

**“I want my music to be my own”**

A contemporary music scene in Honiara,  
Solomon Islands



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Front page picture: Preparations for “Music Marathon” in Honiara in 2008

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## Prologue

I can still sense the tingling in my body as I sat onboard the SkyAirWorld carrier as it made its decent into Solomon Islands, particularly when I set my eyes on Guadalcanal for the first time, and looked down at what seemed like an everlasting cascade of green forests and small rivers going across this island in the South Western Pacific Ocean. In fact, what I remember the most is a lonely canoe, a small dot on the never-ending ocean surrounding Solomons. As the aircraft landed on the tarmac of Henderson Airfield, and I walked off the airplane, I was met by a wall of heat. I had never felt anything like it before, but my sense of adventure and academic curiosity made me even happier just to be in Honiara, a city filled with people carrying stories, hopes, dreams and sensations. A city where a unique musical culture has emerged; influenced by Honiara itself.

Solomon Islands is defined as a third-world country, and has by some been described as a ‘failing state’ (see Berg nd), a country riddled with troubles and challenges. When I spent some days in Queensland, Australia before travelling to Honiara, there were the occasional warning and borderline racist comment, such as “why do you want to go the coconut heads?”. I ignored these comments, as well as the posters of “Solomon Islands – lost in time” displayed in airports and motels. I acknowledge that Solomon Islands is a third-world country with all the challenges this poses. However, what it lacks in monetary economy, it makes up for in diversity. Since the main focus of my visit was music, this was what I focused on. Music has evolved and been spread across the country, as well as the Pacific region, and one that is in no way “lost in time”. On the contrary, it is ever-changing and always making up new ways of expressing itself. This music is one I wish to describe in detail during the course of this thesis, as well as the way it finds ways of moving around. Fact is that music is an important commodity in the lives of many Solomon Islanders, who make use of it every day. In a country without any formal musical training and an absence of a musical infrastructure in the form of professional studios and trained recording engineers, the sheer volume of production is nothing short of impressive, particularly considering that a substantial amount of Solomon Islands recordings make their way to the rest of the region, Papua New Guinea in particular, and become part of the Melanesian musical

consciousness. By looking on websites dedicated to music from Melanesia, it becomes evident that Solomon Islands music is popular and sought after by many listeners. The label “Solomon Islands music” seems to mean something special to people in the region of Melanesia. This has been the case since the 1960s, and when I came to Honiara the newspapers were filled with stories of Solomon Islands artists who dominated the charts of Papua New Guinea. In a city with a lot of ethnic diversity where people come from all parts of the country - for a variety of reasons – people navigate this diversity with impressive ease. Although many never seem to achieve what they came to Honiara for, a great number continue to stay on. Expressing themselves through different channels, such as art and music, seems to be important to many of these urban residents, particularly music. It is hard walk through Honiara without hearing music from virtually every street corner, and just a few days into my fieldwork it became obvious that music in Solomons is highly diverse, and I hope to highlight this in my thesis.

# Chapter I

## An introduction

During the fall of 2008 I travelled to Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands to conduct fieldwork for my M.A. degree in Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen. The main focus of my research was to explore the highly creative – but largely undocumented – music scene present in this Pacific city, which has thrived since the 1960s. Despite this, it has received surprisingly little attention from scholars conducting research in Solomons (for important exceptions see works of Frazer 1981,1985, Jourdan 1995a, 1995b, Keesing 1982a, 1982b, 2000). Due to this I wanted to explore what social practices these songs represented. Were they mere songs, or did they reflect Solomon Islands society?

Conducting research in a location that is well known in anthropology and other disciplines did primarily seem like a somewhat simple task. It was not hard to find scholars who have spent quite a large amount of time in Honiara and Solomon Islands (Frazer 1981, 1985, Hogbin 1937, 1970, Hviding 1996, Keesing 1976, 1982a, 1982b), and as such background information was easy to obtain as far as the physical location was concerned. There have also been conducted important ethnographic works in Honiara (Berg 2000, Frazer 1981, 1985, Jourdan 1995a, 1995b, 2007), but none have explored the realm of popular music. Although research on popular music in Melanesia has been done (Crowdy 2001, 2007, Niles 1984, Webb 2005), none of these, apart from Crowdy (2007), have focused on Solomon Islands in particular. Given that the field of modern popular music in Honiara was a largely ignored subject, obtaining information on potential informants beforehand proved difficult. I was able to find some background material through various websites, where some music was published, and thus I was able to get a fairly good impression of how the music sounded. Musicians, on the other hand, were virtually unknown (with the exception of a few), and information regarding these was hard to come by. With this in mind I arrived in Honiara without knowing who I was actually looking for. I just knew what I wanted to know from them. I will return to my experiences in the field at a later

stage in this initial chapter, but first I would like to give a presentation of Honiara and Solomons as a whole.

### **A brief history**

The nation of Solomon Islands consists of an archipelago of islands located in the South-Western part of the Pacific Ocean in the area usually called Melanesia, a geographical area including Papua New-Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji (Hviding 1996). First encountered by Spanish explorers led by Alvaro de Mendana in 1567 (Woodford 1888:351), the Solomons have since seen its share of outsiders with quite different motives for coming, from whalers ('ship men') and traders, introducing the Solomon Islanders to various goods like iron, tobacco and guns to missionaries introducing a strange new religion and customs (Bennett 1987:24-42). In 1893 the British Empire established a protectorate over the islands (Bennett 1987: 106), called the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, and held control over the nation until 1978 – with the exception of World War II when Japanese and American forces fought some of the fiercest battles of the war during what has been called the Pacific Campaign (Lindstrom & White 1990, 1993). In July 1978 the country was finally granted its independence and was then granted admission into the United Nations the same year (<http://www.un.org/en/members/index.shtml#s>).

### **Honiara**

Honiara has been the capital city of Solomon Islands since the original capital Tulagi was destroyed in a bombing raid during WWII (White 1989:48). It is a rapidly growing city, estimated to be the home of nearly 60,000 people (<http://www.spc.int/prism/country/sb/stats/Social/Popcen/Projection.htm>). It is an impossible task to determine the exact number of individuals living in Honiara, as there is a great deal of movement to and from the city by short term migrants coming to Honiara for various reasons, such as employment or to visit relatives (Berg 2000: 4). The last census was conducted in 1999, and in November of 2009 data collection was conducted as part of a new census

(<http://www.solomonstarnews.com/news/national/1419-registration-continues-population-figure-by-march>), although these results are not yet published. During my stay in Honiara I experienced people coming and going on a more or less daily basis. A trip to the Point Cruz wharf or Henderson Airfield (the main airport) reveals people coming from all over the country. Naturally, I did not know why they arrived, but I always seemed to come into contact with people who had just recently arrived, and who were looking for work or a change in lifestyle in Honiara.

As shown by Jourdan (1995a) and Berg (2000), people come to Honiara for a variety of reasons, but in many cases it is to find work or to pursue an education. The problem is that those seeking to attend Solomon Islands College of Higher Education will rarely return to their home village due to the scarce opportunities for relevant work in the provinces outside of Honiara. Instead they stay in the capital looking for work, but many of these will never find it (Berg 2000: 6), and many become unemployed. There are no official numbers with regards to unemployment in Honiara, but government officials I spoke to estimated that it could have been as high as 70 per cent – and particularly young men and women appear to find it difficult to get employment. Especially dropouts from school are struggling to find work, meaning they have no access to the monetary economy that is prevalent in Honiara. Despite that no official records exist today with regards to unemployment, a census conducted in 1999 with regards to unemployment revealed that of a population of 34,753 above the age of 14, 16,205 were listed as unemployed in Honiara town council

(<http://www.spc.int/prism/country/sb/stats/Censuses%20and%20Surveys/Poptabpdf/EconomicActivity/eco1.pdf>).

Several important works have been published on Solomon Islands, including Keesing's (1971, 1982a, 1982b, 1992), work on *kastom* and kinship in Solomon Islands, particularly among the Kwaio of Malaita, Bennett's (1987) history of Solomons from the first contact to independence in 1978, Hviding's (1996) writings on marine tenure Marovo Lagoon in New Georgia, Western Province, as well as Moore's (2004) historical reasons for the tensions that took place in Solomon Islands between 1998 and 2003. Honiara has also been subject to studies, although not as many. Among the most prominent are Frazer's (1985) work on the To'ambaita movement in Honiara, Chapman's (1985, 1991) writings on mobility in Honiara, Jourdan's



(1995a, 2007) works on youth and identity in Honiara and Berg's (2000) research on violence and compensation among Polynesians and Malaitan people in Honiara.

Honiara as a city is fairly small and compact, with a main street, Mendana Avenue, stretching from Central Market, a busy and thriving market where it is possible to buy everything from peanuts to coconut oil tapped in small bottles. Buildings are usually no taller than two or three stories, containing offices, shops and different embassies or consular services. New Zealand, Great Britain, EU, Australia, Japan and Taiwan all have embassies or high commissions present in Honiara, as well as consular services for United States, France and Germany. All are situated fairly close to each other, apart from Australia and Great Britain, whose offices are at the end of Mendana Avenue, next to various government offices. Streets are filled with people of all ages, either walking around or sitting outside different shops talking with other people. Particularly outside ANZ Bank by the entrance to Point Cruz wharf, there is always a large gathering of people, seemingly doing nothing. A common sight is young men and women – mostly men – who hang around in large groups, appearing to do nothing. They will also walk around town most of the day, doing what they call *wokabaot*, described by Frazer (1985). This activity appears meaningless, but is in fact a good way to meet people. These groups of youth are generally known as *liu*, or sometimes *masta liu* (Jourdan 1995a). What characterizes them is that they are unemployed youth who have no employment and have dropped out of school. Jourdan (1995a) describes them as being very occupied with different aspects of popular culture (1995a:212), as well as clothing. Older people sometimes look down on them, speaking of them like troublemakers or lazy (Jourdan 1995a:218), something that does not seem to affect them too much. I will return to *liu* throughout this thesis.

### ***Wantok***

Arriving in Honiara and being completely without connections or relatives can be a challenge, particularly for foreigners. The red tape of government bureaucracy alone is enough to drain any researcher or visitor planning to stay for more than one month. It is vital to have someone who understands the city and knows his or her way around the many traps that can occur in a town

like Honiara, and in many cases having a friend or – ideally – a relative in Honiara can be the difference between success and failure. But I will not focus on the ‘absolute outsider’ (the local term is “expat”, short for expatriate) in this section, but instead attempt to give a brief overview of the importance of having relatives and kin when coming to Honiara.

One term that constantly surfaces when discussing Honiara – and in many instances Melanesia as a whole – is that of *wantok*. The word is derived from Pijin and literally means ‘one talk’. It is also a term found in Papua New-Guinea Tok Pisin and Vanuatu Bislama, which are the creoles of their respective countries (Holm 2000:96). The concept of *wantok* in Solomon Islands Pijin refers to someone affiliated to the same ethnolinguistic group (Berg 2000:101), meaning someone who speaks your language – thus the concept of ‘one talk’. Jourdan (1995b) argues that the concept of *wantok* has no significant role at village level, but instead comes into full effect when inserted into an urban context (1995b:143). This is due to the fact that many villages operate as more of a kinship affiliation, and as such people are constantly surrounded by relatives, and the concept of *wantok* loses its significance (for more on kinship, see Bellam 1968, Hviding 1996, Keesing 1982a, Miller 1980). When arriving Honiara for the first time what many will do is seek out their *wantok*, not only to meet someone of the same language group, but very often in order to obtain a place to sleep or to get something to eat. As Berg (2000) argues, although “[i]n its most general sense *wantok* does indicate a relationship through shared linguistic affinity (...) [it] is not enough to include a person ad hoc into the concentric spheres of a security circle” (2000: 101), meaning a person usually has to be known to the other person and thus affiliated with him or her. The ‘*wantok* system’ that is in play on a daily basis in Honiara thus function as a social security for new arrivals, securing that they do not experience complete isolation in Honiara. Although it does sound somewhat idyllic it is still riddled with problems, as far as many Solomon Islanders are concerned. A typical Honiara household will be home to a family, as well as *wantok* staying with them for a shorter or longer period of time (Jourdan 1995a: 214-215). This is often done until the kinsman or -woman can find a way to support him- or herself and afford to get his or her own accommodation, although this can sometimes be hard as the number of people versus the number of available land and housing is a dramatic mismatch. Already in 1972 the problem was addressed by the Housing Authority (Berg 2000: 64), and I did not see a single sign that this had been improved – on the contrary a lot of my informants seemed

to struggle to find sufficient housing, especially if they were unemployed and did not stay with their *wantok*. Those who are in the position of housing *wantok* seem to have ambiguous emotions towards the entire system. People I spoke to about this, who were employed in paid work and had housing, were all glad to be able to help their kinsmen, but in many cases they felt like they were getting the worse end of the agreement. Their sentiment towards this was made clear to me on several occasions. One man I spoke to told me that his household currently consisted of 14 individuals. He had three daughters, a wife and nine *wantok* living in his house. Needless to say his government salary was not enough to feed everyone, and he appeared constantly worried as to how he would manage on a day-to-day basis. “My salary just isn’t enough, but I cannot throw them out. They are my *wantok*. It is *kastom*,” he told me. A woman, who was sitting next to us listening in on our conversation, said: “The *wantok*-system is a disaster for Solomon Islands!” Although I do not share her bleak view on this system, it is clear that it has become somewhat of a liability for many residents of Honiara.

### *Kastom*

*Kastom* is a concept that is well known and firmly implanted in the life world of every Solomon Islander. It is a Pijin term derived from the English word ‘custom’, meaning ‘tradition’, although it has far more extensive meaning to most Solomon Islanders (for more on this, see Keesing 1982a, 1989, 1992, 1993, Tonkinson 1982, 1993, White 1991, 1993). With regards to music, *kastom* can in some instances dictate what topics are being covered in songs, as I will discuss more in chapter three. Every man and woman born and raised in Solomon Islands are well aware of the concept of *kastom* and what it entails. It provides a kind of ‘moral compass’ into what society expects of them. In its purest form, *kastom* is a term describing “all the traditional and cultural practices and ways to doing things” (Sai 2007: 25) in Melanesian societies. It is what kinsmen expect of someone as a member of society, and every area of Solomon Islands have their own versions of it. There are many ways of negotiating *kastom* and it can be described in a multitude of forms. Keesing (2000) describes four levels of what he calls “ideologies of cultural identity (2000: 20) with regards to *kastom*. He presents four ways in which the notion of *kastom* is being used (Keesing 1989:20-21), with both national and local level being discussed. In

Honiara one could talk of a ‘national *kastom*’, given that the city is home to a multitude of cultures, which more or less share a generic form of *kastom*, from around the Solomons, and following Keesing’s (2000) argument it could be said that *kastom* in Honiara becomes “idealizations of custom” (2000: 20). In this I mean that the *kastom* of Honiara is in a sense ‘unreal’, although I do not believe this to be completely true. The reason I call it ‘unreal’ is that urban dwellers in many cases pay less attention to *kastom* than those in rural areas, where cultural workings are very different in order to keep society going. However, *kastom* is changing with the emergence of a middle class, who are negotiating their *kastom*, developing a sense of individualism (Jourdan 2007:35), and some people in the rural areas contest how people can be urban and still keep their village identity (Jourdan 2007: 35). However, *kastom* is in no way fixed, but rather interchangeable and evolving (Akin 2005: 184), and as such one could argue that Honiara is on its way to developing its own *kastom*. As Berg (2000) argues: [p]eople generate new understandings and categories as they act on and in the world” (2000: 16), and this is very much true in Honiara as well. Hviding (1998) argues that “[k]astom in its very essence is an intercultural phenomenon” (1998: 255) which is being used to negotiate a variety of situations, often with regards to those who adhere to a different *kastom*. He also argues that *kastom* is being altered in regards to those coming from the ‘outside’, especially when it comes to land issues and rights to natural resources. I agree with his argument that *kastom* can be negotiated and altered, and this is happening in Honiara – especially when foreign nationals meet Solomon Islanders. I will also post the argument that it is necessary to have a flexible approach to *kastom* due to the overwhelming amount of different cultures that interact on a daily basis in town. It would, in my opinion, be virtually impossible to adhere to a static cultural system with this in mind.

I would observe many of my informants in the course of my fieldwork and how they interacted with different people every day. Some of them would have friends and connections from very different parts of Solomon Islands, like, for instance, Choiseul and Bellona<sup>1</sup>. What became clear fairly early was that they would manoeuvre quite easily between the different ethnicities. This correlates well with Goffman (1959) and his theories of self, but this still does not explain this as a whole, since most people seemingly act throughout the day, although

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<sup>1</sup> Choiseul and Bellona are two provinces located on opposite sides of the Solomons. Choiseul is at the far west of Solomon Islands, while Bellona is to the south of Guadalcanal, with a Polynesian population.

Solomon Islanders are not unique in doing this. Instead I post the argument that *kastom* is flexible when it comes to Honiara, because people cannot operate one single *kastom* due to the magnitude of cultures that co-exist within the city limits. So what is *kastom* all about? It has a generic core that is easily interchangeable, and can be negotiated. Also, due to inland migration people will be familiar with those from other parts of the Solomons in their own villages and islands, particularly Malaitans, who can be found all over Solomon Islands as a result of migration, mostly because of scarce opportunities for employment on Malaita (Moore 2004:95), and they now make up roughly fifty per cent of the population in Honiara.

### **A Honiara identity...?**

It is rare to hear someone refer to him- or herself as being from Honiara when asked about their origins. Apart from one young man, every single one of my informants and other people I came across during my stay said they came from one of the provinces – regardless if they were born and raised in Honiara. One who did intrigue me was a young man who so clearly stated that he came from Honiara, as he represented a break with what appeared to me as normal. My initial thought was that no one was actually being born in Honiara, a preposterous claim as children are being born at *Nambanaen* (Pijin name for the National Referral Hospital in Honiara) every single day. So why were people so avid in claiming they did not come from Honiara, but from other provinces like Malaita, Western Solomons or Renbel (Rennel and Bellona)? Jourdan (2007) offers some insight into this phenomena as she explores the socio-linguistic landscape of Honiara, arguing that most young urban dwellers are well aware of the *kastom* of their parent's (or even grandparent's) home village, but in a sense ways of the elders “become symbols of ethnicity” (2007: 37), making it almost a nostalgic memory of life in rural Solomon Islands. This notion of nostalgia became evident to me in conversation with many of my informants, and it has also been the subject of songs written over the years. For many, especially those without monetary means, a notion of village is one of carefree living and harmony, where food and security is always available. This mirrors Berg's (2000) argument on Honiara as “a geographical unit in space where one has a ‘house’ (*haos*) which is distinct from *hom*” (2000: 7) – *hom* being Pijin for ‘home’, meaning your area of origins. He also argues that young people of Honiara are

not maintaining the same close relationship with their relatives from *hom* in the same way their parents are. My own observations led me to conclude in a similar manner, although my research was conducted among the generation following those Berg (2000) had as informants. My informants were largely in their 20s or early 30s, and their affiliations mostly seemed to balance between immediate relatives living in Honiara or friends/bandmates/schoolmates. Friends seemed to be an important factor for the young men and women, as well as *wantok*.

### **Music and Honiara**

After World War II when the government administration moved from Tulagi to Honiara, this newborn town experienced growth through the arrival of young men looking for work and adventure (Frazer 1985, Jourdan 1995a). American forces not only introduced new ideas and concepts for many of the islanders, they also introduced a new form of musical expression; the guitar. This instrument was completely foreign to Solomon Islanders, and children and adults alike would flock around the soldiers as they played songs from far away (Lindstrom & White 1993). These songs would usually be popular music from America, like “jive and swing, and popular songs of various styles (including Tin Pan Alley, show tunes, ‘folk’ and ‘hillbilly’” (Webb 2005:289). This music, combined with an introduction of guitars, helped with the formation of what later became known as stringband music, a style of music based on different acoustic string instruments (Webb 2005:289). Stringbands make up Solomon Islands’ first genuine popular music, and it prospered well into the 1970s (Webb 2005:290). As American forces finally left Solomon Islands after the end of the war, they not only left impressions, but also instruments and Solomon Islanders who had mastered the technique of playing guitars. One of these young men, Edwin Sitori, was a young man from the Onepusu area of ‘Are’Are on the southwestern coastal side of Malaita. Like many of his peers he left home and travelled across to Guadalcanal and Honiara to find work and a different life. Sitori later ended up as an electrician and handyman at the Office of the Prime Minister, but it is not his abilities to mend machines that have forever etched his name into Solomon Islanders’ collective consciousness, as well as many in neighbouring countries. In the early 1950s he wrote a piece of music that stands as a defining song in Solomon Islands history; “*Wakabaot long Saenataon*” (“*Walkabout in Chinatown*”), a

song many Solomon Islanders have an intimate knowledge of. Although it was made popular by “Solomon Dakei and his Solomon Singers” in the 1950s, Edwin Sitori is credited for writing it. In chapter two I give a brief historic snapshot of the music scene in Honiara, including this song.

Pacific peoples put emphasis on music and other forms of arts, not just as means of recreation, but also to keep stories and legends alive (White 1991), something that is important in order to deal with other issues like land rights (Lindstrom & White 1993: 186) and important resources (for more on land tenure, see Allan 1957, Hviding 1996, 1998, Hviding & Bayliss-Smith 2000, Scheffler & Larmour 1987).

### **Theoretical aspects**

During this thesis I explore music as a phenomenon in Honiara in order to examine if it can transgress beyond the world of words and melody. It is important to look at how music gives meaning to its audience, and also how listeners respond to what he or she hears when listening to a song. To do so it is necessary to think of how musicians and listeners experience music by looking at it from a phenomenological (Heidegger 1962, 1982, Husserl 2001) viewpoint, and also how a listener experience music on an individual level (Smith 1979). However, music also needs to be looked at as a collective experience (Lipsitz 1990, van Dijk 2006), since music in Solomon Islands historically has been used as comments regarding particular events and general practices (Lindstrom & White 1993), and thus makes its way into collective memory. I believe that music in many ways is looked upon as knowledge (Foucault 1970), and this needs to be examined within a Melanesian context (Lindstrom 1990). I wish to examine elements of exchange in music, how it ‘moves around’ in a city without any formal musical industry to facilitate such movement. Has new technology replaced other means of exchange (Malinowski 1920, Mauss 1950, Sahlins 1963, 1972, Brunton 1971, Strathern 1988, Gell 1992), or is it simply amplifying and moving it towards a new era? In order to make sense of all of this it is important to look at the concept of ‘music’ in itself (Merriam 1964, Feld 1984, 1994), and how it moves beyond ‘just’ being a piece of art. By drawing on research conducted on music in Melanesia (Feld 1990, 1991, 2000, Zemp 1978, Zemp & Malkus 1979) I attempt to highlight just how music is created and understood in

Honiara (and the rest of Solomon Islands as well). Following Appadurai (1986), music becomes a commodity, or object, in itself. It has “social potential” (1986:6), and it becomes the subject of reciprocity and exchange in a global and local context, and production becomes a “cultural and cognitive process” (Kopytoff 1986:64), in that music in its very existence becomes a cultural product, and cannot be explained solely from a ‘musical’ perspective. By this I mean that musicians in Honiara often, among other things, write songs about a particular incident (Seward 1999:27) in his or her life, prompting people to recognize this event and relate it to their own lives.

