SAPON RIKI BA KAIN TOROMON:
A STUDY OF THE I-KIRIBATI COMMUNITY IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

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**Preface**

I was preparing to return to the village to conduct my fieldwork. It was already too late to await a flight to Wagina, so I had to board the boat. I was told that the boat trip from Honiara to Wagina would take three days. I didn’t approve of the idea of traveling for that long, but it was necessary for the completion of my study within the allocated time frame. I was in my own world on the boat, just lying down and watching everyone move about, so I made no attempt to initiate conversations with other I-Kiribati people on board. By the second day, however, I was bored and decided to start conversations with some of the I-Kiribati teenagers. It was difficult because they would yarn to each other in the Kiribati language, while I merely sat and listened. I didn’t like the idea of just sitting around, but I thought I could befriend some of them; indeed, by the end of the day, I found myself telling stories and chewing betel nut with the group. I recall a young I-Kiribati male telling me that I didn’t know how to chew betel nut—which was obvious because I lacked the chewing skills—and was thus wasting it, adding that I probably didn’t know how to speak the language either. I was offended, but this incident made me realize that I had missed out on some fundamental aspects of my culture while I was away from home.

In this paper I attempt to explore my identity and to evaluate why my I-Kiribati great grandparents and grandparents were relocated to Solomon Islands, and to discuss the socio-cultural and economic changes and issues that the community, being Micronesian in a Melanesia society, faced. Further, this paper addresses how their relocation has affected even recent generations of I-Kiribati Solomon Islanders like myself—in particular, the negotiations of multiple and multi-layered identities.
This study tells the story of a group of people who relocated from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands in the 1930s, and then to Solomon Islands in the 1950s and 1960s. Both relocations were administered by the British colonial government when the Gilbert and Phoenix Island groups were part of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC). This paper discusses the experiences of the original settlers and the changes and issues that their descendants now face more than fifty years later. The issue of identity is a recurring one in this study. The original I-Kiribati settlers were relocated to a place far from their home islands and settled among people whose languages and cultures differ greatly. Decades later, their descendants still feel a sense of ‘not belonging,’ but at the same time acknowledge and benefit from their status as Solomon Islands citizens. Despite this, the most recent generation of I-Kiribati Solomon Islanders continues to face challenges.

This study aims to address the following questions:

- Why were the I-Kiribati people relocated from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands, and then to Solomon Islands?
- Why are minority communities like the I-Kiribati facing issues in a Melanesian society?
- What identity issues do the I-Kiribati community members face living in a Melanesian society as Solomon Islands citizens?

What are I-Kiribati people’s strategies for assimilation? This paper aims to contribute to the discussions of the broader issues of mobility and identity—more specifically, how relocated communities cope with challenges in their new homes through the construction and reconstruction of their identities. I hope that this work will enhance general understanding of the changes and issues that relocated communities face as well as how they negotiate and navigate through life in their new locations. Further, I hope that the incorporation of my own personal experience constructing and reconstructing multiple layers of

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1 After gaining independence in 1979, the Gilbert Islands became the Pacific Islands nation-state of Kiribati. The previous year, the Ellice Islands gained independence and became the nation-state of Tuvalu.
identities and the associated issues will encourage others who have similar experiences to share their methods of dealing with these challenges so that we might learn from each other.

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

Identity issues, experienced by many people in many different societies, are a growing concern both globally and in the Pacific region. For those who were born and raised in localities other than their families’ countries of origin, attempts to identify with certain groups of people, cultures, or societies can reveal self-perceptions of adaptive and assimilative capabilities in such situations; however, these attempts can also be problematic, especially when there is uncertainty about the use of constructed identities in different situations.

The relocated I-Kiribati community, which had to adapt to its new environment using assimilative and adaptive techniques after a resettlement from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands during the colonial era, provides one of numerous examples of communities and groups of people in the Pacific that share these experiences. This paper explores their movement and the resultant lifestyle transitions that have taken place since the community relocated to Solomon Islands over fifty years ago, and it encompasses the changes and issues they faced as an ethnically different and minority community in a Melanesian society. The I-Kiribati community is categorized under Micronesians which account for 1.5 percent of Solomon Islands population (Anon 2011). The study focuses specifically on the construction and reconstruction of identity as a strategy for assimilation. The ideas of identity I share in this paper are not meant to be representative of the entire I-Kiribati population in Solomon Islands; instead, they are my attempts to explore the specific Solomon Islander I-Kiribati identity and to
stimulate further discussion and understanding of relocated peoples in Solomon Islands and the Pacific as a whole.

I grew up as an I-Kiribati Solomon Islander. My grandparents and great grandparents originated from the Southern Gilbert Islands, or what is the present-day nation-state of Kiribati. The British colonial government relocated them to Phoenix Islands and then to Solomon Islands more than 50 years ago. I have inherited identities that bridge beyond my cultural and national boundaries to make me not only an I-Kiribati, but also a Solomon Islander. I belong to that liminal space between cultures and nation-states; I am an I-Kiribati Solomon Islander. My childhood upbringing was centered on the I-Kiribati culture and the moral practices considered acceptable by that community. This is what identified me as an I-Kiribati.

Fiji and Hawai‘i have become home to me. I lived in Fiji for more than five years while attending the University of the South Pacific, and I am now in Hawai‘i, pursuing a master’s degree at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. So many years of formal schooling away from my home and family have affected my ability to converse in the I-Kiribati language and to practice I-Kiribati culture—the very things that identify me as an I-Kiribati. My academic journey has been long, full of challenges and opportunities, and has influenced my construction of multiple layers of identities to help me better assimilate and interact with the communities and people I have come in contact with over the years.

Despite this continuous manipulation of my personal identity as I cross cultural and geographical boundaries, the essence of being an I-Kiribati that was embedded in me while I was growing up in the village will always preserve my identity as an I-Kiribati Solomon Islander. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) highlighted essentialism as a spiritual and cultural connection which significantly reflects the essence of a people to a place, land, and other things that constitutes the relationship between the

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2 ‘I-Kiribati’ is the term used to refer to the people of Kiribati, or the citizens of the nation-state of Kiribati.
people and these entities. My identity as a person of I-Kiribati descendant will always reflect my connections to Wagina, a place where my grandparents and great grandparents were resettled in the 1960s, a place where my family today lives, and a place I call home in Solomon Islands.

**Significance of Study**

This study of the relocation of I-Kiribati people to Solomon Islands and the documentation thereof presents a significant contribution to the history of such relocations in the Pacific Islands, especially in Kiribati. It contributes to our understanding of the contemporary interactions between Pacific Island peoples and places, and of relocation as common exercise employed during the Colonial era. More specifically, this study contributes an ethnographic and oral history of the relocated I-Kiribati people in Solomon Islands and their experiences since the relocation. It significantly highlights identity issues among I-Kiribati descendants, especially members of the generation born and raised in Solomon Islands. This is particularly important given both the expansion of the I-Kiribati population and increased intermarriages with indigenous Solomon Islanders.

This study contributes not only to the historical accounts of this particular relocation but also to existing literature on relocation in Solomon Islands, the Pacific, and other regions around the globe. I hope that this study will help young Solomon Islander I-Kiribati to understand the history of their origins and to appreciate their status as both I-Kiribati descendants and Solomon Islands citizens. This research is also personally important in that it has helped me to understand my I-Kiribati origins and my ‘place’ in Solomon Islands, the country of my citizenship. It is, therefore, not just an academic exercise, but also a personal engagement with issues of identity. I am a descendant of a relocated people; I therefore have to construct identities that connect to different parts of the Pacific.
**Methodology**

Due to the limited duration of my fieldwork, this study focuses mainly on the I-Kiribati population living on Wagina\(^3\) and Gizo\(^4\) in Solomon Islands. I have employed different research methods, including the use of archival and online materials, informal interviews, group interviews, and participant observation, and I have included as part of the discussion my personal observations and experiences as a member of the I-Kiribati community and the challenges I faced during my fieldwork, with a particular emphasis on my role as both an insider and outsider. Based on these experiences, I note some of the issues that a researcher might encounter as an insider in his or her own community.

I reviewed a number of archival materials for this study. Although not a lot has been written about the relocation of the I-Kiribati people from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands and from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands, I was able to make use of Kenneth Knudson’s (1964), Harry Maude’s (1968), and Martha Hoverson’s (1983) meager contributions on the subject, as well as information from archival materials in my father’s collection, which I accessed through the Kiribati archives. I have also drawn from the broader literature on relocation within and outside of the Pacific Islands region, thus positioning the I-Kiribati experience in a regional and global context.

I conducted informal interviews, including individual interviews with eight elderly men and six elderly women from Wagina and Titiana as well as group interviews in the villages of Nikumaroro, Arariki, and Cookson that included elderly men and women aged 50 years and older, young men aged 30 to 40 years, and several teenagers and children aged 10 to 20 years, though this last group did not contribute any information due to traditional norms that forbid teenagers to speak in the presence of the elders in the *maneaba*.\(^5\) These study sites are in the Choiseul and Western provinces, respectively.

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3 My fieldwork took place in the villages of Nikumaroro, Cookson, and Arariki
4 This includes Titiana, Babanga, and New Manra.
5 *A maneaba* is a traditional meetinghouse and center for social and political activities where elders meet to discuss matters and to make important decisions. It is also where important community activities and gatherings take place.
and are major I-Kiribati settlements in Solomon Islands. Although the interviews were informal, they followed a list of questions that I designed to obtain the information necessary for this study. I interviewed several men and women aged 60 years and older on an individual basis, especially those who were not able to attend group interviews due to personal commitments and aging, because of their knowledge of the relocation and of the changes and issues that the Kiribati community has encountered since the relocation.

The interviews proceeded in the Kiribati language, sometimes with the minimal use of pidgin where it could be understood, and a translator assisted me with my questions due to my inability to speak fluent I-Kiribati. The first interviews lasted an hour each, as we were still learning how to convey the questions in a simple but understandable way, but the latter interviews were much shorter. In Gizo (Titiana, New Manra, and Babanga), I conducted informal individual interviews.

Following the recommendations of elders from the three villages on Wagina, who wanted to reminisce together and to assist each other with the sharing of their experiences of the relocation and their knowledge about the I-Kiribati community in Solomon Islands, I made arrangements for group interviews and used the same questions that I used for the informal interviews. This group technique proved an effective ethnographic method for gathering a collective oral history and settlers’ personal accounts of the subjects in question.

Participant observation commenced when I left Honiara to travel by boat to Wagina, and it involved my participation in village activities and my interactions with people as I observed their way of life and daily activities. I spent more than two weeks on Wagina and a week on Gizo while conducting fieldwork in Titiana, New Manra, and Babanga. I primarily used informal interviews in Gizo, as group interviews were not feasible given the vast dispersion of villagers after the 2007 tsunami. Participant observation in this case was not as effective as it was on Wagina, but a week of continuous interaction
with I-Kiribati descendants living in Gizo town gave me some insights into the I-Kiribati community residing there. However, much of the participant observation is based on my experiences traveling between the villages and interacting with I-Kiribati people at these destinations.

**Portfolio Outline**

This study produces a master’s portfolio, which is comprised of four chapters. This first chapter has focused on the introduction of this paper, encapsulating my intentions, my purpose, and the significance of this study, as well as the methods I employed in the field. Chapter two explores the relocation history of the I-Kiribati people to Solomon Islands, encompassing reviewed literature and oral historical accounts. The first section covers their relocation from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands to show their initial movement, and later explores their relocation from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands. Special focus is on Titiana and Wagina, the two resettled locations in Solomon Islands. This chapter also discusses the challenges the people encountered upon arrival at the new settlements.

The third chapter reveals the stories and experiences of those people interviewed who were part of the relocation from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands and their perceptions of the people and places in the Solomons. It also discusses the changes they encountered as new settlers in a country environmentally and culturally different from their original homes and the related issues that the I-Kiribati community encountered, such as land disputes, civil crisis, limited access to opportunities, and lack of assistance from the government, erosion of culture and language, and loss of identity.

The final chapter focuses on the construction and reconstruction of identity as a way to better assimilate to new surroundings. I have incorporated my personal experiences to demonstrate how identity issues are a major concern and how they could be better dealt with, especially among those in relocated communities and those with multiple identities.
CHAPTER TWO
Relocation: From Gilbert and Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands

This chapter reviews the global and regional literature on relocation and mobility, the factors behind these movements, and the ways in which they have influenced people and communities. It focuses on how people have fit into their new homes, as well as on the associated issues they have encountered. It discusses the initial relocation of I-Kiribati people from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands in the 1930s and from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands in the 1950s and 1960s, and chronicles the challenges people faced as they settled in these relocation sites. This chapter also encapsulates documentary accounts of these movements and the experiences people had in the new locations, many of which have been provided by I-Kiribati settlers themselves.

Relocation: An Overview

The relocation of people, whether voluntarily or by force, is not new—not in the Pacific Islands nor elsewhere. This history of the relocation of groups of human beings spans many centuries and reveals situations both advantageous and disadvantageous to the relocated peoples and their hosts. There are many examples globally and in the Pacific Islands region of communities that have been relocated for economic, social, or political reasons, often in the context of war, political conflict, racial discrimination, natural disasters, large-scale resource extraction, or scientific experimentation. For instance, the Banabans’ home island (Ocean Island) was exploited for phosphate beginning in 1902 prompting their relocation to Rabi Island in Fiji (Silverman 1977); the Bikinians in the Marshall Islands were relocated because of the atomic bomb testing that took place on Bikini Island (Kiste 1977); and the Tikopians were relocated to the Russell Islands and Makira to provide labor for coconut plantations and to alleviate the overpopulation of their island (Larson 1977). Another example is the one I will focus on
in this paper: the relocation of people from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands and then to Solomon Islands (Knudson 1964). However, there are still other examples from around the world of people being relocated from their native lands to new places.

In some cases, people were forced to leave their homeland without a specific destination. One example of this is the forced relocation of American Indians and the seizure of their ancestral lands by the invading Europeans. This is one of the historical themes that have lingered on in the history of the new world. Other examples include the resettlement of Algerians by the French government in connection with military efforts, the resettlement of Nubians by the Egyptian government as a result of the construction of the Aswan dam, and the relocation of the Sahelian people in Africa due to severe drought and loss of livestock, a move that required the people to adapt to unfamiliar agricultural systems in the new location (Tobin 1968, 2–3; Merryman 1982). Additionally, Oliver-Smith (1982) outlined the resettlement of the Yungay community in Peru after a mass earthquake in 1970 destroyed their homes. This relocation occurred despite resistance by the Yungay people, many of whom found themselves under great stress and in poor health due to the social and environmental changes involved in the relocation. For instance, they had to live together in temporary shelters as they tried to build new homes and reestablish their community. With the loss of property and many lives, a great number of people experienced mental strain and high levels of stress.

There have been similar cases of relocation in the Pacific Islands; however, the movement of people throughout the Pacific region is not a new concept. This form of adventure and voyaging has been observed by Pacific Islanders for centuries, and people move continuously between islands and beyond boundaries to trade, intermarry, exchange wealth and gifts, establish social networks, and interact in countless other ways with one other. The Colonial era gave rise these interisland movements. Epeli Hau‘ofa described the Ocean as a migration and transnational entity that connects the migrants to
their home islands without hindrances (Hau’ofa, 2008). However, the delineation of imaginary boundaries by Europeans in the nineteenth century transformed the once boundless Oceania into a series of tiny and remote islands, restricting freedom of movement, navigation, trade, and other interactions. Hau’ofa (2008) critiqued this imaginary perception of ‘islands in a far sea,’ which depicts the smallness and remoteness of Pacific islands and contradicts Pacific Islanders’ holistic perspective of the Pacific Ocean as a sea that connects the islands. Nevertheless, today, Pacific Islanders still observe continuous movement between islands, and beyond national and international boundaries, while maintaining contact with relatives in their home islands. For instance, people from Papua New Guinea frequently move to and from Australia; Samoan, Tongan, and Micronesian communities, because of colonial ties and political associations, move between their islands and the United States; and Niueans and Cook Islanders, as part of their relationship of Free Association with New Zealand, hold citizenship in both their home islands and in New Zealand. Such movements have led to the establishment of many Pacific Islands diasporic communities in these destinations, communities that Hau’ofa described as an expansion of Oceania that has created complex cultural networks (Lee 2009, 11–12).

However, many of the migrations and relocations in the region throughout history have been for political, economic, and social reasons, agendas often associated with colonialism. There are several well-known examples of Pacific peoples engaged in such movements. For instance, the peoples of Enewetak and Bikini atolls in the Marshall Islands were relocated in the late 1940s so the United States could use the atolls to conduct nuclear testing (Kiste 1977). Kiste notes that although the Bikinians were resistant to the idea of relocation, they had no choice but to comply with the orders of the US government. They were first relocated to Rongerik and then to Kwajalein because Rongerik could not sustain the population. Another example involves the people from the islands in southwest Micronesia—mainly Fana, Sonsorol, Pulo Ana, Merir, Tobi, and Helen reef—who were resettled in Palau by the German colonial administration. Because the islands are situated along the typhoon path, the
colonial administration considered the relocation a precautionary undertaking, both to protect the islanders’ safety and to avoid having to bear the high economic costs that would result if the islands were hit by typhoons, especially given their isolation (McKnight 1977).

The resettlement of the Banabans from Ocean Island in Kiribati to Rabi Island in Fiji to allow for the extraction of phosphate is another renowned case of forced relocation of Pacific Islanders. Silverman (1977) underlined the struggle of the indigenous people of Ocean Island in the GEIC, focusing on the Banabans whose island was extracted and shipped away to produce fertilizers—an island valued by its inhabitants but no longer livable because it had been reduced to the ugly remnants of rocks. The indigenous people were relocated without much choice to Rabi Island in Fiji in 1945. Silverman also discussed the Banaban traditional social hierarchy and recounted their history from the traditional period, through Christianization, colonization, and the commercial exploitation of phosphate on Ocean Island, all the way up to their present life on Rabi Island. He analyzed the changes that have taken place throughout this period, including the emergence of a new social hierarchy on Rabi, and examined kinship and political issues, particularly the descent system, disputes over phosphate rights, and problems related to the organization of the community on a new island. McDonald (1982) added yet another account of the Banabans’ resistance to the forced resettlement in Fiji so that their home island could be mined and shipped away for agricultural and industrial purposes. Teaiwa (1998) further recounted the pitiful history of the Banabans and discussed the challenges that this group of people faced as a community relocated to a new environment.

However, there are also examples of voluntary resettlement, usually as part of government programs or projects. These are usually designed to relieve over-population and excess pressure on limited resources, including land, or to escape the impact of natural disasters. In cases where governments are responsible for resettlement, there are usually specific destinations involved. For
instance, groups of people from Kapingamarangi\(^6\) were relocated due to a drought that took place in 1916 and led to a famine on the atoll. To avoid continued starvation and death, by 1919 a group of 90 people had relocated to Pohnpei to work for a Japanese trading company. An epidemic then struck the atoll in 1920, causing many deaths and prompting the survivors to relocate to Ponape—today Pohnpei—where they established a new community that exists today as a separate and different community from that on Kapingamarangi (Lieber 1977). Another similar example is the movement of people from Nukuoro atoll to Pohnpei District in the 1920s and 1930s. The Nukuoro chief, who lived on Pohnpei at the time, summoned the islanders to work for him as laborers—clearing land areas, building houses, and planting coconuts for his family—in exchange for accommodations. After the chief’s death in 1953, his son took exclusive possession of the land, and, although the Nukuoro people did not want to establish a community on Pohnpei (like those from Kapingamarangi had), there is still a considerable number of them living there (Carroll 1977).

Other examples include the relocation of West and Southeast Ambrym people from Vanuatu to Epi Island after a volcanic lava flow destroyed many of their crops, as well as their eventual relocation from Epi to Efate after a disastrous hurricane struck their new home (Tonkinson 1977). The resettlement of people from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands in Kiribati and the subsequent resettlement from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands, which I examine in detail below, were both responses to drought, land shortages, and increased population (Knudson 1964).

