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Author(s): Richard Feinberg

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THE 'ANUTA PROBLEM': LOCAL SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

RICHARD FEINBERG

Kent State University

On 7 July 1978, the Solomon Islands became an independent nation. As in other newly independent states, much energy since that date has been devoted to the creation of a sense of national identity and the incorporation of disparate linguistic, cultural, and social groups into a smoothly ordered political and economic unit. And in the Solomons, as elsewhere, this attempt has posed problems for previously distinct communities as they have struggled to maintain their values, symbols, social structure and a degree of autonomy while being transformed into components of a nation state. This article documents the changes that have taken place on Anuta, a small, isolated Polynesian island in the eastern Solomons, over the past decade as a result of external political changes and concomitant encroachment of the world market economy. The first part of my discussion focuses on internal alterations, particularly in economic relations and chiefly authority. Subsequent sections deal with the relationship between Anuta and external governmental bodies. Lastly, the conflicting goals of national integration and local sovereignty are explored in the light of a strong possibility of substantial offshore oil deposits.

Some years ago, Firth (1969) discussed a crisis involving the British Solomon Islands' colonial administration and the chiefs of Tikopia, a small Polynesian island in the Solomons' Eastern District. The issue at stake was the sovereignty of traditional hereditary leaders over their subjects, both at home and overseas. The drama played itself out, however, around the more limited but symbolically potent issue of taxation.

After a brief confrontation in 1966, during which Tikopian leaders in the Russell Islands of the Central Solomons were fined and threatened with arrest for refusal to pay local council rates, an uneasy truce was achieved. Tikopians overseas paid their annual rates and the administration permitted the home island to continue to be governed according to customary political understandings. Still, the underlying issues remained unresolved.

By 1983, the time of my most recent visit to the Solomons, substantial changes had occurred. The Solomon Islands were now an independent nation. Plantation labourers were routinely paying tax, and the issue had been carried to the home island. The Eastern Outer Islands, now known as Temotu Province, and the national government, were pressuring Tikopians and their closely related neighbours on Anuta to participate in the larger political units; to vote in elections; to stand for office; and to pay their tax. While the chiefs had now conceded on these issues for their subjects living overseas, they remained

adamant, however, about maintaining the autonomy of their home communities.

These events underscore the questions raised by Firth in 1969. What is the basis and extent of continuing chiefly authority, both at home and abroad? Why are the chiefs determined to maintain a high degree of local autonomy? Conversely, why is the central government so concerned about incorporating such small, remote communities as Tikopia and Anuta into the larger polities? And what are the prospects for the resolution of these differences? In this article I discuss these issues in the light of the events that have transpired over the past decade and a half, and particularly since independence in 1978.

The observations presented here are based on fourteen months of fieldwork with Anutans in 1972–73, mostly on Anuta Island, and four months' research with Anutans in the Honiara area in 1983. Anuta is Tikopia's nearest neighbour and is closely related culturally, linguistically, and through ties of kinship. Each community has its own leaders, its own problems and experiences and its own somewhat distinct perspective. What is said about one, therefore, cannot always be assumed to apply equally to the other. Nonetheless, the relationship between Anutans and the government has closely paralleled that of the Tikopians; my observations on Anuta thus bear direct implications for Tikopia as well, and for many purposes, the two islands may be considered together as a single unit.

Chiefly authority

Traditionally, Tikopia's chiefs were held to be infused with awesome mana by pagan deities and served as high priests of the community, mediating between their subjects and the spirit world. With conversion to Christianity, which took place in several stages over the first half of this century (see Firth 1970), the chiefs lost their spiritual power. They continue, however, to command respect in secular affairs.

Firth attributes this continuing preeminence to several factors. Tikopian tradition holds all land on the island to be ultimately owned by the chiefs and worked by others at the chiefs' discretion. As Tikopians have had to deal increasingly with outsiders, the chiefs have served as spokesmen for the community, and it is through them that relations with the outside world are conducted. Simultaneously, Tikopians' increasing awareness of their distinctive language, customs and traditions, in contrast with the other peoples of the Solomons, has underscored the chiefs' importance as Durkheimian collective representations. And finally, internal economic crises that in the past have sometimes undermined chiefly authority (see particularly Firth 1959) have not been a factor in over three decades.

