his frustration:

I am sorry to see that traders are getting the lion's share due to the stupidity of the native owners, who sell nuts instead of making copra and tendering it for sale, refusing to avail themselves of opportunities to dispose of produce through the Government. I believe that at present this is all that can be done – that of educating the natives to the real value of their produce – by telling them what price copra is for in Samarai and the charges to convey it there. [PR 6/1927-28; 1/20/1928]

But some copra is being produced and shipments are leaving Losuia for Samarai, and like most economic activity in the Trobriands, it is the initiative of individual villages and their leaders that determines the success of an endeavor. ARM Rentoul writes:

Visited the village of Obulaka, a large village in very good order, and a credit to VC Mobulina who is doing his work well. These and the Kaituvi people have taken up copra making and most of the consignments sent from Losuia come from these villages. [PR 4/1928-29; 12/22/1928]

So by this time a pattern was emerging that would persist indefinitely. People could dispose of coconuts or small amounts of copra very conveniently by selling to traders, but at a very poor price, often just a stick of tobacco for over a dozen nuts, or a few sticks for a large basket of copra. Or people could join together, and with some planning and industry, avail themselves of the government's assistance to ship large amounts of copra to Samarai for sale at the more favorable market rate.

In 1930, ARM Hall is drumming up enthusiasm for copra-making in all the villages, especially those that owe back taxes:

Pointed out to them the Vakuta people as an example; these Vakuta people are gradually working off their back taxes by bringing me for disposal about ten bags each month – some months more than that.⁴⁰ Informed these people that if they come to Losuia I would be glad to hand out bags. [PR 8/1930-31; 12/18/1930]

⁴⁰ Despite the early bumpy start, Vakuta's soil apparently was most suitable for coconuts, and the island already had numerous adult trees bearing fruit, so it is not surprising that this island led the way in indigenous copra production.

Commercial copra was handled in large burlaps bags, availability of which would often become a limiting factor in production.

In 1934 ARM Champion points out a depressing fact: that despite years of effort and planning, the fortunes of the Trobrianders are dependant on the vagaries of the world economy:

For years coconuts have been planted and the natives were told that their reward would come when the coconuts were bearing. In the Trobriands just when the thousands of palms have come into bearing the price of copra drops to nothing and the natives think they have been hoodwinked. [PR 11/1933-34; 3/6/1934]

The Census

The fact that the Trobriand subdistrict, unlike other jurisdictions in colonial Papua, comprised a relatively self-contained and isolated population enabled the government to compile nearly complete quantitative data on the island group. This effort was only possible through the considerable diligence of the colonial officers. Starting with Bellamy's examinations of every man, woman and child for VD, a census was produced listing the entire population of every village. The census was updated annually, and provided the basis for the tax rolls starting in the early twenties. Also by the early twenties, every indigene was identified by a unique census number. Births and deaths were recorded in station journals for each month, based on reports from VCs, adding to the numbers that could be analyzed and manipulated in various ways. Through its incessant collection and revision of quantitative data, the administration was able to keep a finger on the pulse of the population.

While in theory the census was a rather straightforward endeavor, involving an initial counting and recording of individuals, and then simply keeping track of births and deaths, the reality was that it would become an open-ended struggle against the vagaries of Trobriand life and family. ARM Whitehouse describes a typical day spent trying to update and correct the census in the large village of Gumilababa, and his frustration at an apparent inability to extract what should be straightforward facts:

The whole day is spent devoted to these people, who number 258 souls, and one's patience is severely taxed trying to obtain the truth from them as to who might be the true parent of this child or that man; whether this woman did actually give birth to these children or whether they are adopted children of some other man? And it would appear to me that years will pass by before an accurate list containing the truth will be compiled, such a list that can be relied upon and produced in court to prove definitely that this man has no claim to the ground or goods he claims having descended from another woman and not the woman who he considers his true mother.

Although frustrated at the difficulties, Whitehouse remains doggedly optimistic:

Gradually, I believe that I am obtaining the truth and that each year the alterations and additions do bring the census forms up-to-date and accurate insofar as the information they are supposed to contain is concerned. [PR 2/1923-24; 10/25/1923]

The primary number on the minds of the administration was the total population, which confounded them by refusing to rise as expected, and often fell slightly instead.

The reasons for this were never clear, although influenza could wipe out any growth in numbers in any given year [PR 2/1932-33; 9/3/1932]. It was this lack of population growth that led to suspicions of infanticide.

ARMs regularly dealt with indigenous land disputes, refereeing between parties with conflicting claims. Attempts were made to establish rights of ownership based upon inheritance from the original parties to use the land, but this was rarely a simple matter. Whitehouse complains of what to him are the chief roadblocks:

In several of the smaller villages Land questions came before me, and at present the whole system is most unsatisfactory; 1st, because the natives in question are such liars, 2ndly, because most, if not all of the older people from whom some knowledge of the former owners might be gleaned, are dead, 3rdly, because the people who would talk true are afraid, fearing sorcery.

The obvious solution to Whitehouse is to compile a whole new area of documentation for the subdistrict:

Personally I feel that some register of the lands should be prepared of the present owners of all the lands in this group, even at the expense of sacrificing other duties, as it would prove invaluable in the future... [PR 3/1920-21: p.3]

On the cover page of this report the government secretary jotted, "What about a map?" While at face value this suggestion appears to be logical, such a project would take thousands of man-hours to compile, and would probably instigate more disputes over land than it would settle. No land registry or ownership map was attempted.

Taxation

By 1920 the ability of the Trobrianders to produce surplus food, coupled with the islands' relative stability, indicated to the administration that the subdistrict could support a £1 tax per man each year. Once again a program that was simple enough in theory would become a continuous challenge for the men assigned to implement it.

The first mention of the tax is made by Whitehouse in 1919, but this entry suggests that he has been telling the population about it for some time:

Many inquiries were made concerning the Tax, or as the natives call it "Pokala" [tribute]. Many thought that I had come for the purpose of collecting the tax. [PR 3/1919-20, 7/23/1919]

The tax would not begin to be collected for another eighteen months, but both Whitehouse and the locals are already pondering its consequences. Reporting after a visit to inland villages in October, Whitehouse writes:

The natives seem to wonder how they will be able to pay the tax as they do not swim [for] pearls. I told them that they must sell their food to the swimming boys for money and not tobacco and native wealth as they had done in the past. This seemed reasonable to them, but I wonder how I shall stand concerning the purchase of native food for consumption in Losuia...if they demand money instead of tobacco. [PR 2/1919-20; 10/9/1919]

Bellamy begins tax collections while relieving Whitehouse for several months in early 1921. The fact that the plan is presented to the villagers by their old and respected

leader, who had just returned to them after a long absence, must have helped to sway them as to the need and importance of helping finance the hospital and other government services. By the time of initial collection, the tax has been generally accepted in principle, but the intricacies of collection are yet to be ironed out by taxpayer and collector alike.

Many villagers hope to quickly dispose of their tax burden by simply diving for *lapi*, collecting a few pearls to sell to the traders, handing over their pound and returning home:

The prospect of taxation has quickened interest generally in pearlshell (*lapi*) diving. Many of the bush [inland villages] are having a try at diving as well as the coastal villages on the weather side of the *lapi* grounds. [SJ 1/6/1921]

Evidently people are conferring in their villages as to how else to come up with £1 in an economy based on barter and exchange. Bellamy receives a delegation:

Bush natives have been in to tell me it is impossible to pay their tax in money and want to know if the government will accept native food. I think it would not be possible for one individual to pay a pound's worth of food. The traders pay about £2 per ton for native food for export and if the government were to pay the same a tax of £1 would equal half a ton of food, and while a chief could easily manage this the ordinary native could not. [SJ 1/7/1921]

Bellamy can't deny the inequity of the current situation:

Other natives in from the bush today. They ask with some degree of truth it seems to me, how the Government expects them to pay money when it will only pay tobacco for native food, their only produce. No native food is coming in at all. They are going to hold it up I am afraid. [SJ 1/8/1921]

The station is faced with a boycott by the suppliers of its provisions if a solution can't be worked out.

Bellamy begins tax collections on a patrol to Sinaketa and Vakuta. While this patrol report is missing, we can conclude that these village groups had no trouble paying their taxes since they are part of the pearling industry. Other coastal villages come to Losuia: "Mulosaida and Kavataria pay their tax. A diving village each of them. No difficulty in raising the money" (SJ 1/26/1921).

After two weeks of tax collection, Bellamy is overwhelmed by the amount of money coming in, and faces a new problem; "Have collected nearly £450 so far and receipt book for native taxes is nearly finished. I had no idea so many would be liable to the tax." The importance of bureaucratic correctness puts Bellamy in a quandary: he has a different type of receipt book, but is it proper to use it or should he suspend collections until the proper slip of paper can be issued?

I have a new unused general revenue receipt book but I suppose it would be out of order to use that for taxation. I sent in by the [launch] Kaione an urgent letter to Port [Moresby] for more books but I am afraid collecting will be held up if the new books do not arrive quickly. [SJ 1/28/1921]

Bellamy decides that the proper receipt is more important than the act, and stops collection for two months until new books arrive.

In the meantime, the wheels are turning in Port Moresby, and the Government Secretary (the number two man in the administration) sends a memo to Bellamy:

With regard to the entry of the tax, I should be glad to have your recommendation as to what arrangements should be made for the acceptance of native food in payment...As to the present practice of paying for native food with tobacco, I have to inform you that, if you so desire, arrangements could no doubt be made for any food purchased by you to be paid for in cash, but it would be necessary for you to make a recommendation before action could be taken. [Memo 555/A.311/21; 3/29/1921]

By April the new receipt books are in, and Bellamy devotes four days to collections while Whitehouse, back from leave, takes up all other duties. Whitehouse continues collections after Bellamy departs, and can now buy food with cash: "Buying native food with cash (281 lbs for 1/-)⁴¹ which enable a few more natives to pay taxation money" (SJ 4/28/1921). The station journal paints an odd picture: villagers arrive laden with food baskets, Whitehouse buys the food and hands them a pound and a receipt, and then takes back the pound and gives them another receipt for payment of tax. While Whitehouse may not have actually performed this charade, it is likely that he did, given the importance of correct attention to detail, as well as the importance of ensuring that the indigenes understood that they were selling produce to pay the tax in cash, instead of simply paying their tax with food.

Both Bellamy and Whitehouse mention an interesting side-effect of the new tax scheme. Although never proven, the Trobrianders had long been rumored to practice female infanticide, as they preferred small families, and sons were of more value economically. Mothers with four or more children received a cash payment called the "family bonus" of five shillings a year (Griffin et al 1979:27). This made children a source of income, and the sex of children was of no consequence to the government. Thus: "I think it is certain the tax will entirely stop female infanticide" (Bellamy: SJ 2/28/1921); and:

I think that the introduction of the taxation scheme will materially help the native population to take a greater interest their children, and foster motherhood. [Whitehouse: SJ 4/30/1921]

While Ellis Silas, an artist and friend of Whitehouse who stayed with him at Losuia for a time in 1922, states that "married men are allowed a rebate of one shilling for each child" (1926:62), Whitehouse's reports indicate that only families of four or more children qualified for the bonus, and that he usually paid the money to the mothers:

Upon my return to the rest-house I found 7 women with four or more children awaiting my return. They wore an uncertain look with a touch of hope intermingling, whilst the children romped about quite indifferent as to whether their mothers received any cash or not. I am approached by a woman who asks "is it true that women who have 4 children receive money from the Government?" and the onlookers give her a little cheer to encourage her, but the effect embarrasses her!... She and six other women are paid their Family Bonuses and depart quite happily. [PR 4/1921-22; 2/15/1922]

⁴¹ This rate is much less than Bellamy's estimated value of ½ ton of food for £1. At one shilling for 281 lbs, a person would have to sell over 2 ½ tons to earn £1. A possible explanation is that Whitehouse made a typographical error, and was paying a shilling for 81 lbs, which would be somewhat closer to Bellamy's estimate. Recovery of additional records from this period might shed light on this quandary.

Trobrianders were not immune to the universal human temptation to “game the system,” and the family bonus offered a great opportunity. Children were often shuffled around as the ARM went from village to village paying the bonus, stepping up to fill out the ranks of families, and “adoptions” of relatives’ children spiked around payout time. Not all were successful: “Waialakebila, Census No. 27/55 found guilty of obtaining the Family Bonus for two years based on false statements. Ordered to refund the payments and fined 10/-” (SJ 6/25/1923).

The taxation scheme added a whole new regime of responsibilities to the ARM’s list. Tax had to be collected at every village, with a handwritten receipt given to each payer, and the name checked off the tax roll, drawn up from the census. Since not all could pay at the same time, the tax rolls and receipt books had to be carried about virtually perpetually, as well as kept handy while at Losuia for those who brought their tax in (a constant trickle). Exemptions had to be issued for every man on the census who was deemed unfit for taxation due to age, disease or infirmity. Each of these exemptions had to be detailed in an individual “Advice Note of Non-Payment of Taxes,” of which one to two hundred were filled out each month and sent to the Director of Native Taxation in Port Moresby (SJ 5/31/1922). Taxable natives who failed to pay were prosecuted in the Court for Native Matters (ARM presiding).

The pearling villages would suffer from a change in the market in late 1921, and easy money from diving would come to an end, sparking discussion as to how to raise tax money. Whitehouse notes:

Visited Loia, Bwadela and Bwaga. ...natives assure me that they have no food to sell for money and as the whitemen are not buying pearls, cannot see how they will be able to get their taxation money. V. Poole offers to purchase Beche-de-mer from natives at a reasonable price, enabling any native to get £1 per week, but none are offering to work.⁴² [SJ 11/18/1921]

The time and effort required to raise tax money appears to vary widely based on location and type of activity. While Whitehouse contends that collecting *beche-de-mer* can net a pound in a week, earning the same amount through wage work at a white-owned plantation could take much longer:

VCs say that the folk in the bush have no money to pay the Native Taxes with, but several have gone to Muwo Island Plantation to work for two months in the hope that they will have the required £1 before June. [SJ 3/6/1922]

Whether a man qualifies as a “taxable native” depends on age and ability to work. Questions and complaints invariably arise as to who is liable to the tax and who is not. Whitehouse gives an example:

Several natives approached me complaining that they were considerably older than they looked, in fact, they were very old men. After listening to their stories and making investigations from other natives concerning the age of the complainants, it would appear that they were, in reality, old men, although they appear to be of a taxable age. [PR 3/1921-22; 2/2/1922]

⁴² Pearl divers generally found collecting *Beche-de-mer* to be beneath their dignity. See Black 1957:283.

A year into the taxation scheme, Whitehouse shows his frustration with villages who haven't yet motivated themselves to develop the means to pay. Referring to Kaisiga and Bulakwa on Kaileuna:

The usual excuse was put forward, that they had not the money and neither had they the withal to obtain their tax monies. Here we see several hundred Coconut trees in full bearing, which would, if the fruit was converted into copra, and sold, pay the tax of every native in the village.

Others nearby offer a clear example of the way the system is supposed to function:

Kuiaua taxable natives have adopted the work policy, and as a result were all able to pay their taxes, the money for which, like those of Munuwata, was raised by the sale of copra. [PR 1/1921-22; 5/9-10/1922]

With the deadline for taxes imminent, coastal villages empty as everyone goes pearl diving in the hopes of a quick find and easy payment. Apparently the market has revived somewhat by late 1922:

On rounding Bomapou Island point a goodly number of canoes were anchored and the occupants busily engaged in swimming for "lapi" with the hope that they might find a "pearl of great price." Nowadays all pearls are classed this by the native, whose sole ambition is to obtain his taxation money; thus the value of any pearl irrespective of size and weight is twenty shillings[£1]! On anchoring at Obulaku, the village presented a deathlike aspect, being deserted, except for a few old and infirm natives who assured me that the villagers had left two day's prior to go out "swimming" and had not received any message concerning my visit. [PR 2/1922-23; 12/19/1922]

The quest for tax seems to impact the 1922 gardening season. Whitehouse states that "native food reported to be very scarce this year," and To'uluwa tells him that the shortage is due to gardening men "walking about looking for their taxes" (SJ 7/5-7/7/1922). During the next season, some chiefs forbade the men in their villages to go pearling until all gardening work was complete (PR 2/1922-23; 2/22/1923). Elsewhere Whitehouse indicates that the taxation scheme, with its demands on the time of gardening men, caused a shift in some villages from the usual individually worked gardens to communal gardening (PR 2/1923; 1/23/1923).

