ETHNOLOGICAL TOURISM IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: AN EXPERIENCE IN APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY[1]

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Abstract: This paper relates the story of an experiment in tourism in Lau in the Solomon Islands. Whereas tourism is usually seen as a manifestation of globalization, part of a movement toward the eradication of cultural difference, the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project was conceived to achieve a different goal, the defence of a way of life threatened by Christianity and various economic and political forces.

The project involved co-operation between enterprising traditionalists in Lau, an anthropological team based in Québec and a private travel company. The intent has been to immerse tourists in the traditional culture. Although very few tourists have visited Lau, preparation for tourism has resulted in a revival of traditional ceremonial, the fostering of an entrepreneurial spirit and other changes of a socio-economic and socio-political nature. The authors suggest that such schemes cannot fully succeed if they are dependent on foreign private enterprise.

Résumé: Cet article rapporte une expérience touristique à Lau, dans les îles Salomon. En général, le tourisme est perçu comme une manifestation de la globalisation (il s'agit d'une partie d'un mouvement visant la disparition des différences culturelles). Le projet de Tourisme et de Protection de la Culture Lau a été conçu dans un but différent : la défense d'un mode de vie menacé par la Chrétienté et par diverses forces économiques et politiques. Le projet impliquait la coopération de membres traditiona-

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listes de la communauté Lau, une équipe anthropologique québécoise et une agence de voyage privée. L'idée était de plonger des touristes dans un bain de culture traditionnelle, tout en stimulant un esprit d'entreprise et d'autres changements de nature socio-économique et socio-politique. Les auteurs suggèrent que de tels projets ne peuvent pas réussir intégralement s'ils dépendent trop de l'entreprise privée étrangère.

Introduction

There is an irresistible movement toward the internationalization of tourism (Lanfant 1980, Britton 1982, Pearce 1989, among others). Indeed, very few places on this planet have remained protected from those promoters who are constantly in search of virgin territory or an island paradise until now untapped. In a world context that tends towards the elimination of differences, and insofar as travellers are assured by their agents that they can feel at home anywhere, little room is left for other initiatives such as the sort of integrated tourism that favours first and foremost respect for the host societies' cultures. It is this latter form of tourist development that the project presented here, the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project (LCPTP), represents. As the project is still recent and has not yet been fully analyzed, no final conclusions can be made. The authors propose instead a discussion of some of the cultural, political and economic consequences to the Lau community of the first stages of tourism there.

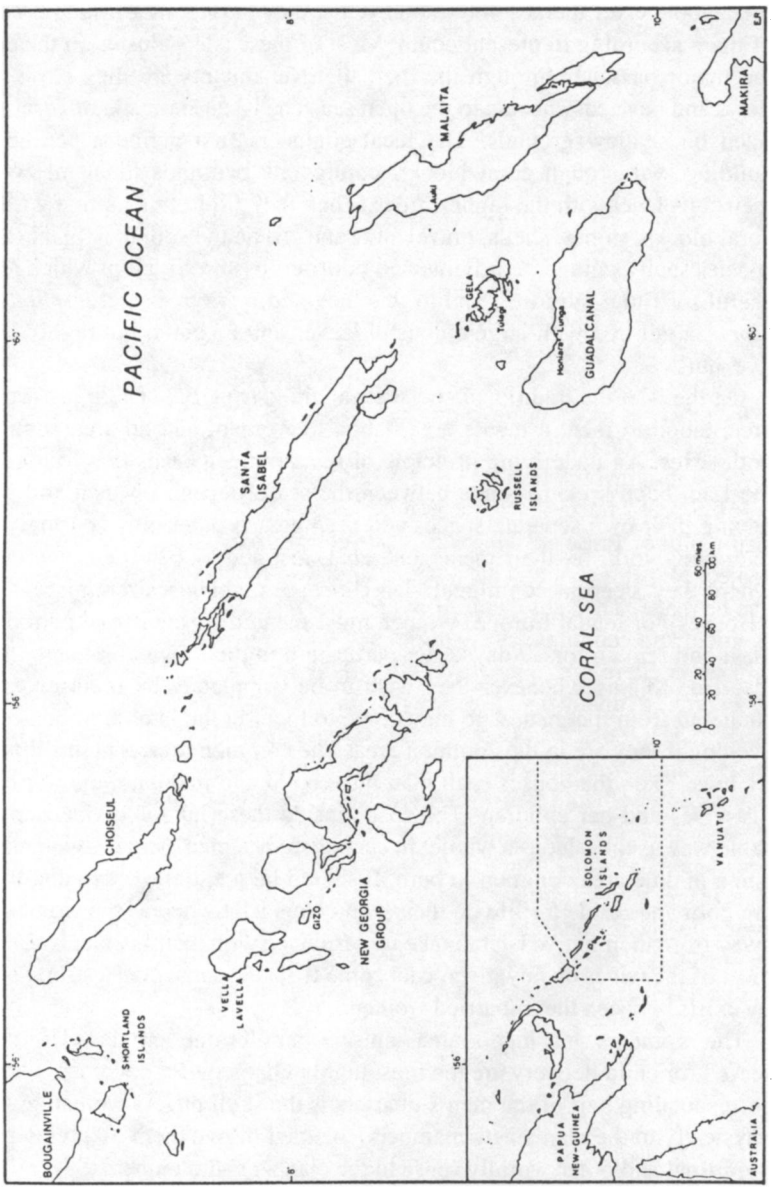
In order to understand the cultural and historical background of this project, we will first look in more detail at the Lau people and their setting in the Solomon Islands. We will review how the Lau decided to undertake a tourism project with the object of restoring and preserving their traditional culture, how they prepared for tourism and how a group of North American university anthropologists—drawing in a North American private sector tourist business along the way—took responsibility for finding, and having arrangements made for, suitable tourists. Additionally, we will describe the actual tourist visits the Lau received, and the rather far-reaching changes Lau society experienced before, during and after the foreigners' visits.