The situation on Anuta in many ways is similar. Anutans rarely speak of their land as being 'owned' by the chiefs, but it is clear that the chiefs have decision-making power with regard to land and what is done with it. Chiefs are said to be directly descended from the most powerful deities, from whom they derive their potent mana. Nor, in the Anutan case, has conversion compromised their spiritual power; God has merely replaced the pagan deities as the source of

chiefly mana. As I have documented elsewhere (Feinberg 1979; 1980a), Anutans are convinced that failure to respect a chief brings terrible disaster. On the other hand, chiefs are expected to employ their mana to promote the welfare of the island and protect those people who lack the mana to care adequately for themselves (on this point, see particularly Feinberg 1978). Firth's characterisation of the Tikopian chiefs as community spokesmen and collective representations applies equally to Anuta.

In 1972, at the time of my first visit to Anuta, the chiefs were firmly in command. Occasionally, people might grumble at a particular decision, but open opposition was extremely rare. In those few cases of serious opposition, illness quickly struck the upstarts, and the chiefs' power was confirmed. Yet, despite the system of beliefs, sanctions and symbols supporting chiefly authority, by 1983, the chiefs' leadership of the community and the very institution of the chieftainship were under serious attack. The present crisis seems to have developed during the middle 1970's, when several domestic units (*patongia*) began to sell taro, betel, tobacco and bananas to others which were short of food. This was not only a glaring departure from traditional behaviour, but it directly contradicted the principle of *aropa* (positive affect as demonstrated through material assistance and support) and kinship, underlying proper action in the old system.

Individuals are deeply divided within themselves as well as against each other. People with whom I spoke unanimously expressed commitment to ancient custom. But all simultaneously desired what they perceived as the benefits of modernity. They recognise that these goals are largely incompatible, and different people have resolved the dilemma in different ways. But even the most forward-looking of Anutans are concerned about the loss of custom, while even the most ardent traditionalists value European commodities and Western education.

The senior chief for years has seen himself as responsible for the island's wellbeing and has emphasised the collective character of the community. During a minor famine in 1972, he ordered the entire population to act as a single domestic unit, preparing and consuming food together. His reason was that the entire population was a family and it would not be right for some members to eat while others starved. Sale of food challenged the very basis of this action, and the chief forbade the practice. From the viewpoint of those engaged in the practice, it was an integral part of a new orientation involving commitment to upward mobility in European terms. It provided an opportunity to accrue cash on Anuta and was thus an important part of a strategy for obtaining luxury and prestige goods. Moreover, the first two 'houses' (*pare*) to start selling food had children in school overseas whom they felt obliged to support financially. Thus, rather than these 'houses' acceding to the chief's instructions and desisting from the sale of food, the practice spread. Furthermore, the *maru*—men of the two leading *kainanga* 'clans'—on whom the chief depended for enforcement of his orders—were among the leaders of the opposition.¹

This state of affairs continued for a few years, sometimes smouldering and sometimes breaking out in open conflagration. Meanwhile, the chief continued exercising moral leadership as catechist, leading services and preaching in one of

the island's two churches. Then, about 1979 or 1980, the *maru* began putting pressure on the chief to step down as catechist. Informants deny a connexion between this and the issue of selling food. The *maru*, they say, simply felt that it was wrong for one man to serve simultaneously as both chief and catechist. The possibility that his opponents wanted to remove from the chief one of his main bases of power and authority, however, cannot be easily dismissed. At first, the chief refused to step down, believing himself to have been personally instructed by Dr C. E. Fox to take responsibility for the wellbeing of Anuta's church and custom. The late Dr Fox was a prominent Anglican missionary who spent most of his long life in the Solomon Islands. He was widely respected and admired for his dedication, courage and sincere commitment to the welfare of the people among whom he, for decades, made his home. And since his recent death, he has been elevated in many minds almost to a demigod. According to Pu Teukumarae, the youngest brother of Anuta's senior chief, the *ariki* 'chief' had been visited several times by 'The Doctor'. On the first two occasions, it is alleged that his arrival was witnessed by a large group of Anutans as he walked across the ocean. On the other occasions, Fox came only to the chief. He spoke to the chief, and when the latter started to reply, the 'Doctor' motioned for him to remain silent in order not to attract other people's attention. The essence of his message was that the church and Anutan custom are of a kind. 'The church is first, and custom follows behind on the same path'.

When the *maru* remained adamant that one person could not simultaneously be catechist and chief, the latter announced that he would sooner give up his position as *ariki* than abandon his role in the church. The other catechists asked him for permission to discuss the issue at a *pono*—a general assembly of the island's population. But he told them that he could not give permission because he was no longer chief. Rather, they should go to the Arika Tepuko—the junior chief. The junior *ariki* replied, however, that he was chief by virtue of his relationship with his senior colleague. 'I only sit at the bottom of the floor mat (*tapakau*); he sits at the top. So ask him. If he is not a chief, neither am I'. An impasse had been reached.