The resettlement and relocation of peoples is a topic of much scholarly research and discussion. Although Tobin (1968) indicated that there has never been a concrete body of theory on how this could be a serious global problem, it is evident today that these movements have generated questions surrounding such issues as identity, rights to land and resources, and access to opportunities the new

\(^6\) Kapingamarangi is a Polynesian atoll in the eastern Caroline Islands
locations. Both forced and voluntarily resettlements usually result in significant changes, both for the migrants and for the host communities. Among the most significant of these changes are those associated with social organizations, political structures, the roles of individuals in the community, the roles of religion and church, and the identities of the groups involved (Tobin 1968). Relocated populations have to adjust and adapt to the new environments, cultures, and communities, a potentially stressful endeavor. However, many migrants, especially those who volunteered for relocation, coped moderately well and often better than those who were forcefully relocated. The loss of cultural connections and values is common among relocated groups and often leads to less structured societies and control systems and to the creation of new or more integrated cultures.

This chapter focuses on the initial relocation of the I-Kiribati people from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands in the late 1930s and presents a brief background of the Southern Gilbert Islands before they were resettled and the reasons for the relocation. The following section then outlines the second phase of relocation from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands from the mid 1950s to early 1960s and again explores the reasons behind it. Both sections include information about the settlement of these new sites and the changes and challenges people encountered upon arrival, information supported by both archival literature on the events and narrative accounts provided by the I-Kiribati informants in Solomon Islands that I interviewed during my fieldwork. I hope that by incorporating accounts from both perspectives, the reader will obtain a general background of the relocation and what was involved, as well as a sense of what the settlers went through.
Relocation from Gilbert to Phoenix Islands

Great Britain’s Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC) consisted of 16 islands of the Gilbert Islands group; nine islands of the Ellice Islands group; Fanning, Washington, and Christmas Islands in the Northern Line; and Ocean Island. Of the 29 islands, four—Fanning, Enderbury, Kanton, and Christmas Islands—were owned or leased to European firms, while the other 25 islands were left to be inhabited by their native populations. The islands were characteristically small, consisting of low-lying coral atolls. Many of the islands were either freehold under the control of the British government or leased to foreign companies for phosphate mining, coconut plantations, etc., while others were not hospitable enough to accommodate a growing population, thus limiting the choice of islands when the time came for populations to relocate (Maude 1968).

Under the Colony, the Gilbert Islands were subdivided into three groups (as seen on the map): the Northern Gilbert Group, the Central Gilbert Group and the Southern Gilbert Group. The Southern Group includes the islands of Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Beru, Nikunau, Onotoa, Tamana, and Arorae. These
were the islands where most of the emigrants to Phoenix Islands originated. The Islands lie about two degrees south of the equator in the central Pacific Ocean, with limited land area to cultivate and resources to exploit. Further, they are densely populated and are subject to occasional droughts (Hoverson 1983). While many Pacific Islands were sparsely populated during the early 1900s, the population of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC) was increasing rapidly. Harry Maude saw this as a potential threat to the wellbeing of the islanders, especially those living in the Southern Gilbert Group where population growth had been consistently high and where the frequent occurrence of droughts had been a primary concern. Rapid population growth and land shortages became the main issues that spurred the idea of using relocation to alleviate the hardships many islanders faced on these islands (Hoverson 1983).

The land tenure system in the Gilbert Islands, based on individual free holdings and passed on from generation to generation through family lineages, was also a major factor that contributed to the scarcity of land and prevented its full utilization. Ownership of land is family-oriented and hardly any land is owned individually. It was acquired either by settlement or through internal warfare in which strong kainga and their allies would defeat weak kainga and gain title to their land, a claim that was reversed whenever the weak families became strong and defeated their former conquerors. Chiefs could also seize the lands of their slaves and distribute them to their supporters in return for past or future favors. Though land could be acquired as a gift or as compensation, such as in the event of an adoption, land rights were and are still mostly acquired through inheritance (Namai 1987, 30–32).

Bedford (1967) argued that the land tenure system in the Gilbert Islands is what prevents the maximum use of land, thus limiting its ability to support more than a small population. Land is not subject to alienation; for instance, the lands of the deceased are divided among their children, which

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7 Harry Maude was the British Resident Commissioner for the GEIC in the early 1930s. He initiated the Phoenix Resettlement Scheme and documented one of the best contemporary accounts of the movement.

8 The term kainga can refer to either extended family or the main social group in the Kiribati society.
results in further land fragmentation. For absentee landowners or for those who marry outside of family lines, their land remains under the care of a relative or caretaker, to be used again when they return. Bedford concluded that land fragmentation and the practice of absentee landownership are the main causes of land shortages of the islands’ growing population.

Traditional methods of birth control, such as infanticide and abortion, were commonly practiced to avoid overpopulation (Maude 2006, 69), and warfare was considered a natural method of curbing the growing population. However, the introduction of western medicines and medical services by the colonial administration in the 1930s reduced the use of traditional birth control methods and contributed to the enhancement of the general health of the population (Lundsgaarde 1968, 31). Additionally, missionaries’ introduction of Christianity into the islands encouraged many islanders to convert and to abandon traditional warfare, sorcery⁹, polygamy, and public tests of virginity after marriage (Onorio 1985). Thus, with these traditional methods of population control no longer in use, the relocation of part of the population was considered a likely and viable solution to the issue of overpopulation in the islands (Hoverson 1983).

After several attempts to identify potential relocation sites throughout the Pacific region, Harry Maude decided that it would be better to relocate the settlers to barren atolls like the ones they are accustomed to rather than high volcanic islands. Harry Maude considered Phoenix Islands a potential site since the group was once inhabited by Polynesians (the Tokelauans) between AD 950 and 1,500 and thereby provided a marginal environment for habitation (Uwate and Teroroko 2007). Also, since the islands resemble their home islands, it would be less stressful for the populations to establish themselves there, even in terms of their culture, traditional practices, village hierarchy, and other activities. In 1938, the proposal to relocate settlers was approved, and in the same year, the Colony

⁹ Sorcery was perceived as an activity that contributed to the reduction of population growth in the islands.
purchased a Burns Phillips\textsuperscript{10} lease in Phoenix Islands for the new settlers (Knudson 1964). Phoenix Islands is a group of ten islets; eight atolls (Canton, McKea, Enderbury, Birnie, Rawaki, Manra, Orona, and Nikumaroro); and two submerged coral reefs (Winslow reef and Carondelet reef) that are situated east of the Gilbert Islands and west of the Line Islands in the central Pacific (Maude 1968; see Figure 1).

Most of the islands are low-lying atolls and have limited fresh water resources. Their land resources were exhausted as a result of guano mining even before the Phoenix Islands Resettlement Scheme was initiated. Out of all the islands, only Gull and Gardner are lagoon islands, as Sydney Island’s access to the sea from the lagoon is blocked, creating a large saltwater lake in the center of the island. Canton and Enderbury islands are barren (Maude 1968).

Though whaling ships had previously visited the islands in the 1820s and 1830s, it wasn’t until 1839 when Captain Michael Baker landed on Starbuck Island to bury his deceased crew and discovered guano deposits\textsuperscript{11} that the islands became known to the world. Baker later established American Guano Company in New York and made claims to the islands. The company extracted samples of guano from the islands and sent them to the United States in 1855, where Congress passed the America Guano Act. The act states that islands containing phosphate deposits discovered by American citizens and not within the jurisdiction of another power would be considered as belonging to the United States; hence, all the islands in the Phoenix Group became bonded to the American Guano Act. McKean, Phoenix, and Enderbury Islands were rich in phosphate deposits, and mining began immediately after the discovery of these islands in the late 1850s. McKean Island was the first exploited, from 1859 to 1870; followed by Phoenix Island, from 1860 to 1871; and eventually Enderbury, from 1862 to 1877 (Maude 1968).

\textsuperscript{10} Burns Phillip leased Phoenix Islands for coconut plantations.
\textsuperscript{11} Guano is the deposit that results from the excrement of bats and seabirds. It contains high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen, excellent materials for producing fertilizers and gunpowder.
Although mining was already underway in these islands, the level of activity was minimal.

Permanent mining of guano in Phoenix Islands commenced in 1897 when John T Arundel, a British man with an enormous interest in guano-mining and coconuts, landed on Sydney Island and later obtained control over Phoenix Islands from the Americans. His intentions for and activities in the islands contrasted with those of the Americans who had preceded him. He aimed to convert the islands into coconut plantations after exhausting the guano deposits.

Canton Island was one of the islands in the Phoenix Group that was already occupied before the initiation of the resettlement scheme. At one point, it was the administrative personnel headquarters for the British Colonial Government. Then, in 1937, it became a site for observing the solar eclipse and was occupied briefly by American and New Zealand scientists who were members of the National Geographic Society expedition. In 1939, the United States and Britain agreed to hold Canton under joint control, and in the same year, Pan American World Airways built an airstrip and refueling stations there and commenced its services the following year. During World War II, the United States Navy established its own airstrip, and the island became a stopover for Navy Air Transport Service flights to Australia and New Zealand as well as a staging point for attacks on the Gilbert Islands. British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines—Australia's first trans-Pacific airline—and Canadian Pacific Airlines also used the island as a stopover and refueling station on their respective routes to Hawaii. A community of I-Kiribati islanders and expatriates was also established to support this operation. According to Knudson (1964, 58), by 1949, there were 134 Gilbert and Ellice Islanders and 180 expatriates living on the island, which had an electrical power station, a hotel for the airline passengers, a medical dispensary, a school for dependent children of personnel, and other necessary facilities. Many of I-Kiribati men were able to obtain jobs at the phosphate mine and as casual laborers on the island, and because of the airline routes through Canton and the presence of a European community on the island, the I-Kiribati workers became exposed to Western materials and goods, which they often sent back to their relatives in the islands. During
World War II, the airline routes through the island were disrupted. This affected both the population and the flow of outside goods into the island. However, in 1960, the American government built a tracking station for the Mercury Space Program on the island and used it until 1965. The US Air force and the US Space and Missile System Organization continued to use the island for missile-tracking operations up until 1976, after which time they abandoned it and used the airstrip for emergency purposes only (Anon 2011).

The Phoenix Resettlement Scheme was initiated to reduce the overpopulation and land shortages in the Southern Gilbert Islands. However, prior to the relocation, a delegation of government officials and representatives from the Southern Gilbert Islands, as well as some locals with agricultural skills and expertise, visited Phoenix Islands to examine their suitability for habitation. The expedition was also intended to identify a potential site for relocation, to determine how many people the location would be able to support, and to explore the possibilities of sustaining an expanding population (Hoverson 1938). Volunteers for the resettlement were recruited mainly from the islands of Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Beru, Nikunau, Onotoa, Tamana, and Arorae, which were considered overly populated. Sixty-one people were recruited to be pioneer settlers in Phoenix Islands. This included twenty-three men, thirteen women, ten boys, and fifteen girls. All of the people who decided to relocate to the Phoenix Group were told to give up their lands in the Southern Gilbert Islands once they moved. Many viewed the relocation scheme as an opportunity for settlers to improve their livelihood and as a means of easing an already precarious situation in their home island (Knudson 1964). Maude (the District Commissioner) hoped that the relocation to Phoenix Islands would allow the settlers to maintain their I-Kiribati customs and traditional protocols despite separation from their home islands. A song was composed by the group of settlers in Tamana when they departed Gilbert Islands for Phoenix settlers.
We are about to sail for Orona,
good-bye, O people of our homeland;
we have got our lands,
in the new Group of Islands.

We shall step ashore at Orona,
shall dig our wells;
We shall build our dwelling-houses,
so that we may live well.

Stand up, O people of the Gilberts,
grasp your working tools;

We shall stand up and clear the undergrowth,
and plant coconut trees.

Chorus:
We are happy, for we shall now live.
Do not forget us, O people of our homeland.

(Source: Schutz, B and Tenten, R. Adjustment; In Kiribati: Aspects of History)

Though the scheme was voluntary, it was meant for poor families who were not able to support themselves with limited land and resources. In 1938, the scheme proceeded. Settlers from Nonouti, Tabiteuea, Beru, Nikunau, Onotoa, Tamana, and Arorae moved to Hull, Sydney, and Gardner Islands in the Phoenix Group. The Gilbert Islands settlers christened these islands with traditional names upon their arrival. Hull Island was named Orona, Sydney Island was named Manra, and Gardner Island was named Nikumaroro12; these were the three islands in the Phoenix Group that were deemed most likely to be capable of supporting a growing population. Of the three islands, Sydney Island was the least hospitable because it was more susceptible to drought (Maude 1968). Despite the precarious conditions, the wells people dug on the island provided drinkable water, although it usually became brackish during harsh drought conditions. The marine resources, which often yielded enough fish to last families for days, were considered more plentiful than those in the Southern Gilbert Islands, and on Hull and Gardner Islands, the supply of freshwater was plentiful enough to support the population. The

12 For the purpose of this thesis, I will be using the original names of the islands as known before they were christened
Phoenix scheme continued from 1938 to 1940, when World War II intensified in the Pacific (Knudson 1964).

**Settlement of Phoenix Islands and Changes Encountered**

In Phoenix Islands, every adult, both male and female, was assigned two pieces of land, each containing approximately 25 coconut trees, and each child was assigned two pieces of land (25 fathoms square, equivalent to .02 acre) with unplanted bush on condition that the parents would help clear and plant the lands within five years. Freehold plots of unplanted land were also given to I-Kiribati settlers in Solomon Islands on behalf of their friends and relatives in the Southern Gilbert Islands, given that they support them upon arrival in the Islands until the lands became bearing, before they can renounce all their lands in their home islands to their next of kin (Maude 1968).

While attempting to reduce overpopulation and to alleviate poverty on the Gilbert Islands, the scheme also aimed to leave intact the cultural practices imported from the Southern Gilbert Islands. Settlers were expected to replicate what was practiced and observed in their home islands. Nevertheless, several changes occurred after the resettlement in Phoenix Islands: people became involved in formal employment and started consuming Western goods; the construction and organization of the *maneaba* (meeting house) shifted; and both land rights and the roles of the administration and local government systems changed. Settlers quickly established self-sufficient communities on the islands (Knudson 1964).

Families that settled the islands depended entirely on land and sea resources for subsistence. Coconut trees and other plants that can tolerate semi-brackish water—such as breadfruit, pandanus, and swamp taro—provided sources of starch for the settlers’ diets. Fresh water for drinking was usually obtained from underwater reservoirs through wells, although these were often affected during drought
seasons. However, the I-Kiribati people adapted to the limited fresh water supplies and drought seasons, and, since many considered water tasteless, they often consumed toddy instead. Toddy is an extracted sap (tekarewe) obtained from the flower of the coconut; tappers cut the flower then fasten a bottle (or coconut endocarp, which was used by many I-Kiribati people before they started using bottles) to its stump to collect the sap as it drips. The sap can be drunk fresh after the bottle has been taken down from the tree, or cooked to make a thick, honey-like liquid known as tekamaimai; this in turn can be used to make tetongo, a sweet candy mixed with fine scraped coconut flesh (Knudson 1964). Toddy sap can also be fermented over a period of time to produce an alcoholic drink.

The organization of the village was around tribal groups, with descent claimed through bilateral lineage. Chiefs were absent at district levels, but the elders took responsibility for governing the villages. The land tenure system was bounded by kinship systems, and land was distributed and held bilaterally, although it could be confiscated as punishment for theft, murder, or adultery. In villages, daily life centered on traditional skills, and knowledge about such things as building, fishing, weaving, and healing was usually passed on through family lines, with families often specializing in certain skills, like traditional massage or weather prediction (Knudson 1964).

Religion also changed. There was a split between the Catholics and Protestants, which influenced the formation of villages along church lines. The island of Hull consisted of both Protestants and Catholics, while Sydney Island reveals its colonization by Protestants and members of the London Missionary Society. The arrival of a Catholic catechist, who converted nine Sydney Island families to Catholicism, and the enforcement of Catholic training on the island created heated debates among settlers regarding whether religious affiliations should be used as a basis for the election of individuals to positions in the island government. Because of this religious factionalism, the Catholics decided to remain on Sydney Island during the relocation to Solomon Islands and thus formed a separate
community. Upon arrival in Solomon Islands, the Protestants decided to establish a new community called Manra, situated just a few kilometers away from Titiana, the main settlement village in Gizo. Similar separations of populations based on religious affiliations occurred among other settlers in Solomon Islands (Knudson 1964).

Economically speaking, settlers shifted from being highly dependent on land and marine resources for subsistence to engaging in income-generating activities such as copra harvesting and phosphate mining. Many of the new settlers became employed on Canton Island where most of the European settlers, formal employment activities, and coconut plantations were located. The introduction of Western medicines and health facilities contributed to the abandonment of traditional birth control techniques, such as abortion and infanticide. There was also increased economic reliance on individual family plots instead of communal holdings. Further, settlers were exposed to imported resources such as food, housing materials, and other goods because of the economic incentives that operated within the islands (Knudson 1964).

The Phoenix Islands Relocation Scheme proceeded for three years (from 1938–1940) and was intended to create a self-sustaining subsistence economy for the people of Gilbert Islands. However, the scheme was halted in 1940 due to the outbreak of WWII, which affected further emigration from the Southern Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands, and declared a failure in 1952 due to the lack of resources and adequate drinking water in Phoenix Islands, the lack of communication with relatives in the Southern Gilbert Islands, and the high costs of regular shipping services to Phoenix Islands (Maude 1968).

In 1945, another relocation scheme was brought to the attention of the colonial government. The initial purpose was to recruit I-Kiribati laborers to work on coconut plantations in Solomon Islands due to labor shortages; however, Maude opposed the recruitment because of its unsatisfactory terms,
and the scheme was abandoned (Maude 1968). By 1954, the islands were already becoming uninhabitable, especially Sydney Island, which was the most inhospitable. The continuous occurrence of drought posed further problems for the settlers on the islands. Water became scarce and was rationed based on individual families. Many coconut crops—which the majority of the settlers depended on for sustenance—died, as did other land resources such as babai (swamp taro). The long periods of drought forced the elders of the community, particularly the Sydney settlers, to propose to the British Administration that the islands were no longer inhabitable and to request relocation. According to my informants, the request was for them to be relocated to Christmas Island (Kiritimati), also part of the GEIC, but the British Administration did not support the idea and suggested that they instead be relocated to Solomon Islands. Solomon Islands were considered a viable choice for a relocation site because, at that time, it was under-populated (Maude 1968).

The continuous occurrence of droughts was considered the main reason for the relocation of the Phoenix settlers to Solomon Islands. However, limited economic assistance from the government during the post-war years, especially to isolated islands, was also a factor (Lundsgaarde, 1968); so many cost-cutting measures were implemented (Uwate and Teroroko 2007). On the other hand, my informants believed that the effects of Britain’s atomic bomb testing on Christmas Island also prompted the relocation of settlers to Solomon Islands. There were a total of 36 British and American nuclear tests conducted in the Pacific. Britain conducted its tests from 1952 to 1958, and six took place on Christmas Island (See Appendix 1). These tests were considered the biggest and dirtiest bombs and created the most dangerous amounts of fallout in the Pacific. While the damages and injuries caused by America’s nuclear tests in the Northern Marshall Islands have been documented, Britain has kept secret the impacts of its nuclear tests on the I-Kiribati inhabitants on Christmas Island (Firth 1986, 1). See Oulton (1987) and Roberts (1972) for other accounts of Britain’s thermo-nuclear planning and testing on Christmas Island.
Informants interviewed on Wagina said that they witnessed the explosion on Christmas Island and described it as a huge, bright light in the sky. They said that the effect of the light (explosion) caused many of the coconut trees to die. They also believed that it was the effects from the explosion that contaminated their well water. An old man from Arariki village who was employed on Kanton Island prior to the relocation stated that, “it was the British officials that were suspected to have poured salt into the well water to make it taste brackish because most of the settlers on Hull and Gardner Islands did not want to be relocated to Solomon Islands.” Although the effects of the nuclear testing are believed to have been the main reason for people’s emergency relocation to Solomon Islands, especially the Hull and Gardner settlers, none of them have been documented. However, this ethnographic account of settlers relocated to Solomon Islands is worthy of mention and requires further research.

