

CHRONICLES OF COLONIZATION

by Losena Tubanavau-Salabula

The colonization of the Pacific island countries began as soon as the foreigners set foot on the shores of Oceania, as far back as the 15th and 16th centuries. There were different approaches to colonization depending on the style of different colonizers, where they were originally from and what their motives were. Among the first main colonizers of the Pacific islands were Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Portugal. Later on, they found problems in administering the far-flung territories. Thus they put up center points within the Pacific region, e.g., Australia to look after Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu. The Spaniards established Guam as their center in Micronesia and later on in Jaluit, Marshall Islands, where the Germans also built their headquarters.

Some of the island states changed colonizers, e.g., in Micronesia the Germans took over from the Spaniards up to the World War I. After that, the League of Nations (now the United Nations) handed over Micronesia to the Japanese from the German administration. In the South Pacific, though, not much change happened in the administration;

here the British were quite dominant, except for Samoa which was colonized by the United States (American Samoa) and Germany (Western Samoa, before New Zealand took over).

The colonizers came wearing many faces: missionaries, explorers, beachcombers, traders, etc. As soon as they set foot on the Pacific shores, they began to influence the lifestyles, cultures and religions of the peoples. In other words, the indigenous peoples' rights began to be violated. Our peoples were forced to uproot the idols that they worshipped, change their dressing fashions, stop cannibalism, change their eating styles, change their cultures and languages. New lifestyles were imposed on them. Some of these Pacific nations quietly and innocently accepted the changes but a number refused and retaliated after realizing how much they had lost their inheritance.

Micronesia, in my view, was the worst affected. Its colonizers have included the Spanish, German and Japanese, and the Americans since the end of World War II. Belau, Guam, American Samoa and Hawai'i are still under USA,



photo by Concepcion Garcia Ramilo

If only feet stomping can stamp out colonization.

and Hawai'i and Belau are still struggling for their independence and sovereignty.

Meanwhile, Tokelau and Niue are still under New Zealand, and the French have kept Tahiti, Kanaky and Wallis & Futuna since the 16th century. Britain rules Pitcairn. West Papua and East Timor are colonized by Indonesia and Bougainville is under Papua New Guinea.

One group among the Pacific Island countries could be categorized as sovereign independent states. The first Pacific Island nation to gain independence was Western Samoa in 1962, followed by Nauru in 1968 and Fiji in 1970. In the same year the Kingdom of Tonga ceased to be a British protectorate. Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands and Kiribati in 1979, and Vanuatu in 1980.¹

On the other hand, some countries adopted free associa-

tion with their former colonizers, in varying degrees of associated-state relationships. The main common feature is that a small state wants to combine maximal independence of action with the benefits of a larger and more powerful system. In many cases the favored colonizers remain largely in control. Thus, in 1965, the Cook Islands associated with New Zealand, followed by Niue in 1974. The Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands became associated with the United States in 1986. The Northern Marianas has a Commonwealth status within the USA (implemented in 1978 and formalized in 1986). In 1994 Belau was forced to accept a "Compact of Free Association," again with the USA, after a decade of economic, political and military pressure and violence.

Then there is the so-called integration. There are five territories in the Pacific who are

claimed to have self-integration by integration with the colonizing powers. Kanaky (New Caledonia) and Te Ao Maohi (French Polynesia) are called "overseas territories of the French Republic." West Papua (Irian Jaya) and East Timor are referred to respectively as the "26th and 27th provinces of the Indonesian Republic" and Hawai'i is the 50th state of the USA. In the other cases, the colonizing powers won't let go because they want to protect their strategic or other interests.²

There are also what might be called voluntary colonies. After World War II, many powers began to consider that their territories had become a burden. But the colonized peoples would not let them go. Although Tokelau, American Samoa and Pitcairn are on the UN Decolonization List, the people fear the loss of their economic and physical security, mobility and choice should they become

independent. Similarly, the peoples of Wallis and Futuna and Rapanui (Easter Island) have made no moves to break away from France and Chile, respectively.

The Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement (NFIP) has expressed in the 7th NFIP Conference resolutions its concern and support for the six territories and peoples in their struggle for the right to self-determination and political independence—Kanak, Te Ao Maohi, West Papua, East Timor, Hawai'i and Bougainville.

France, which has ruled Kanak or New Caledonia since 1853, unilaterally removed the territory from the UN Decolonization List. Since 1947 France has refused to transmit information on its colonies to the UN. It evades the legal principles and tools of international law by claiming that Kanak is an integral part of the French Republic rather than a colony. However, after violent conflicts developed in 1984, the Kanak Movement was able to gain support from the South Pacific Forum governments and in December 1986, Kanak was reinscribed on the UN Decolonization List.

Te Ao Maohi or French Polynesia was colonized 11 years earlier than Kanak, in 1842. It went through exactly the same process as Kanak. The Liberation Movement of Te Ao Maohi continues its diplomatic offensive to gain support from the South Pacific Forum governments for reinscription on the UN Decolonization List.

West Papua was a Dutch colony from 1848 till 1969, when power was turned over to neighboring Indonesia after a referendum that turned out to be a farce. Instead of imple-

menting the one-person-one-vote rule, Indonesia hand-picked and intimidated 1,025 Papuans to vote for integration. In November of that year, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) took note of this outcome and West Papua was removed from the UN Decolonization List.