The chief eventually acceded to the *maru*'s demand and stepped down not only from his post as catechist, but also as leader of the church auxiliary—the Companions of the Brotherhood of Melanesia. But tension continued to build up. The *ariki* left the village and built himself a house atop the hill, where he dwelt by himself for a month. During this period, the chief always carried a small adze when he went out to walk about the island. Word spread that he planned to massacre his subjects some night while they slept; in truth, the chief refused to go about unarmed because he feared for his own life. The chief's dramatic action forced people to look at just how serious the situation had become; and in an effort to cool tempers, he finally returned to his village residence. Around this time, Pu Teukumarae, the *ariki*'s youngest brother, came to Anuta for a visit.

Pu Teuku(marae), known to non-Anutans as Frank Kataina, has been prominent for many years in the national police force. During this time, he has served in such posts as Superintendent of Training for the police and as chief government prosecutor for criminal cases. Although the youngest of his sibling set, he

is the most worldly. He is a man of poise, self-confidence and admirable leadership qualities. His responsibilities provide him little chance to return home, but he is kept abreast of developments by Anutans constantly passing through Honiara; and every three years, he is provided with a three-month leave so that he can visit his kin on Anuta. The moment Pu Teuku walked ashore, he told me, he could feel the tension without being told. In church, he felt as if he were attending a 'club' rather than a service. After church, another brother, Pu Teaokena, told him in detail what had been going on.

Pu Teuku called the *maru* together to discuss the island's problems. Particularly on the question of selling food, he took the same position as the chief. An argument ensued, and the chiefs had to disband the meeting before it turned violent. A general assembly was called, and the catechists addressed the crowd. Pu Tereata, in particular, gave a moving speech, which Nau Teukumarae (Frank's wife) related to me. Pu Tereata said, pointing to the *Patu o Mango* ('Shark Rock', a boulder some distance from shore):

See that rock out there. It's out by itself in the ocean. We have no way to get there. I want you all to take buckets of sand from the beach and build a bridge.

When I was young, I remember the island as being green and beautiful. Now that I'm an adult, it makes me very sad to see everything brown and yellow. It hasn't rained for two years. The crops are dying.

Why is this? It is because certain people have abandoned the chief. The chief is like that rock out there. If you want this island to become green again, you must build a bridge and renew your relationship, giving the chief appropriate respect and obedience.

At this time, Nau Teuku had a disturbing dream. It was during the Easter celebration. Nau Teuku dreamed that she was with her husband on Anuta (as indeed she was). People were getting ready for a feast in the Pare Rau Niu 'Coconut Leaf Shade House' and went up to Maunga (the hill) to get banana leaves. Each one carried a pile of leaves, but there was one left over. She thought that she would carry the extra pile herself and bent down to pick it up. When she picked up the leaves, she found that they were covering a hole. She looked in the hole and saw a giant snake and centipede. She turned to Pu Teuku and said, 'I thought you told me that there aren't any snakes or poisonous insects on Anuta',² to which he replied, 'That's right. There aren't'. She said, 'You're a liar! Come and look in this hole'. After arguing for awhile, Pu Teuku went to look in the hole. She said, 'Look! Isn't that a snake?' The two animals started climbing out. Pu Teuku dropped his bush knife and ran away. Nau Teuku picked up the knife and killed the two animals. She put them back down in the hole and put the cover on. At that point, her husband rolled over in his sleep, hit her, and she woke up. The next morning, they asked the chief's wife to tell the chief the story and request an interpretation. He refused. Mataki (the chief's son) implored him, but he still refused. So Pu Teuku told his wife to go and ask the chief herself. The *ariki* told her that he would not give a full interpretation, but he said that as soon as the Easter celebration was over, there would be a time of great sadness.

On Easter Sunday, a woman named Nau Pourou gave birth to a son. The following week, the celebration ended. As people began walking back to

Rotoapi village from the dance ground, they heard wailing from the woman's house. The moment that the dancing stopped, Nau Pourou's son died. Within a week, an eighteen-year-old youth, Alfred Tauvaka, fell to his death from the cliff at the 'back' of the island while climbing down to hunt for shells. Nau Tanukope, a sixty-year-old woman, died. There was great sickness on the island. Everyone but Pu Teuku was incapacitated with influenza and conjunctivitis. The chief's leg was paralysed, so that he could not walk to treat the sick; the infirm had to be carried to the chief, who got up from his sick bed to treat them in the traditional manner—by the 'laying on of hands'. Pu Teuku tried his best to take care of the sick, but he could not prepare enough food single-handedly. At the same time, crops were failing. There was no taro, papaya or banana. People had to get by eating breadfruit, manioc, and *ma* (fermented starchy vegetables stored in underground pits for just such emergencies).