Genesis of the Project

Ethnographic Briefing[2]

The 6000 (approximately) Lau people of North Malaita, Solomon Islands, are lagoon dwellers. Their habitat is fenced in from the ocean by a reef, 27 nautical miles long, around the northwestern tip of the island of Malaita and extending south along the coast. Four major passages in the reef are navigable, and through them shoals of fish enter and leave the lagoon following tidal movements.

Map 1


PACIFIC OCEAN
CORAL SEA
BOUGAINVILLE
SHORTLAND ISLANDS
CHOISEUL
SANTA ISABEL
VELLA LAVELLA
GIZO
NEW GEORGIA GROUP
RUSSELL ISLANDS
GELA
Honiara
GUADALCANAL
MALAITA
MAKIRA
SOLOMON ISLANDS
VANUATU
PAPUA NEW-GUINEA
AUSTRALIA

The Lau have constructed the actual sites for their dwellings in the waters of the lagoon. Over the last 400 to 600 years, they have built artificial islets—63 of them according to present count. Most of these islets cluster on the edge of the major passages through the reef: their inhabitants are thus close to fish flows and have easy access to the open sea. The islets are made of coral blocks piled on shallow grounds. The local engineers first define a perimeter by building, with rough coral blocks, contiguous pyramids three meters high, their tops level with the highest tides. Then they fill in this outline with more coral blocks, stones, shells, gravel and sand. To tie the soil, they plant reedlike species such as ginger, cordyline and odoriferous shrubs, all of which are also useful for ritual purposes, and to this they add palm trees and *terminalia catappa*, a tall tree with large colourful leaves and inedible, but highly decorative, nuts.

On the islet the traditional social structure is tripartite. There is a women's area, taboo to men; a men's area, taboo to women; and an area common to both sexes. An underlying principle of this arrangement is that, according to the Lau, happy relationships between the sexes depend on men and women having their own separate spaces and seeing each other only sparingly. Thus men live, work, fix their meals, eat, chat, rest and loaf in their own quarters where they sleep in communal clan (lineage) clubhouses reminiscent of the "Houses" of feudal Europe. Women must spend their menstrual periods, give birth and remain for 30 days after parturition in their own area; here they are also free to stay whenever they wish to be completely by themselves, fully sheltered from the men, who may come to them in the late afternoon or early evening if they are in the common area. The common area contains the "family huts," i.e., the houses each man must build and maintain, one for each of his wives and her children. The space inside these huts is divided up in the same way as the islet as a whole: in each there is a men's side, a women's side and a middle area common to both. It should be mentioned here that the men are born and reside for life on their own clan's islet whereas the women move away from their native islet to take up residence with their husbands. But since most of the wives on any given islet come from the same clan a strong solidarity exists between these married women.

The women's and men's areas closely parallel one another. The huts reserved for child delivery are the most highly charged of the women's area; the corresponding part of the men's quarters is the skull pit. As women give birth physically to the clan's new members, the men mimic them by giving birth in a spiritual and other-worldly sense to the clan's dead members. Several rituals develop this parallel relationship; in these the fundamental premise is Woman, as explained in detail elsewhere (Maranda and Kongas Maranda 1970).

The most ancient ancestral islets are the largest and display the most luxurious vegetation. They measure about 100 meters in diameter. Their population

densities are very high: one islet, Sulufou, has as many as 600 people. The smallest, most recent islets are usually somewhat rectangular and their surfaces do not exceed 25 square meters; most are still completely bare of vegetation. These smaller islets—traditionally tripartite like their mother islets—are the homes of one family, i.e., a man, his wife and their children, or they may accommodate two or three brothers with their wives and children. These offshoots of ancestral islets are linked to their mother islets on which the clan's altars, sanctuaries, skull pits and other cult places are located. Thus larger clans may be scattered over several islets. All of a clan's islets, however, remain under the authority of the aristocracy of the clan's ancestral islet—high priests, priests, chiefs, lineage priests and lineage chiefs.

Change and Outside Influences

The impact of Christianity has made profound alterations to the physical and cultural habitat of the Lau. The Lau have always been very tolerant. Despite a shared world view and common social, economic and ritual structures, variations have always existed between their many clans. The major phases of the great ritual cycle are, in some cases, nine in number, in others they are eleven; dugong flesh is taboo for one clan but not for the others; some clans build very elaborate carved temples to mark the next-to-last phase of the ritual cycle whereas others build very ornate ceremonial canoes.

Missionaries encountered such variability as well as a deeply rooted mental curiosity and openness perhaps not surprising in a sea-going people who, to explore the world of their archipelago, venture quite far out to sea. Some clans received the "messengers of God" most hospitably while others showed more resistance and forbade preachers access to their islets. In the case of the former, a few chiefs and/or high priests decided to opt for the new way of life offered by the white people; as a result their ancestral islets were transformed and were, by traditional standards, defiled. The stone walls enclosing the women's and men's areas were torn down; birth sites, sanctuaries and altars were trod upon by members of the sex for whom they had been taboo; and men and women were told that they had to cover their genitals, live together in individual family huts and so on.

As for the clans more intent on the preservation of their traditional ways of life, their chiefs may have prevented missionaries from preaching on their islets, but they could not stop them from delivering their messages at the marketplaces where the Lau trade fish for vegetables with the people of the main island. Nor did clan chiefs, being fundamentally open and tolerant, object strenuously to the voluntary conversion of some of their people to Christianity. But they established a rule: converts had to move out of the ancestral grounds so as to preserve territorial purity and traditional integrity. Consequently, Christians began to build, near their former home islets, slumlike con-

glomerates of huts on piles or on irregular heaps of coral blocks, more or less loosely linked by tree trunks thrown over unfilled gaps. These Christian "suburbs" are near the ancestral islets but do not adjoin them.