Visiting the village of Nuatuba on tiny Kuiaua Island, Whitehouse learns that their plan to pay their tax by making copra from their coconuts on the nearby islet of Kibu has been upset:

To their disgust, the natives of a whiteman's boat landed...last Sunday...and took all the coconuts from the trees... [T]hey stated that they themselves had not seen the boat crews taking the nuts, but the islanders of Munuwata had seen them and conveyed the news to them, after which they visited the islet and found very little left except the empty husks and shells, and a disappearing boat. [PR 1/1922-23; 11/23/1922]

Whitehouse does a little detective work, and after listing all sightings of boats within the vicinity and concluding that the culprits were men in the employ of a certain trader, visits Munuwata to interview witnesses:

Here the story...was corroborated, four natives actually saw the crew go alongside the islet with the dinghies and take the nuts, consequently I forwarded Mr. Clay a memo relative to this matter and I have every reason to believe that he will make investigations and compensate the grieved natives. [PR 1/1922-23; 11/24/1922]

Whitehouse establishes “native plantations” of coconut trees, where people can work in lieu of payment of tax (discussed below). Anyone lacking other means to produce £1 is urged to put in time on a plantation, and some are convicted for failing to do so. The next ARM, Alex Rentoul, is less concerned about collecting tax or overseeing plantation work. In 1929 he tours the area around Kaibola, site of the largest plantation. He discusses the locals’ lack of tax money, but fails to mention the nearby plantation:

All these people are waiting for the coastal people to earn the coin, and for their own gardens to produce in order to raise the tax for 1927/8. I am sure it will take a long time to collect, as at present they have nothing. [PR 5/1928-29; 2/24/1929]

Note that the tax he is referring to is already six months in arrears. Rentoul’s lack of concern is made up for by the people themselves, who are apparently losing sleep over their inability to discharge their civic duty:

The idea that they may have money stowed away, as they do in some parts of the mainland, can be dismissed at once. If these people had the cash they would pay their tax immediately. They are much concerned about it. [PR 9/1928-29; 5/9/1929]

An entry by Rentoul in 1930 shows that some villages are slipping deeper into arrears:

Reached Kulua at 1 o’clock and went into the matter of Taxation. These people are making copra with which they will be able to liquidate their tax for 1929/30 at the reduced rate. It will be the arrears for 1927-8 at the rate of £1 per head that will be difficult to collect. [PR 10/1929-30; 2/19/1930]

These villagers are two years behind, yet no punitive measures are mentioned. It seems that the desire to pay, or some effort in that direction is considered adequate. Note also that the tax rate has been reduced, and that the village places its hopes in copra production.⁴³

ARM Hall uses the procedures now in place to get the tax in. Encouragement and guidance are given first, with leniency shown to those making an effort to raise the tax. Warnings and deadlines are then handed down, and if no results are forthcoming, arrests and prosecutions ensue: “Went into tax defaulters at Mawtawa [M’tau] and apprehended 13 defaulters” (PR 9/1930-31; 2/23/1931).

At this point in the relationship between Trobrianders and the Australian administration, the expectations of the government regarding tax collection were clear, and so were the means to pay. Any one not able to dive for pearls or *beche-de-mer*, or sell carvings, should avail themselves of the now ample supplies of coconuts to make copra, and many villages did so on their own initiative. But time and again ARMs found villages that had apparently “forgotten” their tax responsibility, or continued to complain that they had no way of paying. Austen’s experience in 1932 is no exception:

⁴³ Austen indicates that the tax rate was reduced by one half for certain villages, apparently smaller inland villages with limited means for raising cash (PR 7/1931-32; 1/28/1932).

At Okupukopu found the village full up of coconuts. Bought by Deakin's boy for tobacco. There must have been sufficient coconuts there to make 20 or more bags of copra... found the people had many outstanding taxes from last year. Defaulters were prosecuted... Same tale among the Okaiboma and Ilalima. No money and coconuts all sold for tobacco at 44 for a stick of tobacco. Last years defaulters prosecuted. [PR 7/1931-32; 1/26/1032]

Austen visits nine other villages in central Kiriwina during this patrol and at each finds the same situation: "No change. No taxes. Coconuts sold for tobacco." Austen tells each village that they should make copra:

If they wished I would handle same. If they wanted to sell it to traders, they were at liberty to do so. Only if they did not have their taxes on my next patrol they would be prosecuted.

A pattern has developed, in that each year the ARM must go through the entire cycle of encouragement, warnings and prosecution in order to collect the tax. Many Trobrianders seem to perceive this as part of a ritual of tax collection.

Plantations

The Native Taxation Ordinance included provisions for establishing collective copra plantations for village groups who had no other means with which to pay taxes. Men would do an assigned amount of work and then would be issued a "labour certificate" to be turned in at collection time in lieu of £1. Whitehouse enthusiastically promoted the founding of plantations, especially in northern Kiriwina. This involved the clearing of heavily timbered land deemed "unused." Some entries in his 1921 station journal show his methods:

Inspected a favourable plot of land on the foreshore [at Lebola] suitable for coconut plantation and instructed natives to cut down timber...Half mile of foreshore here [at Kaibola] owned by the chief suitable for growing coconuts, would make an excellent plantation for the natives and instructed them to cut down the timber and advise me...measured and counted coconuts [along tracks around] Luebila, Idaliaka, Kapwani, Uwada and M'tau. Should recommend most strongly that a separate plantation be made for these villages to enable them in years to come to obtain their taxes. [SJ 10/24-27/1921]

Whitehouse's station journal entries in 1922 highlight the efforts taken to get the large plantation at Kaibola up and running; both his planning and direction, and the villagers' alternating enthusiasm and frustration over the heavy labor involved:

3/10: Supervised the clearing of the foreshore at Kaibola-M'tau in view of establishing a Native Plantation, "Native Taxation Ordinance." Cannot take bearings to ascertain the acreage owing to the dense growth of timber, but from inspection at various points, it would seem that the soil is particularly suitable for coconuts, and as the land is not used for garden purposes, the natives are quite prepared to sell the whole length and breadth of this area.⁴⁴ I have very carefully explained what the object of this project signifies; and they are anxious to devote their time, in lieu of the Tax, although, as they point out, the preparation of the ground entails much hard work... 5/22: 8 chiefs from Kiriwina come to Losuia to discuss the hardships they experience in collecting or earning £1. They seem to be of the opinion that 10/- [ten shillings or ½ a pound] would be ample, and that the time spent working on the

⁴⁴ Land for plantations was purchased by the government, which then assigned it to villages to develop. Amounts paid for plantation land are not always recorded, but Whitehouse does write of buying 1 acre near Kuluvitu for £1 (14 shillings and 12 sticks of tobacco; SJ 7/28-29/1922).

Plantation at Kaibola means neglect of the garden-lands (The natives work 3 days a week, and are relieved by other villages who also work three days, and are then relieved by the original villagers). Personally I cannot see how it should hinder their work, to the extent stated by the Chief Tou-u-lu.

It may have become consensus throughout the islands that ten shillings was a fairer tax burden, as Whitehouse noted a few months previously that people on Vakuta had suggested the same amount (PR 3/1921-22; 2/2/1922).

A week later To'uluwa is in Kaibola for more labor negotiations:

Tou-u-lua arrives at Kaibola and states that the gardens in Kiriwina are being neglected as a result of the boys' being away from their villages for three days at a time. I told him that if the boys worked they could each complete their allotted task within a reasonable time, but as he could see... they came to Kaibola when I was not present [VC Kalatauwosi supervising work when Whitehouse was not there], and did not do a reasonable day's work. In this he agreed with me and promised to assist by influencing them to do an honourable day's work when they came to Kaibola. [SJ 6/2/1922]

So each man was assigned a portion of the work, irrespective of time spent, and Whitehouse maintains that they are "slacking off" when he isn't there to supervise.

The new demands on indigenes' time from plantation work, as well as a general hunt for tax money, is conflicting with the traditional cycle of life on Kiriwina. Men are hard at work when they normally would have finished the harvest and begun preparing for the *kula*. Whitehouse receives another visit from the Paramount Chief, who is increasingly feeling the need to mediate between government and indigenous priorities: "Tou-u-lua calls at Kaibola and asks permission to take 60 taxable natives with him on his yearly trip to exchange native wealth" (SJ 7/7/1922). Without the advocacy of this "powerful old fool" (so-called on one occasion by Whitehouse, see below), the colonial government might have altered Trobriand life and culture much more than it did.

In August, with the *taitu* harvest looking very poor, To'uluwa again calls on Whitehouse:

Toulu visits Losuia and explained the serious shortage of food will mean starvation unless extra gardens are prepared and emergency crops planted. Suggests that the natives working on the Native Plantation at Kaibola be relieved for a few months to meet this emergency. In this matter I concur. [SJ 8/2/1922]

But apparently Whitehouse only agrees with the need to address the food shortage, since while he does order all villages to plant sweet potatoes and taro, work at the coconut plantation continues.

In the same discussion, Whitehouse confronts To'uluwa about a related problem. To'uluwa has attempted an appeal to the Mission regarding taxation and plantation work:

Toulu [is] asked why he instructed all the chiefs to wait upon the Missionary at the Convention relative to the Taxation and why he told them deliberate lies concerning the failure of the harvest? [His] reply: "It is quite true that we told them that the harvest was a failure because the young men had been employed on the Plantation, and that those who had paid their tax had of necessity neglected their gardens in the search for money. This is not true, I am aware that the influenza was in the first place responsible for the first failure, and that the continuous rains we have experienced has rotted all the *taitu* this harvest time, but the mission believe[s] us. [SJ 8/2/1922]

This is a difficult entry to unravel, as we have Whitehouse's account of To'uluwa's words, as given to him through an interpreter, but it seems clear that To'uluwa is caught between the need to agree with Whitehouse and avoid "hard words" on one side, and his desire to stick to his argument over taxation, plantation work and the poor harvest on the other, especially after receiving some attention and support from the Mission. Whitehouse is portraying To'uluwa's appeal to the Mission, and subsequent verbal gymnastics upon being confronted by him, as an example of the chief's scheming and dishonest ways, and is clearly irritated (if not threatened) by To'uluwa's tactic of staging what amounts to a public protest outside the missionary convention. The reaction of the missionaries is not recorded, but regardless of their opinion, Whitehouse is to all intents and purposes the supreme ruler of the Trobriands, and protests to others will not help To'uluwa's cause.

Whitehouse sees no reason to leave the largest forested area of Kiriwina uncleared (it would be interesting to know Bellamy's feelings about the loss of the woods around his beloved Kaibola, where he dreamed of retiring with his shotgun). While no direct complaint from the locals about the cutting down of the big trees is recorded, a complaint by another party is passed along:

Some of the natives in this village [Lubila, next door to Kaibola] are rather disturbed owing to the pleadings of the "Tokwai" or wood-sprites who are proving a source of inconvenience to them, by their chatter and cant concerning the negligence of the natives not advising the government that by cutting the big timber down for plantation purposes simply means that they are rendered homeless. I am told that such talk goes on night after night but as I could not hear them I told the natives that this could not be true! To which they replied, "Well, you are a Dim-Dim, but we can hear them rushing about and talking the whole night long and we are blamed that they have no home. [PR 2/1922-23; 12/9/1922]

Thus indigenous misgivings about the deforestation are convoluted into guilt for not defending the home of their spirit neighbors.

All the land is finally cleared at the Kaibola plantation by September 1922. Whitehouse disposes of the bulk of the cut timber, which seemingly could have been a precious commodity in an island group with a constant shortage of housing material: "Work as yesterday, but burned off a 30 by 30 by 30 pile of timber" (SJ 9/14/1922). While this amounts to thousands of board feet of lumber, the means to mill and transport the logs in large quantities did not exist, and so the forest of Kaibola was reduced to so much garbage to be burned off. Ironically, around the same time Whitehouse is ordering improvements in housing: "3 VCs report and are instructed to collect timbers for better and larger houses in the villages under their care" (SJ 7/10/1922).⁴⁵ Later, felled timber is simply cast into the sea (SJ 10/3-8/1923).

Whitehouse does have a handful of *Meku* (teak) logs brought to Losuia on the whaleboat for making shingles to roof the "native buildings" at the station (SJ 3/6/1923). When reading about these busy days on Kiriwina, it is easy to forget the isolation and lack of tools and supplies there. In order to make shingles, Whitehouse must borrow a

⁴⁵ The villages in question are not specifically named, but as the VCs reported to Whitehouse while he was at Omarakana, a safe assumption would be that they are in northern Kiriwina and fairly close to the plantation at Kaibola.

shingle knife from a planter, Mr. Lumley (SJ 3/12/1923). Unfortunately, the prisoners tasked to make shingles break the precious shingle knife while Whitehouse is away (SJ 3/22/1923). The project is shelved until Whitehouse is able to buy a new knife while on leave a year later (SJ 6/17/1924).⁴⁶

Whitehouse was the beneficiary of what amounted to a huge experiment; learning much by observing which of the roughly 120,000 coconut trees planted under Bellamy's direction flourished, and which withered and died. He had already chosen land that had the proper soil for good coconut growth, and was concerned that only the most promising nuts were planted, with the correct spacing between:

9/13: Marking out south-west section of plantation for planting coconuts... 9/15: Planted 300 robust and promising coconuts on plantation... 9/30: Interviewed Mr. E. A. Auerback re selection of seed nuts for Kaibola plantation and obtained a promise from him to supply 1,000 selected seed coconuts for £2/10/-. [SJ 9/1922]

Auerback owned a copra plantation on Muwo Island, and Whitehouse wanted to ensure that his seed nuts were handpicked for promising growth potential.

The station journals and patrol reports of the early twenties are full of accounts of the buying of land, felling of timber, selection of nuts and planting of new government copra plantations, as well as the repeated expansion of the large plantation near Kaibola. The plantation scheme is front-page news all over Papua, and the Trobriands are once again a model for the rest of the territory. Visitors, both official and unofficial, are received and toured around the groves, including H.E. (His Excellency) Sir Hubert Murray, Lieutenant Governor, in October 1924 (SJ 10/30/1924). In July and August of that year, G.H. Murray,⁴⁷ Controller of Native Plantations, spent three weeks on Kiriwina assisting and advising Whitehouse.

In 1926 Whitehouse is able to report good results at Kaibola, despite attacks by bud-rot and other pests:

Made a complete count of three thousand perfectly healthy coconut trees showing excellent growth, several hundred I have not included as their development is somewhat speculative since they are situated on sandy patches...All told 148 coconut palms have to be destroyed on this plantation being badly affected by bud-rot.

After four years and untold man-hours of heavy labor (no other plantation would prove such a challenge to establish), Whitehouse offers a gesture to the 39 taxable laborers on hand: "[A]fter clearly explaining to them the government's policy of making annual awards for the best-kept plantation, divided £5 among them" (SJ 6/3/1926).

Despite this promising report and its suggestion that the hardest work is over, with nothing left to do other than tend the growing trees and let nature take its course, the dream of large groves of healthy trees bursting with nuts would prove to be overly simplistic. This seemingly straightforward undertaking was to be met with a wide array of complications, notably the enthusiastic response of animal, fungal and bacterial pests

⁴⁶ Oddly, the same thing happens the next year to ARM Zimmer, who also borrows a replacement knife from the ever-helpful Mr. Lumley.