These events were uniformly interpreted as resulting from the social conflicts on the island, and people decided that their entire community would be in jeopardy if the situation were to continue. Since that time, both sides have worked to cool tempers and reestablish overt peace. But this has been accomplished by people talking less about the sources of tension—not by resolving them. Families that had been selling food desisted or at least kept their actions hidden, but they still maintained that their actions were appropriate under the circumstances. And the chief refrained from vocal opposition to what he perceived as incorrect behaviour, but he registered his protest by refusing to attend church services on Sundays. He could not bear to suffer through what he saw as misrendering of scripture, and other catechists' interpretations, he found universally wanting.

Looking to the future, there is little prospect for the crisis to resolve itself. By June of 1984, word from Anuta was that tempers had cooled down. People were again accepting the two chiefs' authority. And the senior chief appeared to be on the verge of reinstatement as catechist. But the underlying contradictions that led to the initial breakdown of authority remain and, if anything, are likely to intensify as time passes. Furthermore, after two years of marriage, the chief's son and daughter-in-law (Ta Parikitonga) have yet to conceive a child. Divorce and polygyny are unacceptable alternatives to present-day Anutans. And if Ta Parikitonga do not produce a son, the chieftainship within two generations will face a fundamental—perhaps insurmountable—structural challenge.

Extraterritoriality

Ironically, there is less overt opposition to the chiefs among Anutans living overseas than on Anuta. As was the case a decade ago, there are Anutan enclaves in the Honiara area on Guadalcanal and in the Russell Islands. These people are, inevitably, tied into the market economy—indeed, their primary motivation for emigration is to find wage employment or to acquire training to qualify them for such employment—and there are problems reconciling commodity exchange and dependence on money with traditional emphasis on *aropa* and kinship. Yet, at least verbally, Anutans overseas acknowledge the two chiefs' authority.

The structure of authority, in principle, is clear. The senior chief is represented by his brother, who is also a leading officer in the national Police Force. This man has one or two close confidants with whom he consults on matters of major importance; but when he speaks, it is with the chiefs' authority. Tikopia is similarly represented by the Commissioner of Police, who also is, in the traditional political system, a member of a leading 'house' (*paito*) in Tikopia's leading *kainanga* 'clan'. On matters concerning the two islands jointly, the two officers consult and the commissioner speaks for the combined community.

The major difficulty with this structure is not ambiguity or lack of legitimacy. Rather, it originates with the physical dispersal of the population and the fact that the leaders simply cannot be everywhere at once. Coupled with this, the leaders have no enforcement powers; they must depend on moral suasion and their subordinates' cooperation to implement any decisions. Thus, for the most part, their pronouncements may be ignored with impunity. The one exception to this generalisation occurs in cases where a breach of custom also involves a violation of national law. Thus, when a man used funds belonging to a relative for his own bridewealth payment, the Tikopian and Anutan leaders presented him with the choice of repaying the relative or having the matter turned over to the courts. The accused decided on the former option.

In the Russell Islands, Anutans live interspersed with Tikopians in Levers Company labour lines and are formally subject to company discipline as well as national and Central Province laws. In principle, they are also bound to follow the directives of the Tikopian and Anutan chiefs through their appointed representatives. Those representatives, however, live in Honiara and have little direct contact with the Russell Islands. Every month or two, a few people pass through Honiara on their way to the Russells, and messages are thus transmitted. But communication is erratic, monitoring difficult, and enforcement potential extremely limited.

Relations with external governmental bodies

To date, the people of Anuta have refused to join external governmental bodies. This has been a long-standing issue, going back to the days of the British Protectorate. In contrast, however, with the Tikopian situation in the 1960's, which Firth (1969: 374) described as a crisis of confidence and communication rather than of authority, the current Anutan refusal of participation is precisely a crisis of authority. While the Tikopians of the 1960's did not question the ultimate sovereignty of the British administration, but only their own position within the structure defined by that administration, the Anutans question whether they are (or ought to be) part of the independent Solomon Islands.³ While in 1966, 'the benefits to be derived from local council rates were almost completely unrealised by the Tikopia, especially those on the island' (Firth 1969: 374), the Anutans are well aware of the services provided by the government and the need for an ongoing source of revenue if those services are to continue. In their estimation, however, the costs of political association with the Solomons outweigh the benefits of the services provided.