**From Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands**

![Figure 2: Map of the Pacific showing movement from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands](Image)

*(Source: Contemporary Pacific, Volume 23 (2011))*
The Solomons lie east of Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the Melanesian subregion of the Pacific Ocean. It consists of nine main provinces, Central, Choiseul, Guadalcanal, Isabel, Makira, Malaita, Rennell and Bellona, Temotu, and Western. The provinces comprise of many islands characterized by lush tropical forests and rivers rich in both flora and fauna. The group also includes low-lying atolls like Sikaina and Ontong Java. Although a large percentage of the population is ethnically Melanesian, there are groups of ethnic Polynesians who live on small islands and atolls like Tikopia, Utupua, Vanikoro, Rennell, Bellona, Ontong Java, and Sikaiana. The people of Solomon Islands speak about 80 distinct languages, as well as numerous dialects. The islands are ethno-linguistically and culturally diverse.

The relocation to Solomon Islands involved big changes for the settlers—geographically, environmentally, and culturally. Unlike Phoenix Islands, which shared physical characteristics with the Southern Gilbert Group, the Solomons were different in terms of environment, culture, language, and people, and the communities were more ethnically diverse than those in Kiribati. The land is more
mountainous, with surrounding islands and small islets, the atmosphere is more humid, and the climate is tropical with abundant rainfall. The Solomons have lush vegetation and rich flora and fauna, as well as rivers and creeks. The people in the areas where the I-Kiribati settled had much darker skin and frizzy hair, and their language was very different (Knudson 1964). For the relocated settlers, it was nothing like their atoll islands; it was a major shift from atoll life to life on high volcanic islands. Nevertheless, both countries at that time were under the colonial administration.

Gizo and Wagina in Solomon Islands were selected specifically because they were uninhabited; they had abundant coconut trees, good fishing reefs, and access to employment on coconut plantations (Schutz and Tenten 1979). There were two waves of relocation to Solomon Islands. The first group, Sydney settlers, was relocated in the mid 1950s, and the second group, Hull and Gardner settlers, in the early 1960s. The first group to be relocated in 1955 came from Sydney Island because of the increasing impacts of the drought on the community, and after the elders requested assistance from the British Administration.

In December 1954, prior to the relocation, a pilot team consisting of British administrators and several I-Kiribati officers was sent to Solomon Islands to survey a potential site. Upon its successful completion, more settlers would be sent in. Solomon Islands at that time were under the British Protectorate and, like Kiribati, were administered by the British Western Pacific High Commission, which was headquartered in Suva, Fiji. Many sites in the Solomons were considered for the relocation; however, the choices were restricted due to the types of landholdings in the country. Although the relocation was to be sponsored by the British government, the land owned by natives could not be alienated for the settlers. Thus, potential sites were limited to those lands which had been previously alienated and which were now available for the government to purchase. This meant that only Gizo Island, which had no native inhabitants, could host settlers. On the island, the team identified Titiana as
a potential site because it was uninhabited and thereby alienated land. Further, its location by the sea instead of in the interior bush meant that settlers would not have to suffer through the hard work of clearing land in order to settle, and its proximity to the administrative center in Gizo Town meant that settlers would have access to training and assistance with adapting to the new environment in which they were to live (Knudson 1964).

The pilot party returned to Phoenix Islands later the same year and informed the settlers of their future home. There were ten different relocation trips over a period of seven years. Most of the settlers were transported on Nimanoa. (See Figure 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trip</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Settlers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Young men, 8 nuclear families, and young dependents of earlier settlers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No specific month indicated</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>1958</td>
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<td>1958</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>No specific number indicated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Table showing number of trips and settlers in the 1st wave of relocation

The first group arrived in Solomon Islands on September 26, 1955 and temporarily resided in the government headquarters. These twenty-two men and eight women were to clear the land and build houses for the settlers in exchange for four shillings each—and they demanded five shillings. For

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13 The Nimanoa was a Colony schooner, a wooden ketch-rigged auxiliary vessel.
sustenance, the settlers ate rations of food (such as tea, rice, biscuits, and canned meat) from a trade store, as well as fish. The only remaining elderly woman from the first group to arrive in Solomon Islands said of the relocation: "We came with Karibanang, the assistant commissioner who knows everything about the relocation. We came purposely to work and to occupy that side of Gizo as our place."

The second group of settlers consisted of 59 persons, mainly the wives and children of those in the first group, including a minister from the London Missionary Society, and arrived in Titiana in June 1956. They planted communal gardens but also still received rations from the store. The completion of a maneaba marked Titiana as a true I-Kiribati village; however, the lack of a definite form of land allocation was still causing disputes. The Gilberts system of land holding was supposed to be retained in the Solomons, but the status of land given to the settlers was unclear. Even natives had no titles to their lands under a formal system of registration (Knudson 1964). An elderly I-Kiribati man who was part of the relocation to Titiana and currently resides on Babaga Island stated that,

"It was the British government that decided to relocated us to Solomon Islands because there was no one living here [referring to Titiana] as well and many here actually said that there was no one living here when they came. . . . the first group that came surveyed the land [and] we received news in Phoenix that Titiana is ours....the British government bought the land and now we are looking for where the money went, so that’s why we have settled here because we know that the place is ours." (Personal Communication: Titiana Village, July 28th, 2010)

The third group arrived in Solomon Islands in late August 1956. There were young men, eight nuclear families, and dependents of the earlier settlers. The fourth group, which arrived later the same year, consisted of 25 people, most of whom were wives and children of men in the third group, including an English-speaking teacher and his wife. In late 1956, a marriage took place between an I-Kiribati and a native Solomon Islander, creating discontent among the natives who were displeased with their new neighbors (the settlers) and believed that they had brought epidemics to their islands. The settlers were encouraged by the British officials to work hard so that they could prove their worth. However, several
settlers complained about the hard work and wanted to return to Phoenix Islands. After being told about the precarious conditions in their home islands, many later changed their minds. Among the Phoenix settlers were also some who came directly from the Southern Gilbert Islands. The fifth group comprised of 32 people, relatives of those in the earlier groups, and arrived in July 1957. The sixth group of 15 settlers arrived in February 1958 with a male trained medical dresser.

In March 1958, the British government purchased the small islands (Babaga and Kololuka) near Gizo from the Levers Brothers in order to develop copra-processing sites. The seventh group of settlers arrived in the same year and consisted of 25 people. New Manra village was established for the remaining settlers from Sydney Island who were mainly Catholics. The eighth group arrived in September 1958 on the MV Tulagi, which carried 213 settlers (Knudson 1964). Although those not in favor of the relocation were given the choice to remain back on Sydney Island, it is unclear whether all islanders eventually left the island after a few years. Knudson (1964, 83) confirmed that Sydney Island was left to the Hull and Gardner cooperative trading societies to use as coconut plantations. The ninth group, comprised of 20 people, arrived in 1960, and the tenth group, mainly relatives of the earlier settlers, arrived in August 1961.

There were issues of assimilation among the settlers of Titiana, specifically between the Catholics and Protestants. Catholics remained a separate subcommunity in Titiana, and village activities such as maneaba repair often became the basis of disputes between the two religions. Catholics were allowed to work on Loga Island near Gizo, which they later settled, while Protestants remained in Titiana.

Land on Titiana was to be divided into four-acre plots and distributed to each family, but there was not enough land for every family. There were 84 families and only sixty four-acre land plots, so they would need 27 more plots for the rest of the families. There was no available land near Gizo, and
although there were other possible sites, they were beyond the control of the District Commissioner. In 1962, old plantation land in Komaliai in the northwest of Shortland Islands was made available for purchase. The District Commissioner considered it fitting for the Catholics to move there since they did not wish to live in a predominantly Protestant community. In June 1962, the settlers departed for Komaliai where they had more access to land than did settlers in Titiana. Nusa Baruka, an island near Gizo that was formerly used as a coconut plantation, was also allocated to Titiana settlers (Knudson 1964).

Although, there was progress in the adaptation and assimilation of the Titiana settlers, many were doing moderately enough just to get passed the issues encountered in their new home, while others awaited the five-year period to lapse in 1962, so that they can return to Phoenix Islands. Many were later convinced by the arrival of a letter from Sydney Island that discouraged the return of settlers to the island due to its severe precarious conditions; and should therefore remain in the relocation site. Nevertheless, for many settlers, land was the only solution for and indicator of the permanence of their settlement in Solomon Islands (Knudson 1964, 100).

The second wave of settlers to Solomon Islands came from Hull (Orona) and Gardner (Nikumaroro) Islands. As with the first wave, this relocation program started in 1963 as a result of a continuous drought that affected the islands’ ability to sustain its population. Knudson (1964) gave a very detailed account of the first relocation from Phoenix Islands to Gizo; however, very little has been written specifically about the second relocation from Phoenix Islands to Wagina. I have combined the limited literature available with the narratives I gathered from my informants in Wagina to generate a concise account of this second phase of relocation. A severe drought on both islands in the early 1960s led to the closure of Pan American Airways and the refueling stations on Canton Island, as well as the cessation of mining and copra activities. Settlers on both islands were severely affected given the fact
that most food products were brought in by airplanes using Canton as a transit and refueling route.

There was limited food and water available on the island because most of the coconut trees had died and the well water had become brackish and unsuitable for drinking.

Consequently, the British colonial administration decided to relocate people from these islands to Solomon Islands. As in the case of Titiana, a pilot team consisting of British officials and several I-Kiribati natives went to Solomon Islands prior to the move to identify a potential relocation site. Wagina was identified because it was uninhabited and located on alienated land. Compared to Titiana, it was more isolated and distant from urban centers.

**Settlement of Titiana and Wagina and Challenges encountered**

![Figure 5: Map of Solomon Islands showing Gizo and Wagina](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/ciencia/ciencia_flyingobjects43.htm)

Settlers journeyed from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands without any expectations regarding what lay ahead of them in what would become their new home, although they were told by Bristow, the
Resident commissioner at the time, that they would have access to adequate land. Many of my informants in Wagina stated that the relocation was a matter of complying with the orders issued by the Resident Commissioner and the British officials who initiated the resettlement scheme. Though it did seem like an emergency situation, it was not clear why there was so much of a rush and why people were not allowed to stay behind or to take more time to gather their belongings. It was a compulsory resettlement, and everyone was required to leave. Many were dismayed because they had to abandon their land, their homes, and other properties that they had acquired and worked to improve over the years. One of my elderly male informants from Cookson village stated that the District Commissioner came to the maneaba where people were gathered and gave orders that people on Hull Island (Orona) would be relocated. He said, “prepare yourselves because a ship is coming to take some men who will go and work the place, then you will see your land, a place which the government (British) had given you. You have to remember that Orona is not your place; it is not suitable for you anymore. The place in which you will go and stay will be your place with your grandchildren until you die.” (Personal Communication: Titiana Village, July 27th, 2010)

Many refused to leave, especially those working on Canton Island and those with relatives buried on the islands, since leaving would mean abandoning them; but the Commissioner insisted that they all had to leave and that no one should remain behind. Another elderly male informant who was part of the final group relocated to Wagina, but who is currently living in Titiana because of his marriage to a Titiana woman, described the situation: “the government forced us to come [to Solomon Islands], we just followed the government to come and see here. . . most people intended to come and see and not to stay.” This perception was the basis of their relocation to Phoenix Islands: they were told by the commissioner that if the resettlement of the community was unsuccessful, they would be able to return to their land in the GEIC colony (Knudson 1964, 206). An elderly woman from Cookson who was part of the relocation to Wagina stated during our interview that, “the government said that everyone should
leave, no one should stay. Even if you want to stay, the commissioner gave his word, everyone should move to your new place.”

The journey to Solomon Islands lasted a week, with the settlers accommodated in the bottom of the hull of the Nimanoa. They had limited knowledge of where they were; only receiving notification of the change of days and of their entry into Solomon Islands waters. There were three resettlement trips to Wagina. Most of my informants on Wagina do not remember the exact day they arrived there, but many remembered the year. The first group, consisting mainly of men, traveled to Wagina in 1963 prior to the relocation of the rest of the settlers in order to clear the land and build houses to accommodate everyone upon arrival. The second group arrived on Wagina in 1964 and consisted of the wives and children of those in the first group. The final group of settlers arrived on the island later that year. The first group stopped by Titiana for malaria immunization before continuing on to Wagina; however the latter groups sailed straight to Wagina.

Wagina Island is located southeast of Choiseul Province and is geographically different from those in the Phoenix Group. It has mountains, creeks, and tropical forests. The side of the island chosen for the settlers has no beach but is characterized by raised limestone shorelines that extend into the sea. It was an amazing sight for the I-Kiribati settlers as they looked in awe at what lay before them. It was the first time that they had seen an island with mountains and lush rainforests. It was almost like a different planet altogether. The women and children were winched off the boat because there were no ladders on the sides of the ship. A male informant from Nikumaroro said, “We were amazed by the environment, the surrounding, rivers, mountains and trees, and animals.” An elderly lady agreed, saying that, “the trees were so big and their diameter was like the height of a man.” Strange-looking people stood before them when they arrived ashore. Many were afraid of the indigenous people, who were the darkest people they had ever seen and whom they considered to be backward, crude, and uncivilized.
An elderly female informant—the only remaining settler from the first group to arrive in Gizo—stated that they “were warned by the British officials involved in the relocation of the Solomon Islanders not because they were bad, but because they weren’t very civilized.” Another female informant from Cookson shared the settlers’ reaction upon arrival on Wagina: “we weren’t too surprised to see the black people because we’ve seen one before who was married to an I-Kiribati, but we were very surprised to see the way they were dressed. They wore kabilato while working.” Yet another female informant expressed that some of the settlers felt differently when they first saw the indigenous people of Choiseul: “we were afraid of the Solomon Islanders, they were dark and we don’t have that back in our islands.” On the other hand, the indigenous people viewed the I-Kiribati settlers as loud, noisy, and somewhat immoral and lacking in culture. Many resented the fact that the I-Kiribati people were taking their land, as well as jobs that they felt should have been given to them (Knudson 1964).

Most of the settlers, except for those who spoke or understood English, were not able to communicate outside of the group, so their conversations were primarily in the I-Kiribati language or relied on gestures with those who did not understand or speak the language. The local language was unfamiliar to the settlers, and English was the only means of inter-group communication, so the settlers learned Solomon Islands Pidgin, which became the common language among the different groups in Solomon Islands. Indigenous people from the neighboring islands believed that Wagina was a haunted island and were amazed at the fact that I-Kiribati were able to inhabit the island without being disturbed. A male informant who was part of the relocation and is well known on Wagina for his building skills, spoke of this reaction: “the locals were surprised at us because the land consists of spirits and many people who wanted to live here have died . . . and they were surprised that nothing happened to us.” He added that, “some of the locals in the neighboring islands tried to come and live on Wagina

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14 A kabilato is a loin cloth that covers only the private parts.  
15 Note: I was not able to obtain reactions from native Solomon Islanders about the I-Kiribati settlers.
before our arrival but were chased away by spirits. They said that they were surprised nothing happened to us. They thought our powers are greater than the spirits of the land.”

The settlers were fortunate that the first group had traveled to Solomon Islands prior to the relocation to clear the site and build houses. This ensured that the new arrivals would have a place to live for several weeks before having to construct their own homes. The settlers consumed rations of tea, milk, sugar, rice, flour, canned food, and other foods that the British officials helping with the relocation distributed. Fishing was conducted at intervals, and the catches were distributed to the families. Many were surprised by how big the trees were and how difficult it was to chop them down. Informants from Nikumaroro stated that they could not cut the big trees when they first got to Wagina. They were not familiar with the tools given to them and had to be taught how to use knives and axes and how to chop down big trees. The locals who accompanied the first group of surveyors to the island taught them how to chop down trees, how to construct and thatch houses that would be able to withstand storms and strong winds, how to fish in deep waters, and how to farm and prepare root crops like tapioca, which settlers mistakenly cooked with its skin, making it taste bitter.

Malaria was a major issue for many of the people upon arrival. Although some of them received treatments in Gizo before going to Wagina, many soon contracted the disease. The settlers were given mosquito nets and malaria tablets, but an unidentified number of settlers died from the illness. Initially, the settlers were not aware that people with fevers and headaches might have contracted malaria, and many thought that they had been attacked by the spirits of the land.

The I-Kiribati people understood that Wagina, including the surrounding islands, had been given to them as part of an agreement between the British government and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. Each family received ten acres of land for their homes and farms. This was more than what was allocated to the Titiana settlers, who only receive four-acre plots. An elderly male informant—a
builder from Cookson—said: “when we got here, the decision was already made that this place is ours with surrounding islands which were bought by the British government and allocated to each family.” As part of adapting to the new environment, people started to learn how work was conducted on the island. Although the place was new, many learned how to fish, build houses, make gardens, and interact with the locals. Seeing that the settlers were adapting to the way of life on the island and to their surroundings, officials halted the distribution of rations. An elderly man who was relocated to Wagina with his wife and children and who now lives in Tengeangea in Cookson village said that, “the British government saw that many families were capable of sustaining themselves with their gardens and fishing, so they halted the rationing of food.”

At first, the I-Kiribati people found local foods like tapioca, sweet potatoes, and cabbage tasteless and unsatisfying, but they eventually got used to the new crops. Many of them missed the food and way of life back on the atolls and considered life in Solomon Islands more difficult than what they had been used to. They discovered that hard work was required in order to accomplish anything, unlike on the atolls where less labor was required. As one of the informants said, “Kiribati is very small so we do not need to do hard work, we do not have to cut big trees and life was easy, even to look for food in the ocean.” However, they appreciated that it was easier and more convenient to grow crops in the fertile land in Solomon Islands that it was in the infertile and limited land on the atolls. Many worked hard to become better established in Solomon Islands and grew to like their surroundings and the way of life in their new home.
CHAPTER THREE:  
Changes and Experiences in Solomon Islands

Adaptation and Assimilation in Solomon Islands: Experiences Shared

The I-Kiribati people encountered many challenges when they arrived in Solomon Islands due to the environmental and cultural diversity of the societies they came in contact with. However, over the years, this group of people gradually integrated into the local communities, at the same time adapting to the way of life. Numerous changes have taken place within the I-Kiribati community and among the people themselves (more evidently the younger generations) since the relocation, but only a few that were discussed during my interviews in Solomon Islands will be highlighted in this chapter. Several of these are generational changes that occurred not specifically as a result of relocation, but because of inevitable changes such as urbanization that have influenced many I-Kiribati youth. They are categorized as either sociocultural or economic changes.

Sociocultural Changes

This subsection highlights changes in village structure, organization, and population divisions; in the construction of dwellings and maneaba; and particularly in roles and way of life, traditional practices, and culture and moral behavior. The experience of change varied between the Kiribati communities in Gizo and on Wagina. Most of the changes identified in this section have occurred on Wagina, where I spent most of my fieldwork time. However, I have also included changes shared by informants from Gizo.¹⁶

Remarkable changes have taken place within the Kiribati community since its relocation to Solomon Islands, many as a result of urbanization, intermarriage, and exposure to new environments,

¹⁶ Includes Titiana, New Manra and Babanga, I-Kiribati settlements in Gizo where I conducted my fieldwork.
cultures, languages, and people. The relocation to Solomon Islands has given many people of I-Kiribati descent access to education, employment, and urban livelihoods. I remembered growing up in the village when I was five years old: life was very different from what it is today in terms of the village’s structure, religion, population distribution, activities, and houses.

Village Organization

Arariki\textsuperscript{17} was more organized as a village because of the presence of many elders who administered village affairs alongside the church minister, who was often a local Solomon Islander assisted by an I-Kiribati pastor. The village was more populated, and people celebrated village events with more enthusiasm and fun, involving the whole village. For instance, song and dance competitions were held during Christmas and New Year celebrations, and while young people competed in outdoor games, old people engaged in card and board games in the \textit{maneaba}. During these years, people were more excited to return to the village for the holidays than to remain in town. Village men carried out events and tasks (such as \textit{maneaba} or church reparations, village fundraisers, and clean ups) communally and usually under the supervision of village elders, while women supplied food throughout the duration of the work. Today, most of these activities receive less attention from villagers. Reasons for this vary, but most villagers have become more focused on supporting their families, especially with the downgraded economy of Solomon Islands, and spend minimal time on village events and activities. The absence of elders in the village, many of whom are now deceased, has had a significant negative impact on communal work and village organization since many villagers had grown accustomed to elders overseeing village affairs.