⁴⁷ No relation to Sir Hubert, although Sir Hubert's nephew, H. L. Murray, was Official Secretary from 1916 to 1940, and succeeded him as Governor.

to the closely planted young trees. The care of a plantation was proving to be a full-time job, instead of one which people could devote time to on a seasonal basis. Murray, the plantation specialist, returned to the district in 1926, and accompanied Whitehouse to Kaibola, where he found his “perfectly healthy” trees of just two months before to be infected with a form of leaf scale:

The controller very ably described the attributing cause of the disease retarding the growth of the palms and demonstrated the use of an emulsified kerosene preparation, using a small hand atomizer which was not of sufficient power to reach a large number of scale infected fronds, although a hooked stick was employed in an attempt to bring the fronds in range of the spray. [PR 4/1925-26; 8/24/1926]

Moving on to the newly developed Niniga plantation on Kaileuna, Murray found the trees there “singularly free from scale although most of the palms were found to be infected with *Brontispa froggati* [a parasitic beetle].” Whitehouse lays partial blame on the local constable, who has essentially been drafted as plantation manager:

Mr. Murray again demonstrated the method of dealing with brontispa on this plantation and VC Tomasisi received my assurance that unless he took more interest in the work commented upon, that I should be obliged to deal with him at Losuia. [PR 4/1925-26; 8/26/1926]

As Whitehouse struggles with setbacks, he tries to rethink the causes and come up with new solutions. These solutions invariably involve more time and labor for the locals. Back at Niniga, with his old mentor Dr. Bellamy, who is back on the islands for a visit, he writes:

Coconut palms growing on the foreshore show excellent growth whilst those on the plateau appear backward and badly damaged by brontispa. I am more convinced than ever that the condition of these trees is due to the fact that the seed-nuts were too advanced when transplanted, better progress would be manifested, if these were uprooted and fresh seed, say nuts just germinating substituted. [PR 5/1925-26; 10/20/1926]

Whitehouse also requests a greater commitment from the administration, in the form of equipment more capable of administering the kerosene solution than a small hand pump.

Whitehouse’s conviction that copra should be the primary industry in the Trobriands, and that no effort should be spared for the development of that industry, is evidenced by this comment:

The establishment of plantations wherever possible...appeals to me to be the only sound argument for the satisfactory development of these islands in the interest of the natives and the Government, irrespective of the added amount of work, or additional help to the officer in charge. [PR 9/1925-26; 3/18/1926]

This editorial came as a rebuttal to ARM Zimmer’s suggestion (not extant in the record but paraphrased and referenced by Whitehouse as Memo 92/45/25) that the export of “native foods” was the logical candidate for a primary industry for the district, due to the population’s expertise and motivation along these lines, and their ability to regularly produce a surplus. Despite Whitehouse’s assertions of the relatively low price given locally for this food, and that “all years are not good years” for gardening, Zimmer would eventually be proven correct, since the export and sale of yams and other produce would

remain among the most dependable sources of income for Trobrianders throughout the twentieth century.

Whitehouse adjusts what has evolved into an indigenous weekly routine in order to allow more time for plantation work:

Saturdays... for which the past fifteen years has been a day devoted to the cleaning of tracks and village grounds, has become a day when the men go to the plantation and the women clean the roads. [PR 6/1925-26; 11/19/1926]

While it was important to keep native vegetation at bay, some sort of ground cover was felt to be necessary on the plantations. If a secondary crop could be established that could keep the ground cool and provide additional income, all the better. A variety of plants were tried out as ground cover throughout the 1920s, for instance, pumpkins (SJ 10/8/1923). Cotton was experimented with on a large scale, using specialized strains such as "Sea Island Cotton" (SJ 11/23/1922) and "Hill Cotton" (SJ 6/18/1924). Whitehouse suspected that an initial batch of seed was dead but had them planted anyway (SJ 1/31/1923), with no result. The next year new seed is planted and the results are promising, with the plants maturing and producing good bolls, but heavy rains spoil the crop before samples can be harvested for inspection by Mr. Murray (PR 9/1924-25; 12/6/1924).

Leo Austen inspected the flagship plantation at Kaibola in 1932, and wrote a special report (Inspection Report 468/43; 5/6/1932). One might imagine that eight years into the project Austen's report would be full of production figures such as the number of bags of copra shipped and so forth. The report is, in fact, a rather depressing picture of neglect: "The stagnation was most marked. The grass and trees have been allowed to grow during the last three months...Pests are very very bad." Along with the bad news, Austen lays out plans to redress the situation:

It will be clean cleared [weeded] and the cleanings will be scattered around the coconut trees to form a manure and keep the roots cool... and a special pestboy has been engaged to visit each tree on the plantation during one week.

The "pestboy" gives Austen some figures to report:

While on the plantation he brought me in the first day 30 rhinoceros beetles, and the second day 15, the following week at Losuia he brought down 40. He has been given an oil drum with a cork in which to store his catch and will report fortnightly with it at Losuia.

Some copra is coming out, but only a fraction of what should be produced on a large plantation: "[A]s only 8 bags a year have been made during the last 2 ½ years, I think there has been a leakage somewhere." To prevent the theft of coconuts, or "leakage," and also fallen nuts rooting into the ground, Austen orders that:

Care is to be taken that copra is made EACH month, even if only one bag, so that no nuts will go to waste... All nuts were collected while I was there and sufficient to make three more bags of copra in addition to the two already there were brought to the smokehouse.

These problems of neglect are certainly disheartening, but another comment might come as a shock to anyone familiar with Whitehouse's careful and tireless efforts to found a successful venture for the people of northern Kiriwina:

The soil of Kaibola as has been stated so often lacks nutriment and after examination of other plantations, I have come to the conclusion that no worse spot could have been found to experiment upon. It is situated on the northwest end of the island and therefore does not get the southeasterly breeze through the trees. Again I have found that where the coast is open to the southeast, great quantities of pumice have been washed up, and it has been noted that where coconuts are planted in coral sand mixed with pumice stones, there the trees grow infinitely better.

Austen clearly has knowledge not available to Whitehouse, even though Whitehouse had Mr. Murray, the "plantation expert," to assist him. Whitehouse's grand undertaking is seen by Austen as a failed experiment, one that would have served the people better if conducted on a much smaller scale. Austen also writes: "I am of the opinion that a number of the original nuts planted were of poor quality and are the cause of so many of the trees being stunted, twisted and freaks" (Inspection Report 468/43; 5/6/1932). We know that Whitehouse took great pains to collect handpicked seed-nuts, so this observation means that Austen is not a complete expert on the subject either, but he has been doing his homework, as this comment disputing the expert's latest opinion on ground cover shows: "Mr. George Murray is against planting sweet potatoes among the coconuts but that does not agree with what Sampson in "The Coconut Palm" (1923) says (page 152)" (PR 9/1931-32; 5/6/1932: Plantations).

Austen pays workers their share of the proceeds from the sale of copra: "An average of 2/2 per statutory worker was paid out being the half share of the worker for their produce of the last 2 ½ years" (Inspection Report 468/43; 5/6/1932). The other "half share" belonged to the government. While these workers also had worked off their tax burden, an annual salary of less than a pound might not have engendered much enthusiasm for the difficult work of plantation upkeep and copra production.

Austen finds varying degrees of neglect at other plantations, and orders that all be "clean cleared every new moon." He hopes that this increased maintenance will encourage more even growth among the trees, some of which are doing well, but many of which are stunted.

Three months later, Austen sees the best and the worst of this maintenance program in one day:

Inspected the M'tau plantation. They win the £5 [best-kept plantation prize] for 1931/32. On to the Liluta plantation where the statutory workers were ordered to proceed to Losuia next Monday to be prosecuted for continued neglect to keep plantation clean [PR 1/1932-33; 8/22/1932].

Just as the plantation trees were coming into full bearing, the price of copra on the world market collapsed, and remained a fraction of its former value throughout the thirties. While the native plantations continued to operate, most villagers would have received more compensation for time spent by working as unskilled laborers elsewhere. Many villagers viewed "their" plantations as belonging to the government, and only continued to work them to avoid prosecution (Griffin et al 1979:27-31).

Carving

ARM Whitehouse describes the traditional role of the Boitalu woodcarving industry in 1923:

In the earlier days as at present, these natives kept the Guyaus, Toliwagas and the richer men of Kiriwina and the adjoining islands supplied with articles of culinary use in the form of “kabomas” [wooden bowls and platters] and decorative pieces of work for the adornment of the natives’ houses and person.⁴⁸

He goes on to contrast rather negatively the quality of Boitalu carving with that of the *Tokabitam* (master carvers) around the islands, or perhaps lament a decline in quality in the products of the village, but finishes with kudos to the Boitalans’ special skill:

There are some excellent specimens of native art – excellent in design and craftsmanship – to be seen at various corners of the district, which, when compared with the latter day products of these villagers appears almost unreconcilable [sic]. These craftsmen however possess one peculiarity which is worth noting: - that they can evolve new ideas and can execute these ideas in material. As copyists they are excellent and all that is necessary to have an article reproduced in wood is to show the native the specimen and in four days the article is delivered (From actual work executed it would appear to me that there is a very promising community here who would be greatly benefited by technical training). [PR 2/1923; 1/23/1923]

Over the next few years the local demand for implements is eclipsed by a growing European taste for “native art” and souvenirs. Boitalu obliges by becoming a center for export. Rentoul comments in 1928: “This village is famous for its carving, as from this centre alone originate almost all the Trobriand curios to be found in Samarai and other places” (PR 1/1928-29; 11/8/1928). More details are mentioned in a later report, not only of those involved in shipment and resale, but also some of the objects now in demand:

This is the carving centre of the District and many carvers are busy with orders for Mrs. Lumley and Samuel Brudo, who have a market in Samarai for the output... [The men] assured me that as soon as they received payment for their images, flower stands, etc., they would come to Losuia and pay their tax. [PR 10/1929-30; 2/13/1930]

An indication of a growing interest at the time for indigenous artifacts, especially those of some antiquity, is the attention given to stone axe heads that become available for sale at Losuia. These blades, made from greenstone imported from Murua (Woodlark Island), were and still are an important article of wealth and status for Trobrianders, but often remain hidden by their owners who use them mainly for payment to sorcerers or in the *kula*. Whitehouse intercepts a blade called “Kaipwamana,” intended as payment from a chief to a sorcerer for a murder, and offers it for sale. Samuel Brudo is the highest bidder, and buys the blade for £5 and six shillings (SJ 11/19/1923). A year later another confiscated blade, “Tomaisoso,” brings a slightly higher price (SJ 11/27/1924). In 1926

⁴⁸ This production of eating implements for other villages seems to contradict the general abhorrence of Boitalans by other Trobrianders, as described by ARM Hall: “As these people are considered by the whole of the Trobrianders to be the scavengers of the Kiriwina folk, they therefore have an intense dislike to the drinking or eating out of the Boitalu pots and water containers” (PR 3/1931-32; 9/2/1931). Perhaps items actually used by Boitalans’ are considered corrupted, while things simply made or handled by them are acceptable.

Whitehouse must liquidate the deceased trader N.M. Campbell's estate, and auctions off the blade "Koiivilataiga" for a whopping £18 and twelve shillings, whether due to a better quality, larger size, or increased resale value is not known (SJ 1/5/1926).

Austen looks in on Mrs. Lumley in 1933, and his comments show that her business is still going strong, with hopes for expansion:

She wants me to take some photos of Kiriwina tables etc as there is a chance of her getting a £40 or £50 order for the Melbourne centenary. She hopes that the import duty on Kiriwina curios will be lifted soon in Australia. [PR 5/1933-34; 10/4/1933]

The import duty would certainly hamper exports. Since Papua was a territory of Australia, equal in status to the Northern Territory on the mainland, this duty is a conundrum. A similar situation would be if imports from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States were subject to a tariff.

Chapter 5: Anthropology

Over the years in the Trobriands, various administrators may have displayed different attitudes towards the indigenous population, but all seemed to show great interest in the rich cultural life taking place around them. It was part of their job to do so, as Papuan government policy included recognition of indigenous culture, and its preservation when possible. In the early 1920s the office of Government Anthropologist was added to the bureaucracy in Port Moresby, and excerpts of patrol reports and station journals deemed to be of ethnographic interest were forwarded there by the Government Secretary.

Those interested in Trobriand culture, especially within an historical framework, will find rich pickings in these reports. While previous sections of this study are full of comments and descriptions of ethnographic interest, many entries of anthropological value have been skipped over when charting the trajectories of other themes. As these ethnographic tidbits are too numerous to list completely, here is a selective overview.

ARM Bellamy provides early details of the production process for stone axe blades:

On from Luia to Wabatuma. Found chief Tumlubula busy grinding the rough green stones which used to come from Murua, making a stone tomahawk. Told me it took about 2 years to grind down and complete a stone. [PR 131/15; 5/14/1915]

ARM Whitehouse enjoyed exploring his island realm, and wrote of many “discoveries” in his reports, including several caves and grottoes of archaeological interest. An example from 1919 of the “Bone Caves” near Kiribi:

These caves are of limestone formation and are gradually closing up with stalactites...one can see hundreds of skulls and bones of every description through fissures in the rock but access is barred by the stalagmitic formation. I learn from several of the natives that this is an old custom followed by the people, who after taking the bodies from the ground after decomposition has taken place, take away the bones, and after a ceremony very elaborate, take them to the sea, wash them clean and finally deposit them in these caves and regard this action as the last binding obligation. [PR 3B; 8/5/1919]

Elsewhere Whitehouse records older remains:

These small grottoes appear to be the vaults of some ancient peoples – since the whole skeleton of an individual can be seen reposing in huge clam-shells. The locals have no knowledge whatsoever of how these deposits of human remains came about and regard them as being somewhat uncanny. (Relative to this “find” I might mention that there is nothing new about it, for at many points on the island and more especially around the South-Eastern coastline at Wawela and Glibu [sic] many such collections might be found). [PR 2/1922-23; 12/6/1922]

Whitehouse does note, however, that while these remains near Idaliaka Point are virtually intact in their clamshells, those in other caves are strewn about, with some bones showing signs of use, such as ulnas that are carved into blades, with betelnut stains indicating their use as lime spatulas.

Later Whitehouse documents a less reverent treatment of human remains:

Came to the village of Tauwema where all duties were performed and an enquiry conducted relative to the alleged spearing of the corpse of a native Toapiki after interment. This so I am led to believe was a common practice in days past, persons of ill-repute; sorcerers, adulterers and traitors were liable subjects to receive such treatment at the hands of offended parties; having his bowels stirred up with spears or the remains exhumed (in sections) cast into the sea for fish or thrown into the bush for wild pigs to devour. I believe this is a solution to the finding of skulls and other human remains at intervals by men swimming [for] pearl-bearing oysters. [PR II/25/27; 4/14/1927]

Whitehouse investigates this incident like any other assault case, despite the lifelessness of the victim. No villagers will name the assailants, fearing sorcery. The next year Whitehouse indicates that the spearing of the corpse helped to calm a troubled village:

Tauwema on the N.W. coast has also had its period of depression resulting in the removal of several villagers in quest of peace. This trouble obviously came to finality when the last remains of Toapiki were interfered with, for on occasion of this visit a complete sense of contentment was observed. [PR 10/25/28; 4/6/1928]

This kind of “interference” is one reason why locals were hesitant to bury their loved ones away from their villages, as directed by the government on grounds of health (see p.88).