When asked why they refuse participation in governmental bodies, the first issue Anutans cite is tax. They say, very simply, that they do not have any source of income on the island, and therefore, they lack the money to pay tax. In the past the government has reportedly offered to reduce Anutan taxes in light of their limited resources. But even this conciliatory gesture has met a negative response. The senior chief has felt that if Anutans pay less tax than people of other islands, it will be a source of inter-island animosity and conflict. Anutans have expressed the fear, furthermore, that the offer is a Machiavellian ploy. Once they have committed themselves to the government, they believe that taxes will be raised and anyone unable to pay will be incarcerated.

The latter concern reflects a deep-seated distrust of the government. This distrust is based in part on the Anutans' sense of differentness and partly on direct experience. As to the former, Anutans have a strong sense of their identity as Polynesians. They see themselves as fundamentally similar in culture, language, and essential nature to the peoples of the 'Polynesian Triangle', from whom they believe themselves to be descended. Conversely, they consider themselves very different from the Melanesians who constitute the vast majority of Solomon Islanders, make up the bulk of government officials, and whose interests Anutans believe to be represented by the government. Most Anutans do not think of themselves as Solomon Islanders and speak of voyages to Honiara or the Russells as 'going to the Solomons'. Some even have expressed the wish to be part of a different nation. Although in some contexts, they speak of themselves as *Penua Uri* 'Black Islands, i.e., Melanesians', in most contexts, they distinguish between Melanesians and themselves, whom they identify as *Kiri Toto* 'Red Skin' (see Feinberg 1980b; 1982).

Anutans' perceptions of the government as made up of people who are different from them and do not share their aspirations or concerns are confirmed by their experience. They hold the government responsible, at least in part, for the scarcity of shipping and low priority of their island on shipping schedules. They say that the government has refused assistance in the aftermath of recent storms which decimated crops. And, in general, they feel that if they did pay tax, the benefits would go to other islands of the province. Anutans distinguish between the provincial and central government. They see the latter as relatively benign. They recognise it as providing a buffer between themselves and the province. And via the police, Anutans have even worked for the national government. One Anutan considers himself to be a personal friend of former Prime Minister Mamaloni. Yet, in principle, the same concerns exist regarding the central government as the province.

It is well to ask how uniformly the Anutans share these views. As was true of Tikopians in the middle 1960's, my Anutan informants in 1983 were unanimous in their stated opinion that whether or not to join the larger polity was a decision for the chiefs. Particularly on Anuta, however, there is also strong support for the chiefs' position. The unsolicited expressions of suspicion and fervent animosity towards governmental bodies were truly striking. Among Anutans overseas, the same underlying feelings were expressed, but these were sometimes tempered by a recognition that the government existed as a power to be reckoned with, and that in the long run, the Anutan chiefs would have to come

to terms with the authorities in Honiara and Temotu Province. Here it must be said that the senior chief is one of the most open of Anutans to the possibility of eventual rapprochement with the government. He is suspicious of the government and resents what he perceives as an attack on custom. But in his view, with time, the government's maturity and self-confidence may grow, paving the way for co-operation and participation.

From the government's viewpoint, the situation of course looks quite different. For years, authorities in Honiara have been working to create a sense of national unity in the face of sometimes overwhelming tendencies towards fragmentation. Since independence, the Solomons have seen a major separatist movement in the Western Province (see Premdas *et al.* 1984). Many Kwaio in the mountains of central Malaita have refused to pay tax or participate in governmental bodies (Keesing 1982). The old Malaita District of colonial times has remained a single unit, but the old Eastern, Central and Western Districts have divided into two provinces apiece. There is sentiment on Choiseul to make that island into a separate province. And throughout the country, local areas are demanding more autonomy. As seen from Honiara, and especially from Lata (Temotu's provincial capital), Anutans (and Tikopians) have been taking unfair advantage of a difficult situation. Temotu is the smallest in population, most remote, and poorest of the provinces. The refusal of Anuta and Tikopia to participate in the provincial government destroys the unity that might help exact greater attention, recognition and expenditure of national resources by the central government. The government expends a significant amount of its limited resources to provide shipping, medical service, education and radio contact for Anuta. And government officials resent the Anutans' refusal to shoulder even a portion of the costs through the payment of taxes. There are stories, furthermore, of untapped natural resources either on Anuta or in the ocean just offshore, and the province would like to establish undisputed sovereignty over Anuta before exploration or exploitation of any resources takes place.