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East Timor was a Portuguese colony from 1509. In 1974, the new regime in Portugal started a decolonization process but abandoned it amid a civil war. In 1975, the territory was integrated with Indonesia and the following year was proclaimed an Indonesian province. A struggle continues to be waged for independence.

Bougainville became part of the German territory of north-east New Guinea in 1899, in an agreement between Germany, the UK and USA. After World War I, the League of Nations gave Australia a mandate to govern the former German colonies in Melanesia. After World War II, together with former German New Guinea

and British New Guinea, Bougainville became a UN Trust Territory. In September 1975, Papua New Guinea got its independence with Bougainville entrapped within it—despite a unilateral declaration of independence two weeks before.

For its part, Hawai'i has experienced continuous European and American contacts since 1778. In 1810 a unified monarchical government of all Hawai'ian islands was established which had diplomatic ties with independent states around the world. Commercial whaling attracted increasing numbers of foreign settlers who demanded rights to citizenship and private ownership of land. In 1887, American planter interests organized a coup d'état against the Hawai'ian king, taking away his sovereign powers and the people's civil rights. In 1893, American naval forces invaded Hawai'i in support of the overthrow of the indigenous and lawful government. The USA then extended diplomatic recognition to a provisional government declared by 18 conspirators, mostly Americans. A republic was proclaimed, with a new constitution. In 1898, the USA annexed Hawai'i, directly governing it from 1900 through 1959. In 1946, as required under Chapter XI, Art. 73 of the UN Charter, the USA included Hawai'i on the UN Decolonization List. In 1959, a plebiscite was held on the future status of the territory. Any American citizen who had resided in Hawai'i for one year was eligible to vote. After this, Hawai'i was removed from the UN Decolonization List.

The women of the Pacific have been an integral part of

the struggle for liberation for a very long time.

In 1827 the struggle for independence was started by Aimata, half-sister of Pomare II, who later became Queen Pomare IV. She was to rule Tahiti, Moorea and part of the Austral and Tuamotu groups for half a century till her death in 1877, a barefoot Tahitian Queen Victoria. She allied herself closely with the London Missionary Society (LMS). When two French Catholic priests arrived on Tahiti in 1836, she expelled them promptly. This affront brought a French frigate to Papeete, demanding \$2,000 compensation and a salute to the French flag. Although the conditions were met, the Queen and her chiefs wrote to England appealing for help but none came. In 1842, Queen Pomare was forced to accept the French protectorate and in 1843 she was deposed and fled to Raiatea. The Tahitians resisted for three years, but after Queen Pomare realized that no British assistance was forthcoming, she and her people reluctantly accepted the French protectorate in 1847. As a compromise the British extracted a promise from the French not to annex the Leeward Islands, and so Haahine, Raiatea and Borabora remained independent. The French took over the Marquesas in 1841 and tried to convert the Tahitians to Catholicism, but only in the Marquesas were they successful. Queen Pomare tried to defend the interests of her people as best she could, but much of her nation was dying. Between the 18th century and 1926 the population of the Marquesas fell from 8,000 to 2,000.

During the struggle for independence for West Papua there was a widespread resistance movement that proclaimed the coming of a Golden Age when the Dutch would be thrown out, heralding the end to forced labor and compulsory taxation. In 1938, a powerful millenarian movement took root in Biak, culminating in what the Papuans refer to as "our 1942 proclamation of independence." It centered around a woman named Argganita. The anti-foreign thrust of this movement was also directed against medium-ranking colonial officers whom the Dutch brought in from what is now Indonesia, to work as police, teachers, clerks and the like.

Another woman who needs to be mentioned in the struggle for independence is Susanna Ounei-Small of Ouvea in Kanaky. Susanna has been in the struggle for Kanak independence for nearly thirty years now. She was imprisoned several times by the French but never gave up. She came to work in Fiji in May 1995 at the Decolonization Desk of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement. Susanna stayed only for 18 months, but had to leave in November 1996 because her mother had passed away. "I have to go and work for my people and be with them in their struggle for liberation," she said.

In Bougainville, the women have been a driving force behind the efforts to find a solution to the conflict. In August 1996, more than 7,000 women from all corners of Bougainville endorsed an organizational structure which embraces women from the village level up to the provincial level with the

aim of bringing about reconciliation among all Bougainvillean parties. Both sides in the conflict have killed, beaten, raped and sexually harassed many women. Those who have been active in attempts to restore peace have been subjected to ill-treatment and harassment by PNG authorities.

The long struggle for independence in the Pacific region continues to be waged. Although some of the island nations are independent, others are still trying to win their freedom while a few are quite satisfied to be colonies. For some, independence was gained smoothly while others went through conflicts and even violence. Unfortunately, some countries have not achieved independence despite the blood of the Pacific peoples being shed. Some of our peoples are close to extermination through genocide and the effects of nuclear radiation; many have been murdered in cold blood.

Despite all the conflicts and the many differences involved in the struggles for independence, it is the sincere hope of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement that one day in the not too distant future WE WILL BE LIBERATED.

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¹ NFIP Decolonization Information Sheet, 1997.

² *Ibid.*