There is also a need to examine the concept of reciprocity and giving – receiving in Melanesian society (Gell 1992, Mauss 1950) in order to fully understand the workings of musical distribution. Concepts of piracy and copyright, which I choose to call *stilim samtin blong nara man* (Pijin, meaning ‘to steal from someone’), will be examined in chapter four with empirical examples. Understanding how a city like Honiara works is vital in order to understand what goes on with regards to music and distribution of it in Honiara. There is another issue that needs to be addressed as well; the immediate past of Honiara, because there are key elements in the history of this South Pacific town that needs to be further examined in order to gain a better understanding of how things are in Honiara today.

### **Dark times fall on Happy Isles**

One major event that continues to haunt the people of Honiara is a period of civil unrest in Solomon Islands, which I use by its Pijin name *tenson*. Foreign media made it out as an ethnic tension, although this is a concept that has been viewed as controversial, particularly by Moore (2004). The reason for calling it ethnic tension is that it was a conflict where para-military groups from Guadalcanal and Malaita fought outside the borders of Honiara. It is vital to give an overview of *tenson* in order to understand many processes that have shaped the modern music scene in Honiara, and my reason for focusing on *tenson* is that musicians in Honiara, especially those of Malaitan and West descent, were forced out of the city. It also changed the face of live music and musical performances in Honiara. This is a subject I will return to in more detail in



chapters two and three. In November of 1998 a group of men from Guadalcanal launched an attack on settlements populated by ethnic Malaitans, causing property damage and chasing the settlers away (Kabutaulaka 2001:3) from land they felt was being invaded by Malaitan settlers, many of whom had inhabited the area for generations. Fact is that in many areas of Guadalcanal land was the subject of great conflict, and many land owners felt alienated due to large-scale land projects (Moore 2004:95), and at the heart of the conflict were immigrants to Honiara – predominantly Malaitans (Kabutaulaka 2001, Moore 2004). Indigenous Guadalcanal men could no longer contain their frustration, and finally launched an attack, sparking the fuse for a conflict that would cause social and economic troubles for years to come (Moore 2004). Guadalcanal Province Assembly, under the leadership of Premier Ezekiel Alebua, also sought compensation for the land where Honiara was, as Guadalcanal people “perceived themselves as bereft of their ancestral lands, as they felt they had never got any part in the development of northern Guadalcanal” (Berg 2008:202), and attacked the settlements where Malaitans lived.

Initially called “Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army” (GRA)<sup>2</sup>, they later changed their name to “Isatabu Freedom Movement” (IFM)<sup>3</sup> (Moore 2004:106), which is the name they are most famous for. ‘Isatabu’ is supposedly thought to have been a pre-European name for Guadalcanal. Kabutaulaka (2001) argues that “[t]he IFM (...) forged a common ethnic identity through the name ‘Isatabu’ (...). Social mobili[z]ation (...) was based on the fact that the people involved belonged to the same island” (2001:3), and this could have given them an ‘ethnic justification’ for attacking settlements. In the wake of these attacks, another militia appeared in defense of the displaced Malaitans. Consisting of angry young men either outraged by exclusion from Guadalcanal or “disaffected youth who wanted adventure (...) [and] criminal elements who aimed to profit from the disruptions” (Moore 2004:126-7), “Malaita Eagle Force” (MEF) started fighting back, and both sides suffered heavy casualties. Although no official number exist, it is believed that roughly 107 people were killed since 1998 (Kabutaulaka 2001:4), although there might be more, since people are still missing after *tenson*. A nation that was once named ‘The Happy Isles’ had become victim of unrest. About 22,000 from Malaita and other areas were

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<sup>2</sup> This name is similar to the guerrilla fraction of Bougainville, “Bougainville Revolutionary Army” (BRA), which is no coincidence, as they were in close contact with refugees from Bouganville living in camps in Honiara in the 1990s (Berg 2010: personal communication).

<sup>3</sup> Initially named the Isatabu Freedom Fighters (IFF).

forced to leave Honiara and return to their native islands (2002:11), making *tenson* a national crisis. *tenson* lasted until 2001, when an Australian led peace agreement, called the Townsville Agreement, was signed by IFM and MEF. Intermittent years would still prove to be highly troublesome, and it was not until 2003, when a multi-national peacekeeping force, RAMSI,<sup>4</sup> entered Solomon Islands, that *tenson* finally came to a complete, but artificial, halt.

### ***Tenson and the music scene***

For the music scene, *tenson* was a disaster because many studios that were present in Honiara were forced to leave town. The largest and most influential, Unisound Studios, relocated their whole operation to Micronesia, where they still have a branch. Many master tapes from Unisound Studios, as well as other recording studios, were destroyed when buildings were set on fire and ravished. Many recordings from those times are now lost forever, although there is an abundance of recordings in the library of Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) in Rove located outside downtown Honiara. As many Malaitans were forced out of Honiara by IFM forces, this did a lot to change many bands that were active in Honiara at the time, as a majority of musicians had their roots in Malaita. Several musicians had to move to Auki due to threats they faced in Honiara, and many groups were disbanded. Not all the exiled musicians returned to Honiara after *tenson* ended. Another province that experienced a large intake of new personnel was Western Province, and especially the provincial capital of Gizo, a town that experienced a great deal of changes due to *tenson*. Several businesses moved their operations to Gizo (Hviding 2009: personal communication), making it an alternative to Honiara for some. Actors in the recording industry also set up shop in Gizo, prompting a gradual shift in power with regards to musical resources. Third World Studios is the most famous studio to come out of Gizo, something I look at more in chapter five.

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<sup>4</sup> Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, which is also called *Operation Helpem Fren* (Operation to Help a Friend).

## Methodology

As a conclusion to this chapter I wish to focus on my initial experiences with the field and some of the obstacles I faced during my first weeks of fieldwork. Focus of my research was musicians in Honiara and their daily lives. I was in Honiara to break through an urban environment and get into the music scene of Honiara. I thought I had prepared myself quite well, and left home with a sense of wonder and a heightened sense of self-confidence. My first obstacle was my own pre-conceptions of Honiara. It was nothing like I thought it would be; yet everything I imagined. Flying in from Brisbane and over Guadalcanal was – and I imagine will always be – the most breathtaking experience of my life. The never-ending blue Pacific Ocean was suddenly ending, and all I could see was a gigantic green island. Forest as far as the eye could see, with small villages on beaches and inland. From the air I could even see people out fishing in canoes, and it was paradise in every sense of the word. After landing on historic Henderson Airfield, I was met by Director of the Solomon Islands National Museum, Mr. Lawrence Foana'ota, who gave me an introduction to the areas we were driving through, explaining that these were once battlefields. Now, to be perfectly honest, I did not pay attention to everything he said, as I was busy just taking in all the impressions around me. Arriving in downtown Honiara and settling into a hotel, I then proceeded to look for informants. English is the official language of Solomons, but most people speak one or more regional languages in addition to Solomon Islands' lingua franca of Pijin<sup>5</sup>, and since I did not speak this language this could pose an initial challenge for me. Pijin is a language that is far from easy to understand, especially for someone who has no experience with it at all. At first I could not really understand everything that was being said around me, so I decided that I had to learn Pijin fast in order to 'survive'<sup>6</sup>. My friend John helped me during this training period, until I could gradually understand more and more.

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<sup>5</sup> Although it is derived from English, it is in fact quite different from English. It is a mix of English words and Melanesian grammar. It originated in meetings between ship crews and islanders in Solomon Islands and also later in plantations in Queensland (Jourdan 1995:139) when workers of different language groups met. It later evolved into the primary language used in Honiara.

<sup>6</sup> A process which surprisingly only took me two to three weeks, as I actively sat and listened, taking notes of words I did not understand. Gradually my Pijin improved, until one day when I was able to speak a full sentence.

## Navigating it all

Gradually I would make sense of Honiara and people around me. During my first walk around Honiara it became painfully obvious that I was a stranger. I felt people looking at me during that initial walk, and started wondering if it was the colour of my skin or the fact that I was a stranger. It was not until my friend pointed out to me that it in fact was my t-shirt (a bright yellow soccer jersey with Brazil's national team colours) that attracted attention, simply because it stood out. During my first weeks I took notes of everything while attempting not to come off as a tourist or aid worker. I wanted to blend in, and it almost became an obsession to be as much like a Solomon Islander as I could. I wanted to be an anthropologist, but sometimes my attempts failed miserably, as it took me quite some time to acclimatize to Honiara. This, and the fact that my informants a lot of times would remind me that I was an outsider, took its toll on me during my first days, and I honestly had serious doubts of what I was actually doing. Some days it seemed like I was doing nothing but smoke cigarettes and drink warm Solbrew<sup>7</sup> bought from a Chinese restaurant at the hotel I was staying. After a while, though, people warmed up to me, and I started to make sense of everything. I met with interesting people and was able to obtain information that I felt was useful to my research. However, my informants would at times go to great lengths in order to amplify my sense of alienation. For example, when I first met the group that was to be my main informants, "2-4-1 Band", we sat around the museum area chatting until dark. When it was time to go our separate ways they asked me where I was staying. I told them that I lived at Quality Inn opposite Central Market, and said I would walk home as it was a short walk from where we were. They told me this was not a good idea, as it could be dangerous for me to walk outside after dark. They offered to walk me home, something I felt I could not decline. For all I knew, it could be very dangerous to walk outside after dark<sup>8</sup>, so we started walking to Quality Inn. During this short stroll I started to feel like a complete outsider, like I was someone very fragile whom these four guys needed to protect. At least that was how I felt when I walked with four grown men forming a square around me, like they were my bodyguards. I do not to this day know exactly why they did what they did, but I experienced this sense of 'protection' a few times in the beginning of my fieldwork. When one friend of mine once told me that they viewed people from

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<sup>7</sup> Nationally produced beer.

<sup>8</sup> I would later learn that this was not the case, as foreign men in fact can walk quite safely in downtown Honiara after dark. It is not safe for women to walk there in evenings, and it is also in many cases seen as a breach of *kastom*.

Australia – this meaning all white people – as physically weaker and more fragile than Melanesians, I started to wonder if this was the reason why I sometimes got ‘assigned’ personal ‘bodyguards’. Albeit, this changed as I became more acclimatized to Honiara and found my place in the field.

I became aware at an early stage that finding musicians in Honiara was in no way an easy task to overcome, because in the beginning it almost seemed like every single person I met was a musician, or at least that was what they told me. However, I soon learned that in fact it was a great difference from knowing how to play the guitar to actually being a musician. Another factor that I had to take into account was that many of the ‘musicians’ I initially met simply seemed to want some kind of economic benefit from speaking to me. Although I quickly learned how to avoid these particular individuals, the task at hand still felt somewhat impossible – as there appeared to be little or no organization as far as music was concerned. My grand idea of getting a complete overview of the Honiara music scene quickly needed to change, as it would have required at least one year of extensive data collection, simply because it was so many actors. I therefore started to concentrate on getting to know a few bands very well, attempting to get a sense of how they operated within a city like Honiara. At the same time I took note of many bands that were active in Honiara, thus gaining an understanding of the multitude of actors operating there. Another plan I had for my fieldwork was to record as much music as possible, so that I could get samples of different genres of music. I discovered, however, that this proved to be yet another impossible task. Not because of the number of songs, but because most musicians appeared to have an issue with foreigners making recordings of their products. Especially researchers were looked upon with distaste with regards to recording music, and this is all due to one particular incident involving a French ethnomusicologist, two French musicians and a deceased woman from Baegu in North Malaita. This incident, from now on called the “Deep Forest affair”, was a landmark in the relationship between Solomons and forces of a globalized music industry. The “Deep Forest affair” was an incident where a French electronic duo, calling themselves Deep Forest, released a song called “*Sweet Lullaby*” from their eponymous album from 1992, a song that went on to achieve fame all over the world. It was used in several commercials for multinational products, making Deep Forest and their record company a lot of money. One big problem was that the singing used on “*Sweet Lullaby*” was by a woman from

Baegu in Fataleka, North Malaita, recorded by French ethnomusicologist Hugo Zemp (1978, 1996) in the late 1960s/early 1970s. I discuss the “Deep Forest affair” in greater detail in chapter five, but for now I will say that although this song generated a lot of money, not a single cent made its way to Baegu, largely because of issues of ownership versus intangible cultural heritage. My plans for recording were in short thwarted by this incident, and for the duration of my fieldwork I was reminded just how much this issue meant to people, almost twenty years after it was originally released.

### **The others**

First of all, it has to be said that a lot of people I came across claimed to be involved in the music business in some way or another. At first it was virtually impossible to get an overview of the field, as different people approached me every single day. But after a while I learned how to differentiate between those who had an agenda of some sorts (especially an economic motive), and those who were honest and genuine. I wish to illustrate this with an example from my first week in Honiara.

As I was sitting in the museum grounds just chatting with a man I had met a few days earlier, two men came through the front gate. Although it was always closed and security guards were posted there at all hours of the day, people would still come into the museum grounds all the time, either to sell something or to just chat with *wantok*. These two men, probably 20-25 years of age walked in and started looking around. Some of the men I was sitting with seemed to recognize them, but did not pay them much attention. One of them talked to one of the security guards, while the other came towards me. “Are you the one here to research music?” he asked me, whereas I replied that music was the reason for me being in Honiara. “I know a lot of traditional songs, and if you like I can write them down for you,” he said. I told him that would be great, and asked if he needed any paper, as I had a notebook ready. “I probably need about 5 dollars to buy some paper, and also some betel nuts. They help me think,” he answered. Being that I was new in Honiara and did not know how to act around people, I

gave him 5 dollars. He told me he would be back in about an hour and then left. I did not see him for a week, although this is not uncommon in Honiara, as people follow their own time (Solomon time, meaning that things happen in their own pace). When he returned after a week he did not bring anything with him. Instead he claimed that he needed more money, 25 dollars. But, I had been warned by some of my new friends that things like this could happen, so I refused to pay. The man seemed disappointed, but did not say anything, and walked away. I never saw him again (or the songs, for that sake).

Luckily episodes like this did not occur frequently, and the majority of the musicians I came across seemed genuinely interested in my research, and was more than happy to give me the information I needed without any form of financial compensation. Despite the fact that most musicians seemed happy that someone had taken an interest in what they were doing, they all appeared somewhat reluctant towards me at first. Apart from a few bands, many seemed to think that I was there to somehow capitalize on their music. I did not know why, but after a while I learned that it was because of Deep Forest.

## Chapters

Chapter two focus on the history of popular music in Solomon Islands, beginning with American influence during World War II, when guitars were popularized as a result of contact with allied soldiers. I examine the development of music, focusing particularly on key songs from the early period of 1950 and onwards, before moving on to what I have seen as a rapid evolution in music during the 1980s and -90s. *Tenson* and the subsequent shift in musical relations and topics will also be covered during chapter two, and I will look at development of the music scene from 2000 to 2008 when I conducted my research.

Chapter three looks at musicians, with a focus on lyrical topics. Music in Solomon Islands contain a great deal of social commentaries, something I examine closer. I also give examples of

some songs, in order to further my argument about music as means of social expression by presenting some key topics – often-controversial ones – that have been used in songs.

In chapter four I turn my attention towards the actual movement of the music, as well as looking at it from the consumer's point of view. Modern technology has enabled musicians and consumers to spread songs at a very rapid speed, and I wish to examine if this is actually a continuation of ancient methods of exchanging cultural capital within Solomon Islands society. Another topic covered in part during chapter four will be how Solomon Islands music is spreading to other parts of Melanesia, and why this exchange seems to be a one-way mechanism.

Chapter five summarizes some of general themes, as well as bringing new arguments on different aspects of the music scene, in particular what happens when external multi-national forces meet with a small island nation such as Solomon Islands.



## **Chapter II**

### **The history of Solomon Islands popular music**

In chapter two I attempt to give a full presentation of the history of popular music in Solomon Islands. As there are almost no sources with reference to this particular history, I have therefore had to make use of scant sources, as well as my own notes from my research

#### **Genesis of contemporary music**

When attempting to establish the origins of modern popular music in Honiara, it is necessary to start at a particular period in time; namely World War II. “Guadalcanal Campaign”, which continued into New Georgia, left countless impressions on Solomon Islanders (Lindstrom & White 1990). It was not just the massive machinery of war brought about by Allied and Japanese forces, but encounters between forces and Solomon Islanders, encounters viewed by the colonial government as threatening to their superiority (Lindstrom & White 1990:13). Allied forces that eventually took control over Solomon Islands from the Japanese not only brought weapons and material, they brought new means of leisure to Solomons, such as radios and guitars (Webb 2005:289). One thing that would turn out to be the most important, at least in regards to this thesis, was the introduction of guitars. By introducing Solomon Islanders to this musical instrument, American soldiers effectively aided in the birth of popular music in Solomons, as well as in other parts of Melanesia, such as Papua New Guinea (Crowdy 2001:138). Young men watched Americans who came to the villages, or worked with them on various bases, play guitar. By watching and handling guitars, they learned how to play this instrument as well. It is unclear if the British colonial government brought guitars to Solomon Islands, but if they did, Solomon Islanders did not take notice of it. When Americans - dubbed ‘Joe’ or ‘mate’ by Solomon Islanders (Lindstrom & White 1990:13) - arrived, they had a less patronizing attitude than British and Australians. Solomon Islanders gained a lot of respect for Americans, who paid them well and invited them to join them around the dinner table, something that was completely unknown to Solomon Islanders prior to the war (Bennett 1987:292), but a practice that undoubtedly earned

'Joe' a great deal of respect. This respect eventually led to Solomon Islanders wanting to learn how to play guitars, and thus we can pinpoint the birth of popular music to somewhere around 1943-44.

However, this was not the first time Solomon Islanders came into contact with string-based music. Polynesian ukulele music was to some degree popularized in Melanesia due to contact with sailors who travelled the Pacific, who played songs and sold or traded recordings with Solomon Islanders (Webb 2005:289), prompting new musical impulses to gain root. As a great deal of guitars got left behind in villages, this made young men wanting to make use of skills they had obtained simply from observing American soldiers play. This eventually led to the formation of popular music scene; a musical style that was to be known as *Solomon Islands stringbands*. I do not know exactly how this was done in villages, as there are no records of it, but it is natural to assume – based on information given to me by various informants – that villagers utilized this newfound knowledge and started shaping it into something that fitted their particular reality. How these songs sounded or what they were about is hard to say, but I believe that they were strongly influenced by music played by American personnel at that time. Music that was popular in America at the time, like country/western, bluegrass, Tin Pan Alley and show tunes was now being played to Solomon Islanders (Webb 2005:289). Judging from recordings made in the 1950s it is likely to assume that these three genres were influential on what was the first wave of Solomon Islands popular music. In comparison, in neighbouring Papua New-Guinea stringbands using guitar and ukulele appeared around the same time as in Solomons (Crowdy 2001:138), although these two branches of Melanesian stringband music appears to have evolved in a parallel direction to each other, and do not seem to be directly linked to each other. In Papua New Guinea stringbands appeared to be much larger, using more instruments than in Solomon Islands, who seemed to use only guitars.

## *Qoqala*

In the wake of this new stringband movement there appeared other similar movements in different provinces. While stringbands primarily seemed to be a Honiara phenomenon, guitars were equally important in different provinces and were used as means of entertainment. A particularly interesting issue is that which goes under the name of *qoqala*<sup>9</sup>. There are no records of this whatsoever, and it does not appear to be an issue discussed by many in Solomon Islands. According to Hviding (2010: personal communication), what this specifically entailed was that young men and women in Western Province gathered in forests on the outskirts of villages, lit a bonfire and sat around to play guitar all through the night. More often than not some of these young people snuck away during the course of the night and went into the bushes, most likely in order to get intimate (Hviding 2010: personal communication). In a country where sexuality is in many ways repressed, this was not unproblematic. The general feeling seems to be that “most adults maintain that talking about sex is taboo<sup>10</sup>. *Kastom* (...) does not promote free conversations about sexuality between men and women” (Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003:220), as was also the case in immediate post-war times. When it was discovered what *qoqala* was and what youth were doing at these nightly sessions, the church immediately put a stop to it and guitars was deemed an instrument of sin. In fact, their ban of guitars was so effective that generations to follow effectively subdued information about this phenomenon (Hviding 2010: personal communication), and it was not known to happen in Western Province again. Albeit, this movement did not just appear in Western Province, but in Malaita as well. According to two of my informants, musician John Seda and Deputy Director of the Solomon Islands National Museum, John Tahinao, similar events took place in other provinces as well. According to them it took place in Malaita under the name *kras kokonut*, and also in Temotu province, where it is called *sisi danis*. According to Seda, there is another phenomenon in Lau area on Malaita Island called *tegai*<sup>11</sup>. This is a sort of party which evokes different acts of male cross-dressing. It seems to be done purely for the entertainment, and not as a mark of transsexuality. According to Seda

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<sup>9</sup> *Qoqola* is a local name from Western Province, but no one has been able to figure out the English translation.

<sup>10</sup> In Makira, however, unmarried women and men in fact are allowed “great sexual freedom until marriage” (Bennett 1987: 29). It must be said that Bennett (1987) is talking about the years of initial contact, and not about a modern day situation.

<sup>11</sup> Meaning “pretty flower”.

when this is mixed with modern music, people start dancing more or less subconsciously. Where *qoqala* seemed to stop due to attitudes of the church, *kras kokonut* appeared to have come to a halt because electronic instruments were introduced. As there are no records of these events, this has not been verified by other sources.

After World War II ended, and British colonial government officials returned to Solomon Islands after evacuating its personnel during the Japanese invasion, they found the old capital of Tulagi in ruins after Japanese bombing raids (Bennett 1987:303). They were forced to find another administrative seat, and their choice fell on the area where Honiara is today. This area was in effect an army base for American forces, meaning that infrastructure was already in place, making it easy to move into the area (Bennett 1987:303). Honiara would eventually attract people from all over Solomon Islands, who came to the city for various reasons. I will focus on those young men who arrived in search of adventure, employment or education. Among thousands who migrated to the city, I will now look at a few key figures and songs that have made their legacy live on among people in Honiara and the rest of Solomon Islands.