The two most important islets, the first and the second ones built in the lagoon, are located in a passage called Makwanu near the midpoint of the reef's southeast and northwest ends. Together they are still the stronghold of tradition; each of them has its Christian suburb. The first one is called Funafou; the second, across the passage, is Foueda. A couple of hundred meters from Foueda is Maanaafe, a deserted islet that the Lau recently renovated to accommodate tourists, as will be explained later. In the 1960s, when Pierre Maranda and his family lived with the Lau for the first time, they settled in Foueda because it was more typical of Lau society than Funafou. Funafou was the only islet whose population was heterogeneous; it was founded by a segment of the Rere clan, the first clan to settle in the lagoon and begin building islets. Over time the Rere were joined on Funafou by six other clans and the core islet was enlarged to its present size. The skull pits of the Rere clan are still in Funafou, but the Rere chief and council of aristocrats moved early to Foueda when they built it several centuries ago.

Maranda and his family stayed with the Lau for two years, from 1966 to 1968. There were, he writes, "my wife, our first son who was two-and-a-half years old when we arrived there, and the second son whom we decided to have in the lagoon because it was so paradisiacal" (Maranda 1985). Traditional life was then overwhelmingly vital and exuberant: there were large-scale rituals as well as all sorts of diverse, more specific ones, sumptuous exogamous weddings, ceremonial gardens with high fences adorned with carvings of totemic ancestors and spirits, lagoon-wide feasts with several hundred participants, sacred and profane dances with panpipe orchestras, rattles and ornamented dancers performing for hours on end, nighttime pantomimes between two rows of singers chanting foundation myths with bamboo-stick percussion accompaniments and special multiclan fishing expeditions.

A few years later, in 1975, Maranda was told by the main Rere high priest in Foueda, whose name was Laakwai, that everything was "finished." Laakwai was referring to the fact that none of his sons would take over his duties after his death, nor would any of the sons of his colleague, the other Rere high priest, Kunua, take over from their father. Laakwai anticipated a full collapse of tradition under Christian influence. When Pierre returned 10 years later, he was informed that both high priests had just committed "ritual suicide": Laakwai had dived under a canoe in which a woman sat, thus committing a metaphysical and fatal sin by inverting the position of high and low in Oceanic semiotics; Kunua had knowingly made a ritual mistake. Both were dead within a few weeks. After that, deprived of their mediators with the Spirits, those Rere people who continued to follow tradition were forced to devise a

new type of interaction with the Forces (*mamana*). Many others, however, saw no alternative but to convert to Christianity.

The death of the two Rere high priests left the Lau unable to carry out the important rituals so fundamental to Lau life. All the feasts and ceremonies witnessed by the Marandas—even in 1976—were dealt a bad blow because the Rere clan had always been one of their most important proponents. The Rere clan had been, and still was, the strongest, most motivated and most numerous traditional clan, with well over 2000 members in some 10 confederated islets. It had also always been the most sophisticated ritually and otherwise: its elders had been the repository of enormous sums of knowledge. The two other remaining high priests, Ratu and Gagame, still alive in 1990 in their home islet Funafou, had lost their Rere counterparts and were without the partners necessary for large interclan ceremonial exchanges.

As a result, clans became isolated, islets inward-looking. Smaller islets were deserted, their people flocking to larger ones that were becoming overpopulated. True traditional exogamy, which had been the rule, became fictitious as clans divided islets into wards according to lineage lines so as to keep the pretence of marrying out while actually practising endogamy. Communications between islets and between clans, once lively, deteriorated. Centripetal and myopic trends hardened clan identities, provoking tensions and a general social fission. Large-scale rituals that would have maintained the healthy tonus of Lau social relations could no longer be held. Closure, harsh self-interest and suspicion began to take over.

Origins of the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project (LCPTP)

In 1985 and 1986, during two successive periods in the lagoon, Pierre Maranda became aware of a missionary strategy to defeat the remnants of the bastion of "paganism" in the two most important islets, Funafou and Foueda. The plan was to extend the Christian suburbs of these islets in the direction of the mother islets. It would be an easy task; only a few score meters of vacant shallow grounds would, in each case, have to be filled in with coral blocks. Once Christian soil had made physical contact with traditional land, the mother islets would be contaminated, their separate-sex wards defiled. Their populations would have to convert entirely to Christianity in order to escape physical (and metaphysical) annihilation in the form of the diseases and other disasters that inevitably overtake anyone violating the traditional laws.

Traditional men, and some Christian men as well, congregated with the anthropologist in the men's quarters of Foueda for long evening discussions of the state of affairs. Maranda also imparted to them the knowledge he had acquired in the capital of the Solomons, Honiara (Guadalcanal Island), that multinational tourist companies from Japan, Australia, the U.S.A. and Germany had approached the central government to obtain the right to implant

some kind of tourist enclave in the idyllic Lau lagoon. The government had rejected their plans because it did not like to see local resources exploited by foreign business concerns. The Lau men saw the point. They thought that if tourism were to come to them eventually, they should control it themselves instead of being subservient to outside masters from Honiara or elsewhere. The traditional men also understood that they could use tourism to consolidate their position: no white people eager to watch traditional customs would want to come to the Lau Lagoon to see Christians, of which there were plenty in their own countries. The immediate result was that the plan to extend Christian suburbs to ancestral islets was dropped, and suburbs and mother islets remained separate until 1992 when, finally, Christians prevailed and built a log bridge from the Christian suburb Roba to Foueda.[3]

Together, the Lau men and Maranda drafted a document in which the principles for the actions to come were clearly expressed. These principles were the promotion of cultural preservation and revitalization and the creation of self-organization and development, in order that readiness for the coming of strangers wanting to see unchanged Lau traditions could counterbalance the disruptive effects of missionary proselytism.