Today, several vacant houses throughout the village are evidence that the village (Arariki) is depopulated, mostly due to mass movements to urban areas for education and employment purposes.

\textsuperscript{17} Arariki is a village on Wagina where my family comes from and where I spent five years of my childhood.
Some villagers have intermarried with local Solomon Islanders and moved away to live with their spouses. The village populations, especially in Arariki and Nikumaroro on Wagina, have recently been divided into members of the United Church on one hand and members of Tungavalu on the other. Members of these religions conduct church-related activities separately, though sometimes with each other’s assistance. Village activities, however, are still conducted by all villagers.

**Construction of Modern Dwellings**

Village houses are now constructed using modern materials that can withstand bad weather conditions and last longer before repair is needed, rather than with the thatch and bush materials that were commonly used in the past (more than 20 years ago). Today, most of the village houses are built with timber, cement, nails, and corrugated iron roofing and some even have glass windows and electricity produced by generators and solar panels. Hurricane lamps are still used but not as commonly as before. Some villagers use kerosene and gas stoves for cooking. Although people still use fire, the introduction of these items renders the impression that household lifestyle changes are occurring.

**Change in Roles and Way of Life**

Like most societies, the Kiribati society is controlled by custom. The way of life is centered on hard work, on moral respect, and particularly on family (utu), which is the most vital grouping in Kiribati. Each family possesses such skills as fishing, massaging, canoe building, toddy cutting, babai cultivation, traditional medicine preparation, and the forecasting of weather based on the sky, clouds, waves, winds, and birds. Fishing and gardening were once the basis for household subsistence. The environment is significant to the I-Kiribati people, so they foster a sense of interconnectedness with it (Talu 1985). Roles performed by members of the community and families are significant elements that constitute the I-

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18 Tungavalu is a new religious movement that was formed under the United Church in Solomon Islands and that consists mostly of I-Kiribati people.
Kiribati culture and way of life. Village elders oversee village affairs and make decisions regarding the welfare of the community and the village, and they are well respected because they form the local government, which is prominent in Kiribati communities.

Today on Wagina, elders are still well respected and still make decisions about the village, but to a lesser extent. In the maneaba in the past, only elders could speak during village meetings, but today, villagers—especially adult men—have become more involved in the discussions. It is often assumed that elders lack knowledge of general activities and current issues in Solomon Islands. Today, their roles often overlap with those of the governmental representative who oversees the villages on Wagina and works cooperatively with the elders when making decisions about each village’s development and welfare. With the absence of many elders today, their roles are slowly being abandoned.

On Wagina, daily chores and responsibilities are divided according to gender, but at times responsibilities and activities require the involvement of both genders. Men are mostly expected to provide the means of subsistence by fishing, gardening, cutting toddy, generating income, and overseeing family affairs. Women are responsible for child rearing, food preparation, and household chores. Both men and women can also engage in income-generating activities that require efforts from both genders. At times, children help out, especially during weekends and school holidays. For instance, seaweed farming, which is common on Wagina today, involves men, women, and children. Many of them would camp out on the islands, farm all week, then return to the village on Sunday to go to church, while others would leave for the islands on Friday after their children finished school and return on Sunday before school started again.

Many of these roles are still observed, especially in rural areas; however, livelihoods have changed significantly. Almost none of the men cut toddy because most are employed outside of Wagina. The availability of money and Western goods has changed many of the roles associated with household
subsistence. For example, the availability of sugar, tea, and coffee has reduced the cutting of toddy; outboard motor boats have reduced the making of wooden canoes; and modern fishing equipment has reduced people’s ability to make traditional equipment. The availability and durability of building materials have led to an increase in the construction of modern dwellings and the abandonment of thatched dwellings.

The role of women has also changed. Many have shifted from weaving mats for their dwellings to purchasing modern items such as Chinese mats and carpets. Some women still weave mats today, especially when they are required to contribute to a village event or when it is their primary source of income. Often women are less skilled than they used to be when it comes to weaving, which is time consuming and requires hard labor. Many women are becoming more involved in income-generating activities, such as seaweed farming in Wagina and the selling of betel nuts, fish, and cooked food in both Wagina and Gizo. These changes not only show the transition in the I-Kiribati way of life, but also indicate the efficiency and durability of the Western items that have influenced these changes. Many people have therefore become reluctant to continue making traditional items, and instead rely on Western goods.

Changes in Traditional Practices
Although there are many traditional practices that have been altered over the past 50 years, two of the common changes identified by male informants were in fishing techniques and the construction of the maneaba, while female informants highlighted the change in the traditional practice of katekatekakin te ataen aine, a term describing the traditional seclusion of young females when they reach puberty.

Fishing techniques that were once practiced in Phoenix Islands have been altered because of differences in the fishing locations. The new location requires more deep-sea fishing and trolling than did the lagoons and shallow reefs of the Gilbert and Phoenix Islands (Knudson 1964). Although deep-sea
fishing was commonly practiced and mostly preferred in Phoenix Islands, the methods applied differed from those used in Solomon Islands. The use of fish traps made from coral has been completely abandoned. Traditional cages used for eel, octopus, and lobster fishing are less common now, mainly because many men lack the skills to make them. An elderly man on Wagina—who at the time of our interview had just completed a traditional fishing trap for eels, fishes, and crabs—stated that the younger generations do not know how to make traditional fish traps and other fishing equipment because of the availability of Western fishing equipment (such as nets, fishing lines, and outboard motor boats) that makes fishing more efficient. In Solomon Islands, I-Kiribati people are well known for being good fishermen and divers. However, with these changes, many traditional skills have been abandoned.

In the early years of relocation, maneaba were constructed and organized much like they were in Gilbert and Phoenix Islands and were built under the supervision of a maneaba expert; however, today these traditions have changed. In the past, traditional materials such as wooden poles, terau (sago palm leaves), tekora (string weaved from dried coconut husks) and teinai (sitting mats weaved from coconut fronds) were used for the maneaba. Today, most of the maneaba are constructed with Western materials such as corrugated iron roofing and concrete flooring and pillars. Nails are used instead of tekora, and carpets are used instead of teinai. The construction of the maneaba has changed so that each building can withstand storms and bad weather and generally last longer. For Titiana settlers, the maneaba provided traditional symbols with which people could identify and with which they could contrast the Melanesian communities within their vicinity (Knudson 1964, 224).

Like in other societies, young women are chaperoned more carefully than young men, and for I-Kiribati young women, this is regarded as a proper upbringing. The most significant stage of their life is when they reach puberty, the transition to adulthood. When young girls experience their first menstruation, they are katekatekaki, a term that refers to the cultural practice of excluding the girl in a
room or section of the house and giving her items to work on. This takes place for three days, during which time the girl is given very little food so that she may learn to manage the way she eats, and her body is rubbed with oil every day. At the end of the third day of the menstruation cycle, the family hosts a feast to mark this stage of the girl’s life. Although this cultural practice is still observed by some Kiribati families in Solomon Islands, many have abandoned it. Some young girls live away from their families when they experience their first menstruation, while others do not inform their mothers or female guardians because they refuse to go through the process of being *katekatekaki*. I-Kiribati people traditionally believed that young women who were *katekatekaki* behave according to custom and are more respectful. However, it is difficult to determine if such judgment is completely true, given the exposure to urban life that also influences young I-Kiribati women’s lives and actions.

**Change in Culture and Moral Behaviors**

Change in culture is very evident in the I-Kiribati community, according to the elders that I interviewed. The Kiribati culture is centered around the *maneaba*, a significant meeting house not only for elders to meet and make decisions but also for important and formal social activities. Traditionally, a *maneaba* consists of many *boti*,¹⁹ each one serving as an elder’s assigned sitting place during the meetings. These *boti* held significance in the community as hereditary sitting places for the male family lineage, and each man’s clan is recognized the moment he takes his seat at his family’s *boti* (Maude 1989). Today, though this is still observed in some villages, it has mostly been altered so that elders can sit anywhere they want. The *maneaba* used to be highly respected, and activities that were not significant to the village would not be hosted in it. This has, however, changed. Many *maneaba* are now used for village activities and gatherings, and many of the rules that used to be observed in *maneaba* have been neglected and abandoned. Many *maneaba* have lost their cultural significance and now exist as ordinary buildings. One

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¹⁹ A *boti* is a pillar of the *maneaba*.
of the well respected elderly men in Cookson stated during our interview that, “there is no longer any respect for the maneaba. The maneaba is a restricted place. It is the source and origin of the I-Kiribati people and it’s a taboo place. It’s a place of men, a place of humanity in Kiribati. All the posts have names thus it is considered a taboo place.”

Dancing is a cultural art among I-Kiribati people and is used as way of socializing and as entertainment (Talu 1985). In Solomon Islands, I-Kiribati dancing groups are a major source of entertainment in hotels and resorts and have attracted a lot of attention, especially from the tourism sector. Not only do I-Kiribati dancing groups provide a means of entertainment for hotel guests, but this form of entertainment also becomes a source of income for the groups. However, dances are no longer the same as those practiced in Kiribati, having moved away from many of the traditions and protocols of the original culture and incorporated elements from Solomon Islands (and perhaps Western) music and dance practices. Traditional dancing has changed dramatically since communities have been exposed to other cultures in Solomon Islands, and many of these traditional dances and songs have lost their cultural significance.

Lawson (1989) described traditional dance as a significant element of Kiribati culture and history because it has been passed down through the generations from ancestors. It is a vital part of social gatherings and symbolizes cultural identity. Traditional dances involve complex choreographed movements—such as explicit head, hand, and arm movements; hip movements; knee bending; and back-and-forth steps—that are accompanied by singing and often the hitting of te baoki (wooden box). The dance is coordinated by a group of singers who combine clapping, singing, foot stamping, and body movements. The singing and stomping of feet during traditional dancing once contributed significantly to a cultural and spiritual expression in which dancers would cry, scream, or tremble. Much of this is no longer observed today, especially as people have shifted from singing to using contemporary music for
dancing. However, in many rural communities, this form of dancing is still practiced fairly often (Lawson 1989).

One of the many changes my informants highlighted was the use of new forms of movement in traditional dancing. The use of contemporary music to perform traditional dances is probably the most obvious change in many I-Kiribati communities living in urban centers (Lawrence and Niles 2001). Many of the songs are those already used for traditional dancing, but with a more upbeat rhythm. In a way, it makes it possible for the communities living outside the rural areas to continue to perform traditional dances, only in a more contemporary way. Some of the dances involve the integration of movements from other cultures in Solomon Islands and elsewhere in the Pacific, most notably the fast hip shaking, and many now use contemporary music to perform these dances for entertainment in hotels or during birthdays and family gatherings.

Allied with dancing is the art of costume weaving, which has also experienced notable changes. Given the amount of time it takes to make the costumes, the unavailability of local materials, the lack of skills and techniques, and young people’s changing interests, a shift from traditional to contemporary costumes is apparent (Whincup and Whincup 2001). Plastic materials have been used to make traditional costume elements such as grass skirts, headdresses, and body decorations in many I-Kiribati communities in Solomon Island—even the rural communities. It is now quite rare to see grass skirts, headdresses, and body decorations made from pandanus leaves and coconut fronds. Grass skirts are now made from old videotapes to substitute te karoro (the traditional black grass skirt) because they are black and shiny. Nylon strings have also been used instead of pandanus leaves to make grass skirts for the buki dance. People have become creative with the use of modern materials to make the traditional costumes in colorful and attractive ways—the more colorful a costume is, the more attractive it is.
Lawson (1989) highlighted one example, describing the traditional dances and costumes of a group of I-Kiribati people from Solomon Islands who were visiting relatives in Kiribati in 1983. She mentioned that the grass skirts used were made from rice bag fibers, that the headdresses and other body decorations were made from plastics, and that no mats were used for the male dancers when they performed. Although the traditional dances consisted of Kiribati cultural elements, they were performed with a Polynesian drum instead of the wooden box, and dancers did not walk forward and backward during the *ruoia* dance. The I-Kiribati people in Kiribati regarded the costumes as less authentic even though they resembled the traditional Kiribati dance costumes. Despite Lawson’s criticism, it is vital to understand the importance of the Solomon Islands settlers’ attempts to maintain traditional dance practices as part of the Kiribati culture, even without the skills or materials required.

The I-Kiribati language, an important element of the Kiribati culture has also changed tremendously. Today, it is primarily spoken in the villages and among I-Kiribati people; however, pidgin has become the dominant language in conversations among youth, especially those who grew up in town. Pidgin is a lingua franca used to communicate with other Solomon Islanders, but many I-Kiribati youngsters, especially those born and raised in urban areas, lack the ability to speak or to understand the Kiribati language. Intermarriage between I-Kiribati and local Solomon Islanders has also enhanced
the use of pidgin in villages, as well as within I-Kiribati communities in rural and urban localities. An elderly man from Titiana village who used to translate English bibles into I-Kiribati said that, “Language has now changed, the young children will be talking in I-Kiribati and all of a sudden they would change to pidgin.” I myself used to speak I-Kiribati fluently while growing up in the village, but although I still speak today, I am not as fluent as before and often use it with a mixture of pidgin.

In addition to these changes, respect—another significant component of the I-Kiribati culture—has been neglected over the years. Usually permission is sought from some distance away before a person can pass another person’s house. People would bend low and walk behind other people while saying ‘komatauniga’ (excuse me) and not stand above seated people. Many of these cultural practices have been abandoned, and today respect, especially for elders, is no longer significantly observed by youth. Children nowadays will just walk right in front of people while they are seated without asking to be excused. All of my informants on Wagina acknowledged that these changes are the result of urban influence, exposure to other cultures, and lack of instruction from parents and grandparents. However, some children do not adhere to these protocols even when they have been taught proper manners. An elderly women I first interviewed in Cookson who shared a lot about the I-Kiribati culture explained: “changes probably occur because of the new generation themselves, but to my understanding, it goes far as parents and grandparents to teach them, many do not want to listen but you just have to keep reminding them of the culture and proper manners of the I-Kiribati way of life.”

**Economic Changes**

This subsection outlines the shift away from reliance on subsistence activities, such as fishing and farming, and daily life activities, such cutting toddy and weaving mats, to semi-subsistence and contemporary activities.
Involvement in Income-Generating Activities

It took some years before the I-Kiribati people who relocated to Solomon Islands were exposed to urban life and income-generating activities, but Titiana settlers were exposed early due to the village’s proximity to Gizo town. This allowed access to income-generating activities, such as copra-making, stevedoring, and domestic labor and made income a major resource for household sustenance. This in turn lessened the reliance on fishing and gardening, as many families were obligated to partake in income-generating activities in order to support their families after British officials stopped providing rations. Some male settlers in Titiana took up stevedoring jobs, while others worked on coconut plantations. Women became domestic casual laborers. Other settlers were able to sell handicrafts such as mats, model canoes, baskets, and fans. The economy of the Titiana community, once based on subsistence activities, now relies on semi-subsistence and commercial activities that provide income for many households.

Fewer families fished, and the men did not have the agricultural skills required for planting and caring for crops. Although they were skilled in planting babai, pandanus, and coconut trees (staples in the I-Kiribati diet) in Phoenix Islands, these trees do not require much care, except for the babai in some cases. The men often lacked the patience required to clear bushes for gardening and were reluctant to spend the time and effort required to tend crops. However, settlers’ had a wider range of food supplies in Solomon Islands, and many agreed that their health status was enhanced (Knudson 1964).

Shift from Subsistence to Semi-Subsistence

Despite the availability of a wide range of food resources, processed foods constitute much of the I-Kiribati diet due to the availability of income-generating work and an increased number of stores in the villages on Wagina, as well as access to Gizo town. Many household members are employed, and there is often limited time to spend on subsistence activities such as fishing or gardening. Imported food items
have replaced traditional foods, and this is obvious in villages. For instance, sugar has replaced toddy; flour and rice have replaced starches such as cassava, potatoes, and babai (swamp taro); and canned products have replaced marine resources.

On Wagina today, fish and farm crops are regularly sold to villagers who do not fish or farm. There are other factors influencing these changes, such as the absence of men because they are employed elsewhere, the availability of income and imported food products, the unavailability of boats and the expensive cost of fuel for fishing, and the hard labor required to farm and the length of time before harvest. Villagers have also become dependent on remittances from relatives working in urban areas and on established networks of reciprocity between family members in the village and those in urban areas. For instance, items such as fish, tekamaimai, coconut oil, and mats are often exchanged for remittances or imported food items.

Despite this shift from subsistence to income-generating activities, a considerable number of I-Kiribati people, especially those in rural villages, rely significantly on fishing as a main source of income. Fishing and the exploitation of marine resources are significant aspects of the Kiribati livelihood. I-Kiribati men are known as fishers and divers; however, several of these skills have been altered since the relocation to adapt to the marine conditions in Solomon Islands. Wagina settlers have always been heavily involved in selling beche de mer, shark fins, trochus, and other marine resources. Today, they are also heavily involved in seaweed farming (Kronen et al. 2010), both as a source of income and as an alternative to the exploitation of already exhausted marine resources. In Gizo, I-Kiribati people are the main sellers of fish, a source of income for many families living around the area.

Some of these changes have generated issues for the I-Kiribati community, as many people face challenges as Solomon Islanders of I-Kiribati descent. The next section will outline some of the obvious issues that were discussed during my study on Wagina and Titiana. I gathered the information primarily
from elders who were part of the relocation and who have observed these socio-cultural and economic changes and their associated issues.

**Sociocultural and Economic Issues**

Most Solomon Islanders of I-Kiribati descents have assimilated to the Solomon Islands way of life and have become well established. A considerable number are employed, operate businesses, or have spouses that run businesses or have well-paying jobs. Many have intermarried with local Solomon Islanders and have expanded their I-Kiribati cultural boundaries to embrace their spouses’ cultures. But coupled with these changes are the issues this group of people encounters, especially living in a country culturally different from their own. However, most I-Kiribati descendants have never been to Kiribati and have little, if any, knowledge about the place. Along with these issues, the relocated I-Kiribati population experiences many benefits. The issues outlined in this section were identified during my fieldwork in summer 2010. I focused primarily on Wagina where I spent much of my research time. Nevertheless, I will also incorporate information provided by people in Titiana, New Manra, and Babanga on Gizo.

**Sociocultural Issues**

**Land Disputes**

Land is highly valued and is of great significance in Kiribati society. It is indicative of wealth, prestige, and security. The settlers’ relocations uprooted them from the land on which they had established themselves, land that they are linked to by cultural, economic, social, and traditional ties (Bate et al. 1979). Land is an essential resource for societies and is vital for settlement, subsistence, and economic development. It exists as a source of identity, power, authority, and status and has physical, spiritual, and
cultural values. It is a prominent subject of political discussion within mobilization areas in the Pacific region (Kabutaulaka and Rokolekutu 2011). In Solomon Islands, land titles are vested to groups or clans and are seldom alienable. Alienable lands, held under registered title, make up 13 percent of the total land in Solomon Islands, and they mainly lie along the coastal areas of Russell, Shortland, and Kolombangara. The remaining 87 percent is held under customary title. The government owns two-thirds of the alienated land, while the natives own the other third. Non–Solomon Islanders during the Colonial period were allowed to own land in Solomon Islands, and freehold land used was converted to leases, but sales to foreigners became prohibited in 1914. However, the colonial government encouraged the use of alienated land for development so that it could be taxed to the government's expenditures. The colonial government also gave itself the power to give land that was not considered owned, cultivated, or occupied by any natives to foreigners for development purposes (Crocombe 1987).