### **A walkabout**

A defining moment in the history of Solomon Islands popular music occurred sometimes in the 1950s when a young man from a village called Onepusu in Are'Are area of Malaita Island came to Honiara in search of a better life for himself (<http://www.pmc.gov.sb/content/“wakabauti-long-chinatown”-song-composers-storyline>). He had experienced American soldiers who came to his village, and his fascination with guitars led him to master this instrument quite well. It was a favourite pastime for him, and he played guitar as often as he could. His name was Edwin Sitori, and he was about to create something that has lasted for generations. When arriving in Honiara he engaged in what many Solomon Islanders often do when they first come Honiara; he went on a *wokabaot*, a Pijin word meaning to wander around, often without any clear destination or meaning (Frazer 1985:189). Inspired by these walks around Honiara and what he saw, he sat down to write a piece of music that would forever etch itself into the collective memory of

Solomon Islands; “*Wakabaot long Saenataon*” (Pijin, meaning Walkabout in Chinatown<sup>12</sup>). According to Sitori he co-wrote it together with two friends, Rone Naqu of Kolobangara Island between New Georgia and Gizo Island and Jason Que of Vella Lavella, both in Western Province (<http://www.pmc.gov.sb/content/“wakabauti-long-chinatown”-song-composers-storyline>). This song was recorded in the early 1950s, and a very crude recording still exists. Jourdan (1995a) claims it to be a description of a difficult life facing many young men coming to Honiara during those early days (1995:206), while Frazer characterizes it as a general description of life in Honiara (1985:185). In an interesting note, Moore writes that the song “describes lyrically the delights of wandering through Honiara’s Chinatown” (2008:64), so as we can see there are several interpretations of this particular piece of music.

It goes as follows:

Wakabaot Long Saenaton,	Walking around in Chinatown,
Makem kosi, angga lon kona	Finding a path, stopping in a corner,
Sutiap, sekem hed,	Shouting, shaking one’s head,
Kikim baket enikaen	Kicking anything.
Ies, iu laf	Yes, you laugh
Haf senis, wata nating.	As if the brain is like water.
Tingting baek long iu,	I am thinking of you,
Lusim hom long taem	I have left home long ago,
Tu iia ova mi no lukim iu	I haven’t seen you for over two years,

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<sup>12</sup> Chinatown being a specific area of Honiara where many Chinese immigrants set up shop. It was a popular location to do shopping up until April of 2006 when it was burned down following a massive riot against Parliament.

Tastawe mi no laekem iu,	This is why I do not love you,
Man garange,	[I am a crazy man],
Garange hed lusim mani.	[A crazy man who lost all of his money].
No mata mi dae lon Honiara,	It does not matter if I die in Honiara
Samting mi lusim long taem lon iu,	What we had I lost long ago
Bat sapos iu tingim lon mi,	But if you still think of me
Iu kan weit fo tu iia moa,	You have to wait for two extra years
Letem kam laet skin	Until my skin becomes
Long lilebit.	Slightly lighter.
	(Jourdan 1995:206-207)

According to Sitori, the song was written as a reaction to his many walks around the city.

As I walked around Honiara I constantly observed *wantok* and others who would just hung around doing absolutely nothing. All day long! I myself did not understand why, since I was no *liu*. Frustrated by what I saw I decided to write the song. It is not about myself so much, but about the *liu* I saw.

(Excerpt from interview conducted by me with Sitori in December 2008)

In a recent interview conducted in April of 2010 (<http://www.pmc.gov.sb/content/“wakabauti-long-chinatown”-song-composers-storyline>), the theme “*Wakabaot Long Saenataon*” is boys passing through Chinatown looking for girls, who in those days lived and worked at Central Hospital in Honiara. Although Sitori himself claims it was merely an observation of others, I do

support Frazer (1985) and Jourdan (1995a) in their analysis of it as well. I believe that when Sitori claimed the song was not autobiographical, he was talking about the first verse. In the second and third verse it becomes clearer that he is speaking of himself, although the claim that he is projecting through someone else could also be made. Perhaps the truth is to be found somewhere in between, in that “*Wakabaot Long Saenataon*” is a description of what Sitori observed, but at the same time a lament to a life he left behind. Why I say “life left behind” is because of the line “*tu iia ova mi no lukim iu*”, meaning he has not seen someone for two years. From what I learned during my fieldwork, and what we will return to at a later stage, this someone is merely a representation of home, “*hom*” (Berg 2000: 61), meaning his village of Onepusu in Are’Are. It is not at all a love song, but a nostalgic song of a life he left behind, and somehow wishes to return to.

Sometime in the 1950s – probably somewhere between 1952-55 – Broadcasting Officer of what was then called Solomon Islands Broadcasting Service<sup>13</sup> (SIBS), Bill Bennett, discovered “*Wakabaot Long Saenataon*” and recorded it, calling Sitori, Naqu and Que “Three High Voltage Boys” (<http://www.pmc.gov.sb/content/“wakabauti-long-chinatown”-song-composers-storyline>). This was the first recording of a song that would come to define the very essence of Honiara. Becoming slightly popular on the radio, it did not make it big until it was recorded by “Solomon Dakei and his Solomon Islanders” sometime in the early 1960s. This version quickly grew to become a big hit in Solomon Islands. One reason for this might have been that the general themes of the song – life in Honiara, girls and longing – resonated with so many. Whatever reasons, it eventually made it out to neighbouring countries, and was picked up by Fijian musician Sakiusa Bulocokocoko who made a more up-tempo version of it (Solomon Dakei’s recording was a country-song). Bulocokocoko is considered one of the greatest performers from Fiji, and he popularized “*Wakabaot Long Saenataon*” when he played it live at different venues around the Pacific (<http://www.pmc.gov.sb/content/“wakabauti-long-chinatown”-song-composers-storyline>). It is still popular to this day, and is sung all around the Pacific. As one woman told me during a conversation:

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<sup>13</sup> From 1977 named Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) (Hadlow 1984:8)

I went to Samoa once to attend a conference, and when we arrived there, some people all of a sudden started singing *Wakabaot long Saenataon*. It was just amazing, and it shows just how popular this song actually is. It made us proud to be Solomon Islanders.

### **The troublemaker and friends**

Another famous recording artist and beloved performer in Solomon Islands, not least among the generation who are now between the ages of 40 and 70 years, is Fred Maedola. He recorded with Viking Records in New Zealand, and is said to have modelled his style on Slim Dusty from Australia (Webb 2005:290). He became one of the artists fronting stringband music in Solomon Islands along with Jim Baku, aforementioned Solomon Dakei and Edwin Sitori. Songs like “*Technical week long Auki*” by Baku, “*Honiara girl*” by Sitori and “*Time me sick long Number Nine*” by Maedola are songs that would often be played on SIBS/SIBC during the 1960s and -70s. It is hard to establish just how many recordings were actually made during those years, as no official records exist. However, it is not unlikely that numbers are well into the hundreds, as a tour of SIBC archives in Rove will reveal. These archives are quite impressive, and can be used as a good historical source when looking at the historical development of music.

Stringband music in Solomon Islands grew to become quite popular during the 1960s. Musicians were not interested in traditional music performed in villages, or psalms sung in church and at other religious gatherings. They enjoyed a stringband ‘revolution’ that swept the country, and as radios gradually spread out across the nation, more and more people would gain access to these artists. Fred Maedola, as mentioned, made quite a name for himself as a recording artist in Solomon Islands. Little is known about him, but what is known is that he originated in Malaita Island. He spent most of his time in his home village until his death (Foana’ota 2009: personal communication), but likely he must have travelled to New Zealand or Papua New Guinea to record with Viking Records. It is not clear when he passed away, but his music still lives on. “*Dollar*”, “*Lucky girl*” and “*Trabol meka long taon*” are three of his most beloved songs.



Although his name still lives on in Honiara, his songs do not enjoy the same popularity as “*Wakabaot long Saenataon*”, at least not in the sense that they became a national icon. From what I could tell from conversations and interviews, Maedola’s music appeared to be preferred by the older generation. Still, like Sitori, Maedola wrote music and songs that discussed topics that are still valid to this day. Many of those who held Maedola in high regards always mentioned that they could recognize elements of their own lives in his songs. These elements were, for example, money, love, belonging and day-to-day living in Honiara. Just like “*Wakabaot long Saenataon*”, his songs dealt with what appeared to be more or less general features for many in Honiara. Their value as social commentaries is definitely present, something I will discuss in more detail in chapter three. What needs to be pointed out is that many topics used in stringband music are issues that did not resonate with people on a village level. To them it was not relevant, as constantly searching for money and employment, as well as *wakabaot* in Honiara were in fact quite foreign topics to them. These were lives of urbanites, which do not constitute a majority in Solomon Islands. However, it did not mean that villagers did not enjoy music.

### **A change is gonna come**

Stringbands in Solomon Islands grew to be a large movement, and some songs even made it out of Solomon Islands and into other parts of Melanesia. I have not found any records on exactly how this happened, but I believe it is likely that it either came through a spread of radios or through distribution by Viking Records. This led musicians to become popular in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea in particular. Songs were exchanged and recorded between borders. As an example, there is a recording released in 1970 of “*Wakabaot long Saenataon*” by Papua New Guinean band “Kopy Kats”<sup>14</sup>, where Fred Maedola features on the B-side with “*Taem Mi Sick Long Namba Naen*” (Niles 1984: 266). This is just one of many examples of Melanesian musical exchange, almost like a modern day “kula” (Malinowski 1920), although they used radiowaves instead of travelling by sea. As mentioned earlier, documentation on particular actors involved with stringband music in Honiara is at best scarce. It is hard to establish just how many performers there actually were at this time. PNG’s heydays with regards to stringband music was

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<sup>14</sup> The Masalai blog (<http://masalai.wordpress.com/2009/09/30/walkabout-long-chinatown/>)

in the 1960s (Crowdy 2001:139), and from what I could make out from different songs my informants would talk about from those days, this was true for Honiara as well. What is known is that Solomon Dakei became a prominent figure in Solomon Islands, and he was one of the people who established Honiara Museum Association in the 1960s (Foana'ota 1994: 96). As far I as am aware he did not return to music. However, his legacy still lives on through his recording of “*Wakabaot long Saenataon*”. Same thing is true for Fred Maedola and Edwin Sitori, although Sitori is, as far as I can tell, the only surviving musician from this era.

Stringband music was now becoming the preferred music of adults in Honiara and Solomon Islands. Young generations did not enjoy this music as much and many of them hungered for something else. Although there seemed to be a great demand for something else. As Solomon Islands was moving towards independence in 1979, there seemed to be a growing sense of national pride among people. Solomon Islands had gotten its own parliament, and Great Britain was about to grant them independence. Now, I am not going to make a claim that these sentiments inspired the next big music scene, but it did come at a very special time for Solomon Islanders, and it can serve as a kind of national symbol. One change in music happened when a type of blues-oriented rock, inspired in part by the Rolling Stones, was introduced, called Pijin Rock. According to musician John Seda, musician Patrick Sale, who played a heavy blues-rock oriented style of music, invented Pijin Rock.

I remember when Patrick Sale appeared with Pijin Rock. I was a young man when I first heard his music, and it was some of the best music I had ever heard. When he strummed his first chords on that guitar and sang “When I woke up this morning...” in Pijin, I was hooked.

(Excerpt from interview conducted by me with John Seda in Honiara 2008)

What Patrick Sale in fact did seems to be what stringbands a generation before him; they took an external element and appropriated it into something familiar to many Solomon Islanders. This resonated well with many young people of Solomon Islands, who were looking for something other than their parent’s music. Another element that was fairly defining for Solomon Islanders was that this music was produced nationally, in the sense that lyrics were performed in their own

language, covering topics that were familiar to many, at least those living in urban areas. Like stringband music, Pijin Rock covered topics such as unemployment, money, relationships and general hardships of town life. These topics exemplify well traits observed by Jourdan (1995b) that “Solomon Islanders are by no means passive consumers of imported multinational capital culture in pre-packaged forms: they impose their own creative stamp on the Western phenomena with which they are bombarded” (1995b:212). This was true ever since the first stringbands appeared in post-war years. If Pijin Rock initiated a change in Solomon Islands music, what was to follow would forever change the music in Solomon Islands. A music that entered Solomons – probably through radio – originally came from Jamaica in the Caribbean, and was called reggae. Where stringbands enjoyed a large popularity among the post-war generation, reggae would for following generations have an almost religious connotation to it.

### **Rebel music comes to Solomons**

When or how reggae made it to Solomon Islands is unclear, but it might be natural to assume it came either through Australia or – more likely – from radio broadcasts from America or Australia. This coincided with a worldwide spread of reggae in the 1970s (King 2002: 90). Regardless of how it first came, it forever changed music in Solomons. Introduction of reggae to Solomon Islands came at a time when this particular style of music emerged from Jamaica onto the world stage, largely because of Bob Marley and his influence (King 2002: 90). Marley popularized reggae in Europe and America, while other elements of the reggae movement made it big in other parts of the world, particularly in Africa. For a country like Solomon Islands is likely that appeal lay in lyrical themes, such as poverty, injustice and oppression (King 2002: 97). In a country that had just recently achieved independence, such topics are likely to have resonated with Solomon Islands’ urban population. Also, given that that reggae was made by artists who were black, this might have gone in well with Solomon Islanders, as it appears that reggae was the first ‘black music’<sup>15</sup> that was introduced to Solomons. I will return to a discussion on reggae and its impact in chapter three. Musicians and bands like Bob Marley, Lucky Dube, “UB40” and

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<sup>15</sup> Although blues, which is also a typical category of ‘black music’ was an element of Pijin Rock, it was blues-rock inspired by Rolling Stones, and not traditional ‘black’ blues that served as an inspiration.

“Big Mountain” all became popular names among young urbanites in Honiara, who had more or less turned their back on their parents’ music. Its rhythm was easy to follow, and during the 1980s, bands playing reggae increased. A complete overview of all of these is hard to obtain, as this period has not been recorded in writing. However, from what my informants would tell me, there was a relatively large amount of bands operating in Honiara during the 1980s. Where Pijin Rock inspired musicians to play a different style of music, it was nothing compared to reggae.

### **“Unisound”**

One band that stood out among reggae bands in Honiara during the 1980s and early -90s was without doubt “Unisound”. This band was a more or less traditional reggae band that enjoyed a massive popularity in Solomon Islands, and eventually outside its borders as well. Highly regarded and remembered for their music, “Unisound” also became known as the ‘founding fathers’ of what is today known as Unisound Studios, probably the most famous and renowned recording studio in Solomon Islands. Unisound Studios is often hailed as one of the most important Melanesian recording studios, together with Chin H Meen (CHM) Supersound in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea and Mangrove Studios in Nouméa, New Caledonia. As a band, “Unisound” became very popular in Honiara and Solomon Islands, and they also achieved a wide popularity in other Pacific nations, especially Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji. They also collaborated with legendary Fijian performer Daniel Rae Costello. “Unisound” played together until sometimes in the 1990s, when they – after Unisound Studios was established in 1992 – eventually stopped performing live and concentrated on recording and promoting music on a full time basis. It is not clear exactly when they retired, but likely it was sometimes in the mid 1990s. It would not have been possible without the aid of Chinese Solomon Islander David Chow sr., which helped them establish a recording studio through an enterprise called Unisound Enterprises Limited that was established in 1993. According to Unisound Studios’ website, (<http://www.trader.com.sb>) former musicians engaged themselves not only in recording, but in promoting music – and reggae in particular – in Solomon Islands. They were highly successful at this, and helped bring big names such as aforementioned Daniel Rae Costello, Australian country singer Graeme Connors and Lucky Dube’s old band “Slaves”

(<http://trader.com.sb>). These bands were not invited only to play concerts, but also to interact with aspiring musicians in Solomon Islands. This opportunity had not been given to them Solomon Islands in the past, and according to Unisound Studios, this inspired many musicians to start recording themselves.

Their legacy still lives on today, through their studio, but also through many reggae bands in Honiara today. One thing that was often discussed when speaking to musicians – at least those playing reggae or reggae-oriented music – was how they owed a lot to “Unisound”. It is not only their music people are quick to mention, but also that they were the pioneers of what in many ways could be called a musical revolution, in that it not only brought about a music scene, but also inspired a whole new musical direction; Island Style. They even got a stage named after them at Lawson Tama stadium in Honiara, where DJ Graphics, who owns Unisound Studios, helped sponsor this particular area of Lawson Tama, on the west side of its football pitch. The Unisound Stage is used for a multitude of different arrangements at Lawson Tama stadium, and during the 1990s there were several big shows played there. Most memorable are shows by American reggae band “Big Mountain” in 1996 and South African reggae legend Lucky Dube in 1997. Both of these are legends in Solomon Islands, and many reggae bands at different venues in Honiara play their songs to this day.

Musician John Seda told me about Lucky Dube’ concert in 1997 and how it caused frenzy among the people of Honiara at the time.

When Lucky came to Honiara everyone went completely crazy. There were big trucks carrying the equipment to Lawson Tama, and people would gather around to watch it. When Lucky Dube travelled from Henderson to Lawson Tama people would gather along the road to greet him, and some would even attempt to run after the bus.

(Excerpt from interview conducted by me with John Seda in Honiara 2008)

This concert, along with Big Mountain's 1996 concert was packed with people. Official attendance for this show was approximately 10,000, but several thousand more lined up outside the stadium to listen. A lot of people also sneaked in to Lawson Tama without purchasing a ticket (Berg 2010: personal communication). "Big Mountain" and Lucky Dube were also the last big acts to come to Honiara before *tenson*, and the last big international names to play in Solomon Islands.

### **Island Style**

Island Style could at first glance be perceived as a generic term describing music from different Pacific island nations. In Solomon Islands it is used to describe a particular brand of music that is hugely popular among many people, and one that seems to be the template for a majority of the music released. Exactly at what time-period it originated is not quite clear, but it is likely it came about sometimes around early 1990s, as it was well in place through Sharzy in 1996 (Berg 2010: personal communication). One aspect, which could indicate a timeframe for its origins, is the introduction of electric synthesizers. This instrument came to Solomon Islands and Honiara sometimes in the late 1980s, and it had almost as much to say for music as guitars did in the years following World War II. It helped artists play their music in a completely different fashion than what had been done previously. Island Style has since the 1990s been a trademark of Solomon Islands music, and a style that made Solomon music popular in other parts of the Pacific as well, particularly in Papua New Guinea. It is similar to reggae, but has a very distinct beat and relies heavily on synthesizers for its sound, often accompanied with a dominant riff played on synthesizers. Its origins can most likely be traced back to Santa Isabel province<sup>16</sup> where it is known as Isabel Island Style, and bands from that area are particularly popular among people. Bands like "Sisirikiti", "Pagasa", "Sisiva" and "Saba" are all names hailing from Isabel, and all are highly popular bands in their own province, but also in Solomon Islands in general. All bands are still active, and I return to "Sisiva" at in chapter five because they are special in the sense that they are an all-girl group, something that is rare in Solomons.

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<sup>16</sup> Santa Isabel is simply called *Isabel* by most Solomon Islanders.

During mid 1990s reggae and Island Style dominated Honiara's music scene during what I have dubbed a 'Golden Age' for Solomon Islands music. Studios were being set up, nightclubs were seething and bands popped up everywhere in Honiara. Solomon Islands music was starting to get discovered all over Melanesia, and bands from Solomons were signed by CHM Supersound and Mangrove, who helped market them for an even bigger audience in the Pacific. From what my informants would tell me, there seemed to be a general optimism surrounding the music scene in Honiara. Bands and performers like "Apprentice", "Isles De Sound", "2-4-1 Band" and Ian Roni (also known as Papa Yannie) were all performers that enjoyed success in Solomon Islands during these days. Especially "Apprentice" is mentioned as one of the major influences during this period, and their songs "*Dedicate My Love (to you)*" and "*Immoral Woman*" were both major hits in Honiara, and "Apprentice" travelled outside of Solomon Islands to tour. Especially the two singers, brothers Timothy (Timo) and John Seda, were instrumental in the success of the band. Timo later went on to have quite a distinctive career as a solo artist, as well as performing with other bands. I will give a further presentation of the Seda brothers in chapter three.

Ian Roni is another artist that I will look at in chapter three and four, as his story is one that needs to be outlined even more, as he is the composer a song that was viewed as very controversial when it was released. For now I wish only to give a historic outline of musicians and trends.

Despite that Island Style appeared to have become the new stringbands, and reggae also had a major influence, there were still those who adhered to a heavier style of music. Heavy metal was not a particularly large or important part of the music scene, but it is still worth mentioning. Bands like "Bon Jovi" and "Iron Maiden" were popular among those who did not care too much for reggae or Island Style, and some bands did make it to the surface and played concerts. The most prominent of these were "Solid Black", "Black Centipede" and "Koola Ridge Boys", who played heavy metal and were very popular among those who wanted an alternative to Island Style and reggae.

## End of Golden Age

Honiara experienced its most productive and creative period in relations to the music scene, and things were looking promising for many of the artists that were around. Solomon Islands music had become a trademark in the rest of Melanesia, and people in these countries often spoke of this music with great respect. All and all things were looking quite well musically for Solomon Islands. However, this was all to change in a matter of just a few years, as *tenson* hit Honiara. I have already described *tenson* in chapter one, so I will not go into greater detail the specifics around this particular subject. However, in regards to the ramifications it had for the music scene in Honiara one needs to speak of what happened to a vibrant music scene that in fact were present during those times. As the fighting outside Honiara began in 1998 with skirmishes, evictions and murders in North-East and North-West Honiara, this affected the musicians a great deal. At first they tried to play concerts and go about more or less as normal, playing clubs and such. People still wanted entertainment, despite the fact that Honiara was turning into a low-scale warzone. However, during *tenson* ethnicity would play a part, something that led some musicians to leave town. One of these, Mike, told me a story from a concert his band held in a Honiara nightclub during the height of the tensions.

We had just started playing the concert when three men walked into the club. I quickly recognized them as being members of Malaitan Eagle Force. They sat down in the back of the club, drinking some beers. I thought they were just there to watch the concert, and did not think more of it. But halfway through the second song one of them took out a rifle and pointed it towards the stage. They were aiming for the drummer, who quickly realized this and walked off stage immediately. All three men laughed and started pointing their guns towards the rest of us. This, combined with the fact that my family and I was being threatened, made me leave Honiara and go back home. It took me a long time to return.