On patrol during the harvest festivities of *Milamala*, Whitehouse describes displays of wealth put out to impress the spirit visitors, and what he sees as acts of dishonesty toward deceased relatives:

At this village [Wabutima] the natives had placed bananas, coconuts and the choicest of yams, decorated as only a native can decorate matter, on small platforms...so that the entertained “spirits” might see, and return to Tuma with a good impression...Here I might mention the insincere methods of the native, who will borrow from any trader such wealth as he possibly can and is prepared to pay well for the privilege of displaying somebody’s wealth, firmly believing that the “spirit” will understand that it is his or her respective wealth. [PR 4/1920-21; 8/31/1920]

The next day Whitehouse witnesses the end of *Milamala*:

The natives returned to their dancing and kept it up until the following morning, when at 8am. a great noise and a running hither and thither attracted my attention and, after making several enquiries, found out that the entertaining natives were driving out all the “Spirits” back to their own homes in Tuma. Later a second effort was made to drum out all the cripples who remained hiding in the houses (didn’t wish to return) and after a general search and beating of the wind, the natives again settled down to their usual mode of life. [PR 4/1920-21; 9/1/1920]

At times an officer’s normal duties, such as a village improvement project, will lead to an ethnographic observation. Whitehouse relates such an occurrence at Mulosaida where he directs an effort to remove coral outcrops from village grounds:

The progress however in the interim has been very slow, so much so that one could only conclude that something was amiss... When questioned in the matter of the removal of the coral, one is given the usual casual reply, but in a tone that betokens a certain reticence. The inspection of houses brought me into close proximity to a hollow cylindrical pillar of coral standing two feet high, in the aperture of which lay two stones, each adjusted and held in position by small pieces of coral... I made an attempt to take them up and examine them, but was prevented from doing so by the village “weather-maker”...

This group of stones is called “Ilimaigigita” and operates in conjunction with another conical stone named “Ilutoweta” which leans its apex north-wards a few feet distant from the former.

Whitehouse goes on to discover that the village houses an extensive arrangement of magical stones:

A few paces distant are...two characteristic stones bearing the name of “Namiliiewa” and “Namaigigita.” The former is the largest stone measuring 3 feet nine inches at its widest axis and stands approximately twenty inches high. In shape it resembles a pear inverted, smooth in texture, a rich grey in colour and partly overgrown with moss, imparting to the whole an antique effect. Near this stone is the smaller egg-shaped stone measuring 14 inches in circumference and is 7 ½ inches long and resembles the former in every other respect with the exception that it controls the rain whilst the larger controls the growth of food-stuffs.

It would appear that at this place the past generation obtained its material blessings; rain could be made to fall by the inclination of Namaigigita in a certain direction or prevented as desired. The wind also could be controlled and travelers assured of a favourable wind to carry them to their destination, the growth of tubers planted in the small gardens also received control sustenance from the magical rites performed here by the sorcery-man, which in every instance yielded or responded in proportion to the payment tendered. Penalties for the violation of these places are well known, several people named by the present generation have died untimely deaths and others are suffering from malignant sores as the direct result of interfering with these stones... [T]he age of these stones and the magic attached to them is so old that the term “from time immemorial” is the only satisfactory term that can be applied.

Whitehouse ends this account with some satisfaction for his own investigative skills, as well as a judgment on the minimal effect of the nearby mission, at least on local belief in the efficacy of these magical stones:

Hence by an inquisitive set one learns the solution of the lack of interest displayed in the suggestion of clearing up a village of coral outcrops, from the natives who have been under instruction for a considerable number of years by the local mission, whose grounds adjoin the village and form a playground for the present generation. [PR 2/1923-24; 10/23/1923]

Whitehouse was not averse to including lengthy accounts of origin and other myths in his patrol reports. A few excerpts from the story of the population of the small western island of Konia:

The story or what remains of it today, pictures Muiuwata who had prepared coconut oil and placed it in a bamboo which he hung over the threshold of his house. Later his sister...emerged from the house a spot of this oil dripping in her hair. Outside she passed her fingers through her frizzy hair and... rubbed the oil on both hands the smell of which instantly affected her passions and created the desire for carnal knowledge. All the men of the settlement had departed fishing or in search of fruits. Muiuwata alone remaining in the village, consequently in the heat of passion the native taboo was disregarded resulting in his expulsion from the tribe and his flight to Konia where he had hoped that distance and new associations would obliterate from his memory the awful recollections of his crime.

Such proved erroneous and after some months of residence... [he climbed] to the peak of Kukumilakaliga where... he cut off his penis and scrotum and there bled to death. From the blood which ran from his body a specie of sweet scented mint called “Bebiieta” grew and is extensively used to this day among the younger generation when seeking a wife. [PR 9/1924-25; 12/2/1924]

Despite his penchant for development and “improvement,” Whitehouse extols Tukwaukwa, a rare village relatively undisturbed by western influence:

It appeals to me to be one of the very few villages in the Trobriands where complete happiness and contentment exist, where native law is administered by the chief and native customs have been little interfered by the close contact of Europeans. Never-the-less they are progressive, make extensive gardens and are good canoe builders as well as good fishermen. [PR 6/1925-26; 11/24/1926]

ARM Rentoul reports being shown “a grotto of wonderful beauty” near the Liluta plantation on northern Kiriwina:

Pushing through ferns and undergrowth my guide revealed an opening in the coral cliff through which we passed into the coolness of a great chamber, the ceiling of which lay hidden in the gloom. As I became used to the half light, I observed innumerable stalactites, while a further chamber enclosed a pool of the clearest water sunken at a depth of over 30 feet. I gathered that certain yams are brought to this chamber before planting in the competition gardens, and here they receive very special magic to confound their competitors in due course. [PR 2/1929-30; 7/24/1929]

By the late twenties, RMs and ARMs are forwarding reports of a purely ethnographic nature to the Government Anthropologist. Rentoul makes a comment hinting at a wealth of anthropological writings yet to be rediscovered:

Reached Okobobo at 1 pm where a crowd of women estimated at over 800, had assembled to carry out a Lisaladabu Sagali, particulars of which are forwarded separately. [PR 5/1929-30; 10/10/1929]

Starting in the 1930s, the men posted to Losuia were well read in Trobriand ethnography, and at times refer to Malinowski in their reports. An example from ARM Hall, who oversees the installation of a water pump at Omarakana, but then has the pump moved:

My reason for shifting it was that I found out that years ago burials took place in the village and near the spot where the pump was placed. The Chief [Mitakata] pointed out the place as being suitable... When I questioned him later when I remembered reading of the burials in Malanowski's [sic] book “Sexual Life of Savages” he said that he thought the Government knew and that is why he did not tell me of the burials... I deemed it wise to shift the pump immediately. [PR 2/1931-32; 8/19/1931]

ARM Austen's cultural sensitivity leads him to cancel a road improvement project:

Just outside Deagila found a number of coral outcrops in a portion of the road. I was going to get them to clear them away, until they told me that a certain legend was attached to it and that a mythical turtle lived underground, so I informed that they could leave them there. [PR 5/1931-32; 12/3/1931]

While this type of legend attached to a landmark is common in the Trobriands, it is also entirely possible that the villagers cooked up a story to get out of the difficult work of breaking up and clearing away the coral, especially since Austen was a new ARM on his first patrol. Word could quickly spread of other effective excuses used in this way, such as the fear of sorcery.

Austen is called in to referee a dispute over a magical talisman:

Enquiry continued into the magical garden stick ownership... Had a number of old men brought in as assessors and the matter was fixed up to the satisfaction of all. The whole trouble was brought about by

the true owner holding on to the stick because some of his relatives did not pay for the use of it. To us it is only a minor matter, but to the local natives the matter was important. The stick is called Kaipela and is just a piece of black palm bought many years ago from Goodenough. The success of gardens depends very much on the use of this stick. [PR 3/1932-33; 8/18/1932]

Austen enjoys a celebration at Deagila after the village is given the prize for “best kept village,” which has become an occasion for festivities:

The first dance was a gift dance when the dancers entered the circle with gifts hung on them. On this occasion betel nut was prominently to the fore. The lookers on watched their chance and to use a slangy phrase: “hopped in for their cut.” One dancer had to take off his tortoiseshell earrings which had been appropriated by an onlooker. The Kitava prisoners whom I had with me were also advised to get a share and although they did not seem to know this dance or were frightened of taking gifts from the Kiriwinas they eventually screwed up the courage to go into the circle rather gingerly and get some of what was left. Of course a male cannot take gifts off the body of a female. There is no return present made and it is one of the few occasions when natives can truly be said to take gifts without expecting any return. [PR 6/1932-33; 12/15/1932]

Austen shows that during the course of his magisterial work he is thinking about anthropology, in this case a theory he is developing concerning the idea of paternity in the Trobriands:

Heard a case out of court concerning a betelnut tree. Was fortunate to hear an expression hurled at one of the parties involved. It may have a bearing on physiological paternity, and if so will bring out more clearly the crux of my thesis. The time was not propitious for investigation, so I will leave it for a week and bring it up again then, when I have a clearer knowledge of the exact meaning of the phrase used. [PR 2/1933-34; 9/7/1933]

Kula

The central place of the *kula* in Trobriand life made it an important topic for the administration, as evidenced by a comment made by Austen, after a long discussion of chiefly succession at Sinaketa: “Sinaketa being a most important point in the Kula transactions, it is most necessary to have a strong chief there (PR 5/1932-33; 11/22/1932).

While the bulk of anthropological details contained in government reports come in the form of incidental observations during the course of administrative duties, a patrol by Whitehouse in 1928 includes a specific ethnographic goal: “[I]nvestigations concerning the Kula institution, checking the flow of valuables after a period of ten years – data by Bronislaw Malinowski, Ph.D. D.S.”

During this patrol Whitehouse records a detailed account of the arrival in Omarakana of a famous *soulava*:

During the morning the notes of a conch-shell sounded faintly, intermingling with the thrashing of the wind-swept foliage now being borne with increased volume as the wind veers to the South-East. Touluwa’s listless attitude towards the official’s stereotyped questioning of the inhabitants passes, he becomes alert, questioning his sons...An interval passes whilst speculation and a degree of excitement is obvious among the men assembled near my tent...

A man Vabogibogi of Okaikoda having the rank of Toliwaga now enters the villages carrying a *soulava* (necklace of spondylus shell discs), known as “Matiginagena” suspended on a sapling, followed by the youngster responsible for the intermittent blowing of the conch-shell, then six men of

the same village of the procession. The valuable was deposited on the platform before the house of Iiobukwau (a small chief) who handed Vabogibogi a bunch of betelnut.

Shortly afterwards the soulava was passed to Toulawa who admired it, measured it (across his breast with outstretched arms), passing it to the older men who similarly dealt with the article which eventually returned to Iiobukwau (subsequent investigation indicates that this soulava was made by the kaloma workers of Sinaketa prior to the period when Europeans commenced to make native wealth at that point, which led to the final collapse of the kaloma industry at Sinaketa).

This little incident serves to show that the old time spirit of the institution still exists and I am pleased to record what I saw with my own eyes, the first ceremonial presentation of a soulava in exchange for a mwali (armshell) delivered to Okaikoda a few days previously. [PR II/25/28; 5/1/1928]

This account shows that for all intents and purposes, on this patrol at least Whitehouse has become an ethnographer, and an enthusiastic one at that. He records many important details, including names; he shows pleasure at the endurance of tradition, as well as an ethnographer's pride at being there to record it, and he documents recent western influences.

At the end of the report Whitehouse documents the statistics he has gathered, including a breakdown of the ranks of participants and the number of "ruling class" versus "commoners" involved, a tally of the objects exchanged with comparisons with Malinowski's findings ten years before, and an apology: "whilst figures show an increase in transactions unfortunately I have no data to prove the increase or decrease of the 'ruling class' participants compared with the commoners."

While this report indicates that the government was fully behind the continuance of the *kula*, a final comment shows that the resident missionaries held an opposing view:

I was able to obtain a written statement that the Methodist Mission as a body disapproved of its members participating in the Kula in this District. As the same body operates in the other section of the Kula ring, the disapproval originating at the annual Synod held at headquarters, one must conclude that its import is general, the institution being attacked from both ends and all sides. [PR II/25/28; summary]

This comment (especially the emphasis on a "written statement") shows a picture of Whitehouse gathering evidence for a possible confrontation by his superiors with the Mission over the stifling of native custom. A note written by Lieutenant Governor Murray on the cover sheet of the patrol report strengthens this scenario: "Please ask the ARM to inquire why the mission disapproves of the Kula."

Whitehouse first mentions European interference with the *kula* without further comment:

Visited the ... village of Sinaketa, which appears deserted as most of the males have gone to the Amphletts on board Europeans' boats to transact exchange of wealth in the kula. [PR II/25/26; 4/28/1926]

ARM Rentoul (as previously mentioned) notes local irritation at the unconventional *kula* endeavors of "outsiders":

Much dissatisfaction is expressed at the action of several "foreign" natives, e.g. those from Siau or Dobu Island – in operating on the kula for their own interest and not through the recognized channels. [PR 10/1928-29; 6/12/1929]

ARM Hall details European interference while reporting on a visit to Omarakana:

Mitakata... complained that some of the people in the Kula circle were not following strictly to the native custom in the exchange of native wealth, i.e. they were visiting different places in the circle by boats belonging to Europeans instead of by their own boats (canoes). I sympathized with Mitakata and told him that I would try and persuade all the people to abide by the custom and carry out the exchanges in the proper way. This custom has much ritual connected with and, I understand, has been interfered with... by some Europeans to their own advantage and to the detriment of Mitakata's and other chiefs' powers or native rights...

Continuing, Hall editorializes about the importance of the *kula* and argues for its preservation in the original form:

It would be, I think, a pity to take away or in any way interfere with this ancient custom, the exchange time of which is so eagerly looked forward to each year by all those in the circle. It is a means of giving them an added interest in life and meeting people from other parts and exchanging different ideas. I think this is one of the customs that should be encouraged and preserved. [PR 1/1930-31; 7/8/1930]

ARM Austen reports an indigenous departure from customary *kula* practices:

VC of M'tau at Kaibola to report the breaking of the Kula Ring, by Sinaketans who went to Kitava. Sent word to... Sinaketa and Vakuta to inform them that a Councillors' Court would be held at Losuia on the 16th at which... this breach of old time custom would be investigated. [PR 9/1931-32; 5/6/1932]

Austen hoped that the concerned villages would be able to sort out the problem without his direct interference.

The next season brings a rebuff from neighbors and a stronger stance by Austen against European interference:

Apparently a few weeks ago the majority of the natives in the Kula were taken to Dobu in European launches loaned by pearl buyers. I learnt that they had a very cold reception at Dobu as the people said they should have come in their own canoes. They returned feeling rather shamed. So I struck while the iron was hot and spoke for a very long time on Kula matters and it was agreed that during the next six months they would build proper sailing canoes for next season. The people blamed the pearl buyers here who tempted them to use the boats so as to draw trade. On the other hand the pearl buyers blamed the village people and said they were only following out the custom of many years and that if they did not lend their boats the boys would not go out pearling. This of course is absurd... When His Excellency comes here I intend putting forward a suggestion that I be granted permission to make an order under N.R.117 (2b) that no native shall engage on Kula in an European vessel belonging to an European [sic]. This would give the necessary impetus to building of sailing canoes and also give them a much greater interest in the kula and at the same time a greater interest in their village life preparing for these expeditions. [PR 11/1932-33; 4/24/1933]

The use of European traders' boats (an early example of "corporate sponsorship") is not only a threat to traditional life, but also a safety issue, as Austen reports that these boats are often overloaded with dozens of *kula* participants (PR 11/1932-33; 4/25/1933).

Austen is drawn into the diplomacy and intrigue that is part and parcel of the *kula*. While camped at Kwabaku, he is visited by a group of Kitavans who are on Kiriwina trying to get *soulava* from Kwabaku, but Austen learns that nineteen *mwali* are

outstanding from Kitava, which the Kitava VC says is held up at Murua.⁴⁹ After some wrangling between parties, he suggests the Kitavans go to Murua to free up the *mwali*. This is a simplistic solution, as Austen well knows:

I have no doubt that it will not end there but will go further along the chain even back to Gumasila and Dobu where someone of importance may have died and whose death may have held up soulava or *mwali* for a few months. [PR 12/1932-33; 5/18/1933]

Austen's value as *kula* referee is highlighted when he receives a complaint at Vakuta. An elderly participant stated that he was handcuffed by a VC on Dobu for refusing to hand over a *mwali* to the man, and was kept out in the rain for 6 hours before the handcuffs were removed. Austen writes:

I have written to the ARM Mapamoia [his counterpart on Dobu] regarding this alleged assault which was vouched for by the VC of Vakuta and a number of Vakuta people who were present. [PR 13/1932-33; 6/15/1933]

This case is a real concern, since a Village Constable used his position to coerce a fellow *kula* participant for his own benefit. The use of handcuffs compounds the transgression. Austen's ability to write to Dobu for justice is of great value to the offended village.