Offshore oil: a sticky business

Over the past decade, the strong possibility has emerged that there may be significant petroleum deposits under the seabed just off Anuta. If these reports prove accurate, the entire relationship between Anuta and the remainder of the country is likely to be radically altered. Rumours of a possible oil source near Anuta have been about since the early 1970's. Some Anutans claim to have seen vast oil slicks which occasionally kill fish in large numbers and foul the air with an unpleasant odour. Oceanographers have determined that the geological formations and marine life in the area suggest a likelihood of oil deposits. Anutans claim that they have been approached on a number of occasions by foreign nationals requesting permission to extract petroleum. I was told in conversations with officials at the highest levels of national and provincial government that authorities are well aware of these stories and are taking them very seriously. No drilling has yet occurred as the government is hoping to

resolve the outstanding political and contractual issues between itself and the Anutans before moving forth on technical matters surrounding extraction. But officials are proceeding on the assumption that the Anutan seabed may one day be a key financial resource for the nation.

As might be expected, Anutans are intensely concerned about the possibility that they may soon have an oil well in their 'back yard'. Wherever I went, the first questions I would be asked by Anutans I met were: What did I think of the government? Should the oil be extracted? And, if so, by whom? The second of these questions is perhaps the most decisive for Anuta's future, and islanders are deeply ambivalent on the issue. They envision an immense cash income if the oil is really there and is exploited. Such an income would provide for all their material wants and ensure material security for themselves, their children and descendants. On the other hand, they recognise that their society would be drastically altered by an influx of non-Anutans, by the likelihood of ecological damage, and by infusion of money to replace what is still essentially a subsistence economy. Some of the more sophisticated Anutans recognise the complexity of laws governing control, ownership and benefits accruing from mineral resources; they see a danger of losing their oil, their island, and their customs and traditions while most of the financial benefit might go to an oil company and the national and provincial governments. Some Anutans maintain an idealised vision of the United States and feel that their interests could be guaranteed by having an American company take charge of exploitation; a very few have some appreciation that major oil companies are multinational corporations, and that in any business venture, contractual language and enforcement potential are likely to be more important than the country of the company's home office.

The issue is further complicated by the unsettled nature of Anuta's relationship with governmental authorities. Positions on both sides have gone through periods of hardening and softening. At the time of my investigation, it was expected that a new 'Provincial Powers Act' would soon be implemented, devolving control of such crucial services as shipping to provincial governments. And I was told by one high ranking public servant that if the Anutans failed to join the province by the time the act went into force, the province intended to begin withholding services in order to force compliance. The effect of such threats on Anutans has been to confirm their worst suspicions regarding governmental bodies. Consequently, they have only strengthened their resolve. Some suggest that they are prepared, if necessary, to get by without government services even if this should mean total isolation from the outside world and a return to complete self-reliance. But they are also contemplating ways in which to forestall this eventuality. Shipping, by consensus, is the most important governmental service. Consequently, a plan has been suggested to purchase a ship and declare independence!

There are several versions of this plan. The one given widest currency is attributed to Tikopia's Ariki Tafua, the second ranking chief of that island. His proposal is to levy an assessment on every Tikopian and Anutan family on the two islands plus the settlements in Vanikoro, Makira, Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands. With a total of four thousand people, a *per capita* contribution of

only a few dollars should be sufficient for a downpayment on a seaworthy craft. An alternative favoured by a number of Anutans, including the senior chief, is for their island to proceed alone. They recognise that if Anuta is to rely on its own resources, it will be much harder to acquire a suitable ship. If, however, the vessel were to double as a commercial fishing boat, operated collectively, with all income going to pay off the ship rather than individual salaries, some Anutans feel that they could handle the venture without Tikopian input.

Any of these variants, at first blush, looks preposterous. If Anutans lack the resources to pay an \$8-a-year head tax, how can they contemplate purchasing a ship? Even if they could obtain a vessel, where would they obtain the resources and skilled personnel to operate and maintain it? They do not have, nor is there any prospect of obtaining the facilities for servicing a ship at either Tikopia or Anuta; thus, for major repairs, it would have to be serviced at a shipyard overseas. The most obvious port is Tulagi, where major maintenance is performed for Solomons government ships; but it seems unlikely that the Solomons would make their resources available to Tikopia and Anuta if secession were seriously pursued. Alternative ports might be located in Vanuatu or Papua New Guinea, but both of these nations have recently had to contend with their own secessionist movements and cannot be expected to look kindly on a successful independence movement in a neighbouring state. One must therefore expect at least the possibility that these countries would deny an independent Anuta access to their ports. Such political considerations might be less pressing in interaction with New Zealand, any of the Pacific Rim countries, or the Polynesian nations; but here the physical distances involved might be prohibitive. Similar obstacles would confront any commercial fishing venture initiated by an independent Anuta, which would have to find a market for its catch.