The Québécois Side of the Project

The Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project (LCPTP) tried to set down the minimal conditions for the preservation of the Lau culture, while at the same time allowing a certain type of tourist development. In the basic agreement, approved by the Solomon Islands' Ministry of Industry and Commerce, it was specified that the Lau wanted, first and foremost, their own control over the effects of tourism. Two conditions seemed essential to this goal. The first stipulated that the number of tourists be limited; the second required the tourists to be ready to learn, participate in, and respect the Lau culture, during their stay.

On the basis of these two principles, *Séjours ethnologiques Lau* (SEL) was created. In Québec, Maranda, commissioned by the Lau, engaged himself in the promotion of this "applied anthropology" project. In 1987, he formed a non-profit team composed of students and independent researchers, some experienced in the travel business and in social research on tourism, with whom he began formulating strategies to give this tourist plan a concrete form and to recruit potential tourists.

The tourist concept designed by SEL was based on five conditions, each elaborated in keeping with the reality of travel possibilities and the objective of the cultural preservation of the host society:

1. The stay will last three weeks during which two weeks are spent in the lagoon. The tourists will stay in Honiara for two days on arrival and for two days on departure.

2. The group must not be larger than 10 people since they must be accommodated, fed and paired with Natives. A larger group could potentially cause too great a disruption in the community.
3. All travellers will receive, in addition to the usual information, a basic ethnographic briefing given by Maranda.
4. The tourists will have to conduct themselves with respect for the Lau culture.
5. For their part, the Lau will build houses for the tourists, and will share the elements of the traditional culture with them.

The travellers were to agree to a package deal. Part of the money paid would cover the cost of the flight; another part would be used to pay for accommodation in the hotels in Honiara; an amount to cover a fraction of the costs involved in promotion would go to SEL; and the remainder would be given to the Lau. As far as SEL was concerned, the money obtained would go to administrative costs such as long-distance calls, photocopying and travel expenses for promotional conferences and meetings; a small percentage would go to the team members to compensate them for a fraction of the time they spent working on the project.[4] The ultimate goal of this package deal was to limit the number of administrative intermediaries, thereby enabling the Lau to benefit to the fullest extent from the money spent by the visitors.

Recruiting Potential Tourists

Several tourist agencies were invited to participate in the project; it was *Club Aventure*, a Quebec enterprise based in Montreal, that most quickly showed an interest in the project. *Club Aventure* appeals to an unconventional clientele willing to travel "off the beaten track" in small groups with a *Club Aventure* guide. By publishing an article in its magazine in September 1988 concerning its prestigious, new destination, the Solomon Islands, the agency gave us access to a number of people who would potentially be interested in the type of experience SEL was proposing. Many meetings and phone calls contributed to the establishment of a formal connection with this agency—a connection more and more sought in Canada in the area of academic research, that is, an association between the private sector and the universities. The agreement reached seemed adequate in relation to the basic objectives of the project.

Club Aventure was supplied with written information and a copy of a film on the life of the Lau produced by Granada Television for its "Disappearing World" series (Woodhead 1987) in order that future travellers might familiarize themselves with the setting and culture of the Lau. In addition, lectures were given by Maranda to provide further information and recruit travellers. Following this, the people who seemed genuinely interested received information of a more anthropological nature concerning the Lau culture. In November 1988 a group of four people went to the Solomon Islands for a three-week

stay. Maranda and one other team member, Luc Lafrenière, were in charge of guiding that first group. By all evaluations this first visit was very successful.

With such a positive response, SEL proceeded with a second recruitment attempt. From January to April 1989, SEL contacted, or was contacted by, the press. A total of six articles were published either in daily papers with a wide distribution or in more specialized magazines. Two radio interviews and an equal number of televised interviews were done by Maranda, who continued to give lectures and to promote the project with other travel agencies in Montreal, Toronto, Los Angeles and Vancouver. Despite these efforts, the success of the second phase of promotion was marginal: only five more visitors have gone to the Lau Lagoon since February 1989.

The Relationship between the Private Sector and the Universities

Although it was well known that promotion must be constant to keep up a steady flow of guests, the low number of people visiting the lagoon can be explained at least in part by fact that SEL members lacked sufficient time to spend on the project. Another possible factor had to do with communication difficulties that arose between SEL and the Lau, first because of the geographical distance between the Solomon Islands and Quebec and then, sometimes, because of different understandings of the same question by the two parties. It seems clear, however, that a large part of the problem was caused by the lack of support from the travel agency. *Club Aventure* progressively detached itself from the joint venture, company representatives arguing that the initial contract was not proving profitable for them. Internal changes in *Club Aventure*'s organization also contributed to the decline of their promotion of the Solomons. The new policy of the agency was not to promote the destination but only to respond, client by client, to demand. The Solomon Islands destination has not appeared in *Club Aventure's* promotional leaflets since the winter of 1990, and since that time no more tourists have been referred for information from that agency to SEL.

Yet, as far as the Lau were concerned, it seemed that the visitors' brief presence in the lagoon allowed them to take a firm and dynamic position towards their culture: there was a feeling that their traditional culture, which had been denigrated by the missionaries for so many years, was still of value. And at last the Lau had at their disposal money they could administer as they wished. As far as the actual visitors were concerned, they were able to live like the Lau, participating in the daily activities and receiving instruction in specific elements of Lau culture. Upon her return to Canada, a woman tourist confided to a journalist: "I did not take a trip, I had an extraordinary human experience" (*Le Soleil*, Québec City, 1989).