(Excerpt of interview conducted by me in Honiara 2008)



This story serves a good illustration of the terror many people felt during *tenson*, and when fighting reached its peak, most people seemed afraid to leave their houses. Clubs and cinemas were eventually closed down, and the entertainment completely stopped. As many musicians, especially those of Malaitan descent, left Honiara, combined with the closing of nightclubs and other venues for music, meant that these were the days the music ‘died’, to paraphrase a line from the Don McLean song “*American Pie*”.

Concerts at clubs were not only a venue for musicians to present their material to the fans, it was also an important venue for marketing records for those who were signed with Unisound Studios or one of the other studios. Bands continued to play the nightclub scene, as this was a large source of income. When fighting broke out in Honiara the nightclubs were still open, but members of MEF frequented many of these<sup>17</sup>, and some of these were not afraid to bring weapons when they went to have a beer or to watch a concert. Although I probably did meet people who had been a part of MEF during my fieldwork, I could not ask anyone if they had been a member of these factions, as the wounds had far from healed ten years after the fighting first broke out. I did during a period stay at a location that was said to be the hangout of the MEF during *tenson*, and many former militias would still frequent the location, although I do not know if this is true or not. Again, it was not be safe to ask people whether or not they had been affiliated with MEF in *tenson* years. Most of my informants uncomfortable in speaking of the events that went on, as they were still etched into their minds. When they spoke of *tenson* and their experiences, they would mostly talk about events that were well known to most people. As a consequence I did not obtain too much information about how they felt personally, apart from the story described above.

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<sup>17</sup> Members of IFM, or anyone from Guadalcanal, would not go to nightclubs in those days (Berg 2010: personal communication).

## Rebuilding

As *tenson* finally ended in 2003, people had to rebuild Honiara, and wounds needed to be mended. This meant that the music scene needed to be rebuilt as well. Many musicians fled to Malaita and Western Province, and bands were split as a consequence of this. As life gradually returned to normal in Honiara the music scene would slowly regain some of the strength it had enjoyed throughout the 1990s. However, it would be a slow recovery, as the country was ravished by the tensions and mistrust existed among many people. Creatively, the artists had new topics to address in their songs, and songs were written about this particular period in time. *Isles De Sound*, one of the bands that had been a part of 'Golden Age', wrote the song "Living as One Nation" that dealt with the tensions. Singer Timo Seda performed this song in 2001 in Honiara in a very intriguing fashion, his brother John told me.

After his band had recorded Living as One Nation Timo and a woman got a truck and some sound equipment and proceeded to drive through the streets of Honiara performing this song. They did this all day, driving up and down Honiara singing this song. This was right after the peace agreement had been signed in Australia. People gathered in the streets to hear this song, which was about how Timo felt about *tenson*. It was really powerful.

(Excerpt from interview conducted by me with John Seda in Honiara 2008)

It could be argue that Seda took it upon himself to be some form of mediator during post-*tenson* Honiara. A mere act of driving through Honiara and playing this song, repeating its message through and through, could be seen as the song moving away from being 'just' a collection of words and notes and into a deeper meaning, as music engages society, or rather musicians engage society. Although the melody in itself does not indicate anything as to where the song was written, words and ways these are communicated gave it a specific identity, morally and geographically (Leyshon, Matless & Revill 1995:430), by calling onto all Solomon Islanders to remember they are one nation. However, given that the nation of Solomon Islands in many ways merely is a colonial construct made up of several language- and ethnic groups, it is highly unlikely that a song such as *Living as One Nation* has a uniting force. Even the national anthem,

“*God Save Our Solomon Islands*”, did not appear to invoke a lot of national emotions in my informants. Instead, songs like “*Wakabaot long Saenataon*” seemed to be more valid. This resonates well with Jourdan’s (1995b) argument about music and culture as “stepping-stones” (1995b) in creating national awareness, in that certain pieces of music serve as means of constructing nationality in a country that in reality is lacking such a common emotion.

### **Solomon Islands Music Federation**

In 1994 Solomon Islands Music Federation (SIMF) was formed by Ministry of Commerce (<http://www.solomonstarnews.com/features/local-entertainment/3839-seda-lashes-out-at-music-body/>), as a way of helping to further music in Solomon Islands, as well as trying to help musicians market their music outside of the country. SIMF did not receive a lot of attention in the beginning, and many of the older musicians had little knowledge of this organization when it first began. It was not until after the tension period, when SIMF elected Placid Walekwate Jr. as their president that the organization in reality started to become an important act in Solomon Islands in regards to music. Among other things, SIMF allied themselves with RAMSI for a songwriter competition in 2004 in order to encourage musicians to write songs around the theme “*Braet future ka map fo iumi tugeta*” (Pijin, meaning “Celebrating a brighter future, a better Solomons”) (<http://www.ramsi.org/node/17>). This, combined with an attempt to heighten their profile, in many ways led SIMF to assume the role that *Unisound Studios* had held in the years before *tenson*.

### **A return to glory**

I have argued that musical activity decreased during *tenson* – at least live music - an argument could also be posted that it simply went into hibernation, only to rise from the ashes when *tenson* finally ended. Unisound Studios was forced to flee Honiara during *tenson* because of looting and the eventual burning of their studios at Koola Ridge. They relocated to Pohnpei where they set up a Micronesian branch of their studio. This is still active and has become an important player in the Pacific music industry. After *tenson* they returned to Honiara and set up their studios again.

They still hold the position as the number one recording studio in Honiara, but have been given sharp competition from other actors in Solomon Islands, and not least by a surge of home recording studios that started to emerge at the turn of the new millennium. Today there is a significant amount of digital recording equipment present in Solomon Islands, and these have largely replaced big studios like Unisound Studios and SIBC. This has changed the balance of power in regards to the music scene, and given musicians a lot more power than what was previously the case.

### **Gizo**

One consequence of the tensions was that some Honiara-based studios and musicians also moved their operations to Gizo, the provincial capital of Western Province, because Gizo did not experience the same amount of unrest as Honiara, although there were some instances of fighting there as well (2004: 98). The relocation of many of the resources to Gizo led to the formation of a unique music scene in Western Province. In 2001 and 2002 there were three studios operating in Western Province (Berg 2010: personal communication). Although some did return to Honiara after the tensions had ended, what became apparent was that Gizo now had – together with Auki, to a certain degree – established itself as a centre for music in its own way, and could represent an alternative to Honiara. Third World Productions is still an important recording studio and record company, which is based in Gizo. In fact it has stood behind some major successes in the last couple of years. Artists like “Sisiva” and “Pagasa” are now signed to this label, as well as the rising new star in Solomon Islands – and Melanesia as a whole – Wally Pazzi, who in 2008 released his major hit “*Krazy Love Song*”, which hit the charts in Papua New Guinea and has made Solomon Islands music immensely popular in its neighbouring country again. I will return to Third World Productions in chapter five.

## Today

Where musicians of the time period between World War II and the tensions largely made music and songs based on life in Honiara, as well as themes heavily influenced by the reggae movement in regards to politics and similar topics, the immediate period after the tensions gave rise to songs dealing with the aftermath of *tenson* and the political situation in Solomon Islands. According to several of my informants who had been present during the ‘Golden Age’ period of Solomon Islands music, the general feeling during this period in time was that songs had shifted in regards to topics and now dealt with elements that previously had not been covered as much by artists. Strong political statements were being made, and as the case of “Living as One Nation” shows, a call for unity was coming from the musicians. Ian Roni, now an acclaimed record producer for Unisound Studios, told me during an interview that *tenson* sparked a lot of political songs, not dealing as much with topics like nostalgia, something particularly stringbands covered a lot in their days. Instead topics like love, relationships, politics and money are more present in today’s music. Reasons for this will be discussed in chapter three, where look at some songs produced pre- and post-*tenson*

Several artists made their way into the consciousness of Solomon Islanders, and the rise in computers and the availability of music gave rise to a third musical ‘revolution’ in Solomon Islands. Popular names of this period include Sharzy, Paeva, “Sisiva”, “Native Stoneage”, “O.N.E.T.O.X.”, “Toksie“ and “Apprentice” (this is not the old “Apprentice”-band, but mostly new members). All of these represent the new era of Solomon Islands music, as well as a multitude of other artists. Many of these artists play either reggae or Island Style, but there are some bands that go in a different direction. For example, over the last few years, more and more bands have started playing Rhythm & Bass (R&B), inspired by American artists such as Usher, “Destiny’s Child” and Akon. Paired with musicians finding inspiration from Hip Hop, this has helped usher in a new musical style widely popular among young Solomon Islanders, especially urbanites in Honiara. The change does not only include a change in musical style, but also a change in topics covered. A new generation are now finding their voices within the music scene, as well as helping to create an even more diverse Solomon Islands musical identity.

## Chapter III

### The life and times of music

Moving from the historical overview presented in chapter two, I now look at the situation regarding the music scene in Honiara during my fieldwork. I shall also look at some topics covered in songs released in Solomon Islands over a span of twenty years, in order to highlight the social commentaries present in these songs. I describe aspects of the lives of some of the musicians I encountered during my fieldwork in the fall of 2008. Some are fairly new to the scene, while others have been around for some time.

As mentioned above, the years from 1945 to 1978 were the age of the stringband music in Solomon Islands, while the years after independence brought about drastic changes as availability and communications with the outside world improved dramatically, especially through radio waves. The most distinct period in post-independence Solomon Islands with regards to music was during the 1990s as reggae merged into Island Style and ushered in what I have dubbed the ‘Golden Age’ of Solomon Islands popular music. Unisound Studios were established in the early parts of the 90s, and several popular artists from the Pacific, as well as big international names like “Big Mountain” and Lucky Dube, all found their way to Honiara. A general sense of optimism could be found among the principal actors within the music scene in Honiara. When *tenson* came to Honiara, this meant that nightclubs stopped putting on concerts, which in the past had been an important venue for musicians to sell their records and perhaps recruit new fans. As discussed in chapter one and two, many members of different bands were forced to leave the city, and many would not return. Music never disappeared, though, but in the new millennia it has gone through changes with regards to topics it covers.

Music in Solomon Islands has been the subject of some academic interest in the past, although music previously researched in Solomon Islands has been traditional music, which I call *kastom music* with regards to Solomons, particularly Zemp (1978), Zemp & Malkus (1979) and de Coppet & Zemp (1978) and their study of panpipe music in ‘Are’are, Malaita. I am not talking of the popular term “world music”, a term sometimes referred to as “third world music”

(Feld 2000:145-46), as the music I have studied is nothing short of “popular music” (Middleton 1990:4), and by popular music I mean commercialized music.

When I arrived in Honiara and had somewhat settled down in my new surroundings, I needed to get a good view of the music scene. I had acquired some names during my preparations, but by and large I was more or less on my own when I arrived. However, that was quickly going to change as it turned out that my arrival was known among musicians. Because of this it did not take me very long to meet my first informants. I will here give a short narrative of my first encounter with musicians in Honiara.

While walking on the museum grounds in the centre of Honiara, I became aware of a group of men sitting underneath a tree next to the building of the Culture Division. They were looking at me, probably due to the fact that I was brand new to Honiara. I then noticed someone I knew, John Tahinao, who was Deputy-director of the Solomon Islands National Museum. He waved in my direction, asking me to join them. The men were sitting around, talking in Pijin, which I at the time could not understand. John greeted me and started to introduce me to the group. They turned out to be members of “2-4-1 Band”. Donald, the manager and agent, was a man from Western Province who seemed to do be the one doing most of the talking. He asked me about myself and why I was in Honiara, although I suspect he in some ways already knew who I was. “You’re here to study our music?” he asked me. As I explained why I was in Honiara, he and the rest of the group nodded, and Donald smiled, exposing a set of teeth red from chewing betel nuts. He patted me on the back, saying “we will help you. Meet my band.” The rest of the group, which Donald referred to as ‘the boys’, was a mix of different Solomon Islands ethnicities. There was Rockson from Western Province, Fred, who was half Malaitan and half Papua New Guinean, and Selwyn who was from Rennell Island in Rennell and Bellona province, although I later learned that Selwyn was not an actual member of “2-4-1 Band”.

We sat down, shared some cigarettes, and chatted about music and Honiara in general. Donald explained to me who his band was and what they wanted to achieve with their music. Rockson, as it turned out, was the band’s programmer,

a title that meant he played keyboards and mixed sound for the band. “I sometimes go to the forest and sit there for a while, recording sounds,” he explained to me, before Donald once again took over and told me about their trip to Pago Pago in American Samoa as part of Solomon Islands’ delegation to the Festival of Pacific Arts in 2008. When I mentioned that I was interested in finding places where they sold musical instruments, Donald looked at Fred and told him to show me around town to look for a guitar. Fred, who wore his signature clothing; an army cap, a basketball tank top, cargo shorts and big army boots, was one of the back-up singers of “2-4-1 Band”, he told me. “But I am also a painter and a tattoo artist,” he proudly proclaimed as we strolled out the museum gate, passed the Anthony Saru building<sup>18</sup> and walked down Hibiscus Avenue. It was clear that Fred was a tattoo artist, as his arms and legs were covered in different tattoos. As I am myself an avid tattoo fan, as we discussed this for a little bit, as well as other things like sports and music. “We used to play Island Style music, but now we have moved over to more traditional music,” Fred explained, prompting me to assume – wrongly – that they played *kastom music*. Fred was extremely passionate about music and “2-4-1 Band”, but even more about his art. He told me about the trip to Pago Pago in great detail, and all his impressions from that trip. It seemed that his band had received a lot of positive attention in American Samoa, but on their way home they did not get their drums on the initial flight, and I would later learn that Donald had to pay SBD \$7,000 to get them back to Honiara.

We finally arrived at a small blue building next to one of the bottle shops at the end of Hibiscus Avenue. It was a crowded area, and Fred constantly greeted someone and said something in Pijin that I did not understand. As we entered the shop the insides were equally crowded with people, and loud music came from a stereo. It was a local song by an artist whose name I unfortunately have forgotten, but it was my very first encounter with a style of music that would define my stay in Honiara. People inside the shop was predominantly young men, as well as a few young women, and everyone was looking at the different instruments and equipment that was for sale, which was everything from

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<sup>18</sup> With its seven stories, it is the largest building in Solomon Islands, housing various businesses and the Papua New Guinean High Commission.



batteries to large drum kits and electric guitars. I asked Fred if all of these people were musicians. “Pretty much,” he answered casually, “but some are just *liu* hanging around, looking for betel nuts or beer.” At that moment I realized that the music scene in Honiara was far more extensive than I had imagined, and that I was in for quite a job if I wanted to get a full overview of the different bands.

This story was my first encounter with the music scene in Honiara, and it illustrated that my task at hand was in no way a simple one. It became quite clear to me that in order to get a good picture of the music scene, I needed to take a survey approach – in a broad sense of the term - to my fieldwork in order to obtain names and try to categorize styles of music. In the course of this chapter I present some of these artists by highlighting some individuals I followed around during my fieldwork. In addition to this, I also attempt to highlight some of the most popular songs in order to see if general themes of songs have actually changed, and if so what these changes mean to the artists. I have included specific songs because of their capacity as social commentaries on Solomon Islands.

### **New impressions**

Chapter two illustrated the evolution of Solomon Islands music, starting with Edwin Sitori, and later Fred Maedola, who pioneered the Solomon Islands stringband movement, a movement that would last well into the 1970s, still considered a highly popular genre of music among many Solomon Islanders who were born in the 1950s and -60s. The earliest songs, like “*Wakabaot Long Saenataon*” by Edwin Sitori or Fred Maedola’s “*Dollar*” and “*Trabol Meka Long Taon*” were all songs dealing with the initial experience of coming to Honiara and the life facing urbanites in the brand new capital city (cf Frazer 1985). Other topics covered by the early stringband movement were nostalgia connected with leaving your home area and province. “*Trabol Meka Long Taon*” is a good example of this, where Maedola talks of how he misses his home village, and how he is perceived as a troublemaker in Honiara. Pijin Rock was in many ways a continuation of the stringbands, although this music, in my opinion, drew more from blues-rock than the country/western style that influenced the stringbands.

Reggae and Island Style gradually moved into the music scene of Honiara during the 1980s and -90s, and was adopted in full by new generations of musicians. To this day these two

genres are by far the most popular styles of music. Reggae also brought about songs that dealt with topics traditionally covered by the reggae movement of the Caribbean, as well as in what could be called “international reggae” (King 2002: 89-91), such as protest, poverty and religion ((Veal 2007:33). The immense popularization of reggae in Solomon Islands correlate well with Feld’s (1995) argument that reggae as a musical concept “[is perceived] by indigenous peoples outside the Caribbean as an oppositional roots ethnopop” (1995:110), leading it to be adopted by many indigenous groups, Pacific Islanders included. Reggae has also gained popularity in Africa with its symbolisms of black power, like Peter Tosh’s line “Don’t care where you come from/ So long as you are a black man” (King 2002:97). Reggae also dealt with “the concept of ‘blackness’” (Veal 2007:33), and it can be argued that this resonated to Solomon Islanders (at least those who are ethnically Melanesian or Papuan), as they heard singers talking about ‘black power’. As an example of this, the popular reggae band “Jah Roots” from Solomon Islands have a song named “*Living in a Black Nation*”.

Songs which lasted for decades in Solomon Islands and who received the status as classics were those that deal with issues that seem to be universal to many urbanites in Honiara. This is something I took note of during my stay in Honiara. In the time period from ‘Golden Age’ in late 1980s and upward, new topics were being dealt with by musicians, particularly during the last six or seven years. Topics covered in songs produced since early 1990s went through an evolution with regards to what seemed more or less ‘acceptable’ to deal with. I attempt to highlight some of these topics and musicians behind them, in order to see what has changed and what such changes could mean to the music scene of Honiara and Solomon Islands.

### **I'm not in love**

An issue that appears to be lacking in stringband recordings is that of romantic love and relationships between men and women<sup>19</sup>. Although love songs have been around in music for ages, and is probably one of the most common themes in modern popular music, it was not something Solomon Islands musicians wrote about. In order to understand this it is important to look at *kastom* surrounding interaction between men and women in Solomon Islands society, and in other regions of Melanesia. Among Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea, “social code does not favour romance” (Malinowski & Ellis 1929: 314, but see Weiner 1980), although sexual conduct appears to be strong among Trobriand Islanders (Eyde 1983, Kurtz 1991, 1993, Ingham 1996). This is not the case in many parts of Solomon Islands, as sexuality is riddled with taboo, particularly in Malaita (Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003). Even something as ‘innocent’ as holding hands in public is not seen in Honiara at all with regards to men and women<sup>20</sup>. Though, young married couples have been observed holding hands, but it is unclear whether or not this is a form of social protest by a new generation of urbanites. Lovers will not show their feelings publically at all when in a public setting, something that might relate to *kastom*. This concept, as I have discussed previously, is evident and relevant in many aspects of life in Solomons, even in a multi-ethnic town such as Honiara. Berg (2000) argues that *kastom* works as a means of managing difference (2000: 180), as well as “[serving] as a powerful diacritics in boundary construction in town” (2000: 181). He also talks about *kastom* concerning Malaitan girls in Honiara and their relationships, which can lead to demands of *kompanse*son (Pijin, meaning compensation) (2000:159). Yet, as a specific socio-linguistic phenomenon *kastom* also works as a way of controlling actions of young people with regards to sexuality and morale, such as the case in Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita, as well as other parts of Solomon Islands (Buchanan-

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<sup>19</sup> As recordings from this era are very difficult to obtain, I cannot claim that romantic love is completely absent from this musical style. Although there might be recordings or songs in languages I do not have access to, which deal with just this topic.

<sup>20</sup> On an interesting note observing two people of the same sex holding hands in public is a very common occurrence on the streets of Honiara, especially among males. There is however nothing sexual about this as it is only a display of friendship. I would often hold hands with my friends walking down the streets, and no one would look at this as something unnatural or different, I noticed, and many times I was taken on such walks by male friends, in which they held my hand.

Aruwafu et al. 2003:222), and a breach of this *kastom* can lead to severe claims of *kompenseson*, particularly if it is a breach of sexual conducts (Berg 2000:125), and often it is expected of the boy to marry the girl, while other times violence can occur (Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003:222), leading young people to invent ways of speaking of sex (Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003:227), much due to the rich diversity of Pijin.

One song that deals with sexuality is “*Stiki Lole*” by Nate Hatsoa, a musician and radio personality from Malaita. He is widely popular in Honiara, and his show “John Adafaka and Nate” has a wide following. I saw him perform once at a gathering in Honiara, and the crowd just went wild when he walked on stage. “*Stiki Lole*” is a song with strong sexual connotations, where Hatsoa sings about licking a lollipop, which can be perceived as a metaphor for fellatio, as *lole* is used as slang for just this (Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003:226). Other songs that contain material that could be viewed as sexual is a “O.N.E.T.O.X.” song called “*Confusion Point*”, where the singer talks about a girl he meets at the Aloha nightclub in Honiara, and she proceeds to “[take him] in a taxi/ Up and down the valley / To where my crew used to call Confuse Way”, which could be interpreted as the pair having sex, as I heard some of my informants talking about picking up girls in a taxicab and going somewhere secluded to have sex.

As reggae, and eventually Island Style, gained more and more following among new generations of musicians, the love song gradually moved into the foreground of the songs, where it had not been as dominating in the past. One of the songs dealing with this in particular is “*Dedicate my Love (to you)*” by original “Apprentice” band, fronted by brothers John and Timo Seda. This song was released in 1995 and is considered a classic in Solomon Islands music, also launching the band in the rest of Melanesia – especially in Papua New Guinea.

So hard to say goodbye  
I just can't forget your love,  
You're everything my heart desires,  
and everything I do,  
I do it especially for you

I know honey,

this love will never die  
you mean so much to me,  
When you say “I love you”  
Now I just can’t go on,  
without your love  
to cherish your love,  
is my life’s dedication

Oh baby I love you so,  
you’re my life,  
my inspiration  
I’ll find a way to keep you satisfied  
I dedicate myself to you

I’m born again,  
my love awaits  
Be faithful to you,  
is what I’ve been praying for  
Honey if you walk away,  
I just can’t do anything  
You are the only one,  
Who makes my dreams come true

“*Dedicate my Love (to you)*” is actually a Lucky Dube tune that “Apprentice” took and put new lyrics to it, and the ballad became a definite live favorite in Honiara. It was later covered by Palauan artist Kiblas Soaladaob on her 2002 album “Kibz”, giving it new life and continuing the work of “Apprentice”. It is, however, the original version that is remembered by most Solomon Islanders, and many in other parts of the Pacific as well. It is hard to determine just why this song has become such a classic, but informants did talk of a unique ability the lead singers, John and Timo Seda, had to ‘spellbind’ listeners with their voices. They are said to possess an ability to make their audience cry, and it apparently brought grown men to tears on several occasions, as John Seda once told me.