In Choiseul, people born into clans have rights in their estates; it is their place of origin to which they have significant attachment (Crocombe 1987, 308). According to my informants, the sites in Solomon Islands (Titiana and Wagina) that were resettled by the I-Kiribati settlers were allocated to them by the British government upon relocation. At the time, most of these islands were uninhabited and alienated to private ownership under the British colonial administration. Bennett (1995, 249) noted that in “1961-1962, the British government purchased land on the islands of Robroe, Vaghenas, and Tetepare, Baga and Alu (Shortland Islands). All these islands have been alienated and could be purchased by non-Solomon Islanders.” However, much of the alienated land that was allocated to the I-Kiribati upon relocation was taken back by the Solomon Islands government and traditional landowners when the country gained its independence in 1978. With this transition, I-Kiribati settlers have started encountering land problems, as they do not have absolute rights to the lands that they occupy.
All settlers who were relocated to Solomon Islands were advised to cede their land rights in Phoenix Islands to relatives for 5 years, with the understanding that if their move to Solomon Islands were unsuccessful, they would return and resume occupation of their land. However, if it were successful, their lands would become the permanent property of those to whom they had ceded the lands (Knudson 1964). Knudson also described the four-acre land plots that were distributed to each family on Titiana as too limited to accommodate the growing I-Kiribati population. This led to many people living in clusters on small areas of land. He highlighted the dispersal of the Titiana community to Babanga, New Manra, Loga Island, Komalai in Shortland Islands, and Gizo town as a result of these pressures. Further, he outlined the distribution of land to the settlers and suggested that although the Gilbert system of land holding was expected to be observed, this was not always possible (1964, 66).

Although the area of land allocated to settlers in Solomon Islands was twice as big as what they had occupied in the Gilbert and Phoenix Islands, there were still disputes over how it was to be distributed among the settlers. Besides land disputes, religious factionalism also caused the division of the Titiana population (Catholics and Protestants); most of the Catholics were relocated to Loga (an island near Gizo) and Komalai,\(^{20}\) while protestants remained in Titiana. There was also uncertainty about the ownership of land distributed to the settlers in Titiana. Many refused to work the land because they assumed that they were not going to live there permanently and that they would return to their home island after five years. In Titiana, the completion of the maneaba was an indication of the establishment of a true Kiribati village. However, the lack of a definite form of land allocation still created uncertainty among settlers (Knudson 1964). Traditionally in Kiribati societies, a person without land ownership is regarded as a person with low status. Land ownership is viewed as a source of security and wealth (Knudson 1964, 57). For many I-Kiribati settlers, ownership of land in Solomon Islands

\(^{20}\) Komalai was an old coconut plantation in Shortland Islands.
indicated the permanency of their settlement, and with limited land available to them, many were forced to move away to other places or to intermarry in order to have access to adequate land.

In the case of Wagina, the island that was once assumed to be secure for the settlers is now the focus of debate and discussion between the settlers and the Volaikana tribe in South Choiseul, who are supposedly the traditional landowners (See Appendix 1). Discussions about ownership of the island and its surrounding islets have been going on for years and have generated many issues for the I-Kiribati people living there (See Appendix 2-4). According to the record of a legislative council meeting in the Solomons (See Appendix 5), the initial decision by the British government to resettle I-Kiribati people on the islands was made without the consent of the Volaikana tribe because the government at that time did not view the Choiseul people as the owners. The government presumably bought Wagina for the resettlement—not from the Volaikana tribe but from the Lever’s Certificate in 1963 because the Volaikana tribe had supposedly abandoned the land more than 60 years before the land was first leased in 1904 (See Appendix 1). The Volaikana tribe has been claiming for years that the ownership of the islands, especially Wagina, should be returned to them as the traditional owners. However, this has yet to be fully granted. Although this issue relates back to the colonial era, it will only be settled pending a resolution that is agreeable to both groups of people. The Wagina settlers are determined to resolve it by establishing better relationships with the traditional owners and obtaining legitimate entitlement to Wagina and its surrounding islands.

With the growing population, land has become an even greater issue. An elderly man from Tengengea in Cookson village who was part of the relocation to Wagina in 1964 expressed his concern about land on Wagina:

"we are worried about our future, many of our children have grown up and there may not be any place for them in Solomon Islands, families are expanding and are running out of land to distribute to their children . . . we would be lucky if the government can give us more land for our children . . . but part
of our land has also been taken over by the government for a potential mining activity on part of Wagina Island which is not inhabited, but plans did not proceed because it was considered uneconomical.”

(See Appendix 6)

Another elderly man from Babanga who participates in the provincial meetings held in Gizo as a representative of the I-Kiribati people there shared the following during our interview:

“It was the British government’s choice for us to come [to Solomon Islands]. I remembered at that time I was 18 years old. I am now looking for the agreement but I couldn’t find it . . . every island around Gizo was assigned to us but we don’t own them anymore, this was noted in the agreement, and now I tried to question Solomon Islands government about it. This was the same to Wagina, all surrounding islands belong to the I-Kiribati people but after Solomon Islands gained independence, they took back the island, I tried to question the government about it.”

Like other Solomon Islanders living in urban areas, I-Kiribati people are required to buy land plots if they intended to reside permanently in these areas. With purchased land (which is often extremely expensive, especially in urban areas such as Honiara where land is in high demand), they are able to establish themselves with their families. However, only a limited number of people own land plots in Solomon Islands, especially in Honiara and other central districts. In most cases, land is shared between relatives. On the other hand, I-Kiribati people buy houses that come with the land on which they stand and hence have access to that land area. Nevertheless, these areas are often limited to the size of each house. Unable to find adequate land in town, I-Kiribati families have settled in areas near town such as in White River and Lungga, which have become small I-Kiribati settlements. People often prefer to reside near one another in order to interact and to provide reciprocate assistance, a preference that stems from their custom of living close to one another on the atolls before they relocated to Solomon Islands.

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21 This proposed bauxite mining operation was initiated by Conzinc Riotinto of Australia Exploration Pty Ltd (CRA) on Wagina in 1968 but was halted to determine its economic viability in the long run.
Land issues within the Kiribati community are relatively comparable to those in other minority communities in Solomon Islands. The Tikopians faced land issues when they were relocated to Russell Islands for convenient access to education and employment opportunities, health facilities, infrastructure, and other services; still, unlike the I-Kiribati settlers, they are not widely regarded as foreigners to Solomon Islands. Chinese immigrants, on the other hand, have limited land ownership and access to resources, much like the I-Kiribati settlers. However, the Chinese community is more business-oriented and thus has an advantage over the I-Kiribati community. Some of its members have the choice of either settling in Solomon Islands or moving elsewhere in the region and maintaining their businesses from afar and occasionally commuting between the Solomons and their new locations.

The situation of other ethnic groups residing in the Solomons, such as Tuvaluans and Fijians, also differs. Families or relatives may have moved to Solomon Islands because of ancestral ties, job opportunities, or marriage, thereby giving them the choice to settle in either Solomon Islands or in their home countries. Many may still have relatives and families that they can return to; however, for I-Kiribati people, there are no options for being relocated anywhere else because of both the costs involved and the fact that they have been relocated twice already and would rather not go through the same experience again.

Civil Crisis

Yet, for many I-Kiribati people, especially those who had relocated, life was better in Solomon Islands than it would have been on Phoenix Islands because of the availability of resources, land, and opportunities. However, this changed for many people after a civil crisis began in late 1998 and escalated through 1999 and 2000. A group of Guadalcanal young men—disappointed with the government’s continuous failure to address development issues and the demands of the Province, as well as the increased presence of settlers, especially Malaitans, on their island—began to collect an
In 1998, a group of indigenous Guadalcanal men attacked and looted Malaitan settlements in northwest Guadalcanal, chasing the settlers away. The Guadalcanal group was originally named the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA), but this was eventually changed to the Isatabu Freedom Fighters (IFF) and later to the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM). The GRA was perceived at the political level as a stage-army formed to reinforce the demands of the Guadalcanal Provincial Council (Fraenkel 2004, 44). The crisis escalated throughout 1999 and by June of that year had led to the death of 50 people and the displacement of more than 20,000 settlers living on the outskirts of Honiara.

Confrontations took place between the Royal Solomon Islands Police and the IFM in the same year, and by early 2000, a group known as the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) and claiming to represent the displaced Malaitans on Guadalcanal formed. The group operated on the basis of demanding compensation for the damaged properties and the killings of Malaitans by the IFM, and of protecting the interests of Malaitan settlers living in Honiara. The group’s formation led to increased killing in villages in the Honiara vicinity, and in February 2000, there were confrontations between the IFM and the MEF that escalated into several shootouts and deaths. By June 2000, the MEF joined with Malaitan allies within the Royal Solomon Islands Police, took over the country’s armory, and staged a coup that forced the removal of then Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu, and a new government was appointed under the leadership of Manasseh Sogavare. Fighting, however, continued between the two militant groups and resulted in a considerable number of deaths that have not been verified (Kabutaulaka 2001).

The disturbances caused by the crisis instigated fear and threats among many settlers in Honiara. As Honiara became a Malaitan enclave, many Guadalcanal people in Honiara left and returned to their villages. In the meantime, thousands of Malaitans were evicted from settlements around Guadalcanal (Fraenkel 2004). During this time, many of the major economic activities and industries that were major sources of the country’s revenue were closed down, and many settlers were evicted and sent back to
their home islands. Solomon Islands Plantation Limited (SIPL) and Gold Ridge Mining, which contribute significantly to the revenue of the country, were closed down, resulting in the unemployment of many locals. IMF militants seized vehicles belonging to these industries as well as explosives used in the mine and destroyed and looted the companies’ buildings (Moore 2004).

The crisis also forced the closure of many schools and businesses in Honiara and outlying areas. Many families returned to their provinces, while others remained in town and lived in fear. Peace dialogues were facilitated in 1999, but these attempts failed, and violence broke out again between the two militant groups in 2000. Many homes were looted and burned down, and several lives were lost as a result of the conflict and the use of arms. Many of the settlers in Honiara were affected both directly and indirectly by the tension. At the peak of the tension, about 20,000 settlers on Guadalcanal, mainly in Honiara, were evicted and sent back to their home islands (Kabutaulaka 2002). The height of the crisis also provided an opportunity for young Malaitans and Guadalcanalese to profit from criminal activities and disturbances among settlers. This is more evident in Honiara, where many settlers became victims of criminal activities and threats from mobs of young Malaitan men (Moore 2004).

Although this crisis concerned the Malaitan and Guadalcanal population, it affected the entire country and all its citizens, including I-Kiribati people. I-Kiribati families residing in Red Beach, a small I-Kiribati settlement on the outskirts of Honiara, became victims of the crisis when they were evicted from their homes and sent either to Honiara or back to the provinces. Their houses were burned down and looted, leaving nothing for them to return to after the crisis. Many began new lives in Gizo and Honiara. Other I-Kiribati people living in Honiara fled back to the villages. Most of my family members returned to Wagina to await the end of the crisis.

During this period, many I-Kiribati people lived in fear, afraid that they might be asked to move elsewhere. This also escalated their fear of losing ownership of the land areas that they had settled since
the relocation. During our interview, an expert builder from Cookson expressed his concern that sometime after the crisis they (the Wagina villagers) would start experiencing disturbances from their neighbors (the Choiseul people) associated with the land disputes between the Wagina settlers and the traditional owners from Choiseul. He feared that the crisis could be the basis for such actions, which he thinks might create tensions between Wagina villagers and the landowners.

**Erosion of Culture and Language**

The tremendous change in the I-Kiribati way of life has led to the loss of culture, one of the most apparent changes affecting the I-Kiribati population in Solomon Islands. This has led to both the abandonment of traditional practices and the incorporation of other practices applicable to their living in the country. According to my study conducted in July 2010, urbanization was assumed to be responsible for the changes in people’s behaviors, moral actions, and lifestyles. My informants also agreed that exposure to different cultures and lifestyles in the Solomon has contributed to this change. There are many cultural changes that have taken place since the relocation to Solomon Islands; however, I will only mentioned those that we discussed during the interviews.

I-Kiribati people have shifted from subsistence to semi-subsistence activities in which income is the basis for provisions. Processed food items make up most meals nowadays, though the I-Kiribati settlers were already exposed to these food items as rations in the early weeks of relocation from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands (Knudson 1964). However, this consumption has escalated over the years, and my study revealed that the high dependency on processed food products has contributed to the increase of diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. An elderly man in Tatiana revealed that in Phoenix Islands, “our sickness is only cough and headache at times, but [in Solomon Islands] plenty sickness, malaria, pneumonia, diabetes, high blood pressure.” The lack nowadays of daily
activities such as farming, canoe making, and fishing has led to a decrease in the number of opportunities people have to be physically active.

Moral respect is one of the important elements that constitute the Kiribati culture. Children are expected to learn proper ways of behaving and how to conduct themselves around others at a young age, while adults are expected to behave in an appropriate and respectful manner towards the elders and the community. Parents and grandparents are held accountable for youths’ disrespectful behaviors, as such behaviors reflect their inability to teach the children proper moral behaviors. Like in other cultures, young women require intensive chaperoning and are restricted from doing things like wandering around the village after dark, hanging out with boys alone, or drinking alcohol and smoking, and they are expected to be home most of the time helping out with household chores. Greater restrictions are placed on females who are virgins and who have reached the puberty stage. Today, these restrictions have lost their significance and are not taught to young I-Kiribati females, although they may still be taught to those growing up in the village. The reason for this is that many young women have moved to urban areas, diminishing the practicality of traditional moral rules since many have to work during the night or hang out with men as a way of socializing. Upon reaching the puberty stage, many women are no longer restricted to the practice of katekatekakin te ataen aine because their parents and grandmothers are not around to enforce the custom. Further, traditional moral behaviors are often abandoned in favor of integration into society and urban life. However, there are several young women who are still brought up in the traditional manner, but with less intensity.

Traditionally, women wore grass skirts without tops, but this has long been abandoned because of the introduction of religion. More recently, though, they were not allowed to wear shorts or revealing clothing. Today, this has changed, and women have more freedom to wear what they want or feel comfortable in—even if the clothing is too revealing. My female informants strongly agreed that the
dress code for many I-Kiribati women has changed, especially for those living in urban areas, and that this could be the result of attempts to dress nicely or to keep up with the current fashion. Even married women today are wearing shorts. The informants believed that teenagers have been influenced by urbanization and movies. One elderly woman stated that, “Maybe if we weren’t resettled from Kiribati, our culture may have not changed that much. Here (referring to Solomon Islands), there are many things that children are exposed to . . . urban, movies, children imitate characters in the movies, new hairstyle, different style of clothing, it saddens me.” She used her grandchildren, who returned to the village from Honiara with dyed hair and new haircuts, as an example.

Incidences of drunk young men causing disturbances in the village have increased over the years, a common issue in communities throughout Solomon Islands. Although less is said if the men live in urban areas, from my study on Wagina, it is evident that the level of drinking in the village, especially of te kamanging,\footnote{Te kamanging is fermented toddy, a sap extracted from the juvenile coconut frond.} has increased over the years and is often associated with shouting and fighting in the village. Young people have lost their grasp on proper moral behaviors. Today, children will just walk in front of elders without saying “excuse me” or stand over sitting people, behaviors that were not allowed in the past. Corporal punishment for misbehaving students in schools and in villages used to be common, but it is no longer encouraged. I remembered the teacher smacking me, along with a group of other students, frequently after classes throughout the week for making noises in class while the teacher was away. This was acceptable at that time, but it is not so much today. Drunk villagers who caused village disturbances were summoned to the maneaba by elders and smacked publicly, a punishment that brought shame to the family and effectively discouraged the villager from behaving in such a manner again. However, today, with the presence of policemen in the village, this method of punishment is no longer appropriate.
When I-Kiribati couples get married, the celebration often lasts for a week or more, with the marriage being celebrated by the families of both the bride and the groom. It involves feasting, dancing, and the exchange of material gifts. A significant part of the wedding is to determine the virginity of the bride, a performance that is longer observed due to respect for family privacy and religious beliefs. The cost of hosting the celebrations is considered expensive nowadays, although for many I-Kiribati people, events such as these are greatly supported by both monetary and non-monetary contributions from relatives. Also, with the increased number of intermariages with people outside of the Kiribati community, Kiribati traditional weddings are observed less frequently.

The I-Kiribati language is also one of the greatest elements of the Kiribati culture that has not been fully adopted by younger generations, especially those who are born and live in urban areas. The language has experienced many changes, especially in the way that it is spoken, and it now slightly differs from the version spoken in Kiribati. Take, for instance, *nako* and *matu* (go and sleep). In the Solomon Islands Kiribati language, the ‘t’ is pronounced as written, but in Kiribati, it is pronounced ‘s,’ as in *masu*. There are differences in other words as well, especially in the pronunciation of ‘t.’ However, the language is still widely spoken in villages and among second-generation I-Kiribati. With the younger generations, piijin has become the regular language, and for many, it is their first language. This loss of language presents a barrier to their knowledge and adoption of culture, the vital foundation of an I-Kiribati person. The inability to communicate with fellow I-Kiribati using the Kiribati language creates a gap between those who have spent most of their lives in urban areas and those who live in rural areas. It also generates misunderstandings and a lack of cultural interests since neither party can communicate with or understand the other. For instance, I had to have an interpreter translate my questions during my fieldwork on Wagina because I was not able to communicate them clearly in the Kiribati language. Although I may be able to speak the language moderately, I was not fluent enough to conduct my
interviews on my own. It was a hindrance to my study, and to many of the elders I interviewed, it was due to the predominant use of pidgin among members of the younger generations.

The older generation fears the loss of the language: although the Kiribati language is still commonly spoken in the villages and among Kiribati people in urban areas, because of increased movements to urban areas for education and employment, pisin has become a necessary language for communication and conversations.

Loss of Identity

Both the loss of culture and the loss of language are major factors in the loss of identity. For I-Kiribati people, identity is based on culture. If an I-Kiribati person speaks the language and observes the culture, he or she can be identified as an I-Kiribati even if one parent is of a different ethnicity. Some may be recognized as part I-Kiribati because of their parents and because they are of I-Kiribati descent, but it is often the ability to observe the I-Kiribati culture that qualifies one to be truly I-Kiribati. To bear the I-Kiribati identity, one must be instilled with the culture and reflect this in his or her conduct. However, for children growing up in urban areas, this is not applicable, as many are only familiar with Western culture and speak either Pisin or English as their primary language.

Interrmarriage has been strongly encouraged among the I-Kiribati population as a solution to land issues and to consolidate permanent settlement in Solomon Islands. There are no strategic systems of intermarriage, and it is often unclear what people’s motives are when they marry someone from a different ethnic group. However, they are most likely doing so for more personal reasons, such as to expand personal identities or search for new opportunities. It is difficult to determine the number of intermarriages that have taken place between I-Kiribati men and women and non-I-Kiribati spouses, but based on observations I made during my fieldwork, it is obvious that the population of part-I-Kiribati children is gradually growing.
Interruption is not confined only to local Solomon Islanders—it also includes Chinese, Europeans, and other Pacific Islanders. A considerable number of I-Kiribati women are married to Chinese and European men and even to Pacific Islanders. Motives for marriage may be based on the pursuit of love, a better life, more opportunities, money, the ability to travel to new places, etc., but these vary according to the woman. Many intermarriage are based on love, while other elements also constitute the marriage. However, intermarriage could be viewed as the expanding and bridging of an I-Kiribati community to other cultures and ethnicities within Solomon Islands and abroad. The more people who marry local Solomon Islanders, the better it is for the community, not only in terms of assimilation but also in terms of land security.

