ON CALLING OTHER PEOPLE NAMES: A HISTORICAL NOTE ON 'MARCHING RULE' IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

In the years immediately following the end of the Second World War, the British Protectorate Government of the Solomon Islands reported the activities of a 'quasi nationalist' movement (*Annual Reports* 1948:26). Called 'Marching Rule' by the Administration, these activities have been treated in all general works dealing with Melanesian 'cargo cults', as an interesting example of a people's developing political response (Worsley 1957, Jarvie 1964, Cochrane 1970, Wilson 1973). The transition, from responses based upon traditional religious assumptions to those of a supposedly more modern, pragmatic and secular kind, has been noted by all the authors; Wilson (1973) calls the process a 'rational mutation'.

But the events in the Solomons which have been gathered together under this name (and other names from which 'Marching' is supposed to have derived) remain poorly documented. Reports that some Solomon Islanders awaited the ancestors and deliveries of wealth during this period have ensured their post-war activities a place in the 'cargo cult' literature. Some authors, notably Worsley and Keesing,have argued that such reports have given too much emphasis to the millenarian aspects of the Solomon Islanders'activities and argue instead that these activities are more properly regarded as anti-colonial politics. The evidence that this is so rests upon an assumption that what has been called 'Marching Rule' was an organised, potentially nationalist, movement. While undoubtedly there were 'anti-

colonial' activities in the Solomons (as indeed anywhere else in the colonial world), the historical record, as far as it is presently known, does not justify the assumption. The evidence for the existence of a 'Solomon Islands Nationalism', quasi, embryonic or otherwise,remains unconvincing. An examination of the term itself may be helpful.

The name 'Marching Rule', with which this note is principally concerned, was regarded quite early on as something of a misnomer. Belshaw (1950) noted that 'Marching' was only one of several Anglicizations, used by Europeans to mistranslate an indigenous term. Other terms included 'Mercy', 'Marxian' and the name of a sorcerer held responsible for the deaths of two officers of the Administration in 1927 (*ibid.*: 127).[1] According to Belshaw, the indigenous term was 'Masinga'. 'I am told', he writes, 'by one who was in close contact with the movement, that the word means "brother" in the Ariari dialect' (*ibid.*: 127f).

Belshaw's authority is possibly Allen (later Sir Charles Allen), who, like Belshaw, served in the Solomon Islands Administration in the post-war period and whose own account of 'Marching Rule' was published in 1951. Certainly all subsequent authors credit Allen with making the connection between the name of the movement and the Ariari (Are'are) word for 'brother', though Allen has this word as 'Masina' (1951: 93f). Worsley, referring to 'Marching or Masinga Rule' (1970: 184), seems to have been misled by Belshaw on this point (*ibid.*: 184f). The confusion is understandable in view of the many other versions, some of which Worsey notes from contemporary sources: 'Masinga Lo, Maasina Rule, Martin Lo, Masinga Law, Marssinga Rule, Mercy Rule, Masian Rule, etc., etc.' (*ibid.*).

Keesing, in his reappraisal of the events in the Solomons during this period, confirmed Allen's earlier opinion, albeit with modified spelling. He refers throughout to 'Maasina Rule', 'The Rule of the Brotherhood',[2] noting,

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[1] This man's name was probably Basiana, who was hanged for the murder of Bell in 1928 (Keesing 1978: 261).

[2] The Are'are term has been consistently translated, since Allen, as 'Brotherhood'. Some of the English usages of this word are appropriate, others more doubtful. In the sense of meaning 'association of equals for mutual help, support, protection, or action' it should be noted that this usage is both modern and Western. Whether the Are'are word can convey this meaning is for those fluent in the language to say. On the face of it, it does seem unlikely that Are'are sibling relations were ever expressed as an association of equals as in, for example, 'The Brotherhood of Man'. One appreciates that authors have found this translation attractive; somehow 'Rule of the Sibling Relations' does not have quite the same ring to it.

> The word 'maasina' in the Are'are is the reflex ... of Kwiao 'waasina', Lau 'ngwaasina', etc. - terms that relate to the reciprocal relationship between siblings. In this respect Allen is accurate .... (1978: 49f)

Both Keesing and Allen, from their different viewpoints and experience of the Solomons, represent a considerable authority and their agreement on this point might be thought to leave little room for query. Cochrane's alternative suggestion, that the name 'marching' came orginally from an evangelical mission hymn (1970: 95), is regarded by Wilson as a 'more probable' view (1973: 469), though neither he nor Cochrane have offered any evidence for it.