If love songs were kept out of the music in Solomon Islands due to *kastom*, it has to be argued that these songs in their own way function as a rebellion against the generation who grew up with stringband music. Given that reggae has long marketed itself as ‘rebel music’, it is natural to assume that what followed an uprising of this particular music in Solomon Islands was the issue of exposing subject that had been virtually unheard of in the past. Innocent as it may seem, love and male/female relations are in fact quite potent topics for many Solomon Islanders. Despite the fact that it has been sung about in music since the 1990s, public displays of affection are very seldom seen on the streets of Honiara. Those of my informants and friends who were not married did not visibly reveal affection at all, although men in general would more than often boast about sexual exploits. With this in mind, is music functioning as a rebellion towards established *kastom*? Given that reggae, since its emergence into the international scene, has been “the music of the oppressed” (Ahkell in King 2002: 100), love songs could be seen as a way for ‘oppressed’ youth to voice their opinions. Despite seeming like something fairly innocent, it can actually be perceived as highly controversial to sing a love song.

### **Social issues on the agenda**

Domestic abuse and infidelity are, according to recent research (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2008) common occurrences in Solomon Islands, and a recent survey conducted by the Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth and Children’s Affairs revealed that as many as 64 per cent of Solomon Islands women had experienced abuse in a familiar setting (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2008:62). Domestic abuse is not an issue musicians have tackled, possibly due to the fact that most musicians are male, and domestic violence is not something men discuss publicly. I never heard men talking about this, other than in what they saw as amusing stories, involving wives who angered their men to the point where the husbands “had to teach them a lesson”, as one man said. It is, however, not completely neglected in Solomon Islands music scene, as musician Ian Roni in 1989 released a song entitled “*Mama Karae*”, a song Jourdan (1995b) says “express the love for and fear of an urban life-style which many find both exciting and threatening” (1995b:142). Topics covered by “*Mama Karae*” is however one which is kept ‘in the dark’, at least by most male members of society. Although in recent years

Prime Minister Dr. Derek Sikua has spoken out about domestic violence (<http://www.solomontimes.com/news.aspx?nwID=3085>), showing that it is now being discussed publically. What made “*Mama Karae*” unique was that that it dealt directly and openly with domestic abuse, and even more so, it was sung by a male artist. To do so in Honiara in 1989 was completely unheard of, and Ian Roni was seen as quite a radical person in those days. He would walk around town with colourful clothing and small sunglasses (Hviding 2009: personal communication), and “*Mama Karae*” would attract quite a controversy in Solomon Islands.

Another song that dealt with a ‘conventional’ issue was Ronnie Riti’s song “02”, a song dealing with infidelity and the consequences this had for families. It is written with lyrics that change from local dialect to Pijin, and as such it is hard to transcribe. However, the general theme of the song is a fierce critique of men who spent time with their mistresses, leading to their families being torn apart. The concept 02 is well known to most Solomon Islanders. It is a metaphor stemming from numbers on patrolboats given to the Solomon Islands Government by the Australian Government, primarily for use in the border conflict with Bougainville in the 1990s. The first boat was designated “01”, and the expression came about when the second boat, “02”, arrived some years later (Berg 2010: personal communication).

From what I could make out during conversations and by just listening when sitting in groups was that it was something affecting many families in the Solomons. The word itself is a Pijin expression meaning “second wife” or “other wife”, and is a metaphor for a man having an extramarital affair. From what I could gather, having an 02 was fairly common, and women I heard talking of this seemed to jokingly move away from the subject, while the men appeared to boast a lot (when their wives were not around, at least). “It is just how it is,” one man explained to me once. “If your wife does not want to have sex, you go to your 02. And if your 02 is not willing, you go to your wife.” Even taxi services seemed to cater to the practice of 02, at least according to some taxi drivers I spoke to. Many taxis have tinted windows, making it virtually impossible to see who is inside the car. There were many explanations for why this was the case; everything from keeping the sun out to the troubles of *tenson*, when taxi drivers (who are predominantly Malaitan) did not want IFM fighters to see their ethnicity. Another, and widely popular, theory was that it was there, as one of my friends put it, “so you can drive past your wife with your 02 in the car with you.” “02” picked up the thread from Ian Roni song “*Mama Karae*”,

in that Ronnie Riti wrote a piece of music about a topic which is well known to Solomon Islanders, but rarely discussed in public. Everyone seems to be aware that it is going on, but there is no public discourse with regards to addressing just this issue. Riti did so with his song, which appears widely critical to this practice.

### **“No no good from you”**

Politics has since the first Parliament came into power in 1975 been a topic covered with a certain degree of controversy<sup>21</sup>, and many Solomon Islanders are quite opinionated when it comes to their politicians. The song “*Mista Politic Man*” by “Original Gees” is one of these pieces of music. It is a strong critique of politicians, presumably in Solomon Islands, and deals with the distrust many have towards politicians in Solomons, whom many feel only work for themselves. By talking to people in Honiara about politics, it is clear that they do not feel their politicians work for the good of their constituency. As many other songs in Solomon Islands, “Original Gees” appear to mix languages, making it very hard to transcribe the song. However, the chorus goes as follows.

What shall we do our lord  
In our nation  
Mista Politik Man  
No no good from you  
Treat us in this nation  
Like a fatherless son  
Lord, show some good to your children

In chapter two I briefly explored the song “*Living as One Nation*” by “Isles De Sound”, a song about *tenson* and how it divided the country. Timo Seda drove up and down Mendana Avenue on a truck, playing this song over and over in order to get his message across. I do not know whether or not this in fact had any effect on his audience. However, when talking about “*Living as One Nation*” one has to keep in mind that Solomon Islands is in fact an ethnically and linguistically fragmented country, and it can be argued that “Isles De Sound” is in fact attempting to build and

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<sup>21</sup> For more on Solomon Islands politics, see Fraenkel (2004) and Moore (2004).



maintain an identity (Kaemmer 1993:157) for Solomon Islanders by appealing to a form of national unity. The only problem is that this national unity can sometimes be hard to find. This is much due to the fact that Solomon Islands, as well as Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, are colonial constructs (LiPuma 1995:43). As such, a feeling of nation-state can be hard to establish, as a country like the Solomons is in fact home to a large number of ethnicities and linguistic groups (Jourdan 1995b:128). Especially during the immediate post-*tenson* days, when this song was released, this was even harder. These were, as mentioned in chapter two, times when the country was coming back from *tenson*, and although a peace agreement had been reached, people still had the events of 1998-2003 deeply imbedded in their minds. In fact, even today – despite attempts of reconciliation – the notion of *tenson* is still very much alive in people’s consciousness. Although people were sometimes reluctant to discuss the events of the late 90s, it was easy to sense that it was still troubling to a lot of people. This could be contributed to the fact that many issues were never resolved, nor was the specific wrongdoings that took place in those years. The fact is that very few *kastom* reconciliation ceremonies have been held since the end of *tenson* (Berg 2010: personal communication).

“*Living as One Nation*” and “*Mista Politik Man*” were made by urban dwellers, and they do not resonate as well with people on village level, as rural people “are aware that the new urban milieu of the Solomons is extremely different from theirs” (Jourdan 1995b:143), and they cannot identify with the song, as many of them were not affected too much by *tenson*, unless they had relatives that had to flee from Honiara and return to their village of origin. Jourdan (1995b) argues that nationalism in Solomon Islands has a long way to go due to the large variations in ethnicity in the country. As she says; “[t]here is too much internal diversity (...) for an ethnically monolithic Solomon Islands Self to be opposed to an external Other” (1995b:145), making the task of uniting the country a difficult one. A song calling for unity cannot change this, even if its message is hammered through by repeating it over and over on the streets of Honiara.

## The mighty *Mista Dola*

While the economy of Solomon Islands is in large subsistence based, this is not the case in Honiara. Without dollars in your pockets you will not get far in town, unless you have a network where someone has access to it (like *wantok*). Although concepts of reciprocity and sharing is still very much in effect in Honiara through relatives, friends and *wantok*, people in Honiara still rely almost exclusively on a monetary economy in their daily workings (Berg 2000:40), and the pursuit of it can be felt all the time around town. What became clear from the get go of the fieldwork was that money was always going to be an issue in Honiara. Most of my informants were unemployed without any education, apart from Standard Six or Form Three, which is the basic level of education in Solomons. Nor did they have any formal training, and as such they found it hard to get employment. They did not make money on their music, and lived mostly day-by-day. It is tempting to think that this posed somewhat of a problem for an anthropologist coming from the 'rich' Western – the West here used as an ideational construct for the Euro-American region - hemisphere, in that I was at risk of always being asked for money. In fact, this was not at all the case, as none of my informants or close friends would at any time ask for money from me. I did in fact have much of the same experience in regards to socioeconomic status as Berg (2000) had during his fieldwork in Honiara. Like him, people I was associated with would not view me as another rich *waetman*, like they viewed the many "expats" in Honiara. Instead they would, as illustrated by Berg (2000), give me the status of 'student' (Berg 2000:34), and I was expected to be an active participant in reciprocity. I have to stress that this was my experience with those who were my informants and friends, and not with random people in Honiara. To them, being white and from the West, I was by many regarded as being unbelievably wealthy and was often asked to buy everything from 'traditional' artwork to boats and even entire islands. But as more and more people became aware of my presence, this changed dramatically. Building on the notion of 'student' and *waetman*, together with the quest for money, I wish to make the argument that not only did my informants not ask me for money out of pure courtesy, but they also in many ways followed *kastom*. By this I mean that the system of reciprocity involves not only an "obligation to receive" (Mauss 1950:10-11), but also an "obligation to give" (Mauss 1950:11). My informants could not, or rather would not, ask me for money, as they would have been obligated to give something in return at some point. Given their economic

situation, this put pressure on them to come up with something equal to, for example, SBD \$200. This is not to say that I was not a part of an exchange practice, as I was frequently asked for cigarettes and such. But as one of my friends said; “I’ll buy you a beer, and the next time you buy me one. That is Solomon Style.” This was about as far as reciprocity would go during my time in Honiara, and it did not put any strain on the relationship between my informants and me.

Returning to music and its appeal I wish to look at the song “*Mista Dola Man*” by the popular reggae band “Litol Rastas”. This band has had a lot of artistic success in Solomon Islands, and their music videos are often seen on the national television channel One Television, produced in Honiara. “Litol Rastas” consists of seven members in total, and their albums are among the top selling albums in Melanesia. Their record company, CHM Supersound, claims the strong reggae sound of the band comes from the fact that some of the members have Jamaican ancestry. I did not meet the band personally, so I unfortunately cannot confirm this, although I did not find any evidence of Jamaican ancestry in Solomon Islands, as none of the musicians would mention it even when discussing reggae. The lyrics to “*Mista Dola Man*” deal with the life of a *masta liu* (see Jourdan 1995a) and their relationship to money.

Laef todei ma fren hemi had tumas	Life today is very hard
Masta Liu olsem laek dae nomoa	Masta Liu like me have it hard
Mi nidim iu Mista Dola Man	I need you Mr. Dollar Man
Mi lavem iu and mi wantem iu Mista Dola Man	I love you and I desire you Mr. Dollar Man
Iu nomoa save solvem porobelem blo mi Mista Dola Man	You solve all my problems Mr. Dollar Man

“*Mista Dola Man*” is about personification of money, thus the title, and the ‘love’ the songwriter has for it. Although one could break the song down to something this simple, I believe the case is somewhat opposite. I argue that this song is indeed a social commentary on a relationship many people in urban areas of Solomon Islands have to money. As discussed earlier, money is a means used mostly in urban areas, as the rural villages of Solomon Islands are still largely based on a subsistence economy<sup>22</sup>. This leads me to believe that money is by many regarded as a curse in Solomon Islands – or at least in Honiara. In this I mean that people are all too well aware that they need it, but many seem to adhere to a sense of nostalgia in regards to money; they long back to what they perceive as a simpler time of village life<sup>23</sup>

Litol Rastas have play on the notion of being *masta liu* and the lifestyle of this particular group of young men and women (mostly young men), and their seemingly carefree autonomous lifestyle. Jourdan (1995a) describes them as being very occupied with clothing and modern culture, something I could observe when I encountered them. Although their clothes might give the impression that they have just put on whatever they could find, this is not the case. Walking past a clothing store<sup>24</sup> there are constantly young men looking for t-shirts or soccer jerseys to wear. This correlates well with the argument that *liu* spend a big portion of what little money they have on clothing, or *kaleko* (Jourdan 1995a:216), and not so much on transportation or housing. In fact, most of them will walk wherever they are going, even very long distances. Returning to the *masta liu* and their relationship with money, and not least the song “*Mista Dola Man*”, I feel that it communicates almost a dichotomy between the desire to have money and the ‘curse’ of possessing it. They have a notion of how their old way was in their home village, but they have no desire to return to this life, as they feel they are almost missing out on something if they do (Jourdan 1995a:213), and instead they choose to stay in Honiara and continue the day-to-day search for *Mista Dola Man*. Still, it is hard to escape the fact that their ‘adoption’ of Western cultural traits such as monetary economy and accumulation of goods is not one that means a more

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<sup>22</sup> Although money is not used on a day-to-day basis in rural Solomon Islands, coastal peoples still need *kerosen* (Pijin, meaning gasoline) for their ‘canoes’ (in reality outboard motor boats) in order to fish and travel between the islands.

<sup>23</sup> In reality life is very hard in the villages, as some of my informants would tell me. Droughts, diseases and natural disasters, such as occasional floods, can destroy an entire season of harvest and leave the village in effect starving.

<sup>24</sup> One has to bear in mind that these are not clothing stores as one would imagine them in the Western world. They are outlets that sell clothing that come from foreign aid or have been donated by expats.

or less ‘blind faith’ towards things that are Western. When they write a song, wear clothing or play sport, one still gets the sense that it is unique to them, and not just something they have copied from somewhere else. Everything has a distinct ‘Solomon Flavor’ to it, something that is not unusual in a Melanesian perspective when dealing with Western ideas of economy and Western items, in where they “not (...) become just like us, but more like themselves” (Sahlins 2005:23), and as such their *kastom* stays in many ways intact.

### **John and Timo**

I was first made aware of John Seda through a demo tape of “2-4-1 Band” where he was singing. His voice intrigued me, as it was unlike anything I had ever heard in the past. After doing some questioning around town I was also made aware of his involvement in the music scene during its ‘Golden Age’. I had met his brother, Timo, who came by Solomon Islands National Museum, where I spent some time. He had worked with John on a number of different projects over the years, and told me he would find John and introduce me to him. So, after a few days I got the chance to meet with John and have a chat with him and his brother. As we sat on the museum grounds sharing some cigarettes and chatting about different things, Timo came by and they both started telling me about their background.

John and Timo Seda have a mixed ethnic background, being half Langa Langa and half Lau (both are areas of Malaita), and they grew up in Langa Langa. John is the elder of the two, and is married to a woman from Shortland Island in the Western Province, on the border to Bouganville. Timo is not married, but according to some of my informants he used to be married and has children. I never heard him speak of his family once, for reasons unknown. He now lives with his brother’s family and plays music most of the day, unless he is doing *wakabaot* in Honiara. According to them, their maternal grandfather was a man who possessed magical abilities, and was a revered man in his native area. “He had the power of speech and could talk to dangerous animals,” Timo told me. “In the bush of Malaita there are many poisonous snakes, and if you are bitten you will surely die from it. But our grandfather could walk into the bush freely, and snakes would not bite him at all. All of this because of the power of speech,

a power we have inherited from him.” Whether or not they have an actual power is not for me to decide, but according to several others I spoke to, John and Timo have something special with regards to their singing. This is especially evident with regards to “*Dedicate my Love (to you)*”. Several independent informants would tell me about concerts with the old “Apprentice” band where people burst into tears as this particular song was played. This claim was supported by John as him and I one evening was talking. “We held a concert here in Honiara, and people started shouting, demanding to hear “*Dedicate my Love (to you)*,”” John told me with passion and enthusiasm. “From the moment Timo and I started singing, a man who was standing at the front of the stage started to cry. He cried all through the song, and again as we did an encore.”

Power of speech is not an uncommon feature in Solomon Islands cosmology, especially in Malaita province. Keesing (1979: 25) has described just this among the Kwaio, and according to several of my Malaitan friends, it does exist elsewhere on Malaita as well. With this in mind, it is understandable why people would say the two brothers possess the power of speech, although I was never able to fully understand how this power worked, and whether it was an inherited ability or one they had gained knowledge of through their grandfather.

Regardless, John and Timo are quite famous in Solomon Islands, and on several occasions when I spent time with them – especially John – he was rarely able to walk freely on the street. People would stop to talk to him, and young kids – often carrying guitars – would look at him with awe and admiration. Whether this was because he is a celebrity in Honiara, or whether it was something else is not easy to tell.

### **Sharzy**

The most popular and influential artist in Solomon Islands is by far Sharzy (real name Samson Saeni) who’s albums have a great following in different parts of the Pacific, like Papua New-Guinea, Vanuatu and Tahiti. His mother is from the island of Simbo, where Sharzy was born, and his father comes from Malaita. This dual ethnic identity, half Western half Malaitan, ensures that he in fact combines what are essentially the two dominant musical forces in Honiara. After a

period as a member of the original “2-4-1 Band”<sup>25</sup>, with members from different provinces, he eventually went solo and released his first album, “*Aloha*”, in 2002. He has in a span of seven years released a total of five albums: “*Aelan Feel’n*” (2003), “*Aelan Wei*” (2004), “*Hem Stret*” (2006) and “*Umi Flow*” (2008). He told me he is planning to release another album in 2009, and according to the online news service Solomon Times (<http://www.solomontimes.com/news.aspx?nwID=3103>). This album, called “*Lokal Albam*” was thought to come out in April of 2009, but as far as I can tell it has not yet been produced. His earlier albums have mostly featured more or less pure love songs, with little or no political agenda. This has made Sharzy in many ways a very non-controversial artist in the Solomons, but as he told me he intends to change his image quite a bit.

I am tired of singing about love all the time; I want to sing about things that matter. That’s why on [*“Lokal Albam”*] I’ll use traditional music. I am sick of love songs. (...) I will have dancers with me on stage – a boy and a girl – and they need to follow *kastom* (...). If the girl becomes pregnant, she has to be replaced.

(Part of interview conducted by me with Sharzy, Honiara 2008)

Sharzy has always used different styles of music on his five albums, and he is known to sing in different languages on all of his albums, ranging from English and Pijin, to languages native to Malaita and Western Province. By doing so, I believe Sharzy extends his popularity and range because he is able to speak to a wide range of listeners throughout Solomon Islands. But his popularity does not limit itself to within his native country, as he is also one of the most popular Melanesian artists, reaching as far east as Tahiti in French Polynesia. There have been talks of his music being launched in Hawaii, and this is due to the fact that Sharzy’s long time collaborator, O-Shen, lives there. These rumours are yet to be confirmed officially. As stated above, unlike many of his peers, Sharzy does not tackle social or national issues in his songs to a large degree.

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<sup>25</sup> These are not the same as the “2-4-1 Band” I met. Although they kept the band name, members have changed since Sharzy’s days.

Instead he sings more on issues of love and family, as well as songs in his own language where he follows much of what we have discussed prior, in that *hom*, the island of origin (Berg 2000:61), is portrayed as a romantic notion. But his songs no less resonates with people and his music can be heard all over town in taxis and on radios around Honiara. It is hard to say exactly what makes Sharzy so popular, given that what we have seen earlier is that the more popular songs are those who deal with social issues that are important to people's daily life. But at the same time it has to be said that love and nostalgia are things most people are occupied with on an everyday basis, and combined with catchy tunes and good production, Sharzy manages to resonate to most Solomon Islanders.

Where other songs we have looked at have been largely analyzed from the aspect of lyrics, I believe the key to Sharzy's popularity is by looking at the music that accompanies the lyrics. I believe his popularity stems directly from his music, music inspired mostly by reggae and *Island Style*. This music is, as we have seen, the most popular music in Solomon Islands, and people dance to it whenever they hear it. There are no official numbers regarding the total number of albums sold by Sharzy, but he is widely considered to be one of the top-selling artists in the Pacific. It is like Sharzy's music "reflects emotional states" (Davis 1947 in Merriam 1964:240) for people in Solomon Islands and neighbouring island states. He does not have the raw honesty of Ronnie Riti or Ian Roni, the sassy youthfulness of "Litol Rastas" or the cheeky social commentary of Nate Hatsoa. Instead his music is simply catchy and people seem to enjoy it. The song "*Ta'Umai*", a collaboration between him, Samoan singer Rinai and Papua New-Guinean wonderboy O-Shen<sup>26</sup>, was being played constantly from every car and radio around Honiara. This pan-Pacific cooperation between these three artists is a collaboration one has not seen before in popular music in the Pacific, and it could almost be described as an attempt to forge a common Pacific identity through music (for more, see Hau'ofa 2000). Where Hawaiian ocean canoes have previously been used to symbolize a Pacific identity (Linnekin 1990:167), perhaps a song such as "*Ta'Umai*" has the potential to do the same. This might be the case, and while speaking to Sharzy I got the distinct impression that this was what he was attempting to accomplish.

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<sup>26</sup> O-Shen's real name is Jason Hershey, and he is an American-born singer who grew up partly in Papua New-Guinea. He currently resides in Hawaii, but is considered to be the most popular artist in Melanesia. He is credited as the first performer to use Tok Pisin in rap.



### **Not a particularly sweet lullaby**

As mentioned briefly in chapter one, a French duo called “Deep Forest” in 1992 released an album featuring a song called “*Sweet Lullaby*”. The band wrote in the sleeve notes on their album that the singing was that of Central African San people (Feld 2000:151), sampled from recordings provided to them by UNESCO. The record, “Deep Forest” went on to sell more than two million copies in America and spent 25 weeks on Billboard’s album chart (Zemp 1996:46), largely because of “*Sweet Lullaby*”, a song that would also be used in several commercials. Its distinct singing would later be used by Norwegian artist Jan Garbarek on his song “*Pygmy Lullaby*” from the album “Visible World” (Feld 2000:158). It turned out that the singing Garbarek used was taken from a recording done by French ethnomusicologist Hugo Zemp in northern Malaita entitled ‘Solomon Islands: Fataleka and Baegu Music from Malaita’ (Zemp 1996:46), released by UNESCO. It is not a San people song at all, as one would think when reading the sleeve of the “Deep Forest” record, but in fact the singing of a woman from Baegu in Fataleka, Malaita called Afunakwa (for more on the “Deep Forest issue”, see Zemp 1996 and Feld 2000). The reported reactions among people of Solomon Islands, and especially those from north Malaita, were those of absolute outrage. According to one of my informants Solomon Islands’ Government sent an official letter to “Deep Forest”, claiming compensation due to the fact that they had ‘stolen’ music from Solomons. I have not been able to find any information that can verify this claim, but what is certain is that Solomon Islanders themselves felt that this was just another attempt to capitalize on their culture, an issue they are deeply concerned with (Island Business 2007), and some felt that my presence was just that; stealing their culture. I will return to this issue and the case of Deep Forest in chapter five.