While intermarriage brings about many benefits and opportunities and links I-Kiribati people to people of other ethnicities, it has also contributed to identity loss. Through intermarriage, new and different cultures are introduced into the community, and individuals can either be identified as I-Kiribati or as part of another ethnic group. An elderly male informant originally from Wagine but who now lives in Titiana because of his marriage revealed that when he attends I-Kiribati gatherings in Honiara, he often mistakes some part—I-Kiribati children for Solomon Islanders because they don’t look I-Kiribati at all. He said that, “sometimes you think they are from the Solomon Islands but they are I-Kiribati. I think that’s one thing that contributes to change here (referring to the I-Kiribati community in Solomon Islands), I-Kiribati and Solomon Islands culture are mixed up.” Inevitably, this will gradually erode the I-Kiribati identity as more members of the community intermarry with people of other ethnic groups.
Economic Issues

Lack of Access to Opportunities and Benefits

Being citizens of Solomon Islands, I-Kiribati settlers and their descendants have access to opportunities that are offered to other Solomon Islanders, such as educational scholarships, employment, and health services. A considerable number of students of I-Kiribati descendants have been awarded Solomon Islands scholarships to pursue further studies in regional universities such as the University of the South Pacific, where the majority of Solomon Islands students attend (myself included); the Fiji School of Medicine; the University of Agriculture in Samoa; and the University of Law in Vanuatu. A few with expatriate parents, especially those who are part Chinese or European, have the opportunity to study in New Zealand and Australia with the help of private funds. Several I-Kiribati descendants also hold positions in various institutions in both the public and private sectors.

Regardless of these opportunities and benefits, Solomon Islands I-Kiribati people feel that they are not entirely treated as Solomon Islanders, a sentiment that may also be felt by other minority groups that reside in the country, such as Fijians and Chinese. My study revealed that many of the opportunities are limited, and a common statement among my informants was that, “there is some unfairness in the way we are being treated in this country.” Although they are citizens of the country, they do not see themselves entirely as indigenous or local Solomon Islanders, and thereby do not have access to certain opportunities and benefits that indigenous Solomon Islanders have, such as more scholarships to study overseas, more employment in public and private sectors, more involvement in political affairs, and more access to land. It is unusual to see I-Kiribati in the highest work positions, and there are no I-Kiribati descendants involved in parliamentary affairs. Of the young teenagers who don’t make it further

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23 Note that in the Solomon Islands education and employment statistics, I-Kiribati are categorized according to province rather than separately as I-Kiribati.
than high school, some return to the village while others get casual jobs in Honiara, most of which do not require expertise. It is common to see young I-Kiribati descendants working for a Chinese company or for a relative married to a businessman. In most cases, there is an urge to assist relatives, especially those seeking employment, so that they can help their families, a tradition that I-Kiribati people observe as a way of helping their people. The elders I interviewed in Nikumaroro village\textsuperscript{24} indicated that the “benefits to the I-Kiribati people in the Solomon Islands are often limited, no I-Kiribati in Parliament, or high ranking positions in employment sectors. Many have obtained better positions in non-governmental and regional organizations.” Because of this, the I-Kiribati community continues to work towards becoming more assimilated into the larger Solomon Islands community.

\textbf{Lack of Government Assistance}

Assistance from the government for development projects on Wagina and Titiana where the majority of I-Kiribati people live is minimal. Despite the availability of such assistance, the provincial system for funding development projects is usually complex. With the isolation of Choiseul, government funding is often injected into priority projects, and by the time it trickles down to Wagina, it is not enough for any developments. Plus, most of the development projects are centered on mainland Choiseul, making the decentralization of these services problematic since the province also lacks infrastructure, reliable transportation, and health services. However, the people of Wagina often benefit from fisheries projects like the beach de mer project in the early 1990s, which involved the establishment of a fisheries center on Wagina where most of the villagers sell their catches. According to the development profile of Choiseul Province,\textsuperscript{25} Wagina had the hightest sales for fish products in 1999, and today the seaweed

\textsuperscript{24} Nikumaroro is one of the three villages on Wagina Island.

\textsuperscript{25} http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/B3A7E37C01827904802570B70059F750/$file/Choiseul_profile.pdf
project in which many villagers have become highly involved has become the major source of income for many families on the island.

On the other hand, the Titiana people were segregated as a community after a tsunami destroyed most of the dwellings in Nusabaruka, Titiana, and New Manra villages. Since the disaster, many of the villagers have established their homes in the mountains in fear of another disaster,\(^26\) while some still reside in the village. A new school and teachers houses have been constructed under a jointly funded project by the European Union, New Zealand Aid, the United Nations Children’s Fund, and the Solomon Islands government\(^27\); however, most dwellings that were to be rebuilt stood in skeletal forms because the tsunami assistance distributed to the villagers was not sufficient for their completion. An elderly man from Titiana whose three houses situated by the sea were destroyed by the tsunami confirmed that the money distributed to the villages to assist them after the tsunami was not enough for them to completely rebuild their houses and that construction is still ongoing.

\(^{26}\) Pacific Pulse on Life after the tsunami: http://australianetwork.com/pacificpulse/stories/2982173.htm
CHAPTER FOUR:
Construction and Reconstruction of Identity: Strategies for Assimilation

Mobility and Identity

Movement of Pacific Islanders across national, island, village, and cultural boundaries and within the Pacific Periphery has been occurring for many centuries. The concept of Pacific diaspora, which describes the movements of Pacific Islanders away from their home islands, is not entirely new. Many islanders were recruited as laborers in the fur and sandalwood trades, in gold mines, on whaling ships, and on coconut and sugar plantations in Fiji and Queensland. Hau‘ofa (2008) explored the notion that Pacific Islanders once traveled unhindered by boundaries, allowing for interactions between people as well as the exchange of ideas and products over vast expanses of land and water. He envisioned Oceania, ‘the ocean in us,’ as the basis of regional identity through these networks. In addition, Webb-Binder (2009, 25–34) described Pacific Identity using the concept of Vā, which represents both space, in which identity can be mapped, and time, which is lived through. It constitutes a place where both personal and cultural identity can be imparted through time and space.

Europeans’ delineation of three subregions in the Pacific—Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia exists today as a barrier to the freedom and conceptualization of movement within the Pacific region and beyond. Nevertheless, Pacific islanders continue to move back and forth between rural and urban areas and between islands and metropolitan countries (Spickard et al. 2002). This is especially evident in the movement of Polynesians to metropolitan countries such as the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. Many islanders from Niue, Cook Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Western Samoa, and American
Samoa have migrated to New Zealand or Australia, while Tongans, Samoans, and Micronesians have migrated to the United States. In addition, many Indo-Fijians have moved from Fiji to Canada, and Rapa Nui have migrated to Chile. Out of all the metropolitan countries, New Zealand by far hosts the largest number of Pacific Islanders. In the United States, the largest Pacific Islander populations reside in Hawaiʻi, California, Washington, Texas, and Utah (Spickard 2002). Although colonialism played a large role in the movement of Pacific Islanders in past centuries, today the primary reasons for migration are employment, education, better living, intermarriage, and the crises that persist in many Pacific Island countries (Connell 2002, 69–86). For centuries, the constant mobility and migration of individuals and groups of people have continuously shaped peoples identities. This construction and reconstruction of identities is one of the most significant elements of diasporic communities, whether they resettle voluntarily or involuntarily.

Identity is a concept that has long been debated by social scientists and theorists. It is perceived differently among individuals and groups of people and is defined by race (physical appearance) and culture (Morauta 1985). People from the same ethnic group can be identified by their physical appearances and behaviors, (Linnekin and Poyer 1990, 2). Identity is never singular; it is always multiplying and reconstructed to suit different contexts (Meijl and Miedema 2004). Hereniko (2002, 419) argued that identity is a situational variable and a continual process rather than a static entity. Spickard et al. (2004, 43) highlighted the complexity of identity construction among Pacific Islanders, especially those who possess multiple ethnic identities and are often deeply engaged in more than one at the same time. While the number of Pacific Islanders in metropolitan countries escalates, most have retained the social and cultural ties to their home islands through constant engagement with relatives and the exchange of material goods. Kaea (1990, 136) discussed how many Tongans living in the United

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28 Micronesia includes Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Marshall Islands, and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The people of these Pacific places have unrestricted entry into the US under the Compact of Free Association.
States have opted to maintain their Tongan identity because it gives them the meaning of their existence in American society. Like Tongans, Samoans immigrants and their American-born descendants living in the United States nurture the Fa’a Samoa (the Samoan way) through the church as a way of maintaining their culture and identity away from home.

In most Pacific Island societies, identity is also reflected in kinship (extended family) and its embedment in the land on which the extended family resides. Land is representative of space, of the place of origin with which members of the family can identify. In Kiribati, the kainga is the major land-holding group, and its members are expected to be prepared to defend their land at any time (Bate, at.el 1979). The Binandere\(^{29}\) people living in Oro Province in Papua New Guinea identified themselves with their land boundaries and defined themselves as a family within which they established strong ties. They perceived themselves as different from others based on their kinships, obligations, and consciousness of place (Waiko 1985, 9). The question of identity is not usually asked directly but rather indirectly through such queries as: “Who are your grandparents or parents?” or “Where do you come from?” This indirectness is preferred over explicit inquiries regarding a person’s ethnicity or race because it is often considered more respectful. Barth (1969, 53) argued that ethnic boundaries are what define groups, not the cultural entities they entail; yet for Pacific Islanders, ethnicity is significantly defined by one’s ancestry, culture, and land.

The construction and reconstruction of identities has enabled many Pacific Islanders to adapt to and assimilate into the new communities and cultures that they come in contact with. Many living in diasporic communities, as well as those who have intermarried with people from other cultures, have constructed identities in the different countries, societies, and cultures in which they are engaged. For instance, some Tongans living in America decided to reconstruct their identities to completely adapt to

\(^{29}\) The Binadere is a clan in Papua New Guinea whose members live in several small villages.
the American way of life, while others strive to adjust to the new life but still maintain their identities as Tongans (Kaea 1990). Morton (2002, 141) highlighted how Tongans in Australia construct and reconstruct their identities in relation to the *anga fakatonga*\(^\text{30}\) while also trying to adapt to the lifestyle in their new homes.

Higgins and Leleisi’uao (2009, 37–53) discussed the alienation of the Kamoan\(^\text{31}\) identity in New Zealand, and how this group of people has been burdened by the expectation that they will support their relatives at home. Anae (2002, 150) further examined the difference between the Samoan identity embodied in the *aganu’u, or fa’a Samoa*,\(^\text{32}\) of an island-born Samoan in New Zealand and the constructed identity of a New Zealand–born Samoan, and how these identities are marginalized by the wider New Zealand society. She stated:

\[
\begin{align*}
I \text{ AM – A Samoan. . .but not a Samoan} & \\
To my ainga in Samoa. . .I am a palangi & \\
I \text{ AM – A New Zealander. . .but not a New Zealander} & \\
To New Zealanders. . .I am a bloody coconut at worst, & \\
\text{Or a Pacific Islanders, at best} & \\
I \text{ AM – To my Samoan parents. . .their child} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

The story of Tupou, a young female Tongan whose parents migrated to New Zealand when she was a little girl for better employment and education opportunities, presents another example of identity construction among Pacific Islanders in diasporic communities. Tupou shared her testimony of the identity issues she encountered at her new school in New Zealand, where she was mistreated because she was different from the others. She became frustrated that she was unable to live up to the lifestyle observed in New Zealand—her lunch was wrapped in newspaper instead of foil or plastic wrap, she did not have blonde hair or blue eyes, and she did not wear the latest clothing styles like the other

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30 The *anga fakatonga* is the “Tongan way.”
31 The Kamoan identity is a combination of Kiwi and Samoan identities.
32 The Samoa way dictates the ordering of Samoan society and involves the social order, economic order, historical order, and moral order of the Samoan people.
girls. Her frustration led her to reject her culture and construct new identities that would help her become accepted by the kids at her school. Her trip back to Tonga, where she spent a year, made her realize the significance of her cultural identity as a Tongan (Pau‘u 2002). She later wrote:

> When I speak of Tonga, I speak of me  
> A person made up of multiple identities  
> Through my veins flows the blood of various cultures  
> But I identify myself as one from Tonga  
> There, my heart will always stay true  
> For Tonga is my home. My island and my taboo (Pau‘u 2002, 17)

Parker (2009, 57) discussed her journey towards understanding her identity as a Hawaiian-Chinese who grew up in a Hawaiian cultural system. While she was working in a Japanese-French restaurant in San Francisco, customers would ask about her ethnic background, thus challenging her identity. She would claim to be Hawaiian, Chinese, Caucasian, and sometimes American. However, the uncertainty of her identity was amplified when she was asked if she speaks Hawaiian, which she does not, making her feel alienated from her culture.

The erosion of national and cultural boundaries due to globalization gives rise to the imagined cultures, identities, and communities across the globe (Anae 2002, 150). In his discourse on identity, Hereniko (1994, 418) underlined different levels of identity\(^{33}\) and stated that, “Once colonized, the mind can never be truly decolonized.” Pacific Islanders have often been influenced to believe that access or exposure to foreign education, culture, and materials is best. Those who have been educated in Western institutions—either outside of or within their countries—often have more knowledge of the history, geography, and culture of other countries such as Europe, Asia, and America than of their own countries or others in the Pacific. This is the reality for many Pacific Islanders who have been exposed to Western education and have traveled and lived abroad for many years. While studying at the University of the

\(^{33}\) Hereniko identified three levels of identity: personal, national, and regional.
South Pacific (USP), I was told several times that I should enroll in a Pacific Studies course, but I never got around to doing it. My reluctance to enroll in the program was due to the perception that as a Pacific Islander living in the Pacific, I was adequately knowledgeable of the region and thereby did not need to take the course. However, I was proven wrong when I enrolled as a Pacific Islands Studies student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Hereniko (1994) further stressed that even though many educated Pacific Islanders feel that they are Pacific, many speak English, wear Western clothing, and behave in a European way. They are torn between being traditional and being who they have become, and at times they are unable to reconcile these conflicting notions of identity. Nevertheless, the possession of several identities is inevitable for many individuals given the continuous movement of people, intermarriage between people of different ethnic groups, and the need to better assimilate and adapt to new communities.

This chapter explores the construction and reconstruction of identities as Solomon Islands I-Kiribati descendants, highlighting some of the issues encountered living a different ethnic society. I gathered information on the issues featured in this chapter from my informants on Wagina and Gizo during my recent fieldwork in Solomon Islands. This final chapter examines how identity is perceived at different levels among I-Kiribati, a discussion that specifically focuses on my experiences as a Solomon Islands I-Kiribati descendant—one who has studied abroad—in order to demonstrate many issues that other young I-Kiribati descendants might commonly encounter.

The I-Kiribati community has gradually assimilated into the Solomon Islands culture and lifestyle. Most have learned to speak pidgin and have adapted to and come to understand, at least to an extent, several aspects of Solomon Islands life. This change can be seen in the wearing of tibuta by native spouses married to I-Kiribati people, the selling and chewing of betel nut, and other such customs and

34 A tibuta is a blouse commonly worn by I-Kiribati women.
activities. Many of my informants considered themselves Solomon Islanders because they have lived in the country for more than 50 years and have raised their children and grandchildren there. Many also agreed that they are Solomon Islanders because they have no land in Kiribati to return to. Some identified themselves as I-Kiribati in terms of culture, but Solomon Islanders in terms of the way they live. Ideas about identity vary among individuals from different I-Kiribati communities within Solomon Islands; 90 percent of my informants strongly suggested that they are now Solomon Islanders, while the remaining ten percent claimed that they are both I-Kiribati and Solomon Islanders.

Being identified as an I-Kiribati goes beyond just having an I-Kiribati parent or coming from an I-Kiribati lineage. To be considered an ‘authentic’ I-Kiribati, the person must be instilled with the culture and be able to demonstrate familiarity with certain cultural practices and rituals, especially the language. With exposure to different cultures and languages, these things that define one’s identity are gradually fading. This is evident in members of the younger generations who were born and raised in urban areas or in other communities and who grew up participating in Western or non–I-Kiribati culture. Many of these youngsters lack knowledge of the I-Kiribati culture and language, and this becomes obvious when they interact with other I-Kiribati.

As a Solomon Islander I-Kiribati descendent, my childhood spent in the village revolved around the I-Kiribati culture and way of life. I was able to perform traditional tasks required of an I-Kiribati female and could speak the language fluently. My move to Honiara for studies caused me to adjust to the urban lifestyle and to experience the changes it encompasses. I spent seven years of high school at a boarding school in Honiara, where I lived and interacted with students from other islands, and I learned some things about other cultural groups in the Solomons. My time studying abroad in Fiji broadened this understanding and enabled me to appreciate other Pacific cultures. Not only was I able to cultivate an
understanding of other regional cultures, but I also learned to construct and reconstruct identities that fostered my assimilation into the groups of people I engaged with.

As it is in any cultural society, identity is an important element in the Kiribati community. It signifies one’s cultural heritage and origins. For Solomon Islands I-Kiribati descendants, identity is not singular—it multiplies. They can be identified by their ethnicity as I-Kiribati people; by the place where they live in Solomon Islands (for instance, Wagina, Choiseul, or Titiana); or by other ethnicities, especially for those who have intermarried with people outside the community. Since the relocation, I-Kiribati have also attempted to establish relationships with locals, especially those that live nearby. The people of Wagina often associate themselves within Choiseul as Lauru people when it comes to national events. For instance, the volleyball team from Lauru consists mostly of I-Kiribati players from Wagina. This sense of identity justifies the extent of I-Kiribati descendants’ assimilation and adaptation in Solomon Islands.

Although bearing an I-Kiribati identity is culturally significant for members of the community, it does not always bring a sense of fair treatment. The I-Kiribati are aware that they are settlers in another land. Their relocation from the Gilbert and Phoenix Islands is seen as a kind of uprooting wherein they have been removed from their land, a place where their ancestors live and thrive, a place where their culture and origins are rooted, and a place with which they identify. Bonnemaison (1985, 30–31) used the symbols of the tree and the canoe to discuss roots and mobility in Vanuatu societies. With these metaphors, he described the relationship between man and place and the Melanesian cultural identities that are attached to the place (or land). The collective identity of a clan is inherited through networks of places and the space in which it resides, and it is derived from identification with the land, where personal essence and identity are infused.

35 The tree symbolizes rootedness and stability, and the canoe symbolizes journeying and wandering.
Land is a significant commodity to I-Kiribati, as it is representative of wealth, prestige, origins, and identity, and it is where their culture and lives evolve. Settling on a strange land does not render the same sense of belonging for many of them. With the ongoing land disputes, many have become even more uncertain about the land on which they now live and about the future of their children. An elderly man who was relocated with his family to Wagina expressed his sadness regarding the future of his children, which grows less certain as land ownership becomes a major focus of discussion and debate on Wagina. The insecurity about land has affected how I-Kiribati descendants perceive themselves in Solomon Islands. My informants stated that I-Kiribati are often treated unfairly, especially in the education and employment sectors. Combined with these matters are the limited benefits and opportunities offered to I-Kiribati, as well as other issues that have been going on for years. These factors have encouraged I-Kiribati to construct new identities, whether through the communities in which they live, through those to which they have become attached, or through those into which they have intermarried. They see this possession of more identities as a way to ensure a greater sense of permanency in Solomon Islands; however, these identities are situational given the current state of affairs.

**Identities at Different Levels**

Identity among I-Kiribati descendants in Solomon Islands is perceived differently according to individuals and groups of people and at different levels. The different identities discussed below, which were expressed by Solomon Islands I-Kiribati descendants, occur at the personal, national, regional, and international levels.
Personal Identity

Personal identity varies according to the individual. Most I-Kiribati descendants bear their family or village identities at the community level. A family identity is shared by both nuclear and extended family members and is often traced to the oldest generation; however, this depends on how close the family members are. For instance, on Wagina, the identities of parents and their siblings are linked either to the grandparents or to the great grandparents. The paternal identity is more prominent among I-Kiribati descendants in Solomon Islands. My identity is traced to my grandfather’s family through my father, as are my siblings’ and cousins’ identities. My family members whose husbands or fathers are of a different family lineage bear those paternal identities, but they can also trace their identities back to my grandfather, either as his children or grandchildren or as members of my grandfather’s family.

Individuals’ surnames reflect their family relations and identities.

In the Kiribati society, direct questioning of a person’s identity is considered rude, just like in Rotuma (Hereniko 1994, 417) and other Pacific societies. Instead, people ask who one’s parents or grandparents are in order to trace his or her identity. For instance, during my fieldwork in Gizo, several of my informants did not recognize me; however, they were able to trace my identity to my grandparents when I told them who they were. Hereniko (1994, 419) highlighted consocial identity as an element that reflects the value of kinship and the importance of extended family.