This half-success raises some questions concerning the real stakes in a partnership between the private sector and an academically oriented group like

SEL. It is difficult to deny the differences in the respective goals of the two parties. The travel agency was primarily concerned with economic profitability through the sale of a healthy number of its package deals. As far as SEL was concerned, the main priority was the preservation of the host culture which would be supported by the visitors' desire for cultural enrichment. While the Lau consider the project valid and wish to continue it, SEL feels its partnership with the private sector has not given adequate results. Organizational strategies need to be revised.

The Impact of the Tourism Project on the Lau Lagoon

However short-lived and limited in numbers, tourism did make an impact on the Lau lagoon. As soon as the first visitors were announced, the lagoon's Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project was responsible for the creation of a committee representing the four sections of the island of Foueda. This committee was equipped with a Western-style structure, including a president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary and advisers, but without a charter. All the members of the committee were men, some Christian and others pagan, and all of them were more than 30 years old. Important functions such as president and vice-president were filled by elders. The positions of secretary and treasurer, because they required a knowledge of writing and basic accounting, were held by the only members of the committee less than 40 years old, two men who had studied in mission schools.

Because of the fact that all meetings were held in the men's area of the island, it was impossible for women, had they so wanted, to listen to the discussions of the committee from the sidelines, as was the case with some men who were not directly involved in the committee. Any decisions made by the committee concerning the women were conveyed publicly in the central meeting place in the common area.

Although the structure of the committee was Western, its functioning was closer to the Lau process of decision-making. For almost one year, Lafrenière, in the field as a research assistant on the Maranda project, attended the weekly meetings of the committee; he never observed either the recording of minutes, a meeting agenda or even any kind of vote. All decisions were made by consensus. Time and effort were never spared to achieve a decision to which all parties could agree. Following the Melanesian pattern of decision-making, silence on the part of any member was interpreted as disagreement; therefore, approval had to be expressed by all. Generally speaking, relationships between members of the committee were congenial and the prevailing mood ensured the vitality of the venture.

The first task of the committee was to accomplish the renovation of the island where the guests were to be accommodated and the building of the necessary lodging. The island that was chosen is, by Lau standards, of average size.

Called Maanaafe, it is 75 meters in diameter and has been uninhabited for more than 50 years. An evil spell was believed to reign over it, preventing anyone from living there, though Lafrenière was told of other, more political reasons for staying away. The island was cleared and enlarged, its walls were rebuilt, two kitchens and four houses (one house in the men's quarters, one in the women's and two in the common area) were constructed. Women renovated the women's area, men the men's.

The community of Foueda worked on the project for more than three months. According to Lafrenière's calculations, 2000 person-days were invested in the restoration of the island. On some days more than 100 people—children and elders, women and men, Christians and pagans—combined their efforts to accomplish the task. The days devoted to collective work alternated with days dedicated to subsistence activities. Those who had helped with the renovation of the island were to be paid from the income generated by the first group of tourists; in due time that money was indeed distributed as wages. Apart from children under 10, everyone was paid two Solomon Islands dollars per day (one dollar Canadian) in accordance with a decision of the committee.

The busiest periods were, without a doubt, during the visitors' stays. A group of tourists was paired with one or two guides who spoke some English. The guides were paid five Solomon Islands dollars per day and were responsible for organizing the visitors, accompanying them in their daily activities and translating questions and answers between hosts and guests. It was with these guides that the tourists had the most contact during their stay. The development of friendly relations with the guides led the guests to give them presents before their departure, a situation that created some jealousy. The same phenomenon applied to the cooks who also established friendships relatively easily with the visitors. From the time of the first visitors, it was decided to appoint two new cooks each day.

Although the visitors moved about all over the lagoon, most of their activities took place in Rere territory. In fact, most of the time was spent on Foueda (the hosts' island), on the main island of Malaita in gardens belonging to the people of Foueda and on Maanaafe. One or two outings to the local market also involved expeditions to Malaita. These excursions gave the visitors the opportunity to meet with members of another group, the Baelelea. Tensions between the Lau and the Baelelea are sporadic, fights have erupted occasionally in the past during market sessions. The tourists' presence at the market required delicate negotiations on the committee's part as the Baelelea claimed a right to financial compensation.

The art of trading at the market is a female prerogative and it was therefore the Lau women who taught the basic principles to the female visitors. Following a practice session during which they were introduced to the different taboos that must be observed, the women guests were given fish which they

traded the same day. Despite the fact that all went smoothly, the elders were worried that if the tabus were not properly respected, tensions might flare up between the groups. However, since relations between the two groups were relatively calm at the time, it was possible to attempt the experience.

Immediate Cultural and Social Results

One of the main goals of the project was to emphasize the value of traditional Lau culture. From this perspective, many of the results were very encouraging. Before the arrival of the visitors, Lafrenière undertook a study of the perceptions that the Lau had of the project. One of the questions asked concerned what motivation they thought the tourists would have in coming to visit the Lau and what kinds of activities they would enjoy. All answers referred to the hope that the tourists would discover Lau culture.

Cultural activities were therefore prepared long in advance. Because of the fact that the weakening of ritual activities on Foueda had prevented the youth from learning fully the traditional activities, young men and women began rehearsing Lau dances several months before the arrival of the guests. The teacher/guides began preparation. At one point, Lafrenière and Maranda, in order to ensure that the guides were indeed well prepared, asked to be given a complete tour of the island, its sacred houses, its altars and all its important places. Several minutes after the beginning of the practice tour, the elders came around and began correcting the guides, finally giving the tour themselves to the guides and to an increasingly curious crowd. This practice run was soon transformed into an intensive session of intergenerational communication of information. During a discussion following this tour, the guides expressed their surprise at the generosity with which the elders had communicated their knowledge to the younger generation when formerly they had refused frequent requests to do so. Until the practice tour, the elders had been reluctant to pass on information to Christian youths who, on their part, were beginning to fear the loss of traditional knowledge.