There is one other opinion to be considered, which is contained in an unpublished memorandum, written by a former District Officer in the Solomons' administration, D.G. Kennedy (1967). In Kennedy's view the name 'Marching Rule' derives from 'Marchant's Rule', the name which he gave in 1944 to a pre-war experimental local-government scheme. This scheme had been organised by Kennedy there in 1940, on the authority of the then Resident Commissioner, W.S. Marchant. Keesing regards this to be '... possible, as an ultimate derivation for the term', though 'unlikely' and, in any event, not relevant. Keesing is certain that 'maasina' was used at the time by his Malaita informants (1978: 49f). But if Kennedy is right, and Keesing and Allen both allow the possibility,[3] then his evidence may well assume a greater importance than that of providing historians with a tidy footnote. As it has not been published, I should like to consider it in some detail.

Kennedy states that when he arrived in the Solomons in 1940 the Resident Commissioner, W.S. Marchant, asked him to investigate the possibility of introducing some form of local government in the Protectorate's Central District (Tulagi, Savo and Gela). Kennedy had some eighteen years' experience supervising local government in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. Marchant, who had himself been recently posted to the Solomons (he had served previously in East Africa), was concerned about the District's peoples' attitude towards the Administration, reflected, in Kennedy's words, in 'apathy' and 'passive resistance'. The new District Officer spent the following six months investigating the social, political and economic situation of the people of Gela and Savo.

By early 1941 he had arrived at a tentative outline for an experimental scheme, designed to address the problems uncovered in his investigation. These were, Kennedy reported to Marchant, that the people of Central District were hostile to the government because the sub-district headmen appointed by it, together with the peripatetic Police who visited settlements, were guilty

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[3] Sir Charles Allen has seen the Kennedy memorandum and does not disagree with Keesing's comments on it (personal communication).

of 'habitual extortion and corruption'.[4] The government-imposed poll-tax was resented, both as a tax and for the opportunities it gave to headmen who were empowered to recommend exemptions.

To remedy this situation, Kennedy proposed to dilute the authority of both headmen and Police, upon whom the Protectorate's Administration was based, by the establishment of monthly Sub-District courts comprised of elected delegates. These courts were to discuss any matter of interest and forward their resolutions to the District Officer, but more importantly they were charged with the duty of enquiring into all alleged offences, prior to Police action being taken. They had the power either to acquit an accused person, or to remand them for trial. They were also to hear all petitions for exemption from poll-tax and to recommend accordingly to the District Officer. Finally, the courts were to attempt to organise agricultural production, both to ensure a stable food supply and to provide a surplus for sale at a market which the District Officer would set up.

This was the scheme which went into operation in mid-1941. It quickly became established and by the end of that year it was functioning satisfactorily. Marchant inspected the scheme himself, and Kennedy had little doubt that the Resident Commissioner intended to extend the scheme throughout the Protectorate.

There had been a marked improvement in the Gela peoples' attitude towards the Administration and only those who had lost some or all of their former authority were obviously disgruntled. These latter were local village mission functionaries, the itinerant Police and the headmen (although two of the latter had continued to serve after the other two in the District resigned). The experiment was encouraging but it was shortly overtaken by events.

The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour in December, and by May the following year had invaded the Solomons and occupied the capital at Tulagi. The Administration, including Marchant, declined evacuation. The Resident Commissioner retired into the bush of Malaita Island with a wireless transmitter. Other officers, including Kennedy, became 'coastwatchers', remaining behind Japanese lines to report enemy movements to the Allied forces.[5] The Solomons became a major theatre of war. Kennedy notes of this period (during which he became something of a legendary

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[4] Kennedy gives some emphasis to the manner of his reporting to Marchant. 'The plan was then verbally explained to the Resident Commissioner who gave it his verbal approval for an immediate trial. It would seem that it was Marchant's intention to commit nothing of this to writing until a later stage. He did not request written reports ....' (Kennedy MS., 1967)

[5] A full account of the coastwatchers' part in the Pacific campaign may be found in Feldt (1946) which contains particular reference to Kennedy's exploits.

figure himself) that he was unable to maintain other than random communication with the Gela, or to pay the District any particular attention - something of an understatement in the circumstances. However the experimental system of courts continued to operate in the District without his supervision.

When the Japanese forces were driven out of the Central Solomons, and while Kennedy was still on active service in the Northwest, a skeletal Administration was re-established in 1943. But the officers concerned, knowing nothing of the experimental system, simply re-imposed the former system of supervision through Government-appointed headmen: the now discredited 'Police Rule'. There was an immediate popular reaction and the officers in charge, some of whom were seconded from the army and who were without Administration experience, were unable to deal with it. Marchant had to leave the Solomons an invalid in the middle of 1943, and Kennedy was sent on recuperative leave in September of that year. Since the experimental scheme had not been the subject of written reports, with Kennedy's departure no one in the Administration knew what the Gela were objecting to.