Were these logistical problems not insurmountable, it is still most unlikely that the Solomon Islands government would allow Anuta (with or without Tikopia) to secede and establish itself as an independent nation. Too many people from these islands are too deeply involved in too many facets of national life. Besides, a successful independence movement even in a small, remote and virtually insignificant island would encourage the already problematic centrifugal tendencies in existence all around the country. And even if the Honiara government did not raise objections, it is difficult to imagine an island just a half mile in diameter, with a population of fewer than three hundred people, no permanent houses, no plumbing or electricity, and no system of posts and telecommunications, operating as an independent nation. Even with Tikopia added in, prospects for nationhood are but marginally improved. And all of these logistical difficulties are further complicated by Anutan dependence on the Solomons for schooling, jobs and income, not to mention a demographic safety valve for an expanding population.

It would seem, then, that Anuta simply lacks the resources—logistic, human, and environmental—to establish itself as an independent nation. Should oil be found and Anutans derive an equitable share of the proceeds, however, suddenly the unthinkable becomes thinkable. One need only look at Nauru to realise that, its many problems notwithstanding, a tiny, isolated island with a

sufficiently lucrative resource can survive as a nation-state. But while the possibility of oil might make the Kingdom (or Republic?) of Anuta a more viable eventuality, it provides the government with a still greater incentive to forestall Anuta's separation. According to national law, all mineral resources in the Solomons are owned by the central government. Landowners, which include islanders situated near offshore mineral deposits, expect benefits in compensation, royalties and equity; but this is a matter for negotiation with the government. I was assured by both high-level government officials and the general secretary of the National Union of Workers that landowners' rights are well protected under Solomon Island law, but statutory support for such a statement is equivocal.⁴ In a dispute between the government and local landowners, public sympathy for the landowners' position is normally such as to ensure fair treatment by any politically astute leader. But if Anutans remain adamant in their refusal to join the government, they may find themselves hard pressed to mobilise external public opinion in support of their cause. And if the matter were to come down to a direct show of force between the government and the Anutans, the latter would lack the wherewithal to offer any real resistance. Meanwhile, from the government's perspective, a small nation, fraught with economic difficulties, can hardly be expected to give up a major source of revenue without a struggle.

Conclusion

The eventual outcome of the present tensions between Anuta and external governmental bodies will depend on a variety of imponderables, and political forecasting is, under the best of circumstances, a risky proposition. Yet, a few points seem quite clear. If the rumoured oil is indeed present, its exploitation is inevitable, and Anutans will be faced with drastic changes in a very short period of time. Assuming a fair rate of compensation, Anutans will enjoy prodigious monetary wealth. This will provide access to commodities on a scale far surpassing anything that they or their neighbours have ever experienced, but it will also pose problems of decision-making, particularly regarding long-term investments and priorities. This, in turn, will devalue traditional bases of authority and reward Western education in a manner unprecedented in Anutan history. Expatriates, including lawyers, business people, clerical workers and technicians will become part of Anutans' daily lives. As there is no other habitable land within seventy miles, many of these people will have to spend greater or lesser amounts of time living on Anuta, thereby altering the physical and social landscape. New-found monetary affluence, combined with the likelihood of damage to both terrestrial and marine environments will lead to dislocation if not destruction of the subsistence economy, with all the obvious implications for internal political and social structure.

If the reports of oil prove erroneous, the government might leave Anuta to itself long enough to enable the Anutans to adjust to the new situation on their own. But change they will. Firth's comment that the Tikopians of the 1960's, 'By accepting and incorporating the consumption standards of the new social

system . . . have compromised themselves with it, and cannot withdraw' (1969: 375) applies with even greater force to the Anutans of the 1980's. Conceivably, Anutans could survive for a short time without shipping, medical supplies, or other articles of European manufacture. But they could not do so comfortably for an extended period. They are dependent upon imports (metal tools, nylon fishing line, etc.) even for subsistence activities. Were all Anutans to return to the home island, Anuta would be at or near its carrying capacity, and any storm or drought would spell disaster. Besides, many people are deeply involved in educational or economic activities overseas. These commitments are virtually all in the Solomons, and it is unlikely that many of these people would voluntarily extricate themselves from those commitments. In the meantime, traditional custom, featuring kinship, *aropa*, and hereditary chiefly leadership is inexorably being eroded by exposure to Western ideas and the market economy.