Elders had frequently denied Christian youth information concerning traditional matters, arguing that such knowledge would be harmful to them because of pagan spirits' incompatibility with Christian faith and lifestyle. Furthermore, at a time when traditional knowledge was gaining importance due to the tourism project, elders seemed eager to demonstrate their exclusive expertise in traditional fields of knowledge, considered by many of them to be their last sphere of influence in a rapidly changing society. Some elders also viewed the tourism project as an opportunity to capitalize on their competence in order to create or regenerate power. But when the first group of tourists arrived, the elders never refused to answer any question their visitors thought to ask. The guides, realizing this, often took the opportunity to formulate, in Lau, questions that had not been asked by the tourists. In fact, locals were often at least

as interested in the answers as the tourists who had asked the questions. These sessions often contributed to a greater appreciation among the Christian Lau youth of some of the older men and women whose knowledge had not previously been revealed to them.

Defenders of Christianity were not long in responding to this focus on traditional Lau values. A two-week-long evangelical blitz preceded the arrival of the tourists. Every evening during this two-week period, Seventh Day Adventist missionaries preached the Word with the help of microphones and amplifiers powered by a generator brought from the capital, broadcasting their message to all the surrounding islands. During one of these evenings the Native minister preached against dancing.[5] The spirit of the young dancers was strongly affected by this sermon, and it was only after encouragement and much discussion that they resumed their practices.

The project was never directly criticized or publicly denounced by the local Christian leadership. The differences between Christians and pagans were felt in small details that were all but invisible to the tourists. The tourists did notice that their guides spoke differently about their culture depending on their religion. Christian guides referred to the various aspects of their culture with the words "in the old days," whereas the pagans used the present tense. Once in a while these differences in perception led to long discussions in Lau between the guides who temporarily left the tourists aside.

During the first group's stay, the presence of visitors stimulated a most remarkable cultural event. Since the island on which the guests were to stay had not been inhabited for over 50 years, and also because of the evil spell, an important ceremony was organized on a neighbouring island in order to explain to the spirits the presence of people on Maanaafe. This sacred ceremony attained spectacular heights. Twelve pigs were sacrificed and their meat distributed throughout the lagoon. Sacred dances were executed and, contrary to all expectations, two pagan priests were ordained by their fathers. One year later, during another visit, this ceremony was still the subject of much discussion in the men's quarter.

Despite the undeniably religious character of the ceremony, it is suspected that political factors also motivated it. From the beginning of the renovation activities on Maanaafe, several groups had claimed ownership of the island. Traditionally, the soil of an island could be extended with the permission of the owner. Since permission was almost always granted, construction went ahead smoothly. However, the tourist project made the possession of Maanaafe potentially profitable since the owner was eligible for financial compensation. Who, and which clan, first inhabited the island?

The Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project committee is still trying, at local pace, to clarify the issue of, and achieve consensus regarding, the ownership of Maanaafe. Discussions revolve around the names of the spirits that

live in the sacred houses, the kinship ties with the first inhabitants of the island up to 23 generations ago and certain clans' rights to make sacrifices on the island's altars.

Because the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project committee has been able to function in place of the formal political leadership that is lacking among the Lau and especially in the Rere Tribe, it has, Lafrenière believes, become an advocate for much more than the tourism project. The integration of the Lau into the world market creates new conditions, some of which require a large accumulation of national currency. Unlike the past, when the authority of the chiefs depended first on lineage aristocracy and secondly on their ability to redistribute the surplus they were able to accumulate from their people, nowadays the people keep their wealth, invest it in foreign goods acquired at great expense and in this way cut off the traditional flow of wealth to the chiefs. This dynamic leads to the emergence of the *wane 'initoo faafefe*: the important-man-who-make-me-shit. These rich men are criticized for their lack of generosity.

Furthermore, the increasing importance of Christianity and the forced pacification of the Lau people by colonial power has resulted in the breakdown of the traditional institutions from which the chiefs drew their *maana* to exercise their power and leadership (Lafrenière 1992). Missionaries, local constables, provincial judges and colonial administrators robbed the chiefs of their leadership roles in religious matters, in the maintenance of social cohesion and in warfare. This state of affairs resulted in a deeply transformed political dynamic for the Lau lagoon. Gradually, the Lau culture, under the influence of the newly installed national society, has been transformed. The focus has shifted away from the traditional leaders in favour of the younger, Western-educated elite that forms the majority of the elected Lau representatives in the regional, provincial and national levels of the government.

Political Formalization

Although, in accordance with the relatively new, Western-oriented Solomon Islands constitution, the Lau have elected and sent representatives to the different levels of government for some years now, to this day these representatives have exerted little leadership in the lagoon. They are mostly young men who have been educated by Christian missionaries in the Western system and are hungry to gain more control over their community's destiny.

The Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project committee seems to be a mixture of the new and old leadership systems; it is seen as a legitimate representative of the lagoon by the other Solomon Islands communities. At the outset, this committee fulfilled a specific need: it initiated the organization of an infrastructure to accommodate tourists; this, of course, was to enable the Lau to respond as soon as possible to the pressure to Christianize. This purpose

was implied in the principles laid down at the beginning of the project: cultural preservation and revitalization. Recent results of this initiative, however, have led some Lau to believe there may have been other, equally important motives behind their tourism strategies.

In the summer of 1989, when the Rere Trust Board was created, incorporated and equipped with a charter, it bore witness to a new approach that local councillors wished to adopt in the management of tourist activity. First of all, the Trust Board was overseen by an administrative council made up of representatives of the clans involved in the tourism project. As its name indicates, however, the group is composed of the representatives of one particular clan, the Rere, who, as it has been said, are at the centre of the tourist initiative.