## Other voices

Whereas the bands that were active in Honiara during the 1980s and -90s had to record their music by means of professional studios like Unisound Studios or SIBC, the new generation of musicians now have a better access to digital home recording equipment. Where Unisound Studios dominated the scene in pre-*tenison* era, home-made recordings definitely make up the majority of recordings released in Solomon Islands today. Unisound Studios and SIBC still offer the possibility for recording, as do Homesound studios (Crowdy 2007). However, more and more artists prefer to record with *wantok* or friends who own a recorder. Bands of today mostly consist of young men who have learned their skills from playing in church. As there are no arenas for formal musical schooling in Solomon Islands, the church becomes the most important venue for learning how to play an instrument. Other major influence is relatives who are involved in the music scene and inspire those that wish to follow in their footsteps. Most musicians still play the music that came before them; *Island Style* and reggae, and it can sometimes be quite difficult to hear the difference between the different bands. But where the bands of the 1980s and -90s made songs that dealt with issues such as belonging, home and Honiara, the up-and-coming artists of today very often deal with issues such as relationships, infidelity and the practice of *spoelem*. *Spoelem* is a Pijin word literally meaning to spoil or destroy something. It is used as an expression of saying bad things about someone, and is often used when young men and women talk down to each other, often through music. Many songs will be about a certain person, often a girl, who is accused of doing something young men feel is immoral or a breach of *kastom*. These songs are very popular and are often requested on radio stations, very often by friends of the singer. I heard a story of a girl who released a song where she used *spoelem* against a boy. This, in turn, caused the boys' friends to record another song, which was even cruder. According to John Tahinao there is no tradition for using music and songs for *spoelem*. He informed me that these songs are often made by young boys in order to highlight a setting where a boy and a girl of different economic status, a kind of "social stratification" (Weber, Gerth & Mills 1991), become friends or lovers. In these instances the boy has in effect two choices; he either asks for the girl's father for her hand in marriage, or he has to pay compensation. Most young boys are reluctant to do so, either because they do not wish to marry, or that they cannot afford the compensation. As

such he makes a song to more or less ‘protect’ himself, and it seems like he hides his real feelings by using *spoelem*.

Some old musicians feel that *spoelem* and blatant use of sexual references in modern songs is making music of Solomon Islands worse, while others accept that the young listener are not as concerned with the issues of the generation that came before them. Most of the musicians today are born and raised in Honiara and do not share the affinity to the provinces that their parents do. A song discussing logging or environmental issues in, say, Marovo Lagoon does not resonate with a young urbanite in the same way as it does for his father or mother who have strong ties to this place. Issues of love and life in the city are things he or she can relate to, and this leads to a change in attitudes, which ultimately leads to a change in artistic expression.

As veteran artist Ian Ronnie told me: “The social commentaries change with the generations (...). The songs about the islands are gone, that’s not what the young people want to hear. Culture is changing, and this reflects back to the music.”

## Chapter IV

### Music as a means of social capital

In chapter three I examined performers in the Solomon Islands music scene based on meeting artists during my fieldwork. Now it is time to turn my attention towards consumers of music, as well as how music moves around in a city like Honiara, where there is – apart from a few studios and retailers – a lack of an established ‘industry’ dedicated to music. This, combined with an informal network of distribution, generates different strategies for distribution, and I will examine whether this resonates with classic and contemporary descriptions of reciprocity in the region (cf. Malinowski 1920, Mauss 1950, Sahlin 1963, Strathern 1990, Gell 1992, Dureau 1999).

Where chapter three focused on musicians and topics of songs, chapter four will be dedicated to the way music is distributed in Solomon Islands, with an emphasis on movement of music in a country where distribution often is conducted through formal and informal networks. By informal network I mean that consumers of music do not buy their records at music stores, but instead exchange them in informal networks through friends and *wantok*. By formal I mean stores that sell music in Honiara. These informal and formal networks can also be perceived by some as a kind of musical piracy, which is another topic I will discuss during this chapter. However, when I talk about piracy in a Solomon Islands context I use the concept of *stelim*, which is a Pijin expression meaning to steal or in other ways acquire something unlawfully. I use the concept of *stelim musik blong nara man*, meaning to steal someone else’s music. This concept is one which will be discussed during the course of chapter four, and I will look at how people react, and how they in fact take part in a widespread distribution of music. Since such a distribution directly affects musicians, I will also examine their role in the distribution as well, as many of the artists I met had strong feelings towards just this. However, as I will outline during chapter four, some of the musicians play an active role with regards to *stelim*, and are in fact in some cases dependent on it.

People feel a strong connection to music, and more times than not prefer to hear local music instead of externally produced songs (Seward 1999:26). It generates less monetary capital,

however, and the practice of consuming music in many ways plays out differently than it might have in other parts of the world. During the ‘Golden Age’ when Solomon Islands music was at its peak, it was released primarily on audio cassettes and sold in stores, and Unisound Studios produced a great deal of music for Solomon Islands and Melanesian markets. In post-*tenson* years digital recorders were introduced in full scale to Honiara, as well as personal computers. Musicians today record a lot of their music themselves and mix it on their computers, making studios less important. Where they previously had to pay a sum of money to the different studios, it is possible to do it for free if the equipment is available.

### **“*Stilim miusik blong nara man*”**

First I wish to establish that when I speak of piracy I am talking of copyright infringement<sup>27</sup>. This term is often being used when discussing illegal downloading of music or computer software. Although, it is important to bear in mind that no cultural copyright (Strathern 1999) exists in Solomon Islands, as what is “[m]ore important to an object’s value is its social and ritual role within the community” (Philbert & Jourdan 1996:62). With this in mind, downloading might not be a particular big issue for Solomon Islands musicians. During the course of this chapter I examine both instances, but mainly I focus on elements element of music and copyright infringement.

One question that rises to mind is that of how *stilim miusik* applies practically to a society such as Solomon Islands. Is the widespread sharing and copying of recordings viewed as theft, or is it in fact a well-established part of *kastom*, with regards to the value of objects (Philbert & Jourdan 1996)?<sup>28</sup> In order to answer this question it is necessary to look at concepts of sharing in a Solomon Islands context. In many Pacific societies there exists an obligation to share, “the obligation to give presents and the obligation to receive them” (Mauss, 1950:10-11). In many Austronesian societies it can function as an essence of cultural and economic principles (Gell 1992). People will in fact make clear assumptions about you if you do not share. In fact, I quite

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<sup>27</sup> The U.S. Copyright Office definition of this concept is “copyright infringement occurs when a copyrighted work is reproduced, distributed, performed, publicly displayed, or made into a derivative work without the permission of the copyright owner.” (<http://www.copyright.gov/help/faq/faq-definitions.html>).

<sup>28</sup> See chapter one for a discussion on *kastom*.

often experienced a ‘pressure’ to sharing what I had. If I had a pack of cigarettes that I placed on a table when sitting with a group, I immediately and non-verbally told the others that they could help themselves. Likewise, I could help myself with cigarettes or betel nuts<sup>29</sup> that had been placed on the table. In my experience a notion of selfishness was almost unthinkable to most people. They shared almost everything, although I did see instances of people wanting to keep items to themselves<sup>30</sup>. Sharing and an obligation to give is a very important aspect of life, even in modern day Honiara. It is in many ways a community project, but can this be transferred into the realm of *stilim*? We will discuss the paradox of piracy and the sentiments on this phenomenon at a later stage in the chapter. Sharing and giving is made relevant to the music scene of Honiara as well, as musicians often share their recordings with each other. I argue that this is a form of exchange of commodities, where music as a commodity is “a socially desirable thing with a use-value and an exchange-value” (Gregory 1982:10). It is also a form of exchange where the music gains a “cultural framework” (Appadurai 1994:83) for exchange. Sahlins (1965) defines three types of reciprocity; general, balanced and negative (1965:147-149), and I believe that all three elements are found with regards to sharing of music, although the negative reciprocity might be applicable with regards to foreigners taking music from Solomon Islanders, like “Deep Forest”, as I discussed briefly in chapter three, since this can be viewed as an attempt to “get something from nothing” (Sahlins 1965:148).

Musicians in Honiara distinguish between internal and external factors with regards to their music becoming a commodity. It appeared as though they too view it as an object that can be shared, but it seems like this is only in the context within their own society, and not one that can be taken by foreigners, or outsiders, whom they believe will use it solely for economic gain (Sahlins 1965:148). Selling audiocassettes and CD’s in clubs or in the streets for most musicians appear to be the only way most artists can hope to make any kind of money from their art, and most of them have to resort to this if they wish to spread their music. There are very few stores that sell original albums in Honiara, and these can be quite expensive as well. There are only two

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<sup>29</sup> Betel nuts (Areca nut) are a nut from the Areca palm, and an important element in Solomon Islands society. It is also vastly popular in Asia, and is thought to be the fourth most consumed psychoactive substance in the world (Gupta & Ray, 2004:31).

<sup>30</sup> Mostly these items would involve alcohol, and friends were reluctant to purchase a crate of beer if they saw *wantoks* hanging around outside the bottle shops in Honiara, as they knew their obligation to share.

record stores in Honiara: R & R Records in Chinatown, where an album will cost roughly \$85 SBD, and Island Trends next to Central Market. Prices here are quite high, ranging from \$100 to \$150 SBD. These two stores are rare ‘gems’ in a city like Honiara, and are not commonly used by most people, at least not Island Trends, which is a store designed mainly for tourists. Instead there are a wide range of strategies at play with regards to how people get their hands on the latest recordings, and I hope to highlight these through this chapter.

### **“We like it local”**

Music in Solomon Islands is distributed through more or less informal networks, and not least by handing recordings to *wantok* who play it, and then pass it on to their friends and *wantok*. In the 1990s this was done by distributing music through the use of recordable CDs or audiocassettes, where copies were made and distributed through informal network. These networks of kinship and friendship are still very much alive today, although the method of distribution appears to have moved into the digital world, as computers and MP3-players are becoming more common among people, as well as mobile phones that are MP3-compatible. This is however the case in Honiara, as CDs is still the preferred medium in rural areas and in Western Solomons (Berg 2010: personal communication). The cassettes and CDs, though, are still the most important source of music, next to radio. There are three stations in Honiara: SIBC, Paoa FM and Z-FM, who are always being played. While SIBC focuses more on hard news and reporting, Paoa FM and Z-FM are more focused on music and music shows. One thing that is striking when listening to one of these two commercial radio stations is the fact that most of the music is produced by Solomon Islands musicians or other Pacific artists. Sometimes an international hit song will come on, but that is usually during shows that highlight international music, and not on a regular basis. Local music is always in the forefront when it comes to Honiara, and listeners seem to prefer just this arrangement. Radios are found everywhere in Honiara, from large office buildings to small betel nut stands along the road.

Local flavour is not unique to Solomon Islands, however, since these mechanisms appear to be evident in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea as well, according to Seward (1999), as “[t]he

music is *local* and the appeal is to *local* culture, confirmation of its own protagonism” (1999: 29), although” local” can mean one’s linguistic or ethnic area, but also music produced at a national level. I agree with the local, or rather national, aspect of the music, as people in Solomon Islands have a connection to the songs, particularly those sung in their own language or lyrical topics from a specific geographical area. People appear to feel a certain sense of pride concerning music made by *wantok*, but they are also quick to draw on the Solomon connection. One feature that seems to be evident when observing the consumption of music in Honiara, whether it is through the radio, an MP3/CD/cassette player, or in concerts, is that repetition is an important feature. It is by no means uncommon to hear the band play the same song two or three times during a concert, something I observed during a concert in Honiara, where the bands would play no less than seven version of the Bob Marley song “*One Love*” , and the crowd was loving it. A rapport from a concert by popular Solomon Islands band “O.N.E.T.O.X.” in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, illustrates that this is not just a Solomon Islands phenomenon.

“The crowd were loving their hit “*Rakumanji*”<sup>31</sup> which was played 3 times much to the delight of the fans.”

(Narokobi, Masalai Blog 2008)

This pattern of repetition occurred again and again during my stay in Honiara, but it seems to be about taste, and not as much about definite cultural workings. Or is it? Lindstrom (1990) argues that repetition in South Pacific societies indicate that a statement is made valid through authorization, in that “[r]epetition of knowledge depends on its continuing storage in individual memory” (1990: 76), and by following this argument, what people seem to be doing is securing music as a part of shared cultural knowledge, making sure it is remembered in their collective memory by repeating it over and over.

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<sup>31</sup> On the album cover the song is listed as “*Rakumanzi*”, but it is still named “*Rakumanji*” on most websites.



## Channelling music

One topic often brought on by many musicians I spoke to during my fieldwork was the hardship of being a musician. However, one sentiment I frequently picked up from many musicians, especially those who released their music themselves, was a sense of optimism with regards to their music's power to reach out to other parts of the world, which was also attested by Solomon Islands music's popularity throughout the Pacific. On several occasions I heard the phrase "we give you a recording of our music, you take it back to the West to sell it, and we make money". It could be argued that this shows a lack of understanding as to how global music industry actually works, but at the same time it illustrates how the music scene in Honiara in reality works, because if a music recording is made in Honiara, chances are it is going to be played through active networking with kin and friends. Consumers are less interested in music coming from outside Solomons, and instead they largely focus on internal products. Clubs and radios will constantly play new music, and it seems to generally be a large amount of songs produced every month.

Music produced internally in Solomon Islands could be described as being "objectified" (Lindstrom 1990:106) in that it is something that is no longer just a part of shared knowledge, but has been turned into recorded knowledge as well. It is set free "from the tyranny of individual memory" (Lindstrom 1990:106) and shared with everyone in the greater community. As such it becomes part of a collective consciousness and is made into something everyone claims ownership to. When someone attempts to take this knowledge and somehow transform it into something different it becomes not only stealing from the original author, but in fact from the entire community as a whole. Such is definitely the case with "*Sweet Lullaby*", as discussed briefly in chapter three, a topic that is still heavily debated among Solomon Islanders, and particularly among people of North-eastern Malaita, who felt violated and robbed at the fact that someone had taken a piece of music that essentially was their own and profited on it. I will return with a more detailed discussion of this in chapter five.

When tables are turned and music is externally created – e.g. produced and made in the West, the situation is a completely different one. Walking into one of the few stores owned and run by Solomon Islanders who sell music, one can immediately observe that the walls are covered with records by foreign artists. People buy these often and share them with each other.

This applies also to those of my informants who felt the most outrage over the fact that their music was being copied by others. This duality was one that fascinated me, as I pondered this question through my fieldwork, but was not really able to get a clear answer as to why this was the case. I believe, though, that the key to answering it might lie in the notion of reciprocity within the Melanesian community, so I will attempt to analyze my findings by looking at the traditions of gifts and favours.

Following Sahlins' (1965) argument on the three types of reciprocity, particularly generalized reciprocity, as sharing a song or a record that you have with your friends, will in return secure that they will reciprocate you (1965:147). It is also possible to use the notion of balanced reciprocity, where you exchange something, e.g. a song, and get something in return (Sahlins 1965:147-148). There appears to be no negative reciprocity involved in this, as neither side is looking to make a profit from it. Could the issue of piracy and copyright infringement translate into a model of exchange that goes back generations, or is this be an impossible task due to the nature of Internet and how sharing and distributing of music actually is being done? Following Strathern (1992) or Gell (1992) and looking at how the exchange of gifts – if it is possible to call a piece of music a gift – maintains personal and social relationships, the question thus become if music serves as an element of social maintenance not only in the artistic realm, but also as a physical commodity to be bartered with. It could also be useful look to Davenport (1986) and the issue of value of things in relations to someone's social standing (1986: 97) in San Cristobal in Eastern Solomon Islands. People remember a person's history of giving and reciprocity and as such judge them on these grounds. These are many of the same elements at play when it comes to sharing everything from cigarettes and betel nuts to music. Perhaps it can be said that exchange of music is not just a means of sharing modern entertainment, but a purchase of social acceptance and ensuring that relations are maintained.

Whereas music in the past was largely shared through the radio and informal networks, there are a number of ways to obtain music from Solomon Islands for both locals and anyone interested in familiarizing themselves with this music. For Solomon Islanders living abroad, especially students, Internet has become the number one source of local music. Despite the fact that the music scene in no way is professionalized, compared with Port Moresby and CHM

Supersound, there is a high rate of production of music, and every single month one can hear new songs played on the radio or the many. By reading blogs written by Solomon Islands nationals living abroad, it is clear that the writers have a large insight into what is stirring in the music scene of Honiara at any given month. The only way this has been made possible is through the Internet, something a search on the website YouTube will reveal. By punching the keywords “Solomon Islands music” in the YouTube search engine, a new world is opened to the user. The number of videos from Solomon Islands is in the hundreds, and they are being commented on by different users. Judging from the different comments, these songs are widely popular all across the Pacific, especially in Melanesia. However, despite the fact that there are a wide number of Solomon Islands artists available, there appears to be a popular few who dominate most of the market. Artists like Sharzy, “O.N.E.T.O.X.,” Wally Pazzi, “Litol Rastas” and “Apprentice” dominate the charts in Papua New Guinea and are popular among Melanesians. These bands play a mixture of Island Style and reggae, apart from Wally Pazzi, who has branched into the American music style of R&B, a more soul and hip-hop oriented style of music, widely popular in the West. His biggest hit is by far “*Krazy Love Song*”, released in 2008, which led one user on YouTube to compare him to R&B-artist Akon who had major hits in 2006 and 2007. Perhaps a little quaint, but I feel that this comment illustrates that Solomon Islands music has moved even closer to the mainstream music. Wally Pazzi is popular in all of Melanesia, and his concerts are usually sold out. Judging by the promotion that is being done by his record company, Wally seems to be the first Solomon Islands artist who has been marketed aggressively through the use of the Internet, and his music video “*Krazy Love Song*” has been a YouTube favourite in Melanesia since its release. His album “*Krazy Love*” is also available through the online music store iTunes, together with Sharzy, “Apprentice” and “O.N.E.T.O.X.”. This could pose the argument that Solomon Islands music has finally been accepted as a definite part of the global music scene, as anyone with access to iTunes can now legally download this music. Still, the label, which this music is put under on iTunes, can illustrate some of the attitudes towards music from Solomon Islands, and Melanesia as a whole. iTunes labels it as “world music” (Feld 2000), and as such the argument can be raised that it is seen as something “exotic” to a consumer. Truth is that this is not world music in the traditional sense, but is in fact music in the reggae or Island Style genre, and as such should be considered in its own right. Feld (2000) argues with regards to

the term “world music” that “musics understood as non-Western or ethnically other continued to be routinely partitioned from those of the West” (2000: 147), and this could be moved to the iTunes vs world music debate. Leyshon, Matless & Revill (1995) claims that “[o]ne has to be wary (...) of assuming that because place may be of importance it will necessarily be evident in the music’s aesthetic” (1995: 431), a point I agree with, as this music should be judged on its own merit, and not as something “exotic” from the South Pacific.

### **Chinese *stilm***

Chinese shops spread around all of Honiara are a very uniform entity in that their appearance and content are more or less exactly the same. There is a fairly large counter close to the entrance of the shop, and goods are either displayed behind this counter, or it is placed on different shelves in the store, more in the fashion of a regular supermarket. Clerks behind the counter are in most cases Solomon Islanders, and they are the ones who collect the money. What is striking is that the stores have no cash register to place the money. The money is quickly handed over to a man or woman<sup>32</sup> sitting elevated above his or her employees. This person counts the money and hands the change back to the clerk who quickly gives it to the customer. Several actors within the music business voiced their concern over the fact that the Chinese shops openly sell pirated copies of their music in their stores, a concern that is not only confined to Honiara and Solomon Islands, but has also been voiced regarding similar shops in Neighbouring countries Papua New-Guinea and Vanuatu (<http://www.solomonstarnews.com/news/national/2464--pirated-local-music-sold-in-png>). President of The Solomon Islands Music Federation (SIMF), Placid Walekwate has voiced this concern publicly several times, and during my talks with him he repeated these concerns, and told me that the federation is working actively towards the government in order to get them to implement laws protecting the musicians and their intellectual property. In an interview with the online newspaper Solomon Times, Walekwate repeated his concerns (<http://www.solomontimes.com/news.aspx?nwID=2495>). In his talks with me his focus was on the stores selling pirated material, but when talking to Solomon Times he advocated

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<sup>32</sup> These are mostly Chinese, although there are some shops where Solomon Islanders occupy this position.

copyright laws that ensured the artists would get paid royalties every time their songs were being played on the radio.

There is no control over royalties and copyright at the present time, and radio stations can play songs without having to pay any royalties to the artists. In Walekwate's opinion "it is vitally important for the country to introduce such an act to guide and protect the rights of the composer of songs and artists."

(<http://www.dailypost.vu/ArticleArchives/tabid/56/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/3097/categoryId/12/Vanuatu-warned-over-pirating-Solo-artistsAaa-music.aspx>), a concern he has voiced to the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, which is the ministry in charge of musical affairs in the Solomons today. He wants to target radio stations, shops and nightclubs and make them pay for the usage of the music. In the same interview he also said "because there is no copy right law in Solomon Islands, what is illegal in other countries under their copy right laws such as pirating of the work of other artists, people are totally free in Solomon Islands because of the absence of any copy right act." (Solomon Times 2008). However, Placid is not completely right in his argument, as the Solomon Islands legislation indeed has a copyright act<sup>33</sup>. So far the issue of piracy has not been resolved by the government of Solomon Islands, although I did speak to some government officials who did in fact claim that this was an issue taken quite seriously.

### **The paradox of *stilim***

There is a large paradox in the whole *stilim* situation when talking about Solomon Islands – and Honiara in particular. The reason I claim this to be true is that although most artists oppose downloading of their own music, they are in no way strangers to downloading and sharing music from foreign artists or computer software used for recording. In fact, most computers used for recording in Honiara are using pirated software, at least the home studios. I did not get a chance to see what the professional studios are using, so I cannot claim that they too use pirated software.

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<sup>33</sup> Revised in 1996 ([http://www.paclii.org/sb/legis/consol\\_act/ca133/](http://www.paclii.org/sb/legis/consol_act/ca133/)).