Yet, Anutans are proud, determined people who cherish their sovereignty. They value custom, and despite recent attacks upon the chieftainship, the chiefs, with their political and spiritual power, remain the central symbol of Anuta's ancient customs. Similarly, while there may be divisions and even conflicts within the community, all Anutans seem to share a sense of commonality among themselves and distinctiveness from non-Anutans. It therefore seems safe to say that any attempt at coercion by the provincial or central government will reinforce Anutans' sense of unity and separateness. It will strengthen the Anutans' resolve to remain apart and increase their tendency to look towards their chiefs rather than the government for leadership. Anutans value the services provided by the government, but they seem quite prepared to get by without external assistance, at least in the short run, should they perceive that to be necessary. Should the government pursue a policy of patience and conciliation, Anuta (and Tikopia) will inevitably become increasingly involved in the life of the province and the nation. If not, the situation can only grow more tense, precluding any possibility of reconciliation in the foreseeable future.

As this account suggests, Anuta then epitomises the dilemma faced by small communities in newly independent nation states. Among the most important problems for a newly independent nation is how to create a sense of national identity and to integrate divergent linguistic, cultural, and social groups into a smoothly ordered economic and political unit. But such a programme inevitably poses problems for previously distinct communities as they struggle to maintain their values, symbols, social structure and a degree of autonomy while being transformed into components of a nation state. In this sense, the 'Anuta problem' typifies a scene repeatedly performed among emerging nations of the world. An understanding of the elements involved in the Anutan case may therefore yield insights into problems of political 'development' and 'nation building' far beyond the shores of the Pacific.

NOTES

Research on which this article is based was conducted between September 1983 and January 1984 with Anutans in the Honiara area on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. Because of tensions between

Anuta and the government of Temotu Province, I was not permitted to conduct systematic on-site investigations either on Anuta or in the Russell Islands; and information on developments in these two locales had to be gleaned from Anutans living in or passing through Honiara. In addition, my family and I were permitted to make brief social visits to Anuta and the Russells. These visits proved to be emotional and personal high points of our trip, and we are deeply appreciative of the understanding and concern of the many officials who helped make the visits possible. Among those to whom I am particularly indebted for assistance during the period of research in the Solomons are Research Officer Henry Isa and his associates at the Ministry of Education, Training, and Cultural Affairs; Nathaniel Waena, Permanent Secretary for Makira and Temotu Provinces; Fred Soaki, Commissioner of Police; Francis Saemala and Senda Fifi'i of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Wilson Ifunaoa, Secretary for Cabinet and Public Service; Lawrence Foa'na'ota, Director of the National Museum; Frank Katana, Superintendent of the Solomon Islands Police Training School; and John Roughan, technical advisor to the Solomon Islands Development Trust.

¹ It must be emphasised that the English glosses used in this article, while convenient, are very approximate. For a proper discussion of Anutan cultural categories, the reader is referred to my earlier writings, particularly Feinberg 1978; 1979; 1981a; 1981b.

² Nau Teuku was a non-Anutan Solomon Islander of Tuvaluan ancestry. This was her first visit to Anuta. She related her experience to me in English; 'insects' was her word. In fact, Anuta does have centipedes (*morokau*), but no snakes.

³ The salient contrast, of course, may well be in the government in power during the 1980's as opposed to the 1960's rather than the identity of the local communities. My impression is that Tikopians have the same reservations about the current Solomon Islands government as do the Anutans.

⁴ The Petroleum Production Ordinance of 31 December 1969 vests ownership of all petroleum resources in the British queen, who is to be represented in such matters by the Western Pacific High Commissioner. To my knowledge, this ordinance has not been revised since independence, although presumably the Solomons' governor-general rather than the no longer existent high commissioner would represent the crown. The act appears to provide for compensation of landowners (B.S.I.P. 1969: 3625), but authority to determine 'what would be fair and reasonable between a willing grantor and a willing grantee' (p. 3625) rests with the queen's representative. Compensation for landowners is also guaranteed in the 1978 Constitution. I have found no explicit statutory reference, however, to undersea resources. The common understanding among national leaders is that any resources within a certain radius of any island will belong to the provincial government, which must negotiate a mutually acceptable compensation agreement with local landowners. Again, I could find no such provision in the Provincial Governance Act.

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