The Trust Board's purpose is unique. Its *raison d'être* is to make decisions on behalf of the areas of the lagoon that are predominantly Rere concerning tourism and the capital it generates. However, since it is unthinkable for the Lau to compartmentalize narrowly spheres of decision in which the whole community has a stake, there is a second objective motivating this new political force: the Trust Board wants to make a place for itself as the primary representative on matters concerning the economic development of the Rere parts of the lagoon.

On the local level, there was, in fact, a void in the power structure. It is true that the three-level governmental structure (national, provincial and regional) which ensures national administration already applied to the lagoon as well as to the rest of the archipelago; furthermore, parallel to this structure, the Councils of Tribes have a right over cultural jurisdiction. Nonetheless, there was until now no organized decision-making structure to oversee the administration of funds that the community might derive by its own means. In the past, sums of money from outside the community were the object of negotiations between the different parties in the lagoon. However, the initiatives that led to these incomes were almost all aborted in the short- or mid-term because of clans lacking either the willingness or the ability to collaborate in a project. With the broadening of exchange networks, economic effectiveness depended on the creation of an operating political and economic organization that could accommodate various future partners. It was, therefore, natural that the movement toward formalization would lead to the establishment of a local authority that would attempt to resolve questions in a way that would forestall conflicts between clans.

In the first articles of the charter of incorporation of the Trust Board the means of accumulating the funds that will make up the Trust are defined:

> [The Trust] shall consist of any money, investment, business, or other property, real or personal, which (1) has been donated or granted to any person for the purpose of establishing the Trust, or (2) is donated or granted to the Trust.

The objectives that the Board aims to fulfill through the management of the funds are then described:

> To provide financial assistance to the people of Foueda Island to revive and maintain their cultural activities and values:
>
> 1. traditional customs and codes of behaviour;
> 2. traditional dancing and chanting;
> 3. arts and crafts, for example, shell money making and traditional weapons making;
> 4. traditional marriage activities and performances, traditional customary exchanges and cultural values;
> 5. the barter system and the activities that go along with it.

Although it may not be stated in precisely these terms, the aim is clearly the establishment of a structure for the collection and management of capital. Through the national government and missionary organizations, by means of tourism, a capitalist market economy is entering the lagoon. At the same time, the charter reaffirms the lagoon's primary objective: the preservation and promotion of the Lau culture.

Managing and disposing of funds involves the Board of Trustees. The Board's composition illustrates the interrelationship of the new and the traditional political structures:

> The appointment of the members of the Board of Trustees shall be made by the chairman of the Board, based on tribal or clan representation. The appointment of the Chairman shall be made by the Board of Trustees. All members, including the chair shall be appointed for an unlimited term. All members are eligible for further appointment.

The choosing of Trustees is based on delegation and the principle of cooptation. Half of the original 12 members of the Board already held a position in the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project; several others were members of the Rere Tribal Committee. Most lived on Foueda, the others mostly on Ropa, Foueda's Christian suburb. Choosing representatives this way reflects a willingness to achieve a compromise between the traditional and modern factions and may attest either to respect for the founding principles of the community—which would only be in keeping with the primary objectives expressed in the charter—or to the firmness of the hold that influential members of the community have on the reins of power, whether they be "Kastom people" or Christians.

The economic and political impact of this organizational formalization is multifaceted. It reveals the wish to control the economic destiny of the community in the most thoroughgoing way, to gain total power over the administration of the capital invested in community development. This mandate goes

far beyond the simple management of tourism. The possibilities offered to the members of the Board of Trustees by the charter are enormous and involve all economic activities linked to the entry of currency into the Rere parts of the lagoon.

Discussion

As in other parts of the globe, the encounter with the Western world brought about some profound changes in the Lau community of Malaita. Even though contacts with Westerners have been limited, missionaries have taken the leadership in health and religious matters, while colonial administrators and judges have enforced the new social order as requested by colonial rulers. Traditional chiefs were left with a limited sphere of influence; the Lau way of life was irremediably transformed.

Traditional leaders, until then unable to modernize the institutions that had allowed them to exercise power, saw in the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project an opportunity to gain influence by managing the project and the incomes it would generate. Knowledge of traditional matters, which had become decreasingly relevant, became much more important when the Project was discussed. The traditional elders were able to form the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project committee and to arrange for themselves to handle the distribution of profits. In controlling the money and using it for the good of the community, as they used to when administrating the wealth of the clans, they were in a position to renew and modernize the institution that had assured their leadership for centuries.

In view of the relative success of the enterprise, it was only natural that the Rere would want to extend the experience to all Rere lineages and to formalize it into a charter, reserving for themselves the prestige and the benefits that came with knowledge of traditional matters.

Although the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project is still too young for us to draw any definite conclusions about it, we can ask ourselves a few questions. While the elders have substantial knowledge of traditional matters, acquaintance with Western-style management is mandatory for the type of enterprises from which they hope to benefit. Where will the elders find the appropriate skills for such management? They may have to rely on the more aggressive and, in Western terms, better-educated youth whom they have hitherto tried successfully to keep out. Second, although few would deny the Board of Trustees the right to manage the profits generated by their own organization, it is questionable that all profits made through commercialization of traditional activities will necessarily be forwarded to them simply because they have a charter. The future of the project and of the Board are still largely uncertain; international conditions and the vigour of the elders will both determine it. The ability of the elders to build partial alliances with other groups

may determine the future not only of Project and Board but also of the traditional forms of political leadership of the Lau.

The Lau case is one of community involvement in a broad sense, rather than the infiltration of a new sector of activities by a category of local or foreign merchants already active before the arrival of tourists. This is largely due to the absence of a formal class of entrepreneurs in traditional Lau society: all resources, including shell money and dolphin teeth, the traditional forms of currency, were always managed by clan heads. These aristocrats, whose power is strictly hereditary, were the stewards of collective riches. They were never entrepreneurs in the sense of the Melanesian "big men" found elsewhere in the South Pacific. Small-scale local trade has, of course, existed for a long while, but its integration into the community is regulated, both on the level of the accumulation of initial capital and as far as the redistribution of profits (through the inevitable ritual expenditures and the exchanges of services) is concerned.