Tuma

The first mention of Tuma is a brief, tongue-in-cheek comment by Bellamy in 1911: "This island is the traditional place of departed spirits, and there was some speculation amongst police and crew as to whether we should see any of our dead relatives" (SJ 5/26/1911).

Four years later Bellamy writes of the living inhabitants of Tuma and their claims of a special relationship with the dead of the Trobriands:

Tuma is of course the traditional "Place of Spirits" for all deceased Trobriand Islanders. They show you where the spirits get their drinking water and the hole into which the newly arrived spirits disappear. They have a lively imagination and are always ready to act as intermediaries between deceased persons and their bereaved relatives. They have of course the latest news from their geographical position of all spirits and are able to state how any special individual spirit was looking when last seen. This is quite a fact and not an exaggeration. There are 16 houses in Tuma. [PR 38/15; 2/5/1915]

In 1922 Whitehouse gives a detailed description of the geography of Tuma, starting with the village of Gisaukoma (population twenty-seven, with nine houses), and the creek that bisects the island into two parts:

Tuma, therefore can be roughly described as two islands, that east of the creek "Wasasa" and that west "Kalakaliia" although these names can only be used in a very broad sense for every small pocket of soil found suitable for gardening purposes has its own peculiar name. Investigations prove that the original inhabitants of Tuma resided on Wasasa (the spirit portion of the island)... [PR 2/1922-23; 11/27/22]

⁴⁹ Note the status of Village Constables as leaders of village deputations. During this period, VCs can rival chiefs in their powers and prestige, and ARMs must be careful to mediate a balance so as to not undermine the chiefs.

The proof is clumps of coconut trees at two old village sites. Whitehouse reports that Gisaukoma is on the non-spirit side of the island, at an ideal site on the beach facing west, with its new coconut plantation adjacent, but that the islanders still use the garden lands of one of the old villages. Inset into the report is a neatly drawn map of the island (Figure 17).

In 1924 Whitehouse reports the population on Tuma has shrunk to twenty, due to deaths and not many births. Here he also asserts that Trobrianders are buried with their feet pointing toward Tuma, “so that their spirits might not mistake the direction” (PR 9/25/45; 12/3/1924).

To’uluwa

Paramount Chief To’uluwa was at times a difficult case for the colonial authorities, as he often resisted their attempts to curb his influence. While mentioned in dispatches prior to the founding of Losuia, he first appears in the Losuia records in 1911, when ARM Bellamy writes of a dispute over a pig:

A Kabulula man had killed a pig near his garden. He thought it was a bush pig. On finding his mistake he sent a payment to Moliassi of Kwabuku [second in rank to To’uluwa, but a traditional enemy] to whom he thought the pig belonged. Moliassi returned the payment saying the pig did not belong to him. In the mean time word had reached Toulou that the pig was his and hearing that it has already been cooked he set off in person with a crew of friends to seize any of the pig which had not been eaten. Kabulula is a small village, only six or seven men, otherwise the matter would have led to a fight. As it was the Kabulula men stood aside while Toulou and his friends took possession of the village. Toulou sat, apparently in state on a verandah while his friends turned the houses inside out looking for the pig. He was convicted and given the option of a fine with his friends. The Kabulula man was also punished for taking possession of the pig and cooking it. Toulou paid his fine. [SJ 473/23; 8/18/1911]

This level of detail in explaining the case was warranted as anything involving the chieftainship merited special attention. Bellamy is careful to be evenhanded in judging the case, because while To’uluwa’s prestige was important to the notion of indirect rule, it was equally important to show that he was not above colonial law.

Bellamy convicted To’uluwa of sorcery in 1911 and sentenced him to a stay in gaol. This lessened his authority somewhat, as it showed that the government could haul him into court just like anyone else. While he apparently learned that open defiance of the Australians was sure to fail, over the years he shows that he can argue on behalf of his people, and also use the administration for his own ends.

Bellamy writes of a visit to To’uluwa in Omarakana in 1915:

He wears wonderfully well for his years. He came up and shook hands solemnly. I have never known him to do this before. Still I suppose with 16 wives he likes to think he has a friend somewhere. The same discussion about coconuts.⁵⁰ Toulou more interested today in war news than coconuts. [PR 131/15; 5/11/1915: p.3]

⁵⁰ As this took place two years after Bellamy’s interruption of the chiefly monopoly on coconuts, this “discussion” indicates a long-running argument between the men on the subject.

and is fringed with a dense growth of mangrove trees of a diminutive character (not the tall mangroves which are characteristic of the Kiriwinian creeks). The main bed continues in a N.W. course for approximately half a mile, becoming shallower and shallower until eventually it assumes a swamp terminating off the N.W. coast of the island.

TUMA, therefore can be roughly described as two islands, that east of the creek "Wasasa" and that west "Kalakaliia" although these names can only be used in a very broad sense for every small pocket of soil found suitable for gardening purposes, has its own peculiar name. Investigations prove that the original inhabitants of Tuma resided on WASASA (the spirit portion of the island) on the edge of the creek about a quarter of a mile from its present source. Here are a group of sixty old coconut palms and a water-hole which mark the one time village of Okaitapu and again another quarter of a mile W. is a clump of forty coconuts with its little water-hole marking the now defunct village site of Oilogogwa. The garden-land which these early natives; the occupants of the two villages presumably found sufficient to supply their needs is of the "front garden" type:- small areas of ground 25 feet square, bordered with thick crops of coral standing six feet high. Some little distance away another similar garden can be found and so on over a distance of some fifty acres and it is here that the present inhabitants make their gardens. The soil seems to

be very fertile for I saw Bananas, taitu, sugar-cane, taro all growing in the one garden.

The present village site: Gisaukoma is in every respect all that could be desired for a village site. It is situated on the S.W. sandbeach of of the island: Kalakaliia, this beach, four chains wide, extends W.N.W. for about a mile with the reef-studded sea on the W. and the extended swamp inland.



It is here on this sand spit that the natives have planted all their coconuts in close formation, some six feet apart and others at varying intervals from twelve to twenty-feet apart. All these palms show fair growth, although, as could be expected a large percentage of the 800 planted are overcrowded and showing indifferent growth. It would however, be a fair average to say that 50% are bearing and are moderate

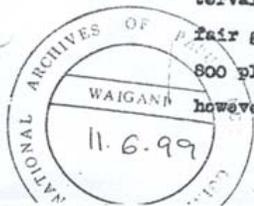


Figure 17. Excerpt from Whitehouse's report of a visit to Tuma in 1922.

Despite the close proximity to German New Guinea (Kaiser Wilhelmsland) there is little mention of WWI in the record, but the few comments made show that the Trobrianders were talking about it and were curious. Bellamy notes in November 1914: “am asked many questions about the war” (PR 315/14; 1117/1914), and in 1915 writes:

Toulu spent a considerable amount of the night at my tent door asking questions about the war. He was very interested in the mechanical turtles which dived and swam under the water and bit holes in the big ships bottom. [PR 160/15; 6/26/1915]

As a seasoned political strategist, To’uluwa’s interest in the war may have been more than academic. He may be trying to judge whether the Australians’ days were numbered in his realm, and how that might affect his status.

ARM Campbell’s view of To’uluwa was benign:

He is a man of very fine physique and looks about 50 years of age, and appears to me to be of a kindly disposition. He commands great respect from the ordinary natives, who bend their backs and bow their heads when passing him and when entering and leaving his village. A woman, possibly one of his wives, approaching him with a lime-pot will do so on her knees. [PR 11/1916-17; 4/20/1917]

While Omarakana is, to many who first read of the Trobrianders in Malinowski’s work, the “capital” village of traditional Kiriwina, in 1919 ARM Whitehouse finds it in decline along with the fortunes of To’uluwa:

Omarakana, a village famous in days gone by for the power held by the chief residing there... still exhibits an immense food-house and a gigantic hut, the home of Toulu, but at the time of this patrol the strong S.E. winds which we have experienced, together with the silent working of the white-ants⁵¹ have rendered the hut untenable. Since this patrol was made...the hut has been completely demolished. [PR 2/1919-20; 10/15/1919]

Three years later, Whitehouse finds a similar situation. Commenting on a visit to Omarakana and the adjacent village of Kasanai, he writes:

Both of these villages appear to be dying out and the new houses built in accordance with the instructions issued from Losuia tend to make the older buildings look the more dilapidated...Toulua, the great chief, calls the Government’s attention to his empty food-houses due to the fact that he is not allowed to keep his fifty wives as in the days of old – finding thirteen an insignificant number to attend to his personal wants. His village also, which at one time was one of the largest in Kiriwina is now one of the poorest both in numbers and in riches, but the great man never mentions the present period of want due to the failure of the last year’s harvest. [PR 2/1922-23; 12/14/1922]

Here Whitehouse casts oblique dispersions at To’uluwa, misreading his comments on his declining political and economic influence (grounded in wives and the yams they bring for redistribution), as carpings about lost personal luxury. Whitehouse also dismisses To’uluwa’s diminished status as the reason for his empty *bwaimas*, instead seeing the year’s poor harvest as the main culprit.

In the same passage, Whitehouse touches on an issue of concern for the government, the fact that over several years deaths have been outnumbering births throughout the islands, pointing to a long-term trend of depopulation despite improved

⁵¹ Termites, of which the Trobriand variety is a dedicated enemy of any wooden building, especially fond of devouring posts sunk into the ground.

overall health due to the administration's medical efforts. This is a trend that neither Whitehouse nor his superiors understand, and Whitehouse asks To'uluwa his opinion, but in the same breath discounts what appears to be a well thought out hypothesis:

Right through the length and breadth of Kiriwina there is evidence of depression, but possibly more marked in Omarakana than elsewhere...A talk with Toulua relative to the declining birth rate and the large number of deaths merits no other remark from his royal personage than that of the effect of the advent of the Whiteman in the Woodlarks, which says he, at one time had many people, but now only a few remain, and he assures me that Kiriwina will be the same. I tried to obtain his solution to this paradox and for any suggestion he might care to make, but this conversation was brought to a close by his asking me for some tobacco.

Whitehouse trivializes To'uluwa by depicting him cutting short a rational discussion to ask for a handout, but To'uluwa seems to be politely changing the subject, as the obvious reply to the ARMs question would be "hard words" against white domination of his realm.

In 1922 To'uluwa explains to Whitehouse that the plantation labor scheme involves too much time and work, and argues for a halving of the tax. While these efforts are apparently wasted on the ARM, the Paramount Chief at least shows he is more than just a figurehead by speaking for the interests of the entire populace of Kiriwina (SJ 5/22/1922).

Whitehouse's attitude towards the Paramount Chief is one of ambivalence; sometimes supportive, at other times condescending or even hostile. Most friction between the two arises when To'uluwa resists or interferes with one of Whitehouse's development projects. On issues of Trobriand custom Whitehouse is generally hands-off, or even defensive of the chief's prerogatives. In 1923 Whitehouse appears neutral in a moral dispute between the seventy-year old To'uluwa and the Church:

Complaints received from the Missionary that Toulua had taken another wife, and as this wife was a small girl of approx 10 years of age, they thought that this was disgusting, although they admit that he has merely taken her for the extra food which will go into his boimas. Toulua had his number of wives limited to 13 by Mr. Bellamy, recently one died and Toulua has replaced her. [SJ 7/30/1923]

Also in 1923, Whitehouse sympathizes with To'uluwa's situation as an elderly chief and de-fanged sorcerer, and steps in to defend his prerogatives against some young Turks:

Toulua visits Losuia complaining that some of the younger men of the village are taking liberties with his wives and of his infirmities. Says he could prevent this unseemly conduct by resorting to the olden customs of his Court but that he is frightened by the government. Some of the accused men severely reprimanded. [SJ 2/19/1923]

In 1924 two legendary chiefs meet when To'uluwa welcomes Lieutenant Governor Murray to Omarakana: "Toulua met H.E. [His Excellency] and placed his house at our disposal. Toulua presented H.E. with two of the largest tubers that he had in his store" (SJ 10/30/1924). This was a fitting gift from one chief to another, as these giant yams, often well over ten feet in length, were part of a chief's regalia.

Two years later, Whitehouse displays a decidedly negative attitude towards the aging chief:

Interviewed Toulu concerning a strip of sand beach on the eastern coastline which would make a suitable plantation for the taxable men of the joint village [Omarakana and Kasanai], unfortunately he will not listen to the project as he states that it is the only land he has suitable for bananas and sweet-potatoes. Thus progress is again retarded by the lies of this powerful old fool. [PR 7/25-26; 1/30/1926]

In 1928 ARM Rentoul writes of his first visit to Omarakana, lionizing To'uluwa and suggesting measures to redress what he discovers to be the main factor in his growing poverty:

The fame of this Chief reaches throughout the Western Pacific, he is an old man, and compared to his former greatness has little left to subsist on. I am...recommending that some small grant may be arranged for this man – say 1 lb of tobacco per month. I think this would have a very good effect, as Toulu nurses a certain grievance against the Government that an order was issued in the past to stop his food supply. I went into this matter and satisfied myself that such an order was issued – but by a local AC employed at Losuia – a commoner now deceased, and without the knowledge of the Magistrate at Losuia. [PR 2/1928-29; 11/15/1928]

By this account, it appears that To'uluwa was actively targeted by a maverick government agent, rather than simply presiding over a naturally withering system of leadership.

Rentoul also encourages To'uluwa's subjects to reinstate their support for the elderly chief: "I told all the people that it seemed a very sad thing to see a chief of Toulu's rank to be sitting beside an empty food house." It is agreed by all that To'uluwa's old *bwaima* is much too big, but "if a new one of half the capacity was built the people would see that it was kept filled with the new fruits of the garden" (PR 2/1928-29; 11/15/1928). The next year Rentoul finds that the old yam house has been repaired and partially filled with about a ton of yams: "Had the harvest been a better one, the offering would have been more generous" (PR 3/1929-30; 8/21/1929).

Mitakata

To'uluwa passed away to Tuma in April of 1930, to be succeeded by his nephew Mitakata. Mitakata was not first in line to ascend to the Chieftainship, but To'uluwa passed over an elder brother, Uluwaiagu, in favor of Mitakata. Apparently To'uluwa foresaw a need for someone with more personality and drive than his elder nephew, and Mitakata definitely fit the bill. Austen writes that he had "a certain dignity and personality" (1945a: 21). An early testament to Mitakata's drive and initiative, as well as the competitive spirit common to Trobrianders, is his rebuilding of the Omarakana rest house as described by ARM Hall:

I found a very fine Rest House: the best yet! And the finest structure of its kind that I have seen... Mitakata set himself out to "beat" all Boioa⁵² and, indeed, he said he wanted to beat all New Guinea with his Rest House. I would be surprised to find a better one anywhere. [PR 4/1931-32; 9/21/1931]

⁵² An alternate spelling of Boyowa, the indigenous name for Kiriwina.

Recognition of this project went all the way to the top of the administration, as on the cover page of Hall's report, Lieutenant Governor Murray wrote of his desire to see the rest house on his next visit to the Trobriands.

By 1932 the prestige of the Paramount Chief and Omarakana had rebounded dramatically from the low point of the mid-twenties:

Mitakata has built himself a most imposing house...He has five yam houses each holding about 2 tons of taitu and another one of great size which I estimate must hold nearly 20 tons if not more. It is many a long year since the Paramount Chief has had such well filled yam houses...Of course Mitakata will give most of his food away for services rendered. [Austen: PR 1/1932-33; 8/22/1932]

This change of fortune was partially due to Mitakata's emerging chiefly qualities, but also to the administration's efforts to rehabilitate the Chieftainship. Austen continues:

There is a greater atmosphere of respect in Omarakana than I noticed on the previous visits. Whether it is that Mitakata is becoming a greater personality or whether it is the result of many talks to the Councillors I cannot say. I hope it is the former.