Personal identities are continuously manipulated with exposure to other cultural groups. Identity becomes subject to manipulation as one transcends beyond his or her home of origin. Thaman (1985, 106–115) shared her personal experiences as a Tongan and how her personal identity has been reconstructed in each of the different geographical locations where she has lived. These movements have greatly influenced her sense of self, yet her identity is still tied to Tonga, the land of her origins. My identity as a Solomon Islands I-Kiribati descendant may be comparable to Thaman’s. My experiences
living in Fiji for more than five years and in Hawaiʻi for two years have contributed to the reconstruction of my own personal identity. I have learned to express these identities in different situations and with different groups of people. I have developed a Fijian identity from having interacted and lived with Fijians for years. In Hawaiʻi, when I’m with I-Kiribati, I bear my I-Kiribati identity; when I’m with my Fijian friends, I bear my Fijian identity; and when I’m with my Solomon Islands friends, I bear my Solomon Islands identity. Generally, however, I bear a Pacific Islander identity, given the diverse ethnicities represented in Hawaiʻi. I-Kiribati descendants who bear more than one cultural identity are identified according to which is more applicable where they are at the time. For instance, those who are part European or Chinese are identified as part I-Kiribati and European or as part I-Kiribati and Chinese depending on where they are and who they are with.

On the other hand, people are also identified according to place, such as where they live now or where they are from. In Solomon Islands, people from Wagina recognize I-Kiribati living in Titiana as ‘kain titiana,’ or those from Titiana, and the same goes for those living on Wagina. I-Kiribati living on Wagina also identified themselves distinctively according to their villages. Villagers from Cookson are known as ‘kain Cookson,’ or those from Cookson, and the same goes for villagers from Arariki and Nikumaroro. On Wagina, villagers are also identified according to religion. Those living in Cookson are Catholics, and most of those in Arariki are either Methodist or Tungavalu; however, this may not be applicable in other Kiribati communities in Solomon Islands. It is often easy to maintain the I-Kiribati identity through constant interaction with members of the I-Kiribati community who share the same culture and language. I-Kiribati descendants who have moved away from the village or have intermarried with non–I-Kiribati people are strongly identified as I-Kiribati and as part of the community if they continue to maintain relationships and contact with their relatives. Nevertheless, this varies according to individuals, families and communities.
National Identity

It is rare for people to claim to be Solomon Islanders at the national level, as ethnic and provincial identities take precedence in Solomon Islands. National identity could be attained with an overarching national unity; however, Hereniko (1994, 422) argued that national unity is difficult to achieve in larger Pacific Island places like Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea where geographical and linguistic barriers are numerous. It is more attainable on small atolls where kin groups and factions are prioritized over national interests. This varies with newly independent states where cultural unity is attained through the selection of symbols of the more dominant political group; however, for island states struggling for sovereignty, the use of symbols to emphasize ethnic identity serves a dual purpose (Hereniko 1994, 423). For instance, the establishment of a Fijian bure\(^{36}\) parliament, which resonates the traditional Fijian hut made from wood and straw. This signified a Fijian national identity and was viewed as a replacement of British-style government buildings. Other examples include the revival of tattoos in Tahiti and of indigenous Maori languages in New Zealand. The need for all cultural groups to be represented under a national identity is often complex and at times creates conflicts. For instance, the Indo-Fijian population bears an extremely different identity from the ethnic Fijians, although both groups can be identified as Fijian citizens. A similar situation exists among the Maori people in New Zealand.

Like indigenous Solomon Islanders, I-Kiribati descendants also bear a different identity at the national level. They are identified as Gilbertese,\(^{37}\) or people from Kiribati, a perception still widely used today by many Solomon Islanders when identifying I-Kiribati. Additionally, some Solomon Islanders use neiko\(^{38}\) or sakapo\(^{39}\) as informal terms to refer to I-Kiribati, though this is not common. Such associations

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36 Fijian word for a traditional hut built with wood and straw
37 “Gilbertese” was the term used for I-Kiribati people when Kiribati was still known as Gilbert Islands.
38 “Neiko” is a Kiribati term used to address a female.
with the I-Kiribati’s origins reflect the differences between the I-Kiribati ethnicity and the ethnicities of other groups in Solomon Islands. Many could also be identified according to province, such as Choiseul or Western provinces, a more general identity used by those who live in the peripheries of these provinces. With the diverse cultural identities at the national level, there is often a tendency for I-Kiribati descendants to be identified either as I-Kiribati, given their physical features and cultural characteristics, or as Lauru people, depending on the situation they are in. I-Kiribati who have married into other ethnic groups also have the option to identify with their spouses’ provinces or ethnic groups. Some people possess an urban identity, especially I-Kiribati descendants who were born and raised in Honiara and have not been to the islands or have no cultural knowledge of their origins. Defining identity at the national level, however, is not as complex as defining it at a regional or international level. While attending high school in Honiara, I was identified as an I-Kiribati and often a Choiseulese, given the fact that Wagina is in Choiseul province. And since most students there have a relative understanding of what an I-Kiribati looks like and where Wagina is located, it was often easy to determine my identity.

Regional and International Identity

For most Pacific Islanders, national identity is substantially borne at regional and international levels. This identity enables others to determine the countries they come from or represent, which is helpful given the complexity and diversity of cultural groups in Oceania. I-Kiribati descendants identify themselves as Solomon Islanders at both levels despite the noticeable cultural and physical differences. In the midst of other I-Kiribati people—from Kiribati, other Pacific places, or abroad—they are identified either specifically as Solomon Islands I-Kiribati or generally as Solomon Islanders. This assertion is based mainly on the fact that they are Solomon Islands citizens and view Solomon Islands as the home where they have lived for many decades. One’s assertion of either an I-Kiribati identity or a Solomon Islands I-

39 *Sakapo* means “let’s say goodbye” in the Kiribati language.
Kiribati identity among other I-Kiribati people depends on the language spoken. Though the Kiribati language spoken by I-Kiribati descendants in Solomon Islands is very similar to that spoken on mainland Kiribati, there are slight differences in the way certain words are pronounced and in the way the language is spoken in general. For instance, islanders from Northern Kiribati pronounced *matu* (sleep) as ‘masu’; but Solomon Islands I-Kiribati descendants who most are from Southern Kiribati pronounced it as ‘matu’ without enunciating the s.

A Solomon Islander I-Kiribati married to a European, Chinese, or other non–Solomon Islander and holding a different citizenship status can be identified according to his or her spouse’s ethnicity. Many I-Kiribati descendants in this situation maintain their I-Kiribati identity, especially those with strong relationships and who continue to practice the culture and engage with I-Kiribati. Nevertheless, the transition between different cultures and national boundaries contributes to the construction and reconstruction of identities depending on how individuals perceive themselves in these situations. For instance, I-Kiribati descendants from Solomon Islands who have gained citizenship in Australia or New Zealand can identify themselves as Solomon Islanders or as Australians or New Zealanders, respectively, depending on the location and situation.

**Identity Issues: A Personal Reflection**

The years I spent in Fiji not only enriched my understanding of other Pacific cultures but also contributed to my construction of new identities and the reshaping of my personal identity as a Solomon Islands I-Kiribati descendant. In 2004, I was a new Solomon Islands undergraduate student at the University of the South Pacific (USP). Although I had been to Fiji before on a holiday trip to visit my parents, it appeared to be a new destination that I would have to grow accustomed to during my three years of undergraduate study. As a Solomon Islander, I relied on my Solomon Islands friends who had
entered the University before me for their guidance through registration and university life. I didn’t like my classes at first, especially my geography class because of the large number of students in it; however, the exciting fieldtrips we took to a village during my first year made up for it.

I never really thought that I would make friends with other Pacific Islanders, but later in the year, I was already making friends. I had a Niuean friend named Jamal who always invited me to the Niuean gatherings since its one of the smallest cultural groups on campus; and because I hung out with them and participated in their cultural performances, many assumed that I was a Niuean, especially given my Polynesian features. Students from countries other than Solomon Islands thought that I was either Tongan or Samoan, and when I would tell them that I’m Solomon Islander, they would respond with skepticism. At times I would explain why I look different from the other Solomon Islanders, but I always tried to avoid such conversations given the complexity of cultural diversity in the Solomons.

On several occasions, Solomon Islanders mistook my identity as a Solomon Islander, especially in Fiji. Once, I was with several students at a research site in Nadroga, Fiji, hosting a group of delegates from the Pacific History Association Conference in 2008. A Solomon Islander came up to me and started asking me questions about the site in English. It was a strange situation, and I felt the urge to respond in pidgin, but I did not want to embarrass him. Later when he asked the other Solomon Islands student who I was and discovered that I was from Solomon Islands, he was so embarrassed for thinking that I was from Tonga or Samoa because of my physical features, which do not really give me away as a Solomon Islander.

On the other hand, I do not often associate myself with other I-Kiribati students from Kiribati because of my inability to converse fluently in the Kiribati language. For the most part, I tried to avoid having to converse in English with them, especially given the fact that we share the same cultural identity and language even though we come from different countries. My last years in Fiji broadened my
sense of identity: in addition to my Solomon Islands I-Kiribati identity, I had begun to develop a Fijian identity. Fiji was becoming a home to me. My network of friends consisted mainly of Fijians, and my continuous visits and research trips to Fijian villages fostered interactions with indigenous Fijians that helped me to learn and understand the basics of the Fijian language and culture and also to adapt to their way of life, especially in the villages where the Fijian culture is predominantly observed. I was often mistaken as Fijian, even by Fijians, but I did not really contest this because of the Fijian identity I had developed throughout my years living in the country.

In Hawai‘i, I saw myself as a Solomon Islander I-Kiribati, but more as a Solomon Islander, and I also bore a Tuvaluan identity and a Fijian identity to some extent—multiple layers of identities that I have been able to use in different situations when applicable. However, my graduate seminars with other Pacific Islands students at the Center for Pacific Islands Studies altered my perception of identity as an overall representation of who I am and of my cultural origins. These classes are interdisciplinary, encompassing fields that deal with such topics as cultural identity, the marginalization of Pacific Islanders, and political and economic issues in the Pacific. These discussions brought the uncertainty of my identity to the surface. I realized that I had never taken heed of how I expressed myself in terms of my cultural identity, and to some extent it did not matter to me because I was so consumed with the desire to better understand the world and its complexities.

When I was in Fiji, I never had the opportunity to return home for the holidays. Unlike other students who are always excited about returning home to see their families during the semester breaks, I busied myself during these times. The lack of communication and constant interaction with my family that I experienced during the years I spent in Fiji alienated me from my culture. I became so uncertain about my identity as a Solomon Islander I-Kiribati, as well as about the identities I have constructed since I have been away from home. To some I-Kiribati, I have become a product of the Western world, a
path that many desired for their children and grandchildren. While I see Solomon Islands, specifically Wagina, as my home, my sense of belonging to my place of origin, a place where my culture and identity are embedded and to which I can connect, was dimmed by the ongoing issues surrounding land ownership, a major concern for the I-Kiribati population in Solomon Islands.

Hawai‘i became a point of return for me. My newfound awareness of the marginalization of Pacific Islanders and the deprivation of their identities and lands of origin—experienced, for instance, by the indigenous people of Hawai‘i and the Chamorro people in Guam—made me realize the significance of land and place as aspects of cultural identity. Coming to Hawai‘i in order to have an opportunity to go home seemed ironic to me given the geographical proximity of Fiji to Solomon Islands. While in Fiji, I rarely return home for holidays, and when I do, it’s only for a week or two. My realization of the significance of cultural identity transformed the way I viewed myself in relation to my home island, to other people, and to the world. I became appreciative of my cultural inheritance and origins, as well as of the inevitable changes that continue to subdue my personal identity as a Solomon Islander I-Kiribati descendant. Thus, my efforts to produce a thesis focused on identity construction and reconstruction among I-Kiribati descendants in Solomon Islands.

My trip back to Solomon Islands in June 2010 to do fieldwork was a journey of reconnection—a reconnection with my people and with the place from which I originate. I anticipated the complexity of reconnecting with my community after spending several years abroad; in fact, I was very fearful of the effort and time it would take to become acquainted enough to carry out my study, the reason for my return home.

The boat trip back to my village, which I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, initiated a phase of reconnecting with I-Kiribati descendants living on Wagina. I used the situation to become more open and to understand the criticisms I was receiving. It didn’t get any easier while I was conducting
fieldwork on Wagina. Although many recognized me, some did not. I had incidences where I was regarded as a politician because I was conducting fieldwork at the time of an election campaign. I was also regarded as a nurse because I went around the village carrying a bag. I was a European to some, especially to the children who would whisper among themselves when I walked past. At one point, I was teased for not pronouncing I-Kiribati words properly; at another point, it was for not being able to speak the Kiribati language fluently because I had not lived in or visited the village in quite a long time.

This reminded me of Achica’s (2008) experience: she shared a personal account of her childhood in Samoa, of the experiences she gained living in Hawai‘i and California, and of how her identity as a Samoan was challenged and marginalized. Although she still observed the Samoan traditions taught to her by her grandmother while growing up in Samoa, her Samoan-ness did not prevail when she returned to Samoa for the holiday; she was instead perceived as a Samoan American, even though she retained her identity as a Samoan. Kilisi, a Tongan student who lived in Australia, claimed to be pure Tongan, yet her cultural identity was challenged when she returned to Tonga and was viewed by other Tongans as a pālangi (European) instead of a Tongan because she did things that did not reflect the Tongan way of life (Morton 2002, 143).

Home islands exist as places where identities are revived and where islanders become born again of their identity (Morton 2002, 144). The incidences I encountered in the village challenged my personal identity, but I was determined to prove my I-Kiribati-ness. I just needed some time to revive this relation. Towards the end of my fieldwork, after days of continuous interaction with the villagers, I found myself immersed in the village life. I was even invited to visit some of them after my fieldwork, and for once, I felt reconnected to my people, to the place I called home.
Conclusion

The relocation of I-Kiribati people from the Gilbert and Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands presents one example of the movement of people in the Pacific from their home islands to other destinations as a result of economic, social, and political issues. The first relocation from the Gilbert Islands to Phoenix Islands in the 1930s was due to overpopulation and land shortages on the islands, and the latter relocation from Phoenix Islands to Solomon Islands in the 1950s and 1960s was the result of recurring and severe droughts. Though challenged upon relocation by the environmental and cultural diversity and way of life in Solomon Islands, I-Kiribati settlers have gradually adapted to these changes, thus altering their culture and way of life as I-Kiribati people. Despite being a minority community in a Melanesian society, I-Kiribati now view Solomon Islands as more than just a relocation settlement—it is home to them and their families.

Although I-Kiribati descendants still retain their identity as I-Kiribati people, they have also become Solomon Islanders in terms of citizenship and thus have access to education and employment opportunities, health benefits, and other amenities offered in the country. Still, while the I-Kiribati community has gained benefits as Solomon Islanders, its members have also encountered issues due to cultural difference. These issues stem from land disputes, civil crises, the erosion of language and culture, the loss of identity, the lack of access to many opportunities and benefits, and the lack of assistance from the government. Land dispute is by far the biggest issue they have encountered and is the focus of debate between the Kiribati community and traditional landowners in the country over the land on which they have settled. Although this leads back to the colonial era, it has become a problem for the settlers, who have been making attempts at resolutions and agreements for years. These issues have encouraged the construction and reconstruction of identities among I-Kiribati descendants as a way to deal with these problems and also to make sense of their permanency in Solomon Islands.
Citizenship, lifestyle adaptation, and language-learning in Solomon Islands have developed a stronger sense of Solomon Islands identity among the Kiribati community. Intermarriage between I-Kiribati descendants and members of other ethnic groups in Solomon Islands, as well as Europeans, Chinese, and other Pacific Islanders, has expanded the social network of the Kiribati community and fostered multiple identities among I-Kiribati individuals. Some inherit identities from other ethnic groups in Solomon Islands, while others claim European, Chinese, or other Pacific Islands identities through their family lineages, spouses, and the locations where they live and to which they identify. Education, employment, and residency in other places in Solomon Islands, the Pacific, and overseas have also influenced the reshaping of identities. Many I-Kiribati descendants with multiple identities have used them variably in different situations, whenever appropriate.

By constructing and reconstructing my personal identity while I was in Fiji, I was able to assimilate and adapt to the different cultural groups that I came in contact with. Like Parker (2009, 57), I knew that I was grounded in the Kiribati culture, yet the uncertainty about my cultural identity as a Solomon Islands I-Kiribati was amplified by the fact that I felt alienated from my culture due to my inability to speak the Kiribati language fluently. My experiences in Fiji of being identified by non–Solomon Islanders as a Niuean, Tongan, Samoan, and Fijian revealed identity issues that many Pacific Islanders and I-Kiribati descendants may also experience. These incidences are inevitable and are likely to be encountered by other I-Kiribati descendants given the cultural diversity of ethnic groups in Solomon Islands. Nevertheless, a person’s cultural identity, which is rooted in the ancestral land and perpetually instilled in him or her, becomes the very essence of that person’s identity despite these influences. Multiple identities can be constructed, yet the underlying identity will remain Solomon Islander of I-Kiribati descent.

Finally, it is at an individual’s advantage to be competent in more languages and cultures. Meilj and Miedema (2004) highlighted that identity is never singular: it multiplies and is constructed and
reconstructed continuously in different contexts. The construction and reconstruction of identities is thereby a continuous process, and as I-Kiribati descendants cross national and geographical boundaries, their personal identities will continuously be influenced and reshaped; however, the secret is to be able to adjust to the changing circumstances. Therefore, for Solomon Islanders of I-Kiribati descent, identity should be understood not as static, but as a continual process and situational variable that can be used differently depending on one’s context.
References


Teaiwa, KM. 1998. Tirawata Irouia: Re-presenting Banaban Histories. MA thesis, Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa,


APPENDICES

Appendix 1

MEMORANDUM

BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS PROTECTORATE

O.H.M.S.

10th February, 1955.

To

District Commissioner, Western...

From

Registrar of Titles...

Application No. 7/63

Lot 387 Manning Straits (Wagina and other Islands)

Your reference AR(172) F. 44/54

It appears from your reports that the Volikana line as represented by

Sere Talanga Tabnai

Faul ni Vatevate

Simon Vairo

Joe Boga

Sam Yenanga

M. Judai

Sena Bold

claims the land referred to above, the grounds of their claim being that while they abandoned it because of sickness and raids over 60 years ago, they did not abandon ownership.

2. The history of dealings in this land commences with the grant by the High Commissioner to Capt. Hamilton of a Certificate of Occupation for a term of 50 years from the 1st June, 1904. This grant was made under the provisions of the Solomon (Waste Lands) Regulations 1903-1904, which provided for such certificates of occupation of waste land (defined as "land which is not owned, cultivated or occupied by any native or non-native person"). Subsequent transactions are as follows:

(1) 1908, Assignment of Certificate by Capt. Hamilton to Burns Philip & Company Limited.
(2) 1909, Assignment of Certificate by Burns Philip to Solomon Islands Development Company Limited.
(3) 1919, Lease for a term of 1 year to C. J. Davis.
(5) 1957, Lease of part (excluding Wagina) of the land by E. H. Everett to E. N. Wagstaff.
(6) 1958, Assignment of (same) part by E. H. Everett to E. N. Wagstaff.
(7) 1961, "Surrender" of remainder by E. N. Wagstaff to Government.
(8) 1962, Assignment of part (same as in (v) and (vi)) by E. N. Wagstaff to Government.

3. It is important to note that though Native Claims in respect of islands to the West of Lot 387, including Rob Roy and Dillonara (Vella Lavella and Guma) Islands, which were included in the Levey's Certificate of Occupation, were submitted to the Phillips Land Commission, no such claim was submitted to the latter in respect of the islands comprised in the Hamilton Certificate, i.e. Lot 387.