When Kennedy returned to duty in the Solomons early in 1944, the newly appointed Resident Commissioner, O.C. Noel, directed him to investigate the trouble on Gela. A local leader named Alogobu had started a movement resisting the re-imposition of 'Police Rule' and had gained widespread support. In some places Kennedy's name had been used to justify defiance of the Administration.

Kennedy sent out a personal message to each of the 1941 delegates to the experimental courts, asking them to meet him. There was an immediate response, and the largest public gathering ever recorded in the District up to that time heard him address the assembled delegates. It was on this occasion that he first used the phrase 'Marchant's Rulu', when during his speech he summarised the Gela experience.

Prior to 1941, Kennedy told them, the system in force had been referred to as 'Police Rulu', which had been followed by the new system, 'Marchant's Rulu'. This system had continued throughout the Japanese occupation, though unsupervised by the Administration. Following the Japanese withdrawal, an attempt had been made to re-establish 'Police Rulu' and this had led to the local rebellion, which he called 'Alogobu Rulu' after its leader.

He then asked the assembled delegates to express themselves as to the system they wished to have on Gela. There was unanimous support for 'Marchant's Rulu', or, in its earliest Pidgin form, 'Rulu longa Masini', as Marchant's name was rendered, according to Kennedy.

'Masini' (pronounced *mar-sini* with the stress on the first syllable), could sound sufficiently like 'marching' to English speakers lacking an adequate knowledge of Pidgin usage, especially as the Pidgin *mas* ('march') could be mistakenly associated with it. Pronunciations nearer the original ('marchin' for example) could persuade Cochrane, in good faith, that Solomon Islanders

said '... marching ... correctly in the English manner' (1970: 95). That Are'are speakers had a ready-made term of their own with which to mistranslate the rumoured name for desired change has been made evident. Nor can there be any doubt that the Gela experiment and Marchant's name were both known on Malaita. A senior NCO of the armed Constabulary had accompanied Kennedy during his investigation on Gela in 1941 when the scheme was being set up. He was one of those imprisoned after the war for his part in the so-called 'Marching Rule' activities on his home island of Malaita. The Resident Commissioner had chosen Malaita for his wartime Headquarters following the Japanese invasion.

This is not to suggest that the much-reported activities which took place on Malaita after the war had necessarily any direct reference either to the Gela experiment or to Marchant. Many Malaitans, including some involved in what they called 'Maasina Rule', may honestly insist on their ignorance of both. But if 'Marchant's Rule' became the general name for desirable change, as defined by leaders and communities to whom rumour carried it during the period, the discussion of so wide a variety of reported activities becomes rather more simple.

The name which spread, according to Allen (*op.cit.*: 93), throughout Malaita to Guadalcanal, Ulawa, San Cristival, Florida (Gela) and Ysabel Islands, cannot plausibly have been an Are'are term. If 'Masina' ('Maasina') expresses a relationship between siblings in Are'are and related languages, it cannot be seriously suggested that it means anything of the kind to members of different language-groups. Nor is it clear why traditionally independent-minded Solomon Island communities should accept an Are'are term for a relationship which their own languages were perfectly well able to express.

It seems therefore reasonable to suggest that the term which spread throughout the different islands and language-groups, was expressed in the Pidgin lingua franca. It is noteworthy that all of the names reported are either some sort of 'Rule' or, less frequently, some sort of 'Law'. *Rulu* and *Lo* are Pidgin expressions, and why even Are'are speakers would include either in a name which they had invented is a mystery. To Are'are speakers the addition of a Pidgin word to make a hybrid phrase seems both curious and unnecessary, while Pidgin speakers would not know what the phrase meant.

Kennedy's opinion alone remains plausible and matches the facts as these are known. For if Marchant's Rule meant 'Marchant's system of local Government' to the Gela, as it certainly did, and to speakers of Are'are (and related languages on Malaita), their attempts under various leaders to organise themselves in order to make their marks in the changing postwar scene, other responses by different Solomon Island communities are to be expected. That some awaited the ancestors, or the wartime Americans' return, and called their preparations by a name which usage had associated with desirable expectations, however these were defined locally, is hardly surprising. And all of these activities need have nothing more in common with each other, or

the events on either Gela or Malaita, apart from the rumour of hopeful expectancy and the name for it.

It is beyond the scope of a short note to consider the ramifications of Kennedy's view, which further research must confirm, that the name which supposedly spread from Malaita did not in fact originate there. The studies that have been made, starting with Belshaw and Allen, have been heavily biased towards the Malaita activities, and we know virtually nothing about what went on elsewhere in the Solomons during this period. But in gathering together such reports as there are, lumping them together under a name which confers upon them a suspect unity, and then attributing all of them to Malaitan influence, or even leadership, as the authors have consistently done, may well prove to have been a dubious enterprise. In any event, Kennedy's memorandum raises some doubts, and those who insist on calling other people names, in this case other people's names for them, have a duty to proceed with caution.

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