Elsewhere Austen notes that Mitakata was awarded a monthly stipend of two pounds of tobacco, and as ARM he was sure to show public deference to all village chiefs:

At each weekly councillor's meeting at Losuia, the dignity and authority of the district chiefs was impressed on all councillors, and the people were asked to show their old-time respect to the chiefs. Little by little the commoners began to realize that their chiefs were being treated as people in authority, and the Government was deferring to them in small matters... [Austen 1945a: 22]

Austen goes on to assert that the missionaries had also begun to change their attitude toward the chiefs, which had formerly put the Mission at odds with the administration:

The native missionaries too who had at first no desire to see the authority of the chiefs reinstated, began to see that the Government was not working against them, and where [there] were chiefs with authority, they themselves might gain more ground in their work with such chiefs on their side.

Before becoming Paramount Chief, Mitakata was appointed a Village Councilor, and was given the badge that all councilors wore on a chain around the neck. As Chief he offered to give the badge to his brother Uluwaiagu who had been passed over. Since regalia was equally important to both Trobrianders and the colonial government, this was cause for some discussion. Austen remarks:

There was of course more behind the suggestion than a feeling of sympathy for his elder brother, and I was not long in fossicking out the fact that Mitakata felt it rather beneath his dignity as Paramount Chief to wear a councillor's badge which gave a degree of equality to the "Tokaraiwaga" Councillors (who are merely headmen or bosses)... [PR 4/1932-33; 10/17/1932]

RM Rentoul's concern leads him to write to Austen from his district office at Bwagaoia to offer a solution:

As the one who presented him with the badge when he was "heir-apparent" might I suggest that the badge in this instance represents a real liason between the Paramount chief and the Government, and it would be a very regrettable thing if the arrangement ceased to exist.

Badges, ornaments and even feathers have, as you know, a tremendous significance in the eyes of these people, and I think the matter could be adjusted by hanging another badge on Mitakata's chain, and presenting the dual badge with due ceremony. He would then be distinguished as the only councillor with the dual badge, and that would appease his dignity [Memo 295/25/1932; 11/18/1932].

As no further mention is made of the badge in existing documents, we might safely assume that this arrangement was successful.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Trobriand Islands, while looming large in an anthropological landscape, were in bureaucratic terms an isolated outpost in a small and relatively insignificant colonial territory that was administered by a small and still-developing settler nation. The gigantic wave of colonialism that had swept over the non-western world in the previous four centuries had dwindled to a ripple before it lapped against Trobriand shores. The small-scale nature of the Australian administration of the islands makes it a unique case for students of colonialism.

The Trobriand colonial apparatus was as much personage as system, in that an individual white officer was in charge of the entire subdistrict. The attitudes, habits and predilections of the ARM had more to do with the administration of the islands than any other force. While these men were mostly pressed from the same mold of Murray's intrepid "outside men," Trobrianders had to contend with variations in style.

While highlighting the importance of a lone ARM in the colonial Trobriands, it is important to recognize that this man did not rule single-handedly. It was the cadre of indigenous village constables (and other government employees) that made up the bulk of the colonial apparatus. These VCs were indispensable to colonial rule, and without the willing participation of these men the Australians could never have brought their version of law and order to the islands. It could be argued that the ARM's main duty was to supervise and support the VCs. Given the acceptance by most Trobrianders of colonial rule, and the fact that the vast majority of colonial representatives were indigenous, it could also be argued that the Australian colonial system was in reality an indigenous system, albeit with a single foreigner at the top. This notion de-essentializes a strict European/Indigenous model of colonial studies.

Refereeing at the Center of the Edge

While a center/periphery model is a useful tool in understanding colonialism, it can lead to an overly simplistic view. Amarshi amends the model to call the Territory of Papua an "ultra-periphery," in that it was "the colony of a colony" (1979:12). This notion would make the Trobriands an "ultra-ultra-periphery," being an isolated corner of this "quiet backwater of empire." A closer look reveals a more multifaceted landscape, based on one's perspective. Port Moresby is a periphery to the centers of Sydney and Brisbane, but becomes the center when viewing Papua as a whole. Samarai, peripheral to Port Moresby, is the hub for the south-eastern portion of the territory. Losuia, an isolated outpost when compared to Samarai, is the busy center of the colonial Trobriands. Furthermore, multiple "centers" operated different but overlapping systems in the Trobriands. The Mission at Oiabia was a center for the Christianized population, the traders' stations were economic centers, and Omarakana remained the center of traditional life, although its influence waxed and waned over the decades. All these centers were ruled over by the ARM at Losuia, who often served as a referee in this complex patchwork of powers.

Chiefs, missionaries, traders, sorcerers, village constables, all of these competed for power to further their own interests. The ARM worked to regulate the influence of these competitors for the perceived best interests of the villagers. Some were supported

whilst others were suppressed, but at times the tables could be turned and the previously suppressed would find themselves being defended.

ARM Whitehouse describes a series of events in 1923 that are illustrative of the interdependency of the various powers mentioned above, as every player is involved. It all starts with a commoner named Giiodabwana, who upsets tradition by wearing decorations that are reserved for chiefs to a feast. Chief Kasiotagina of Kapwapu reports the indiscretion to Chief Togalai of Mulosaida (the offender's village). Togalai visits Kasiotagina and tells him "that he better bring about this man's death," and gives him a stone ax blade as partial payment. Kasiotagina, aware and frightened of the administration's penalties for sorcery, procrastinates for three years and then finally "approached Mr. Lumley [a trader] to explain the matter...as he was no longer a sorcery man and had decided to amend his ways." The blade is sent to Giiodabwana but is intercepted at Oiabia by Inosi, a mission teacher (this is apparently arranged by Whitehouse for dramatic effect). Whitehouse confiscates the valuable blade and cautions the errant chief, who is told:

He had lost the stone and acted foolishly, had he made representations to this Court he would have had a hearing, and Giiodabwana [would have been] forbidden to wear the decorations to which he is not entitled according to native custom. [SJ 11/19/1923]

So Whitehouse quashes malevolent sorcery while upholding another native custom, with the help of a trader, a mission teacher and a repentant chief.

Murray's Mold

As within many institutions, the men of the early Australian colonial administration in Papua tended to emulate their leader, Hubert Murray. Whether they were chosen by him for particular characteristics, or tended to emulate him over time, the outcome was the same. Key traits were intelligence, perseverance, calm "under fire" or in chaotic situations, restraint, patience and diplomacy. Officers had to be "Type A" personalities in order to see projects through with diligence and determination, but also had to display "Type B" traits in dealing with their indigenous charges, showing an easy-going and at times fun-loving attitude to keep spirits up. A good officer had to be in absolute control of himself and any situation at all times, but at the same time appear relaxed and congenial. Judgment was crucial, in knowing when to be lenient and when to be a stern authoritarian. An active interest in indigenous life was also important, and all officers were at least amateur anthropologists (and some much more). Perhaps the greatest trait for a successful officer was a wry sense of humor, which helped to put things in perspective after a long, difficult, lonely, and at times downright bizarre day. Putting all of these qualities together, the reader might discern that what has been described is the epitome of the ideal Australian national character.

An officer who displayed these traits could expect to advance to high office, such as Alex Rentoul who became District RM after six years in the Trobriands, or Ivan Champion, one of the greatest "outside men," who became Director of Native Affairs, one of the highest offices in the Papuan administration. Those who did not quite fit the profile were eventually sent home, such as C.A.W. Monckton, an intrepid early officer and explorer who tended to show too heavy a hand towards indigenes.

Luckily for historians, another common trait was a talent for writing. Lieutenant Governor Murray once again led the way here, publishing two books, *Papua or British New Guinea* (1912) and *Papua of Today* (1925), and producing widely read annual reports for the Territory (Nelson 1986:646). ARM Bellamy's previous job as a journalist and humorist served him well in government service. ARM Rentoul penned a lengthy and entertaining manuscript (1943, unpublished). Leo Austen wrote an extensive series of anthropological articles that were published in various scholarly journals, and Ivan Champion wrote a book about his experiences crossing uncharted New Guinea at its widest point (1966).

While one might assume that government reports are by definition dry and lifeless reading, these men produced official texts full of fascinating narrative, anecdote and observation. The patrol reports and station journals from Losuia are written in clear and accessible language, and Murray's annual reports are written not only to inform but apparently at times to entertain, reading like pages from a popular magazine such as *National Geographic*.

The first ARM at Losuia, R.L. Bellamy, was the epitome of an effective colonial officer. He showed considerable energy and diligence in carving a government station out of the rocky shoreline at Losuia and building one of the first "Native Hospitals" in the Territory. He won the loyalty of the local population through alternating doses of patience and heavy-handedness. While arresting and imprisoning hundreds of villagers each year, and using them for free labor, his gentle good nature seems to have made a stay in gaol feel almost like a holiday for many inmates. Bellamy was able to step into the role of father figure with just the right amount of relaxed control.

ARM Whitehouse, Bellamy's protégé, appears as somewhat of a black sheep when compared to other officers. While he obviously had to be an effective officer in order to remain at his posting for ten years, certain traits show up in his writing not seen elsewhere. In thousands of pages of reports, he is the only ARM to use pejorative terms in reference to indigenes. Over the years he calls Trobrianders "niggs," "stupid," and "liars," and refers to Chief To'uluwa as a "powerful old fool."⁵³ While at other times he does show care and sensitivity, as when he is the first to bring a tent along on patrol for VD examinations, he still stands alone in venting his frustrations in his reports. While it is possible that his only error was not seeing fit to keep attitudes and frustrations shared by other officers out of his reports, the effect is the same as if he were alone in these views. It seems that as a "good churchman" (see below), Whitehouse leaned a bit too closely towards the views of the Mission, hamstringing his ability to act as impartial referee. His closeness to the church, strengthened by his marriage to a "missionary sister," helps to explain his judgmental attitudes towards indigenes not seen in the writings of other officers. A likely scenario is that Lieutenant Governor Murray cast a blind eye towards Whitehouse's shortcomings, as he was the only man available that was remotely suited to be both Magisterial Officer and Director of the Native Hospital, but it is not surprising that he returned to a strictly medical capacity after leaving Losuia.

It is important to be clear that Whitehouse was far from the rigid Christian colonialist that some might discern in these examples from his writings. He was a man

⁵³ It is important to place Whitehouse's language in the context of the time. While never expecting his diary to see the light of day, Malinowski used similar language in reference to Trobrianders (1967a:162).

deeply caught up in the ambivalences of his place and time. He was fascinated by Trobriand culture, but abhorred what he saw as native closed-mindedness and intransigence. While an unforgiving task master and diligent bureaucrat, he was also a talented artist, whose modernistic depictions of Papuan life won placement on six of ten territorial postage stamps issued in 1932 (Anon. 1932:30; Figure 16). Perhaps in an act of youthful enthusiasm, Whitehouse also prefaced his first patrol report with the village scene that serves as the frontispiece to this study (see Figure 1; p.1).



Figure 18. Papuan stamps by Ernest Whitehouse, 1932.

When the Government Comes to Town

During the Australian administration of the Trobriands, for most islanders government was a “traveling show,” in that it was moveable, performative and transitory. Most villagers would see an administrative patrol pass through their village once every few months, or even once a year in more remote locales. The ARM would perform for the villagers by greeting the village chief or headman, inspecting the village and gardens, engaging the inhabitants in a medical examination with on-the-spot treatments (including the ever-popular injections), and giving a “talk.” The villagers would in turn perform for the ARM with an impromptu but ceremonious welcome, often involving the blowing of *kibis* as reported by Rentoul (PR 8/1929-30; 11/30/1929),⁵⁴ lining up for inspection, and presenting newborn infants for his approval. The visit of a patrol can also be viewed in the context of an exchange ritual, with the ARM giving out medicines and the village reciprocating with food and tax monies. When the patrol moved on, European government went with it and the village was once again left to its own devices, with the Village Constable the only agent of government remaining. The VC acted as an intermediary, and with each having his own particular mix of authority, strength of character, motivation and village loyalties, each village’s experience of western government was unique.

Murray characterized the Papuan government’s hold on outlying areas, with a single European in charge of an indigenous population in the thousands, as “rule by bluff” (in Young 1984a: 4), with the administration pretending to greater powers than it actually had. This made it imperative that the government win the battle for hearts and minds. Despite the administration’s preference for gentle persuasion, violence and fear were the initial tools used to exert dominion over the Trobriands. RM Moreton’s two armed confrontations with villagers in 1897 and 1899, and the threat of more, were what

⁵⁴ This welcoming fanfare is similar to Whitehouse’s account of the arrival of a *soulava* in Omarakana (PR II/25/28; 5/1/1928).

initially convinced many Trobrianders to comply with the new power (Dispatch #44; 7/8/1897:62-63).

While the reality of government was one of impermanence, administrators always strove to maintain an impression of permanence and regularity. Central to this was the daily routine of the government station at Losuia, where the Papuan territorial flag was raised every morning and lowered every evening,⁵⁵ accompanied by a “parade,” consisting of a muster of prisoners who were lined up military –style, and Armed Constables (usually two) who would form up and present arms, and where work, meals and inspections were conducted by the clock (Rentoul 1943:chapter 20). The routine at Losuia was a daily performance to be witnessed by any villagers who had business there, and these people would return to their villages to share their impressions. Most VCs visited the station on a weekly basis, helping to reaffirm their ties to the colonial system.

While seemingly odd at first, it should come as no surprise that one of the most effective means of winning over locals to the government was a stay in the gaol, which was often seen as the first step in the making of an effective VC. Prisoners got a close-up view of the workings of government, participated in the routine of the station, and were allowed to be part of the government “team” either by working around the station or acting as carriers or boat’s crew for a patrol.

The Truth about “Lies”

Colonial officers at times displayed frustration in reports over the difficulty in getting straightforward answers to requests for information from Trobrianders. At issue here are differing notions of what is important during a conversation. As westerners, these officers felt that the information exchanged during an interview was of primary importance. As this idea was part of their cultural sensitivities, perhaps they assumed that anything other than straightforward responses to their queries indicated willful dishonesty.

On the other hand, Trobrianders’ cultural sensitivities may have placed the exchange itself above any information passed along during the conversation. As part of a ritual of exchange, it was important to ensure that conversations with colonial officers went well, and that the officer went away satisfied. This desire to please often resulted in locals telling officers what they thought they wanted to hear. Lieutenant Governor Murray, in writing of the Trobriands, comments on an indigenous “desire to say what is pleasant rather than what is true” (AR 1934-35:30). An officer on patrol, arriving in a village, was little different than a chief paying a visit. The importance of honoring high-status guests would prevent villagers from doing or saying anything that they thought might keep the visit from going smoothly.

The western notion of Truth is one of immutability. To us, Truth is inviolate, not likely to change from day to day or in different situations. While this is a noble idea, and one that may be valid for the hard sciences (although quantum mechanics might prove otherwise), it doesn’t hold much water in the field of human interaction. Truth can often depend on who you’re talking to, meaning that it is situational. The context-dependent

⁵⁵ The importance of the territorial flag as a central symbol was paramount. ARM Campbell’s supposed laxity may have been magnified in the eyes of his colleagues by his station journal entry reporting that the flagpole at Losuia had been eaten through by termites and had fallen over (SJ 1/12/1918).

nature of truth in human interaction ensures plenty of seemingly scandalous soundbites for our modern media. A politician's commitment to patriotism, as spoken to a veteran's group in a Midwestern town, can sound like jingoistic insensitivity on the evening news.

While many Trobrianders were likely to be familiar with a notion of Truth as we know it, as something existing inviolate on a level above any exchange of information, their notion of the validity of a statement might translate more into other western ideas such as goodness, righteousness, consensus, suitability, plausibility or believability, or even forcefulness of delivery. In his article "Lies My Informants Told Me," about fieldwork experiences in the Nissan Islands a few hundred mile north of the Trobriands, Steven Nachman highlights the dangers of confusing what might be termed etic and emic truth: "[O]ne must be careful to distinguish between the notion of 'truth' as 'the way things really are' (so called objective truth) from that of 'truth' as 'the way a person believes things to be'" (1984:536).