From being a simple local group fulfilling a specific need, the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project committee has grown into a representative of the general interests of the community in relation to the other clans and tribes, the governmental authorities and the Council of Tribes. This extension of the original mandate of the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project can be explained by the fact that tourism constitutes an activity without any precedent in local history. The traditional power structure had no preplanned response with which to manage it.

It must be kept in mind that concurrently, and without tourism being directly in question, the community had been engaged for several years in a formalizing process stemming from the federal policy promoting the unification of the people of the Solomon Islands and its peripheral areas into a national whole. This inclusion has, until now, proceeded at a very moderate rate for it has come up against regional traditions; thus its effects will be no more than distant and intangible for quite a while. The Lau lagoon is an example of this. This slowness is not, however, characteristic of the disruptions linked to tourism. A multitude of effects are immediately observable; every member of the community can perceive them at a glance. And because tourism is occurring within the local community, it is triggering a series of tangible consequences that national modernization, although on a much larger scale, is taking a long time to attain. When the Lau speak of modernization, or of the central government or of the capital of the country, they are referring to a reality distant both in real and in figurative terms. When they speak of the few visitors they have rubbed shoulders with in the past two years, their remarks are specific and their opinions set.

Thus, paradoxically, it will likely be in part because of the age-old isolation of Lau culture, an asset in that it is the culture's main attraction for visitors,

that the Lau could suddenly be projected into an accelerated process of economic, political and cultural transformation. This process coincides with the wishes of the elite in the Solomon Islands capital who are the only ones in the archipelago to have truly experienced such a transformation. In this sense, tourism can be said to have been a catalyst for modernization and integration into the national political, economic and, eventually, cultural identity.

The political weight that the Lau Cultural Preservation and Tourism Project has gained in the lagoon is now exercised against government, the missionaries and the other clans and tribes; they are suddenly being confronted with an element that emerged from their midst but speaks another language and is making connections both in the capital city and overseas. This element accumulates capital, solicits investors and follows norms of conduct that until recently were only barely understood. It is difficult to predict how viable this new mode of operation and new blend of power will ultimately be. It is frequently shown that tourist development encourages the emergence of an intellectual petite bourgeoisie, descended from the most powerful families, that, as universalist ideology becomes more firmly implanted and as the need to speak a modernist jargon in the day-to-day functioning of the community is felt, will progressively take over the exercise of local power (Din 1988 [on Malaysia]; Fürer-Haimendorf 1984 [on the Sherpas in Nepal]; Michaud 1991 [on the Ladakhis in Kashmir]). On the other hand, there is a body of research suggesting that in pre-industrial societies tourism may prevent the decay of traditions and even help to rejuvenate them, provided locals have some control over the flow and the business (McKean 1989 and Picard 1992 [on the famous Balinese case]; Saglio 1979 [on Senegal]). But social research does not provide us with much information about the reactions of tribal societies to the penetration of tourist capitalism, apart from some elements by Crystal (1989) on the Sulawesi in Indonesia and Altman (1988) on Aboriginal Australia. There is much room left for further investigations of this type.[6]

Currently, the SEL project and the activity of recruiting tourists to visit the Lau Lagoon are at a standstill. No more visitors have been sent from Canada since the summer of 1990. A solution considered by the members of SEL was to create an independent charitable organization to take charge of the whole project. The new organization would seek access to government financing through such sources as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); sources that, unlike the private sector's *Club Aventure*, would allow it to remain relatively free of the need for profit. However, time and a great deal of energy would have to be invested to gain access to such funding; both of these the members of SEL did not, and do not, have.

Facing an early end to the Lau tourism experience, and considering the important efforts and emotional investment made by the Lau to make it a success, one question remains: was the experience worth trying? The four of us think

we may find elements for an answer to this simple but fundamental question by going back to discussions we had at the outset of the project. We knew then that tourism was approaching the Solomons, in the form either of large tourist resorts or of travellers following guidebooks.[7] We believed the Lau were certain to meet with an increasing number of tourists/travellers reaching their islets in the years to come, and would then have to act quickly to find ways of protecting their traditions and coping with the possibilities tourism offered. Discussing the issue during our first meetings, we came to see our efforts as providing some of the Lau with an opportunity to prepare. The Project, to use a mechanical and only partially legitimate analogy, would be a kind of tourism vaccination, injecting into the social body small quantities of the virus of tourism in order to provoke an adaptive reaction. In this limited sense, the experience seems to have triggered an interesting set of valuable reactions.

Notes

1. This topic first took shape as a joint panel presentation during the annual Congress of the Canadian Anthropological Society (Casca) in Calgary, Alberta, in May 1990. The four papers presented there were subsequently melded into this article.
2. See Maranda and Kongas Maranda (1970) for details and development.
3. With Christian encroachment, the pagans of Foueda saw themselves confined to the men's area; tensions rose.
4. A grand total of $2,500 Canadian was thus split between five members of SEL.
5. A minister said that an American study had showed that 70 percent of young American girls who danced were no longer virgins.
6. Michaud is currently researching the impact of tourism and social change on a community of the Hmong, a tribal society of Northern Thailand.
7. For several years now, the publishers of the *Lonely Planet* have offered an annual guidebook to the Solomons; each new edition takes the traveller closer to the Lau lagoon.

Acknowledgment

The map on p. 37 is reproduced from p. xi of *Custom and Confrontation: The Kwaio Struggle for Cultural Autonomy* by the late Roger M. Keesing, and is printed here by permission of the publishers, the University of Chicago Press.

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