During a workshop on recording facilitated by SIMF in October of 2008, Australian ethnomusicologist Dr. Denis Crowdy held a weeklong seminar for musicians and aspiring producers in Honiara. It was a great success, and almost one hundred participants attended the workshop, where they gained further insight into recording and mixing music. What became strikingly obvious was the sheer amount of personal computers present at the workshop, and the advanced software that was being used. According to Dr. Crowdy the price of this type of software was several hundred Australian dollars in Sydney, something that seemed to give the participants a sense of pride, as they knew they had access to software many in Australia could not afford. Although they did not have any formal training in mixing or operating such advanced software, they still managed to obtain a decent sound on their recordings. The skills they learned during this week would later be reflected in recordings and concerts later that fall. The workshop greatly illustrated the ambiguity regarding piracy among the performers and their engineers. This is an argument previously made by Crowdy (2007), who argues that “[w]ithout piracy, musicians are essentially locked out of access to the latest sounds” (2007: 151), a point I strongly share, as the price of proper sound equipment in the Solomons effectively shuts the musicians out of purchasing this legally. The same argument can also be made with regards to the music being produced and their consumers, as the cheapest legal recordings are sold between \$SBD 70 and 80 in the few shops selling these copies. As such most people obtain their music from their *wantoks*, and not downloading it from the Internet, as is the practice in the Western world.

### **Getting to grips with *stilim***

One artist who has been present on the music scene since the eighties, and has seen the changes the industry has gone through is Ian Roni – also known as Papa Yannie. He was a radical artist in the early 90s with, among others, his hit song “*Mama Krae*” – the song that has spent the longest time on the hit lists in the Solomons - and later went on to become a record producer, working for Unisound studios in Honiara. I had a strong desire to meet with Ian, as I wanted to gain a greater insight into his background and history. As he spent a substantial amount of time in Maliata, it was difficult to get a hold of him something. However, in late October I finally succeeded in meeting him, and this is a narrative of that meeting.

Ian Roni is a well-known name in Solomon Islands music, much due to his previous hits like “*Mama Karae*”, plus his involvement with Unisound Studios. He has more or less left the business of creating music and instead concentrates on producing. One day I was talking to Frank, a painter from Bellona, who told me he knew Ian Roni. I asked him where I could find him, whereas he pointed towards a large man in an Australian dingo hat and said “There he is.” Frank hissed at Ian as to signal him to come over to the table where we were sitting, and introduced him to me. We started to chat, and after a short while I asked him if he was free for an interview one of the following days. “Why don’t we do it right now,” he asked and suggested we head over to the King Solomon Hotel. I was happy he agreed to speak to me, and forgot that I had really not prepared any questions for the interview. I apologized for this, whereas Ian just started laughing with a deep voice, smacked my back and said; “no problem.” We entered the King Solomon Hotel and found a seat at the bar. As we sat down, I was struck that this large man in a black t-shirt and a dingo hat could be the same person who walked around in Honiara during the late 1980s and early 90s wearing colourful clothing and was considered quite the radical because of his hit song “*Mama Karae*”, a song that dealt with the issue of domestic abuse. “Oh yeah, that song there,” he says, looking proud. “Did you know that song has the record for being the longest on the hit lists in the Solomons? No song has ever managed that again.”

Ian is in his 40s – his exact age is unclear – and he started playing in bands during the 1980s. His first band was “Ian Roni and the Workshop Boys”, a band that played cover songs. “We started playing in different nightclubs, playing rock songs. We played other people’s songs, but after a while we decided to record our own material.” The band in fact became the first to start home recordings in Honiara, according to Ian. This led to a creative boom for him and the band, but after a while he broke out of the band to go solo. His initial solo career did not last too long, though, as he did not experience too much success. He went back to a band and started the group “Guadalcanal”. This band worked as a creative outlet for Ian, but he would eventually break out of this band as

well, and this time around he would channel his creativity better than the last time. In the late 1980s he wrote “Mama Karae”, and the rest is music history, so to speak. “I grew up on modern music, mostly rock,” he says, “but I moved into Island Style when it came.” His musical endeavours would lead him into the business of producing, and in the 1990s he started the recording company Pacific Junction. “We did a lot of different recordings with Pacific Junction,” he says, “but unfortunately all the master tapes were lost during the tensions.”

He now works as a producer and technician at Unisound Studios, and does not record as much of his own material as before. His job requires him to keep up with what is moving in the modern music scene of Solomon Islands. We sat in the bar of King Solomon and chatted throughout the afternoon, where he would tell me different things about music and projects he was involved in. He has a lot of different opinions about his home country, and is highly involved in environmental issues, especially with regards to logging. Music, however, is his first and foremost passion, and he is not emerged in nostalgia. “No, no. Music needs to change,” he states, “it follows the generations, and we who belong to the generation of the past need to keep up. I like the new music, I really do. It’s modern and fresh. These new bands surprise me a lot.” As the afternoon dragged into the night, we moved into the realm of music as social commentaries, a topic he is very familiar with, as his biggest commercial success was just this. “The social commentaries change with the generations,” he tells me, “what I felt is not what these new bands feel. They are preoccupied with something else than I was, although some of the themes are the same. After the tensions the music became more political, and the songs about the provinces did not relate to the kids anymore. They don’t want to hear songs about this and this island, it’s not their reality. The culture is changing, and this is reflected in the music. Kids today write songs about other people. Now, do I like it? I don’t know, but it is their thing. I am too old to understand it anyway.”

*Stilim* is something one cannot escape in Solomon Islands, especially when chatting to someone who make their living from selling music. When the conversation moved into this, Ian for the first time stopped laughing and became very serious. “*Stilim* is very bad, very bad indeed. I’ve produced 18 albums, and



I've made quite a lot of money on that. But after the computers came to Honiara my income dropped by 80 per cent. Imagine that! 80 per cent." Although the introduction of the digital age to music in Honiara meant a loss for the recording industry, Ian states that it has not affected the musicians. They continue to create their music at an impressive rate. As the night came to a close, I felt I had a whole new understanding of the music scene in Honiara. It was one thing to hear it from people who played in different bands. It was quite another to actually speak to someone who has been – and still is – deeply involved in the recording industry of Honiara. As our ways parted, I could not help to think about what the future would bring for Ian with regards to music.

Although selling copies of one's albums during club concerts is a good way of making some income for the artists, the problem is that the business of club concerts has more or less vanished after the tension period of the late 90s, as SIMF President Placid Walekwate explained to me. He himself was a musician before the tensions, and would regularly play concerts in Honiara. "We would play three or four concerts from Thursday to Sunday, moving from club to club (...), but after the tensions this completely stopped (...). No one plays live music anymore" (excerpt from interview with Walekwate in Honiara, November 2008). SIMF has initiated what they call "Music Marathon", a musical event they intend to put on every month - although it only happened twice during my time there – and they hope to present the diversity of Solomon Islands music, as well as showcase new bands on the rise. Different bands were brought in to play, all were based in Honiara, and the "Music Marathon" drew a large crowd to the Cultural Village, a large open space with a scene, situated next to Mendana Hotel in downtown Honiara. In the next chapter I will give a more descriptive narrative of this happening, which I attended twice.

### **Gifts and trading**

Solomon Islanders have always been very adapt in the fields of trade and bargain, like their Melanesian neighbours, who were famous for being more 'business minded' than the peoples of Polynesia (Mauss 1950:30). Still, it is important to differentiate between the notion of 'trade' and

that of 'reciprocity' in this context. Where trade initially was a means of exchanging surplus goods, or goods that were regarded as "luxury items and therefore dispensable" (Bennett 1987:33), the concept of reciprocity in fact carries far more complexity within the context of the Solomons. As Mauss (1950) observes, "[these societies] exchanges vast amounts in ways and for reasons other than those with which we are familiar from our own societies" (1950:31). These reasons often contribute directly to the balance of society, and are reflected in the very nature of the exchange. Gifts are not only practical, but in fact do imply a great deal of emotions and responsibilities for those involved in the exchange.

Transferring this to present day Honiara and the music scene, I believe it is necessary to once again look to Sahlins (1965) and his three models of reciprocity, as the way music is being exchanged and moves around in Honiara can be viewed in a reciprocal fashion. One thing to think about, is whether music is seen as a *gift* or as a *commodity*. Gregory (1982) makes the distinction that "gift-exchange establishes a relation between the transactors, while commodity-exchange establishes a relation between the objects exchanged" (1982:42). It could be argued that music in a sense does both of these things, as it on the one hand, by way of reciprocity, establishes or maintains social relations. However, it can also be used as a commodity, in that one can exchange a record or a song for another song or another object. I have to stress that music becomes a gift or commodity only in its physical form; a CD, audiocassette or, as I will explain below, an MP3 music file transferred onto a carrier. Thus, could it in fact be called this an artefact? I believe it can, and by following Thomas (1991), it can be argued that music in this form becomes "subjects rather than objects, things which produce or express cultural change while standing as fixed and stable entities themselves" (1991:208). The song or record does not change in itself, but can yet be used with regards to social change, like the social commentaries in music, as described in chapter three.

### Memory stick – ornament or just a modern day accessory

Where most young people in the West have access to the Internet through school or in the home, this is not the case in Honiara. None of my informants had any access to the Internet in their homes<sup>34</sup> and they had to rely on *wantoks* who worked in government offices who were connected, or through the many Internet cafés found in Honiara. But when talking about these hubs, one has to return to what seems to be the focal point of more or less all activities in Honiara; the access to money. If you do not have friends who work in offices with an access to the internet<sup>35</sup>, your only option is to use one of the many cafés around. And usually you pay good dollar for every minute. Or, if you are so lucky as to have a laptop with a wireless internet connection you can buy what is called Bumblebee Cards, which cost anywhere from SBD \$20 to SBD \$250 – depending on the amount and time of access<sup>36</sup>.

Most people use public Internet access, and at any time of the day most of the computers are usually occupied by people doing anything from chatting to downloading (a gruelling process, as the lines are not too fast) music and films. What intrigued me about the whole thing was the extreme resistance every single person seemed to have towards outsiders copying and using their music without them being paid for it, while they appeared to have no moral resistance towards doing the exact same thing. An interesting feature that can be observed in Honiara is the use of portable USB-sticks. These are relatively cheap, and can be bought from a number of stores around town. Now, USB-sticks by themselves are not an unusual feature, how they are being deployed in Honiara is what makes them interesting. While most people who hold traditional office jobs in Honiara have one or two of these, it is not unusual to see young men walking around town with four or five of them hanging around his neck like ornaments. Following Jourdan's argument (1995a) about the way the *liu* take pride in their appearance in that "clothing is the foremost item in a *liu*'s budget" (1995a: 216), it is not surprising that they

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<sup>34</sup> In fact, most homes do not even have access to electricity.

<sup>35</sup> More and more offices now go as far as banning people from having *wantoks* hanging around in the office during work hours. I did observe signs everywhere in office buildings that specifically said that *wantoks* were to stay out of the office. It also needs to be stated that although many offices now have access to the Internet, it is still more or less a 'luxury'.

<sup>36</sup> In Honiara one can find the Bumblebee hotspots at the Panatina Plaza shopping mall, the Lime Lounge restaurant, the Mendana Hotel and the Honiara Hotel. All these are spots more or less frequented exclusively by whites or Chinese.

implement new technologies in their fashion attire. This feature is nothing new in Solomon Islands culture, as they have always been good at making usage of new items introduced into their culture and implementing them into their own daily life (Jourdan 1995b:142). These USB-sticks not only function as means of exchanging information, but it can also be used as a kind of ornament. Given that keeping up to speed with music seems to be very important for the young people, the fact that one has several memory sticks filled with music generates in a sense cultural or social wealth. As such, the sticks not only work as ornaments or information storage, but also as a kind of wealth.

The question has to be asked if these objects, which are used on a daily basis all over the world are just that – modern inventions used making storage of information easier – or if it represents something else for people in Honiara. We have discussed the concept of knowledge as power, and thus have to consider the argument that these are merely vessels used to control the information, and as such contribute to the distribution of a modern knowledge system. USB-sticks could be viewed as a form of knowledge distribution. I use knowledge in the sense of music, where having music means that one has the “knowledge” of this recording. Following Lindstrom’s (1990) argument, in the rural setting this distribution is confined to certain individuals who are “better able to circulate knowledge than others” (1990:105). This power of knowledge changes drastically when operating in an urban setting, as the traditional modes of hierarchy and power seems to change, at least when observing the core of my informants; young urbanites born and raised in Honiara, or those who have travelled to the city to escape the grasp of traditionalism – the *masta liu*. These two groups dominate the usage of modern technology within the borders of Honiara, although they do not actually control the very core of it.

I believe that the memory sticks represent something else than simple technological advances. The reason being that if one needs to store a great deal of information, like movies or songs, it would be better to buy portable hard drives which can be found in most computer stores in Honiara, given that they have them in stock, naturally. Instead people sometimes choose to carry around anywhere from two to six or seven of them. Memory sticks are also substantially cheaper than portable hard drives, and the difference in price can be quite a substantial amount. A USB-stick will cost anywhere from SBD \$50 to \$150, depending on how much storage space you

need. A portable hard drive with storage capability of 250 Gigabytes is likely to set you back about SBD \$1,000.

This led me to believe that it had to be something else behind it all, and I had to ask myself the question if they had any form of symbolic or cultural value to the people. I was not able to get a clear answer to this question although I do feel somewhat that the answer can lay in the notion of visual expression, particularly among the *liu*, who are quick to utilize what Jourdan (1995a) calls “symbolic expressions of identity” (1995a: 211), in this case clothing. She also argues that since Honiara is such a new town, that has not fully established its urban identity, “[people are] continuously creating a culture in which they are immersed” (Jourdan 1995b: 142), and the memory sticks might function as an imagery of what is perceived as being urban.

### **Means of survival**

Music produced in Australia, America, Europe or even Melanesia is being copied and shared among people on a day-to-day basis. No one seems to be affected by the fact that this is as much *stelim miusik blong nara man* (stealing another man’s music), since this ‘other man’ comes from outside their own cosmology. This attitude seems to correlate to the image many people have of the West; namely that people – and especially famous musicians and artists – have a lot of money and thus will not take notice if someone, like in the Solomons, copies and shares their artistic products without paying for it. When compared to Solomon Islands this attitude certainly rings true, and one can understand the points given by those who communicated this sentiment to me.

Given that the music scene in Honiara in no way is professionalized in the same way as one finds in Papua New-Guinea or New Caledonia, with the large studios like CCH and Mangrove, illegal piracy is devastating to any artist hoping to make money of their art. However, as I have mentioned, the anger towards piracy seems to be focused on an external ‘enemy’, and not towards those in their own community who do exactly the same as the ones they criticize. The option of making money from music is not really present in Honiara, as cash flow among the consumers of music is by and large at a minimum. When people need to spend money on food and school fees, leisure is not always an option. Thus one shares music through the network that

is memory sticks or recordable CDs (and even cassettes in some instances, although these are not as common as CDs).

There were several instances where I met with informants who had an extremely fatalistic view on the issue of piracy and sharing of music. They would say that it threatened the very essence of the music scene in Honiara – and the Solomons as a whole. Still, interestingly enough, they would see nothing wrong with sharing the latest Metallica album with their *wantoks*. It is, as I have mentioned earlier, an external affair, and not something that comes from the inside.

However, what happens when this sharing of commodities transcend global limitations and become a part of the world scene, i.e. the iTunes case? All of a sudden the artists are not just a part of the Solomon cosmology, but have the opportunity to be a contender on the world stage. However, being given the label “world music” by iTunes, they are not able to compete on the same terms as other artists in the same genre, and instead risk being seen as something exotic and quaint, instead of being judge on their own merits.

Despite the fact that Solomon Islands artists are included in the world’s largest digital musical store, these are still a chosen few. In a country where most people do not own a credit card, which is a requirement for shopping on iTunes, Solomon Islanders cannot even shop for their own artists. As such, musical distribution within the Solomons still adhere to traditional means of exchange, in that music is part of an informal network, by and large.

## Chapter V

### Music becomes global

During the course of chapters one and two I attempted to explore just how the music scene of Honiara has developed, as well as outlining the history of popular music in Solomon Islands from the times of World War II up to modern times. I looked at how music evolved over the years, with the massively popular stringband wave from 1945 and up until independence, when other musical styles gradually took over. From the 1980s reggae and Island Style have been the two dominant genres in Solomon Islands, although these are gradually losing ground to new styles based on hip-hop and R&B, inspired by predominantly African-American artists in the last decade.

In chapters three and four I looked at how music evolved pre- and post-*tenson*, and how the digital revolution has affected the modern day music scene in Honiara. The advent of computers changed a lot of the rules of the game for musicians, but they were quick to adapt to these changes and have turned it to their advantage. Channels like YouTube and iTunes have given Solomon Islands music the potential to reach the entire world and compete on the global music scene, as opposed to the time of LPs, audiocassettes and CDs, when music was predominantly broadcasted through either radio or more informal channels. Although the movement of music has changed as technology has become more available, it could be argued that the practices controlling the movement are much the same as they have been before. Internet, memory sticks, and mobile phones have made their way into the market and made the means of exchange easier, but the practices could appear to be the same as they have always been. It could be argued that these new ways of musical movement and exchange, particularly when the exchange takes place in the whole of Melanesia, could be viewed as a form of “kula” (Malinowski 1920: 97), although “kula” has never really been an integral part of Solomon Islands history. Instead the islands in pre-colonial times enjoyed a complex system of exchange routes where “[t]hings’ from any one location reached any other place via a series of agents and locations” (Dureau 1998:199). Although these gradually vanished when the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was established (Dureau 1998:201-202), the argument that the way musical

exchange happens in Honiara today might contain elements of this pre-colonial exchange, as music is being distributed through – largely – agents and locations.

Other factors that will be discussed are the matters of gender divisions in the music scene, and the relationship musicians have with the concept of social commentaries. So far we have looked at some of the members of the music scene in Honiara, as well as look at some of the songs which have been made by members of this music scene. The element of gender, however, is not one I have discussed in great detail, although it needs to be mentioned in relations to my research. During the course of my fieldwork I came across very few female artists, and this left me to ponder if the music scene is but another realm where men dominate in Solomon Islands society. Although women are not completely absent in music, they are in many cases silent voices, in that the music scene is predominantly a male arena. It has to be said that although the women are not at the forefront of the music scene, they can often be found singing backing vocals.

### **Mobility of music**

As illustrated in chapter four, the mobility of music in Solomon Islands in many instances take place in more or less informal networks. We talked about the concept of *stilim miusik blong nara man* in chapter four with regards to music piracy. However, *stilim* seems to apply only when talking about external sources<sup>37</sup>, and not among Solomon Islanders in general. For example, the president of the Solomon Islands Music Federation (SIMF), Placid Walekwate, reacted very strongly towards the Chinese business owners who distribute pirated copies of Solomon artists. The anger towards the Chinese was shared by most musicians I spoke to, but why did they not react in the same way towards their own, even though they obviously knew that their *wantoks* were distributing music by copying CDs and audiocassettes from each other? Not once did anyone of my informants seem to mind that their music was being spread by their own people, but they were very concerned about someone from the outside would “steal” their music and use it to their own advantage. One example, which can help shed some light on this, is the issue of

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<sup>37</sup> With external sources I mean those outside of the Melanesian/Pacific context.



the international hit song “*Sweet Lullaby*” by French duo “Deep Forest”, which is the source of a lot of controversy in Solomon Islands, almost twenty years after its release. It can be argued that the controversy surrounding this song is the key element in the general scepticism among musicians towards the Western music industry.

### **No sweet lullaby**

As mentioned briefly in chapter three, the song “*Sweet Lullaby*” became a huge international hit when first released in 1992 as part of the album “Deep Forest”. The song was used in different commercials as well, making the French duo “Deep Forest” quite a large amount of money. The song is thought to have sold more than four million copies worldwide, as well as appearing in different television commercials for various multi-national corporations (Feld 2000:155), and thus made the French duo quite a lot of money. However, as we have discussed previously, the recording was shrouded in quite a lot of controversy, especially after Hugo Zemp, the ethnomusicologist who recorded the original song, “*Rorogwela*” in 1969-70 in North Malaita, became aware of the fact that the producers had used this song without his consent, and wrote a letter to the members of Deep Forest, Michel Sanchez and Eric Mouquet, where he more or less accuses the two for stealing the tune and voice of “*Sweet Lullaby*”, as well as accusing the two of being “disrespectful first to the musical heritage of the Solomon Islands, using without permission a piece of music and concealing the source of your arrangement on the CD notes” (Zemp 1996:48), requesting the two to pay royalties to the people of Solomon Islands. He never heard anything from them.

I will now give my account of my own experiences of this song and the ramifications it had for my fieldwork. Below is a narrative of my first meeting with this song after two weeks in the field.

After about two weeks in Honiara, my friend John decided to take me on what he called a “Honiara initiation rite”, and told me to meet him outside the Anthony Saru building one evening. I was curious to actually see this, and every anthropological fibre in me told me to experience just this. I waited around the

Anthony Saru building that night, and after a while John arrived with another friend of mine, Sosimo, and the taxi driver named David. We drove out on Mendana Avenue and headed west out of town. “Now we’re going to welcome you to Honiara,” John told me as we headed towards our destination; a beach right outside of town. John and Sosimo told me this was the way to greet newcomers to Honiara. However strange I found this, I could almost picture an elaborate rite of passage being performed on the beach. Everything from dancing to swimming with crocodiles went through my mind. However, the reality was a bit more mundane, as David pulled the taxi in front of a bottle shop, where John went inside to purchase a case of Solbrew. As we approached the beach, two men stopped the taxi and told us to pay a toll. This is a common occurrence when going to a beach in Honiara, as these are all private land, and the landowner demands compensation for the usage. We paid and entered the beach, parked the car and sat down to chat and enjoy some beers. After some time the conversation moved into the “*Sweet Lullaby*” issue, a topic John and Sosimo both had a lot of opinions on.

“The story goes that there was a Solomon Islands man who was in New Zealand and walked into a record store when he first heard the song,” John told me. “He recognized the singing and asked the clerk what this was. The clerk answered that it was a song by a new band called Deep Forest, and the singing was by African Pygmies. Naturally, he knew this was wrong, and when he came back to the Solomons he told people about this song.” According to John the events proceeded with the Solomon Islands government addressing the record company that released the album, demanding an explanation for what was viewed as Deep Forest ‘stealing’ “*Rorogwela*” and thus using Solomon Islands culture for their own gain. According to John, the government sent claims of compensation to the recording company<sup>38</sup>, but these claims were not met. John then went on to tell me a story that fascinated me a lot, as it involved elements of my own native country. “In 2007 some representatives from UNESCO in Norway came to Honiara to look for the woman in the song. They said they were there to find the relatives and help to get compensation.” According to John, the

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<sup>38</sup> I have not been able to verify whether these events did occur or not, but given that John at the time worked at the museum, I did not have any reason to doubt this story.

representatives from UNESCO Norway travelled to North Malaita and told the inhabitants there that they would help fund a clinic, as well as aid with the compensation.