Above all, the Trobriand notion of truth could be seen as more honestly admitting of its own contextuality. Hence, in the context of an interview with the ARM, a woman might attest to her motherhood of a child and find it truthful, even if biologically the facts might be otherwise. Furthermore, differing notions of what constitutes motherhood lie unexamined beneath the surface of such an interview. The ARM might assume that the notion of motherhood is universally understood to be who bore the child, while ethnographers suggest that Trobrianders view breast milk as the vehicle of maternity, so a woman who suckles a child truly becomes its mother (for example, Macintyre 1987b:210; Montague 1998:10).

While the above demonstrates that representatives of two different cultures can each speak "truthfully" yet find themselves at variance, this does not explain all situations where an ARM found himself to be "lied" to. Trobrianders were certainly not averse to lying in order to further their own interests, and clearly engaged in a complex interaction with their colonial masters that involved many strategies of obfuscation.

Lying can be an act of resistance when no other option exists. Nachman notes, "Those who lack political power may, as a means of protection, resort to lying in their dealings with those who have power" (1984:538). In the colonial Trobriands this strategy was uniquely tempting. The ARM had nearly absolute power, so open resistance was generally futile, but the ARM's Achilles' heel was his difficulty in checking up on facts and statements due to a lack of time and resources. A local who successfully misled the ARM would not only have saved him/herself time and trouble, but may have also gained prestige in the village by displaying the wits of the trickster: "Lying is in itself a coercive measure, a source of power for the liar" (Bok 1978:18). Just as familiarity breeds contempt, the familiarity gained over the years by Trobrianders of the habits of their masters would have enabled them to more easily manipulate the relationship, and ARMs would have had to "contend with a style of lying reserved exclusively for them" (Nachman 1984:538).

It is important not to conclude that indigenes had a casual disregard for truth and honor. In 1924 an Armed Constable named Ainamani was tasked with accompanying a London journalist as she toured Kiriwina, and she complained to ARM Whitehouse that he had been stealing tobacco from her. Confronted with this accusation, Ainamani "disrobes and lodges his uniform and kit in the office and states that he desires to be

discharged from the force... He refuses to return to duty and is charged with disobedience.” This man, a member of the highly esteemed Native Constabulary, prefers to commit professional suicide rather than be branded as dishonest. A few weeks later Whitehouse notes that “Prisoner Ainamani No. 3987 transferred to Port Moresby...Complete kit of AC No. 309 sent to headquarters” (SJ 8/1-26/1924).⁵⁶

It is an ingrained European assumption that if accused of an indiscretion it is natural and “right” for a person to supply any information they might have to prove otherwise. However, in Trobriand society this is far from the most logical strategy. Firstly, to confront someone with a straightforward complaint, especially in a public context, is viewed as a shocking breach of etiquette. Westerners’ confrontational habits are at odds with the communication strategies of Massim cultures. Nachman, an anthropologist who would interact similarly with informants as our patrol officers would with Trobrianders, notes that “my style of asking questions made people uncomfortable” (1984:536). This discomfort would naturally lead to evasiveness, not as a means to mislead but as a way to “back out” of an awkward situation.

Secondly but similarly, to rebut an accusation with truth would, in Trobriand eyes, be an escalation to “hard words,” which can only lead to direct confrontation. A smarter move would be to defuse the situation by redirecting the accuser. One example from the record is ARM Whitehouse’s experience with the men who were charged with defacing their own coconut trees with their “private mark” and notches for climbing (see p. 110). Anyone who has spent time in the tropics will know that many coconut trees are notched for climbing without apparent harm to the tree, and an owner’s mark would have a similar lack of effect (palm trees do not weep sap when cut into like other trees). Whitehouse here appears to be a bit ignorant and overzealous in his duties, and may again be conflating aesthetic concerns with manufactured pragmatic ones. These men seemingly could have defended themselves by explaining to Whitehouse the custom and lack of danger to the trees, but instead try to blame passers-by and are jailed. ARMs regularly interpreted indigenous politeness and self-effacement as willful disingenuousness, and the locals paid the price. Another example is To’uluwa’s changing of the subject when questioned by Whitehouse about a possible remedy to the depopulation of the islands. The chief avoids further criticism of colonial rule, and Whitehouse misreads his intent (see p.139).

A World Turned Upside-Down

The assertion of colonial rule often involved an inversion of indigenous value systems, such as when “heroes” of intervillage warfare were branded as criminals and prosecuted (Dispatch #44; 7/8/1897:37, see p.36). Likewise, the administration’s own value system was at times convoluted, as when convicts were seen as prime candidates for the village constabulary when their stay in gaol was complete. “Criminals” could soon find themselves returning to their villages not as ex-convicts, but as newly appointed government agents, having graduated from the administration’s course in enforced socialization. That sorcerers, feared above all else by Trobrianders, were also prosecuted

⁵⁶ Note the symbolic importance of the AC’s uniform in this story, both in his stripping it off as a renunciation, and Whitehouse’s comment on sending it back to headquarters. It is sent on the same launch as its previous owner, but the two are carefully separated by Whitehouse’s language.

and jailed like common criminals (as by Bellamy; AR 1913-14:46), elevated indigenous perceptions of the administration and diminished the power of the sorcerers.⁵⁷

While professing a desire to uphold chiefly authority, the colonial government's taxation scheme weakened the *guyau* by diverting commoners' time and resources to a competing system of "tribute." Every day spent working to earn tax was a day not spent growing yams to fill the chiefs' *bwaimas*, and often surplus yams were sold to the station at Losuia instead of being rendered up to the chiefs.

Prior to the advent of the pearling industry, the large inland villages such as Omarakana and Gumilababa were clearly at the top of the heap due to their surpluses of food. Coastal villages were generally lower in status, depending on the inland villages to supply them with yams in exchange for fish. As pearling gave these "saltwater" villages growing amounts of surplus wealth, the "bush" villages found themselves with reduced status. This issue resurfaced sixty years later in the political turmoil following national independence, when Trobriand society split roughly along inland/coastal village lines (Leach 1978:233).

A Matter of Priorities

The administration's "Native Plantation scheme," while not an abject failure, never became the intensive industry that was hoped for. While the fall in copra prices of the 1930s was an important factor, perhaps the main reason was an oversimplification of the task at hand, and an underestimation of the labor required which hamstrung the plantations from the start. White planters were successful because they had access to plentiful and cheap labor which was employed full-time and year-round in maintenance and upkeep, while indigenous plantations were expected to be worked on a part-time and seasonal basis.

Trobrianders have firmly established priorities in life. The gardens take up the bulk of their time and attention for most of the year, and the cultural activities of *milamala* and *kula* come to the fore for the few months when the gardening cycle is in hiatus. Acceptance of colonial rule meant participation in a competing agenda, and villagers had to make time for track clearing, village cleaning, assembling for inspection, et cetera.⁵⁸ These added chores were generally accepted with grace and good humor, but the plantation scheme demanded time and effort far beyond any of these, and people were reluctant to sacrifice so much for such a small monetary reward that they generally weren't in particular need of anyway. The subsistence economy of the Trobrianders did not necessitate extensive cash cropping, and as long as villagers had the wherewithal to trade for a bit of tobacco they were generally content. So it is no surprise that plantations were often in a state of chronic neglect, and that only the individual attention given by ARMs kept them operating.

⁵⁷ Conversely, a convicted sorcerer garnered the administration's stamp of approval as a "bad man," which could enhance his fearsome reputation in the villages (Darrah 2007: pers. comm.). Such is the convoluted nature of the hybrid structures of meaning fostered by colonialism.

⁵⁸ ARM Bellamy clearly understood that Trobrianders were not inherently lazy or prone to shirking, rather they had clear ideas of where their time and energy were best spent: "I am afraid that he looks upon time spent on village cleaning and track cleaning as very much wasted energy, which, if expended on his garden, would bring some satisfaction" (MR 7/11/911, in AR 1911:120).

Although Trobrianders had good reason to disregard development projects that conflicted with the traditional work schedule, the fact that these undertakings progressed only due to the personal intervention of the ARM lent weight to the European notion that indigenes were childlike. Villagers might have played up this characterization, as it helped them to more easily resist or elude the responsibilities placed upon them by the administration.

“An Intelligent Conception”

In 1925 ARM Zimmer writes of trying to instill into the population “the European idea of a plantation” (PR 12/11/1925). What does he mean? His point is that a plantation, from the “European” point of view, is a project with a specific goal, requiring planning and attention to detail, and that it will take hard work and sacrifice to see it through. His deeper point is that Trobrianders, possessing “native” minds, are incapable of this kind of planning and industry on their own, at least until their minds are “developed,” just as a wild piece of land is cleared and re-formed. Zimmer’s attitude is brought with him to the Trobriands, and is so entrenched that he can’t see the considerable amount of planning, foresight and industry that goes into indigenous projects such as gardening, *kula*, or distribution ceremonies such as *sagali*. The fact is that locals simply were not motivated to develop large plantations, not due to a childish disregard for planning or hard work, but because they did not mesh with indigenous priorities.

From the Australians’ point of view, “development” needed to take place not only in the villages and fields, but also in Trobriand minds. The “native mind” needed to be cleared of the overgrowth of fear and superstition before being replanted with modern ideas. This process needed to take place step by step, and was not to be rushed. Each modern idea would prepare the ground for the next. The germ theory of disease would pave the way for notions of hygiene, which would in turn prepare the people for improved village sanitation, and so forth. After a long period of gradual mental development, Trobrianders would eventually come to the point where they could comprehend and undertake democratic institutions. This process was expected to take at least 100 years.

In reality, these new ideas, while certainly novel to the indigenous population, generally did not replace traditional notions of life, but simply overlaid them. Trobrianders often bought into the development trope offered by the Australians, but were able to retain their preexisting lifeways as a safety net to fall back on when development projects met with less-than-expected results.

If a project was deemed beneficial to islanders by the government, any indigenous disagreement was viewed as resulting from an inability to understand the true nature of the undertaking. In 1924 ARM Whitehouse visits Wawela to get permission from local owners to develop a piece of land for yet another native copra plantation, and he characteristically discounts their misgivings: “Some objections were expressed, chiefly that they depended upon the bush fruits as a means of sustenance (which statement is untrue).” Feeling sure that the owners will consent as soon as they understand the benefit, Whitehouse has 20 acres cleared and writes: “Details of this area... will be forwarded to the Hon. G.S. [Government Secretary] as soon as the native owners obtain *an intelligent*

conception of the scheme and are able to give their consent” (SJ 11/13-15/1924, italics added).

Are You My Father?

The Australians imagined their role in Papua to be one of benevolent paternalism. Administrators saw themselves as father figures to a naïve, vulnerable, and somewhat childlike population. Governance required the paternal qualities of patience, protectiveness, and at times a firm hand. Whitehouse typifies this attitude when he writes that “gentle and careful encouragement must be offered at all times and a careful watch kept on all their proceedings when engaged in work of a serious nature” (PR 2/1923-24; 10/30/1923). Trobrianders adopted the father/child framework themselves, to varying degrees, but had competing father figures to choose from. The *guyau* (chiefs) were the original paternal figures, and continued to play a dominant role in most villages. The missionaries were, of course, important father figures to Christianized villages. The ARM had to place himself as the “top father” without violating the boundaries of the other institutions. Trobrianders generally negotiated this multilayered landscape with a facility that was definitely un-childlike. Ironically, all this took place in and around a society that discounted the importance of biological fatherhood.

While this notion of indigenous childishness and innocence was held throughout Papua, forming the basis for the paternal nature of government philosophy, the ambivalence endemic to late colonial societies is evidenced by a diametrically opposed fear of the “dark side” of the indigenous world. Beneath the thin veneer of childish simplicity was thought to lurk all the basest and most violent impulses of “savagery.” Most colonials felt that a firm hand was needed to keep these tendencies repressed, and Murray’s liberal policies were condemned as “molycoddling the natives.” The popular press of the time had a field day in the rare instances when traders or planters were murdered by their servants (cf. Anon. 1931:1). This fear was partly to blame for the segregationist legislation that Murray allowed to be enacted.

A Penchant for Paperwork

While ARMs were generally independent thinkers who were able to think up novel solutions to novel problems, they also could display a predilection for bureaucracy rivaling any Byzantine clerk. Bellamy’s quandary over whether or not to use a general receipt book rather than the one specifically intended for tax collection is symptomatic (he suspends collections rather than use improper receipts, see p.114).

Perhaps the prime example of bureaucracy run amok is the surviving file pursuant to Cyril Cameron’s application for a grant of land on Kitava Island, which contains 29 individual pieces of correspondence between ARM Whitehouse at Losuia, the District RM at Bwagaioia, the Commissioner for Lands at Port Moresby, the Government Secretary, and Mr. Cameron himself, written and exchanged over a period of three years (July 1921-June 1924).⁵⁹ This monsoonal flow of paperwork was required to finalize possession of land Cameron had already occupied for several years. A typical example from the file, sent to the Lands Commissioner by the District RM:

⁵⁹ The epic and strange story of the eccentric “King Cam of Kitava,” who lorded over his own private island realm for over 40 years, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this work.

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter No L.22/8/22 of the 8th ult, and have to inform you that a reply to your letter No 122/7/22 was forwarded to you on the 24th April last with letter from Mr Cameron attached. Please see my letter No 113/1.304/23 (Memo 185/L.304/23; 6/12/1923).

Paraphrased, this letter tells the Commissioner: “Writing to tell you I got your letter and that other letter, and I already sent you a letter telling you this, along with another letter, please see that other letter I sent you.” While this file of often seemingly meaningless letters borders on the ridiculous, it was the administration’s penchant for paperwork that allows us such a clear picture of the history of the colonial Trobriands that we have today.

Counting Coconuts

The intersection in the Trobriands of a late-colonial apparatus, based upon secular humanism and science, with a small, traditional and relatively un-westernized society, highlights the incongruities between European colonials and their indigenous counterparts. Throughout Papua, one of the most “modern” colonial administrations ruled over one of the most “primitive” populations on the planet. The western predilection for quantification ran unchecked through a landscape of trackless forests, boundless swamps, tiny gardens, rough-hewn villages and shifting populations. In the Trobriands, the Australians attempted to demarcate and control the vagaries of indigenous life with the precision tools of the hospital, the court, and the census. Each of these efforts produced a prodigious body of work and attendant figures, some of which appear to have served the common good and others with a more ambiguous utility. Exhaustive medical examinations over two decades certainly curtailed venereal disease, and the hospital at Losuia saved countless lives. The application of a western rule of law resulted in thousands of convictions for offenses that many villagers did not understand, with the resulting prison labor proving indispensable to the colonial administration, but also served as an alternate avenue for settlement of disputes that made the islands a more peaceful place. The attempts at a precise census resulted in an endless rechecking of village populations and tracking of individuals’ movements, but the fact that every indigene was recognized by the government perhaps gave more value to those on the edges of society, such as lepers and the infirm, and helped to curtail infanticide, as theorized by ARMs Bellamy and Whitehouse (see p. 115).

Of all the exercises in quantification, certainly the most quixotic was ARM Bellamy’s exhaustive tally of individual coconut trees planted along tracks under his supervision, serving no purpose other than to supply a report of progress to his superiors in exact terms (hence the title of this study). Given the extreme effort required to count trees that numbered in the hundreds of thousands, when a good estimate would seem to have sufficed, this exercise appears to point to a deep-seated need for precision that may be a part of Bellamy’s cultural conditioning. This exercise was carried out by an officer who was one of the most balanced, successful and popular, not only amongst his peers but amongst indigenes as well, as evidenced by the fact that upon hearing of Bellamy’s death in Sydney in 1938, villages throughout the Trobriands went into mourning (Black

1957:281). Bellamy's otherwise admirable characteristics might indicate that this predilection for quantification was not the product of an abnormal background, but is a part of the mainstream European experience.