4. In the proceedings in respect of the Levey's Certificate, the Volikana line claimed Rob Roy, Dillonara and other smaller islands. The chief spokesman for the line appears to have been Fiko, who in his evidence stated that his line had previously occupied Wagina but had left at least six generations before. Other members of the line who gave evidence were
Derekoko, Soro and Wonga. All indicated that the line had lived in Wagina a long time before but had abandoned it because of raids and sickness. Wonga stated that "the white man has taken Wagina finish" indicating perhaps that this was one reason why they did not want to lose any further land. (It has been observed that according to the Commission's Report, none of Lever's Manning Straits land had been developed at the time of the enquiry.)

5. The Phillips Report reveals that Barnes Philip steareders were at that time in the habit of calling at Sallikana Anchorage. Since none of the land in Lever's certificate was then developed, then such visits must be presumed to have been in connection with the use to which L.R. 387 was being put by the Solomon Islands Development Company.

6. It is quite clear, therefore, from the evidence of the Report referred to in the preceding two paragraphs, that the Volaiikan line, people inter alia in the neighbourhood, had for some considerable time before 1923 been well aware of the alienation of Wagina and adjacent islands. It also seems clear from the Report that the Volaiikan line, at the time of the enquiry, had been for a long time indeed resident on the mainland in Choiseul, though about 1900 they appeared to be beginning to come down again to the coast to fish, but only to a limited extent and near to their base.

7. As far as I am aware then, the Volaiikan line made no claim to ownership of L.R. 387 from the time of the grant of the Certificate of Occupation to the time of the Phillips Land Commission Enquiries or from that time until 1963, when, with the purchase of Rob Roy, the re-settlement of Gilbertese in Wagina, and the application of Government for registration of title, the possibility of obtaining money if a claim to ownership of L.R. 387 could be established must have occurred to them.

8. All this seems to me to raise a strong presumption that ownership of Wagina had, in fact, been abandoned by the Volaiikan line long before 1900, though of course it is also likely that, in accordance with current native usage in these times, they could have at a later date re-established ownership by re-occupation, if (but only if) the land were still vacant or if they were able to drive out any wave of inhabitants. It seems not unlikely that when the Volaiikan line left Wagina, they occupied land on the mainland of Choiseul which had been previously abandoned by earlier "owners" or from which they drove out the "owners" then in possession, and I have little doubt that they would resist any claim by earlier "owners" to the land now occupied by them on grounds that such "owners" had not in fact abandoned ownership.

9. However, in order that further consideration may be given to the claims put forward by the Volaiikan line, I hereby, under paragraph 11(2)(c) of the Second Schedule to the Land and Titles Ordinance, Cap. 56, refer the following questions to you for report:

(1) Do the claimants accept the evidence given by their forbears before the Phillips Land Commission, that the Volaiikan line had, because of sickness and raids, abandoned occupation and use of Wagina and the other islands comprised in L.R. 387 a very long time before 1900, (and not merely, as they appear to have stated, "at least 60 years ago")? If not, can they be more precise about "at least 60 years ago"? (It is important, of course, to ascertain as far as possible what the position was in the period about 1900-1904).

(2) If they claim that, although the line had abandoned occupation and use, they had not abandoned ownership, bearing in mind the evidence referred to and the conclusions which it has seemed reasonable to draw
therefrom in paragraphs 4 to 7 above -

(a) What reasons do the claimants give for the failure of the Volaiakana line when putting forward claims to Rob Roy, and other islands comprised in the Lower's Certificate of Occupation, for hearing by the Philippe Land Commission, to put forward any claims to the islands comprised in L.R. 287, and

(b) What reasons do they give for the failure of the line to put forward any claims to ownership, or in any other way to attempt to establish ownership of the islands comprised in L.R. 287, from the date of the grant of the Certificate of Occupation; i.e., 1901, the effect of which the members thereof who were alive at the time were aware, as is shown from the evidence taken before the Land Commission, at any time between 1904 and 1963? The reason quoted in your memorandum of 8th August, 1964, - "that there were no educated men then" is clearly inadequate, since at least as far back as the time of the Land Commission, they were able to put forward claims in respect of Rob Roy and other islands.

(3) What reasons do the claimants give for the failure of the Volaiakana line, if they, as claimed, have never abandoned ownership of any of the land comprised in L.R. 287, to make any use of this land for "at least 60 years" - admitted by them as reported in your memorandum of the 4th August, 1964?

(4) What evidence can the claimants produce in support of their claim?

(5) What, according to the claimants, would have been the rights to the land of any Solomons Islanders who, had there been any such, might have moved into Vagina and other islands in L.R. 287 and settled there after its evacuation by the Volaiakana line?

(6) Would the claimants agree that if any former "owners" of the land on Choiseul of which the claimants are now in possession, came forward to claim that land on the grounds that, although they had abandoned occupation, they had not abandoned ownership, they (the claimants) would accept the right of such persons to resume possession of the land or to receive monetary compensation in lieu? (From your knowledge of the area and its people you may feel that this question will serve no useful purpose - e.g., that the answer will not be based on native custom but in full confidence that there are no persons who could or would make such a claim: if so, and you feel that it would be better not to put this question, since the answer would be unlikely to be indicative of native custom and might well be misleading, I leave this entirely to your discretion.)

(7) What physical evidence is there on the islands comprised in L.R. 287 of cultivation and occupation by the tenants from time to time under the Certificate of Occupation, in particular in the form of plantation coconuts, rubber and the like, and constructive development, (a rough assessment of the ages of various coconuts and other plantings would be valuable)?

10. I have referred these questions to you rather than myself because I am ill at present, and I am unable to write them.
(a) the information presently available to me indicates, in my opinion, that the claimants do not have a very good case.

(b) it does not seem that the enquiry into the questions put in paragraph 9 (1)-(6) above, per se, should take up any great deal of time; I venture to think it could perhaps be carried out in the normal course of administrative touring, and it can, if necessary, be extended over the course of more than one tour: there is no urgency, though of course it will be desirable for Government’s application for registration to be dealt with without undue delay.

(c) your knowledge of the area and the people will be of considerable value in prosecuting the enquiry, and may assist in its more expeditious treatment, and

(d) the answer to the question put in paragraph 9 (7) may probably best be reported on with information provided by Mr. Mason of the Agricultural Department, and if so, I am anxious that this information should be provided before he goes on leave.

If, however, you feel that for any reason the enquiry should not be made by you, please let me know.

11. The background given in paragraphs 2-6 is for your information, and should, I hope, prove useful in explaining to the claimants the basis of Government’s claim to title. All claimants who wish should, of course, be permitted the opportunity to be heard during the course of the enquiry, (paragraph 11(3) of the Second Schedule refers).

(A. GRAEME CRUES)
Registrar of Titles.
Hon. Joini Tutua
Burnsoreek
P.O. Box 984
NUKUALA'A

Dear Hon. Tutua,

Thank you for your letter of 12/3/97, and I regret for not replying to it earlier due to the fact that it has only reached me this week.

First of all, and that is if it was true as you have claimed in your letter, I must apologise to the Volaiikana tribe because of my letter to Raymond Zama on behalf of our community (the settlers), expressing their concern about his illegal activities i.e. cutting and selling from Wagina island. Although, my letter never mention or accuse Volaiikana tribe, but since they were insulted as you have claimed, please convey my apology to them accordingly.

To us the settlers, from what we were told by the Government (Resettlement Officers), Wagina island with some of the small islands (almost all of them have been allocated and occupied by us), have been bought for us, so we claim they are our land, and therefore believe have all right to express and direct what we want and think good for them. As a matter of fact, the said remaining unallocated land of Wagina, has once subdivided and allocated to the settlers. However, sometimes latter the Government negotiated with the settlers for a possible prospecting and mining by CRA. Due to this prospecting, those who have land on the other side, were reallocated with land further north-east of the Island. However, some of them did not get any new allocation of land until today. Mainly settlers from Nikumaroro village were affected by this arrangement. But since CRA left about 20 - 30 years ago, apparently there is no intention for mining by the Government, therefore it is right and most appropriate for the Government to release and return the remaining land back to the settlers for early allocations and developments.

What is your real concern or problem about Wagina island and us the settlers? I think you should come out clear so that it can be settled once and for all. If it is for the payment of Wagina and the small islands occupied by our people, then we feel that you should not keep nagging and insulting us about it, but please direct your complain to the Government, and perhaps include both the British and Kiribati governments for this settlement was their arrangement. Besides that, you have been a Minister of Lands once and you should have solved the matter thereof. What happened ? Why you did not do it then ? And what was your excuse to your people, the Volaiikana tribe ?! Please be reasonable to our people.

If not for the payment, then what? Perhaps you want us to go out from Wagina? If that is what you are really aftering, then it is a strippery mystery to us. As you know, we have been living on Wagina for almost forty (40) years now. Forty years of peace and happiness even together with the two communities near us i.e. Kaa people and Foseora people your own people. Currently we are jointly running a conservation area with them. It is from it that both Foseora and Wagina communities get their Fisheries Centre's which you even insulted us with. Perhaps you are not fully aware of our good and happy relationships with your community, because you do not live with them as you live and stay in Honiara. I am afraid that this peace and good relationship might be disturbed because of what you always tried and stir among our people and your community or Volaiikana tribe. Please try and avoid this happen.
We know and aware that certain individuals used to go out and steal or
dive from other peoples' reef. Choiseul and I have an area of Teebel, but not the whole
community of Waginathat did this. Therefore, it is an insult to my community
for you to claim that Wagina community stole from your reefs. Stealing is a
very bad thing in our society. A very shameful thing and a hard thing to do.
And if anyone did it, he did it with no care attitudes. You or Volai people
should deal with them individually, but not blaming the whole community
of Wagina please. Perhaps we should also sue you for this.

Certainly, our elders and young men talked about and regretted for the two
good chiefs that came to Wagina with you and the Deputy Commissioner of Lands
that day. You should have known for I have told you face to face at Taro that
Waginam do not like you. They hate you mainly because of what you always
insulted them with about Waginaland. If it was not because of you, in other
words, if the chiefs came on their own or led by someone else and not you, they
would have been received with great respect and a warm welcome according to
our custom. Please kindly convey our sincere apology to them. I am happy
too that there was no incident occurred apart from some young men were
swearing at you, so I was told. I am so sorry and regret for the inconvenience
cause.

Thank you for the copy of the letter of the Secretary for the Lauuru Land
Conference Tribal Communities to the Commissioner of Lands regarding their
resolution about the lands of Wagina and other small islands. First, knowing
that the Chairman of such Conference is a top clergyman of the United Church,
Bishop Leslie Boseo, perhaps the resolution is of no evil but of a good deed
for your people and us the settlers. I believe that the Bishop's resolution
is of no intention to create ill feelings and unwarranted conflicts among our
two communities. Will such resolution keep and maintain the current good
relationship now exist among our two communities? Certainly not, but the
Bishop is the person of God. He prayed every day to our Heavenly Father so
the resolution he adopted and passed in his conference, is of our God's will
and blessing to both Volai people and us the settlers of Wagina island.
And I doubt it very much that it is intended for a doomsday for our community
like the way you hinted and implied in your letter!

Your worry about developing Wagina island is unrealistic. Wagina island
is only a very small land beside your many islands and big land and which you have not even develop them yet. Wagina island is not even big and
maybe even enough for the us the settlers to develop it. And since Wagina has
been bought for us, then it is only right for us to develop it ourselves.

Indeed you do not really need the answers for the five (5) questions you
want us to answer for you. Like as I said earlier, you have been a Minister
of Lands once so you should have all the answers already. Beside that, you
should not keep bothering us the settlers for this. You are an educated person
and should deal with the matter appropriately. Anyway, should there be a real
need, I am requesting the Prime Ministers Office by copy of this letter to
answer your questions for us.

To conclude this letter, I would like to beg you not to use us the settlers
again for your election campaign. This was your normal practice, so as the
National election is now due, you are starting again to make a lot of talks
about us and Wagina island to your people. You should know that such talks
create sense of ill feelings, mistrust and insecurity among our two communities.
Perhaps, our feelings and fears are not important to you than for you to win
the election?! But if I may remind you, such moves are very sensitive and can
be disastrous to our existing good relationships and the well being of our
two communities right here in our villages.
You and your family feel and sense nothing because you live and happy there in Honiara, while we are here victimised from your Conside rates moves. Please try other means or ways for your campaign for the election, and not such a sensitive issue as this.

Thank you. Any inconvenience caused is regretted.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed)
Hon. John T Rabaua
for Wagina Community
12/03/97

Hon. J Rabaua
Vaghenia Postal Agency
South Choiseul

Dear Hon. Rabaua,

Your letter to Raymond Zama is an insult to our tribe, the whole tribe of Volaikana. Since time immemorial up until the day (17/02/97) you delivered to me the copy of your letter to Raymond Zama, no one in the whole of Solomon Islands has stopped our traditional and commercial usage of the resources in and around Vaghenia. You and your people are the first ones to tell us off our own land.

Governments, Traders never told us not to cut down trees and sold them at Vaghenia. This is the first time in all our history to have someone like you to stop us and convince a government officer to tell us not to go back to that part of our own original land, Vaghenia. You stop us not to exploit resources on land which is not yours. At least it is government land and as original owners the Volaikana tribe has the first priority of exploiting the resources.

Our traditional relics on the islands are clear indications that we own it. Your people begin to spoil it we learned.

Your claim that you own the whole island of Vaghenia and other islands must be proved to the independent State of Solomon Islands and the tribe of Volaikana. You have to convince us of several things.

1. To whom was the money paid by Gilbertese Government?
2. How much was paid?
3. Who was then the Title holder?
4. How much was paid for our customary reefs around Vaghenia of which is now empty of its resources?
5. How much was paid for the disturbances caused by your people not only within Vaghenia itself but around Velavitu to Oloko and as far as Katupika, stealing our reef resources?

For years we have tried to bring your people and our people together. But because we look poor, simple and uneducated we have been given the attitude "who are you to talk with us, Vaghenia is ours and not yours". A clear example of this kind of attitude has been
given to my two chiefs and myself on the 18/02/97 when you told us that your people especially young people would be upset and say things not respectful to our chiefs.

It was rather surprising to us to know that in your society where elders suppose to rule, were ruled by young people. We come to the conclusion that your young people did not want to talk with us. They only want to talk with the Deputy Commissioner of Lands. That is the usual attitude.

As an educated person yourself, you should understand communication is very vital for our peaceful co-existence. We must bring our chiefs and your elders to talk together about development of Vaghania. Because we received nothing from your former government (Gilbertese Government), we still claim Vaghania as our own.

This claim is supported by all chiefs around Choiseul (see attached). You must educate your young people to live peacefully with our people. Do not write letters or chase our people away from the other side which is government land according to the independent state of the Solomon Islands.

The best solution for our peaceful co-existence is for you not to consider whole of Vaghania as your own bought by your government. We must work together as we already started with our two fishing centres. Your fishing centre is a direct benefit from our tribe to your people. It was through our struggle to be recognized as original owners of Arvon Islands.

Please let us come together to speed up development of the government held part of Vaghania to benefit all of us.

Your Sincerely,

Hon. John Tutua

For Valaikana Tribe

CC  Minister of Lands and Housing
    Permanent Secretary - Ministry of Lands and Housing
    Prime Ministers Office
    Chief Stephen Sero
    Chief Jonah Vona
    Raymond Zama
Honourable J. T. Rabana
Wagina Postal Agency
Wagina
Lauru Province

28th January, 1999

Stephen Sero & Jona Voanga
Chiefs Of Valekana Tribe
Posarae Village
Lauru Province

Through: Honourable Johni Tutua

Greetings to you and many happy returns, great chiefs of Valekana, from the people of Wagina. May 1999 bring you and your people blessings in abundance.

We write to you, in my capacity as an elected servant of my people, to express their humble request to your good selves and your good people of Valekana about the land on Wagina, which our people have settled on now for more than forty years.

We fully acknowledge that the Valekana Tribe are the original land owners of Wagina and its surrounding islands. We also fully acknowledge that the Valekana Tribe was perhaps not party to the resettlement of my people to Wagina by the British Government.

At this stage, we can not establish whether or not the Valekana Tribe benefited from any proceeds from the purchase of Wagina Island and its surrounding islands, by the British Government for purposes of resettlement. Most probably, your people never received a single cent from the purchase.

My people realise in this day and age that neither the Valekana people nor the people of Vagena have a choice on why we were resettled on Wagina.

However, as time passes, we realise that we have to live peacefully and harmoniously with each other. We must learn to accept each other in the way Christ accepts us all.

We also realise that there are issues that need clearing up between our people so that we can live side by side as one people, with no animosity towards each other. These issues are not the making of the Valekana people nor my people. They were forced on us by the Colonial Administration and we have to live with it today.

Through talks with your Honourable member and Deputy Premier of Choiseul, Hon. Tutua and Hon. Bishop Boseto (Minister of Home Affairs), the people of Wagina now see the gross errors that have been committed to your people and our people.
On the 8th January, 1999, the people of Wagina held a Maungatabu to find an amiable solution to this problem. At this meeting, it was unanimously agreed that the people of Wagina would like to address the issue by formalising the acquisition of Wagina and its surrounding islands from the Valekana people, through a Melanesian custom ceremony for land acquisition, to enable both people to live together peacefully side by side.

It is in line with this resolution from our Maungatabu that we now write to your good and honourable selves to formally and kindly request that you give us an opportunity to settle this land matter by way of a Melanesian ceremony.

We trust and believe that Hon. Tutua will detail to you the understanding we reached at a small meeting held between Hon. Tutua, Mr. Lawson, myself and Mr. B. Koraua to discuss ways of finding an amiable solution for both our people.

May we take this opportunity to apologize on behalf of our people if there are any misunderstandings in the past and thank you very much for your audience.

May God bless you and your people, always.

[Signature]
Hon. John T. Rabaua

[Signature]
Baoro Laxton Koraua
The Honorable the Clerk, \( \text{?} \)

To the Honorable the Clerk, \( \text{?} \)

I beg to move that this Council:

1. That the motion be considered.

2. That the motion be carried.

3. That the motion be referred to the Committee.

4. That the motion be approved.

5. That the motion be recorded.

6. That the motion be passed.

The Council of the Province, \( \text{?} \)

I, \( \text{?} \), move, that this Council do now adjourn.

Respectfully, \( \text{?} \).
Wagner, I DIAGRAMS

The government has been faced with a number of problems. In particular, the government has been confronted with the need to increase its efficiency and effectiveness in delivering services to the public. To address these issues, the government has implemented a number of reforms, including changes to its budgeting and accounting practices. These reforms have led to a significant improvement in the government's financial management and have helped to increase its accountability to the public.

In addition to these internal improvements, the government has also been faced with a number of external challenges. The government has had to respond to a number of crises, including natural disasters and economic downturns. In each case, the government has worked to provide support and assistance to those affected by these events.

Despite these challenges, the government remains committed to its mission of serving the public. Through its ongoing efforts to improve its services and respond to the needs of the community, the government continues to strive to make the lives of its citizens easier and more prosperous.
[Partial text not legible due to image quality]

[Partial text not legible due to image quality]
Kukutin Village,
Wagina Island,
GOGOBELE PROVINCE
23rd August, 1999.

The Commissioner of Lands,
Ministry of Lands, Mines & Energy,
HONIARA. DEPT OF LANDS & HOUSING.

Dear Sir,

Re: WAGINA REMAINING LAND

Our community directed our Committee (Wagina Land Trustees) to request your good office for the release of the remaining land on Wagina, and entrusting it to our Committee, so that further allocations can be given to the new families please.

You may not be aware but, land disputes is now getting common among the settlers families. This is because of the shortages of land within each family due to the increase in numbers in their families, since the initial time of settlement which was about (40) years ago. Currently, there are about a hundred families who are now badly in need of land for purposes of residential, for subsistences (bush gardens) and for developments respectively.

In case the Government has difficulties in carrying out the surveys for the demarcation of boundaries, our Committee is prepared to assist by hiring any private surveyor that can be available to do the surveys if necessary.

Your kind consideration and early reply to this urgent matter for the needs of our community, will be very much appreciated.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Hon. JOHN TESIIRA BAHAMA
Secretary,
Wagina Land Trustees