If we put ourselves in Bellamy's place, perhaps we can make some sense out of this exercise. Bellamy had many things to point to when attesting to the "progress" made in his district, but most were qualitative. It is not possible to count battles *not* fought, villages *not* displaced, famines *not* endured, or people *not* killed by disease. Here was "progress" that could be quantified with hard statistics, however irrelevant. If Bellamy's intent was simply to report the number of coconut trees planted, then a rough estimate would have sufficed, but clearly he wanted hard data to use as a starting point for a statistical presentation to be included in his 1913-1914 annual report (see p.108). Without a precise number to begin with, the subsequent statements could not have been considered "factual," but only speculative. This whole exercise, which required many hours of physical and mental effort, was not merely intended to inform, entertain and impress Bellamy's superiors, although it certainly did all three, judging by the gushing praise given to Bellamy by his usually tight-lipped superiors, including Lieutenant Governor Murray (see p.106). This was also a project that allowed Bellamy to exercise his scientifically trained mind. On this tropical island, the intervillage tracks were his laboratory, and sprouting coconuts his subjects. In a non-technological environment, his technology was a tally-stick, a pad and pencil, and his mathematical imagination.

A Place for Progress

The colonial Australians in Papua shared in the ambivalence of the late colonial era. As one of the last colonial systems to be developed and one of the most "modern," they were confronted with the inherent conflict between economic exploitation and indigenous welfare. It is to their credit, especially to the first Lieutenant Governor, Hubert Murray, that they tended to favor the latter, often with political as well as economic consequences. Yet even within a framework of indigenous welfare, conflict and ambivalence were present. At odds here were the notion of "development" and the value of preserving local custom and culture for its own sake.

A prime example is ARM Whitehouse's about-face regarding housing "improvement." He spent years doggedly and energetically working to get villagers to adopt larger and "better" houses, only to be ordered by Murray to reverse his position and tell everyone to build their houses in the traditional style (PR 9/1925-26; 3/22/1927). The reader may feel some sympathy for Whitehouse, who is obviously somewhat "out of the loop" as he charges ahead with "advancement" only to be reined in quite late in the game by the preservation-minded Murray (see p 149). A certain tight-lipped acquiescence sneaks into Whitehouse's writings, hinting at his frustration, and again it is no surprise that he leaves Losuia soon after to continue his career in a strictly medical capacity.

The Australians tended to overrate the prospects of various development schemes while discounting the staying power of local custom and belief. The Native Plantation scheme (copra) was only the first of several projects to fall short of the mark in the Trobriands, and the numerous predictions in patrol reports and station journals from these first four decades of the administration, of the inevitable downfall of the chieftainship, sorcery, canoe building, and so forth, proved to be overly pessimistic. While we have

seen that the administration took steps to preserve or revitalize certain native customs such as the chieftainship and canoe building, the practice of sorcery persisted in the face of active suppression, and is alive and well today.

Why did the colonial government find it so difficult to promote its ideas of “native advancement”? An indigenous answer from a similar context, that of the Siassi Islanders in the Vitiaz Strait a few hundred miles northwest of the Trobriands, was so compelling to anthropologist Alice Pomponio that she named a book after it: “Seagulls Don’t Fly into the Bush” (1992). Indigenous lifeways and identity, having developed over centuries, are exceedingly persistent and not likely to be easily changed over the course of a few years or decades, regardless of the benefits of new ways. For the Siassi Islanders, a switch from life as seagoing fishermen and merchants on a tiny island to horticulture on a larger one proved to be disastrous. In the Trobriands, traditional gardening and other institutions like the *kula* are so intimately linked to identity and the local “way of being in the world,” that new projects were often only given lip service in order to please the ARM. For Trobrianders, constraints of time and energy appeared to be the most limiting factor.

It seems that Trobrianders were receptive to new ideas and practices, but only if they did not interfere with traditional activities that lay at the core of Trobriand identity. While the new social landscapes of the colonial period offered a range of choices for negotiation of self, or “emplotment,” most Trobrianders chose to keep traditional culture close to the heart. Co-opting the notion of “identity politics” (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997:1), most Trobrianders turned out to be social conservatives. Luckily for them, the colonial administration did not dictate wholesale change, but only offered development as an option, while always allowing villagers to remain in their traditional lifeways, and protecting and supporting them if that was their choice. Enforced changes such as Native Plantation work were generally introduced as adjuncts to traditional village life, and steps were taken (not always successful as we have seen) to mediate any negative effects.

There was also some ambivalence within the administration regarding its own role, as it worked to both support missionaries and traders, yet also to protect the indigenous population from their excesses. While officially independent of other Europeans, government officers regularly depended on these missionaries and traders for waterborne transportation, and all Europeans regularly borrowed and loaned each other goods and services. While accepting rides from private launches, it is another mark to ARM Bellamy’s credit that he initiated the building and maintenance of government rest houses in each village group, so that he and his successors did not have to rely on missionaries and traders for overnight accommodation while on patrol.

In Their Own Words

While it would be easy to pass judgment on the Australian administration of Papua, any conclusions reached decades later would be overly facile. Ideally we might travel back in time to query the participants in the colonial experience. Luckily, the Australians in the Trobriands engaged in some exercises in self-reflection unprompted by future historians and anthropologists.

In his Annual Report of 1909-1910, ARM Bellamy asks himself a straightforward question: “I take it that the question which lies behind every Annual Report is this: Is the

District advancing or going back?” Rather than citing facts and figures to quantify progress as might be expected, Bellamy chooses to first deconstruct the entire notion of “development” by situating the term in a multifaceted landscape composed of various players, each with unique perspectives on the question:

Before this can be satisfactorily answered, it must be clearly understood what is taken as constituting advancement. If I go to a missionary he will, in all probability, tell me “more church attendances, bigger collections, less thieving, less adultery.” And he may be right. If I go to a pearl trader and ask him, “more men diving, more pearls coming out.” And he may be right. If I go to a copra trader or beche-de-mer man and ask them, the one will consider more coconuts, and the other more beche-de-mer, as encouraging signs of advancement. And they may be right. If I go to a native, to Toulou the Chief, for instance, and ask him, He is almost certain to say, “More wives, more gardens, more food houses.”

It would appear, then, that advancement may be taken as a molecule, whose constituent atoms spring from different sources, with the solitary exception, however, of my polygamist friend Toulou, whose polygamy alone I withdraw unconditionally.

After this acknowledgement that the notion of “advancement” means different things to groups with differing interests, Bellamy addresses the question from an imagined position of objectivity:

To the Government Officer, however, who looks through his office window, or through where the window would be if there were one, and sees all impartially – missionary, trader and native – it appears that, no matter what things are to be taken as possible signs of advancement, cleaner villages, greater freedom from disease, better houses, cleaner habits, a growing recognition that behind the white man’s gaol lies the white man’s justice, whatever all these things may or may not be, they certainly are not signs of retrogression. [in Black 1957:283]

Bellamy’s conclusion at face value evinces a minimalist assertion that the government at least has done no harm (in keeping with his Hippocratic Oath), but his examples of “possible signs of advancement” in fact reveal his true opinion: that his efforts have produced marked improvement in the living conditions of his indigenous charges. We can see that his notion of what’s best for Trobrianders lies in the realm of progressive action in the areas of health, hygiene and an Australian version of the rule of law. Strangely, Bellamy ignores one of the administration’s greatest accomplishments by any standard: the curtailment of famine due to drought-induced crop failures, both through the distribution of emergency food rations and his own coconut planting campaign.

While Bellamy’s opinions are certainly illuminating, it would be interesting to ask Trobrianders of the time what their own thoughts on the subject were. Fortunately, ARM Austen did just that twenty-five years later. His exercise displays the shift in colonial attitude toward a greater emphasis on indigenous welfare, as well as indigenous choice. In 1935, Austen queried a group of village councilors “to give him the public opinion on what good the government had done.” Murray quips that Austen “ran a very real risk...for the question might easily have elicited the reply that the only good we did was to supply tobacco...but his courage was rewarded, for he goes on to report as follows:”

First and foremost their answer was this: The Government had stopped wars and by doing so had conferred a great benefit on the Kiriwinan, for when war was rife gardens could not be looked after properly and many went hungry. The second idea that they brought out was that the Government had

done most valuable work with the sick, and were the Losuia hospital to be closed down greater numbers would die than did at present. A third idea in the native mind was that the government took a keen interest in native gardening, and so kept a fatherly eye on that most important subject – food. By its interest it stimulated some of the lazier ones to do more work than they otherwise might. The last idea brought out was that the Government took a keen interest in dancing and keeping of old customs, and this was good for the Kiriwinans [in AR 1934-35:30].

Murray qualifies these remarks by stating that the first two (suppression of warfare and operation of the hospital), since they were well-known as keystones of government operation, might have been mentioned by the councilors “merely from motives of politeness,” but nevertheless we can take them at face value.

It is interesting to note that the virtues of the administration as seen through Trobriand eyes are evenly divided, between dictated change on one hand and preservation of tradition on the other. The Australians stepped in to quash warfare and treat disease without regard to Trobriand opinions, but also took steps to protect the central indigenous tradition of gardening, and worked to preserve Trobriand culture by taking an active interest in dancing, *kula*, carving, et cetera.⁶⁰

The Australians practiced a unique form of despotic humanitarianism where they saw fit, using an etic lens to view Trobriand life and to judge where to step in, but also showed rare cultural sensitivity for a colonial administration of the time by defending Trobriand culture against the inroads of missionaries and other outside forces. While “development” remained an important factor during this period, Murray’s equal emphasis on preservation of custom resulted in a balanced approach by some officers such as Austen, but also a somewhat schizophrenic approach at times, as in the case of Whitehouse.

Again, this study is not a proper forum to either laud or castigate the Australian administrators of colonial Papua, but the fact is that today the very word “colonialism” has become laden with negative connotation. While it is a simple exercise to pick through these reports to find actions and attitudes to criticize from the perspective of current sensibilities, it is equally simple to find examples of rather prescient behavior on the part of these men, acting as they were in the moral environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A few examples: The “Fish Protection Ordinance” of 1898 (mentioned by Whitehouse in PR 15:25:27; 6/24/1927) outlawing dynamite fishing; Whitehouse’s decree forbidding the roasting of live pigs at feasts (SJ 7/27/1923); the territory-wide prohibition of “wife flogging” (AR 1934-35:31); ARM Austen’s admonishments to a pregnant woman to curtail her heavy smoking (PR 5/1933-34; 10/5/1933); and the many instances over the years of ARMs acting as watchdogs and guardians of indigenous labor.

At the intersection of these two cultures, at first glance vastly different, the remarkable lesson is that each found the other, although at first perhaps entirely alien, in reality more similar than surface impressions would indicate.⁶¹ The hybridized colonial

⁶⁰ An acknowledgement is due here to “the elephant in the room.” While the Australians took steps to preserve indigenous culture throughout Papua, the fact that Malinowski’s work and writings enshrined Trobriand culture throughout the world ensured that Trobrianders were even more protected from the inroads of westernization than most.

⁶¹ For instance, Trobrianders shared with their Australian colonial officers a keen competitive spirit. Bellamy’s intention to have his subdistrict “show its heels to the rest” (Black 1957:282) resonates with

culture that grew out of this interchange gave European and indigene alike a multitude of options for negotiation of self, whether socially, economically, professionally or morally.

Future Prospects

The preceding study covering extant documents from Losuia from 1891 to 1934 is by no means exhaustive. A wealth of information still remains unexamined for future research. The value of these documents has hopefully been demonstrated. These archives can be mined for a variety of thematic material, for example, weather observations could be compiled in order to reveal a climatological history of the region, to be compared with larger patterns such as *El Nino*. The precise nature of most entries might allow for checking on the provenience of artifacts that have found their way into museum collections over the years, such as ax blades, prow boards and other carvings. Biographers might check these records to pin down precise dates, such as ARM Campbell's observation of the arrival of Malinowski (SJ 12/3/1916). Most importantly, these records might serve Trobrianders today as a rich lode of historical information, helping to augment oral family and village histories.

Students of Trobriand history and ethnography are lucky to have these records available in a reasonably intact form, as many colonial records housed at Samarai and Port Moresby were lost during WWII. More records may be waiting to be unearthed in various archives and private collections, not only in Papua New Guinea but also in Australia and New Zealand, where many colonial officers may have taken copies home as mementos. The most valuable find for future archival archaeologists would be missing patrol reports and station journals, the largest gap being between the years of 1934-1943. An obvious avenue of investigation would be to locate descendants of the officers stationed at Losuia at the time, to find out what they might have tucked away and forgotten in attics and trunks. Other ancillary records would also be a great addition to the known collection, such as the "Boat's Log" mentioned by Whitehouse (SJ 11/8/1924), apparently a record of all voyages taken, plus details of maintenance. Some paperwork from colonial times may still survive in villages in the Trobriands, such as pay slips for VCs and other government employees, and tax receipts. Thousands of these bits of paper were handed out over the years, but the humid environment of the islands would make any surviving copies rare finds.

Equally valuable are related texts such as diaries, memoirs and personal letters, not only of government officers but also of missionaries, traders and other visitors over the years. While official texts are full of detail, their context and original purpose ensured that the writers would not "tell all," although the somewhat informal writing style of Australian administrators, especially in the early years, and the fact that reports were expected to be read by a select few trusted colleagues, did allow much to be written that might not have been included in similar reports from other places in the colonial world. Nevertheless, other sources can greatly enlarge the sometimes-narrow view provided by official texts, and a single sentence from a letter or diary can open a door to a whole new understanding of a facet of the colonial experience. Trader Billy Hancock's letters to

Paramount Chief Mitikata's ambition to "beat all New Guinea with his Rest House" (PR 4/1931-32; 9/21/1931). ARMs used local competitiveness for their own ends, for example, the £5 prizes given out for best-kept gardens and plantations.

Malinowski, written after Malinowski left the islands, are a well-known example. In one letter (in Stocking 1977:11), he mentions the new ARM (which we know to be Whitehouse) as a “good churchman,” which helps to add detail to the picture of this dedicated but somewhat old-fashioned officer. Another example comes from the unpublished memoir “*Papuan Adventure*” written by ARM Rentoul. In it he writes of Mrs. Lumley, references to whom in patrol reports and station journals portray a trader’s wife, at times unscrupulous or even downright abusive towards indigenous labor. In his memoir Rentoul lionizes “that wonderful woman Mrs. Lumley of Trobriands fame,” as an intrepid and indefatigable character, steaming about the district in all manner of weather with her indigenous crew, with windswept hair and a wild look in her eyes, delivering mail and shouted advice as she went (1943:chapter 17). In this picture Mrs. Lumley becomes a colonial stalwart, a sturdy leg in the colonial triad, and Mr. Lumley is reduced to the ignominious role of “trader’s husband.”

Mention of Mrs. Lumley brings up an awkward fact, that this study contains relatively sparse mention of women. While women, both western and indigenous, played an integral role in the history of the colonial Trobriands, the fact that the records at the heart of this study were written by men for a largely male audience has minimized this side of the story. All the more reason to search out additional materials that might add balance to the story, especially letters and diaries of the women involved, whom we know were just as prolific in their writing as their male counterparts.

While this study has focused on the records of the first half of the colonial period in the Trobriands from 1891 to 1935, these records continue right up until preparations for the birth of Papua New Guinea as an independent nation in 1975. Future work will illuminate the events of these later decades, including WW II when nearly all European colonials were evacuated from the islands and the American army arrived in force on Kiriwina; the postwar years when the Trobriands languished as an underfunded backwater of the revived Papuan territory; and the rush to independence in the 1960s, prompted by both international and domestic Australian political pressure.

Hopefully, through the lens of these colonial writings the reader has gained not only a clearer picture of the European colonials who called the Trobriands home, but also a glimpse of the Trobriand people themselves, as they lived their lives over the decades in their gardens, villages, dancing grounds and on the open ocean, alternately striving against and accommodating their colonial guests, sometimes humorously, sometimes poignantly, but always with dignity.

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