Now, John's story was quite intriguing, not least for myself. If it were any truth to this story, this would mean agencies in my home country was deeply involved in this story. However, when I later learned the story behind this UNESCO visit I learned that things weren't exactly as John thought they were.

The real story is that it was not UNESCO Norway at all, but a reporter from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) and her husband. They came to Honiara unannounced and asked the Solomon Islands National Museum to help them with the logistics of travelling to North Malaita, despite being warned of this travel beforehand. However, UNESCO Norway had provided them with travel support, after the couple told them they were travelling to Malaita to make a documentary about this song (Hviding 2009: personal communication). The director of the museum, Mr. Lawrence Foana'ota, attempted several times to talk them out of this, but his attempts were futile. Bad preparation and little or no knowledge of how things work in North Malaita made the 'expedition' a complete disaster<sup>39</sup>. Another element the couple did not take into account, much due to their lack of knowledge on *kastom* in Fataleka, was the fact that the issue of compensation (Keesing 1970, Akin 1999) is one everyone venturing into North Malaita needs to bear in mind. By telling the people of Fataleka that they would help to fund a clinic they may have unleashed a rush of compensation claims, something which was backed by the fact that this story was well known among the people of Baegu and Fataleka whom I ran into in Honiara, who – despite my attempts to claim I had no knowledge of this incident – would ask me a lot about this, and some would even approach me in quite a direct fashion. UNESCO Norway are aware of what happened during this travel, and are apparently not pleased with the outcome (Hviding 2009: personal communication), since they in reality funded an 'expedition' which led to nothing more than broken promises. The reality is that Afunakwa, the woman in the

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<sup>39</sup> Apparently the couple asked for everything from off-road trucks to helicopters, as the Fataleka area can be difficult to reach by conventional transport. Getting these means of transportation is impossible in Solomon Islands.

song, has passed a long time ago, and when people realize they can get compensation out of the “Rorogwela” case, the picture is complicated further.

### **Who owns culture?**

This issue is just one of many regarding “Sweet Lullaby”, which for Solomon Islands turned out to not be a particularly sweet issue at all. However, the case raises some interesting issues; especially regarding music as “intangible cultural heritage”

([http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=34325&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=34325&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)).

Another issue is how one should treat cultural heritage when faced with international notions of ownership. A story published in *Island Business* (2007) addresses just this, and raises the question of how cultural heritage is treated with regards to copyright and intellectual property. The article raises several interesting topics, especially that of ownership of culture in the Pacific. “[I]t is a difficult thing to reconcile the concept of ownership in Pacific societies to that of the commercial world. (...) Cultural inheritance with its own concept of wealth creation, need not or cannot be ‘stolen’ and one need not ‘sell’ it in order to make a living” (*Island Business* 2007). As Aroha Te Pareake Mead, co-editor of *Pacific Genes and Life Patents* talks of in the same article about the notion of culture in the Pacific, saying “indigenous cultures (...) don’t claim – that’s not part of who we are or how we define ourselves, or how we define wealth. In fact, in most cases, we define wealth not in what we have but in what we give away” (*Island Business* 2007). However, when this mentality clashes with Western notions of copyright and intellectual property, the tables could risk being turned in a way that does not benefit the Pacific Islanders. This is the case with regards to “Sweet Lullaby”, simply due to the fact that Deep Forest did not break any laws, given that they were granted permission by Hugo Zemp, who owned the recording in regards to copyright law.

What happened with regards to “Sweet Lullaby” could be seen as a form of “globalization of culture” (Friedman 1994:41), where a relatively obscure recording from the late 1960s was turned into an international hit song. As Feld (2000) comments, “the musicians who made ‘Sweet

Lullaby' (...) didn't need to know (...) the song's actual geographical location. From the initial standpoint of the sampler, Afunakwa is not a person but a sound" (2000:163). However anyone might feel about this particular case, the truth is that Deep Forest seemingly did not break any laws, as the rights to the song would be copyrighted by the record company that released the album (Seeger 2004 :164), and as such the people from Baegu in Fataleka were in effect cut off from any economic compensation. There appears to have been no known response from Afunakwa or the community of Baegu with regards to "Sweet Lullaby" (Feld 2000:163), although I did run into several individuals who claimed to be relatives, and these would often voice their dissatisfaction over the issue. "They stole our music and made money off it, and we have not seen any of it." Such ill feelings are in danger of being amplified further by the incident involving the Norwegian journalist and her husband, where the people of the area was promised the compensation they feel they deserve.

UNESCO has defined intangible cultural heritage as cultural artefacts that cannot be touched or seen, like music (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=EN&pg=home>).

"The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing states as for developed ones."

(UNESCO Infokit 2009: 4)

The original material that was sampled by Deep Forest thus falls into the category of intangible culture, as defined by UNESCO (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002>), and as such should be treated as something belonging to Solomon Islands. However, the "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage" (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>), defined by UNESCO, was not written

during the time of the “*Sweet Lullaby*” controversy<sup>40</sup>, and as such there was no legislation at work during the early 1990s. Zemp (1996) concludes that ethnomusicologists need to accept that their works can become known, and asks members of his own discipline to “think about these commercial implications when we fulfill our professional functions in documenting and disseminating traditional music” (1996: 53), which could be interpreted as him reluctantly ‘accepting’ that he is more or less powerless towards the multinational recording industry.

### **Musical mobility**

“*Sweet Lullaby*” is but one example of musical mobility in a globalized world. A relatively insignificant song sung by a woman from North Malaita in the 1960s would more than twenty years later become an international hit song. Though, this incident can be seen as an example of musical globalization (Feld 2000), and not a common occurrence that goes on in the context of the Honiara music scene. However, the whole issue appears to have a two-sided element, in that the controversy is not that Solomon music has become known all over the world, but that an external source contributed to making it famous. What most people appear to have a problem with is not the song itself, but the aftermath, where Deep Forest made big money off the song. From what I could make out when hearing people talking about this, no one appears to know exactly how much money “Deep Forest” made off “*Sweet Lullaby*”, but the numbers went from a few million to billions of dollars. This appears to have angered most people, since no one in the Solomons have seen any money off this, something they feel is deeply unfair. Some even accused Hugo Zemp of making money off “*Sweet Lullaby*”, prompting them to be sceptical towards all researchers of music, including myself. This particular song took on a life of its own and ended up becoming an international hit phenomenon in the early 1990s, an honour it probably never would have achieved without the help of Deep Forest. Whatever feelings people might have with regards to this issue, it is likely that the song would never have been heard by others than a chosen few ethnomusicologists if it had not been discovered by the French electronica duo. I believe we here are talking of an aspect of recurrent globalization within music, e.g. African music popularized through *world music* (Feld 2000), since one particular local piece of music

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<sup>40</sup> It was agreed upon at a convention in Paris in October of 2003.

became something that the whole world related to. This event correlates with the definition of globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990 in Pieterse 1995: 48), meaning that the recording done by Zemp in a country most people have not even heard of, many years later became a phenomenon, which again shaped the view Solomon Islanders have on the outside world. Friedman (1995) defines globalization as “a flow of meaningful objects and ideas that retain their meaning in their movement” (1995: 86), and one can ask whether or not “Rorogwela” did retain its meaning when it was remixed as “Sweet Lullaby”, or if the song took on a whole new set of meanings when it was released upon the world. Although the English title is a translation of the original title, it is highly unlikely that most people who heard the song, at least outside of Solomon Islands, had any idea what the lyrics actually did mean. However, I am using Friedman’s (1995) definition due to the fact that the meaning of the song did not change, despite the fact that the listener could not understand what was being said.

### **National mobility**

Musical mobility is going on at an impressive rate in Honiara, as discussed in chapter four. Modern technology has given the sharing of music an entire new dimension, in that a recording can be shared at an impressive rate. For example, Australian ethnomusicologist Dr. Denis Crowdy arranged a recording workshop in Honiara in October of 2008, which I attended. This workshop has been described in chapter four, so I will not go into greater detail at this moment. However, the end result of the workshop was a re-recording of the classic Edwin Sitori song “*Wakabaot Long Saenataon*”, which was then mixed by the participants into a multitude of versions, and the best versions were presented to the Minister of Youth, Women and Children Mr. Peter Tom at a ceremony on the last day of the workshop. However, the most interesting incident occurred when a group of us went to the King Solomon Hotel later that evening to meet, and all of a sudden a version of the song came on the radio. A music show hosted by Thomas Riti, had gotten a hold of one of the recordings and aired it. Everyone who had attended the

workshop stopped and sat absolutely quiet, and then everyone started laughing and cheering. Dr. Crowdy and I sat there, looking at each other, and then we started laughing as well.

I feel this example serves as a good illustration on how rapid music can move around in Honiara, the mobility of aspects of culture, so to speak. The time span between the times the song was recorded and ultimately mixed, to the time it premiered on the radio, is but a few short hours. The song was never intended for public release, and was more to teach the participants how to mix a song with the equipment they had at their disposal. The song thus proceeded to rapidly make its way from the workshop to Thomas Riti's radio show within the span of maybe one hour, illustrating well how rapidly music can move between agents within Honiara. All participants had access to their own version of the song, but Dr. Crowdy and I discussed how the song might have made it to the radio, and we concluded that some of the participants downloaded the song from Dr. Crowdy's computer through Bluetooth technology on their mobile phones, and thus proceeded to spread it around. Both of us were impressed by how fast the music actually moved through Honiara. Perhaps the most important reason for the song making its way to the radio is most likely the fact that Thomas Riti's brother, Ronnie, was one of the participants. Following my argument about the spread of music through informal networks (chapter four), this is a natural social result of the rapid distribution of music. Another factor could be the fact that radio stations often have strong ties with the musicians, particularly Z-FM, where Sharzy is the station manager. As such, the way from the recording studio to the airwaves can be very short. This guarantees the artists who have access to this network added airplay on the radio stations of Honiara.

In Gizo the situation is similar to what goes on in Honiara, the difference being that the spread of music happens at an even faster rate than in Honiara (Berg 2010: personal communication). The radio station in Gizo, Radio Happy Lagoon, is a radio station where local music is preferred to international music (Seward 1999:28), and one could speculate that they enjoy a close relationship with the musicians of Gizo, as well as the recording company in Gizo, Third World Studios. I have no detailed knowledge on the complete workings within the music scene in Gizo, as I did not have the opportunity to go and examine this. As such I cannot discuss this in greater detail.



## **Honiara's women do not speak**

One feature about the Honiara music scene that to an extent surprised me was the absence of female voices, so to speak. Naturally there were a few female singers around, but as a rule the women were more or less silent. We know from prior research conducted in Solomon Islands that women in many societies do not voice their opinions in public, but we also know that they in fact have a lot of opinions on many issues regarding them (Keesing 1985, Jourdan 1997). Despite this, the women do not use their voices in music to a great extent. The one band consisting of all women, who enjoy national and regional success, is the Isabel band "Sisiva". The four girls in the band are very popular, especially in Vanuatu, and have held several concerts throughout Melanesia. I did not see them perform during my time in Honiara, but I did hear them on a few new recordings that were released. However, many of my male informants did not appear to take the band seriously, prompting me to wonder if this was another element of the gender relations in Solomon Islands. Why was it that music was a male dominated realm in Honiara? I knew women were just as concerned with music as men, and speaking to some female singers confirmed just this assumption. One of the members of SIMF, Erin, was female, and she was passionate about music, not least the music of Solomon Islands. She told me she had been singing since she was a young girl, and she appeared very opinionated with regards to the directions music was taking in the country. Erin and "Sisiva" are not in any way a majority with regards to the music scene, they are in a sense something that stands out from what is common. The question thus beckons, why is this? Women listen to music just as much as men and young girls come to concerts in the same way as the men do. They dance to the music in the nightclubs and listen to the albums on their radios just as the men do. Still, they appear to be completely silent when it comes to performing the music.

Female voices in general appear rare in the public space of Solomon Islands society, and many of the women I met seemed shy and secluded in the company of men, while they acted in a completely different manner when they were in groups of other women. However, in general, Honiara seemed to be a male domain. Rosaldo (1974) argues "that male, as opposed to female, activities are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men" (1974: 19), a feature that can be observed in

Solomon Islands culture, at least in Honiara. In many instances men seem reluctant to give women access to their realm, in this case music, and will argue that women cannot play music like a man. In some sense it seems like they are frightened that women might in some way ‘destroy’ the musical world they have built up. It can be argued that this is similar to the notion of women as “nature” (Ortner 1974: 72), almost like an uncontrollable and potentially destructive force.

Let us revisit the songs “*Mama Karae*” and “02”, where male artists addressed issues that concern women. Domestic abuse and infidelity are issues women are very much aware of, and many experience this on a daily basis. Yet, they let the men ‘fight their battles’, in a sense, since it is the men who need to address these particular topics. One particular incident that was told to me on several occasions was the issue of a song released in 2008 (I never got a hold of the title) in which a boy was taunting a girl, in Pijin called *spoelem*, and badmouthing her. Apparently this girl was a former girlfriend of his, and he wanted to get back on her. The song was played on the radio and became a hit among the youth of Honiara. However, the girl did not sit idly by, and in the span of a few months she released a song of her own, where she fought back against the boy who had written the initial song. Apparently, she made the boy look very bad, claiming he lived off his father and *wantok*. This angered the boy’s friends, who rang the radio station, demanding the song be put off the air. Girls, however, loved this song and wanted to hear more of it. The end result was that the boy and his friends released another song about the girl. Whether or not the girl answered this call is uncertain, but this incident is quite interesting. *Spoelem* is a fairly new phenomenon in Solomon Islands music, and is spreading among the teenagers. Where it comes from is not clear, but many older musicians say it comes from the introduction of hip-hop to Solomon Islands. Hip-hop has a long tradition of using songs to bash someone else, a phenomenon often referred to as *battling* (Price 2006: 50). This trend has apparently now spread to Solomon Islands, much to the distaste of the parental generation. As discussed in chapter two, the feelings towards the introduction of reggae and Pijin Rock to Solomon Islands angered the parental generation in the 1980s as well, so one could say that those who angered their parents are now being angered by their own children. It is almost a case of ‘what goes around comes around’.

### **Social commentaries – an esoteric knowledge?**

In chapter three I argued that a lot of the songs released in the Solomons have elements of social commentaries, like “*Mista Dola Man*” by “Litol Rastas” or “*Mista Politik Man*” by “Original Gees”, where topics such as money and politics are discussed. This enables the musicians to get their opinions across, without the songs being perceived as a form of “agitprop” (Seward 1999:33). Their songs transgress cultural borders and ring true for people from Honiara, Makira, Malaita or even in Port Moresby. Solomon Islands songs have received great appreciation in the rest of Melanesia, and concerts featuring Solomon artists are almost always full of people. This has been the case for more than twenty years, and thus one has to speculate just why this is the case. Most explanations as to why this is the case, indicate that the way Solomon Islands artists take an existing musical style and mix it into something new (e.g. *Island Style*) resonate with their neighbours in Melanesia. However, as previously indicated, it could be suggested that this explanation is not the only one. As musical styles change with the years, so do preferences among people. Why is it that Solomon Islands music has been popular for so many years, despite the change in styles? There is a long way from “Apprentice” to Wally Pazzi and “O.N.E.T.O.X.”, but the elements of popularity are still very much present. Could one argue that this is also due to the elements of social commentaries in the songs coming out of the Solomons? One element that was being repeated to me when speaking to the consumers of the music, young and old, was the way they felt music spoke to them. Without speculating, one could argue that this rings true in Papua New-Guinea and Vanuatu as well, since these societies often regard themselves as *wantoks*. With this in mind, it could be argued that elements present in Solomon society – Honiara in particular – are familiar to those living in Port Moresby and Port Vila as well, making the songs ring true for them as well. However, another argument towards the popularity of Solomon Islands music in Papua New Guinea could be one relating to marketing. The bands that are massively popular in PNG, like “O.N.E.T.O.X.”, Sharzy, Wally Pazzi and “Sisiva”, are all signed under CHM Supersound, a studio with a large marketing budget. Raymond Chin, the CEO of CHM has been marketing Solomon artists quite actively in PNG, and this might contribute one explanation as to why this music is so popular (Webb 2010: personal communication).

Given the notion of a regional kinship in Melanesia, the topics covered by artists in Solomon Islands ring true to their *wantok*, in that they can relate to it on different levels. Despite this, Wilson (2008) highlights an interesting feature in Port Moresby with regards to music and consumption of music, as his research has shown “that people are using commercial music in order to connect with the places they are unable to connect with physically (...). People buy music from ‘their place’, therefore reinforcing their relationship to place, and thus reinforcing their cultural identity” (2008: 7), and as such it would seem unlikely that Solomon Islands music would in fact be popular among people of Port Moresby, unless they in fact originated from the Solomons.

Wilson (2008) brings about another interesting argument regarding international music, in that youth are using international music, in this case R&B, as a way to “construct identities that are less concerned with traditional links to village and ‘place’” (Wilson 2008: 9). This is something we have seen happen in Honiara as well, as youth are constructing their own Honiara identity, which I discussed in chapter one. With this in mind, it could be argued that the Solomon Islands music is part of the construction of a new identity in Port Moresby.

The way musicians use social commentaries in many songs could be an indication of many factors. One of these poses the question if the artists have a knowledge few others possess, the usage of the commentaries becomes almost esoteric in the way they are being used and repeated between the generations. From the early stringbands to the modern reggae, R&B and Island Style, bands have been very adept in commenting on events that people can identify with. However, this would indicate that the musicians have commercial motives with the usage of social commentaries, and not just a desire to comment on current events. My impression is that there appears to be a duality in this, since every musician I met seemed to harbour a dream of making it big with his or her music. Yet, this profit has not materialized itself, and after the tensions the economic situation of Solomon Islands became even direr. Despite this the activity among the musicians seem to be at an all-time high, with new bands forming every month.

## **It's evolution, baby**

We have talked a lot about stringbands, reggae and Island Style in this thesis. These are, however, not the only musical styles present in what is in reality a very diverse music scene. New voices are finding their way to the bands that are being formed, and one can see new influences slowly taking new ground. As mentioned, R&B has now started to appear in Solomon Islands music, amplified especially by the success of Wally Pazzi. Hip-hop is another genre that can now be heard in the music being recorded and released. This has been the case for some years already, but the influence of this particular musical style is growing. Interestingly enough, there appears to be very few 'pure' hip-hop bands present in Solomon Islands. Instead the bands are adding rap into Island Style, something that can be heard in the music of, for example, "O.N.E.T.O.X.", who is now enjoying great success in Melanesia. This is but one example of what I perceived to be a constant musical evolution going on in the Solomons. Musicians appear extremely adept at mixing styles and ending up with an end product that sounds uniquely Solomon Islands. Island Style has for a long time been the music associated with modern popular music in the Solomons, but new voices are finding their place.

As discussed previously there have been elements of hard rock and heavy metal present in the music scene, but these are more unusual occurrences, and represent something out of the ordinary. I came across two bands playing hard rock/punk rock. One of the bands consisted of three 14-year-old boys who used to hang around the Music Marathon concerts arranged by SIMF. They played cover songs by American pop-punk bands like "Blink 182" and "Green Day". The other band was far more exotic, and I will give a brief narrative of this below.

During the first Music Marathon in September of 2008 I attended the show in the Cultural Village on the western end of downtown Honiara. This was a chance to see many of the bands that were active in Honiara at the time, and I was looking forward to see my first live show in Solomon Islands. The show had been announced for quite some time, and several bands were lined up to play. I did not know any of the bands on the line-up, but I was told it was primarily reggae and Island Style bands. When I arrived at the area in the morning of the

show, there was already a big line of people in front of the gates, all of them waiting to get in. Clearly this show was something out of the ordinary in Honiara, and people had been talking about it the entire week prior to it. Folks of all ages seemed to attend the show, and many brought their families as well.

The stage at the Cultural Village is quite large, and was decorated with a big banner saying “Music Marathon”. Stage workers were preparing the stage as I entered the area, and I quickly noticed that the crowd was sitting in a half-circle around the perimeter of the stage area. The field in front of the stage was completely empty, something I was not used to from going to festivals in Europe. However, this set-up intrigued me, and for some time I found myself observing the crowd more than the artists on stage. As I had been told, most of the bands that entered the stage played a mixture of reggae and Island Style, although there were a few young men with guitars playing by themselves. What I noticed about all of these singer/songwriter types was that they played religious songs and thanking God when asked by the MC who meant most for their musical careers. The concert lasted for several hours, and people seemed to enjoy the day, and the whole concert had the feeling of a family day out. The bands on stage did not receive a lot of applause, and people kept away from the large field in front of the stage. However, despite the lack of response, the audience seemed to enjoy the bands, and when the main event of the day came on stage they became a little bit more lively, applauding a little more. The band people seemed to wait for was the Island Style band “Jah Roots”, a group of young men who – according to the band – used to be involved in more or less criminal activity, but are now preaching the message of love. They played several of their hit songs, including “*Dad When you Left Me*”, a song that is a big YouTube hit in Melanesia.

It had been quite an interesting day musically, as it was my first experience with Solomon Islands live music. However, little did I know that the most interesting of all was to follow, as the last band prepared to go on stage. Four young men came on stage, all dressed in black shorts and black t-shirts. One of the guitar players had his face painted green and red, and they did not look like any of the other bands I had seen. While the other bands came on stage wearing

casual clothing, here was a band that appeared to be meticulous about their public image. The singer, a muscular young man with dreadlocks, came towards the front of the stage. When the MC, an Australian man, stuck his microphone in his face and attempted to interview him, he looked at him with an angry face. The MC still went on with his pre-show interview, asking the young man who was their influences and why they played music. Looking at the MC with a stern face, the young man all of a sudden grabbed the microphone, prompting the Australian to take two steps back. He then proceeded to state that “all these bands are bringing Solomon Islands music down the drain. We are here to bring it back up again.” As the music started, I was even more surprised. They played hardcore heavy metal, and their attitude was in a sense surprising. All the other bands seemed humble when on stage, while these four boys, calling themselves “Unseen Guest”, had an attitude unlike anything I had ever seen. Their confrontational style and their image seemed to go home with the teenagers in the crowd, while those in their late 20s and in their 30s seemed more or less shocked.

However fascinating “Unseen Guest” actually was, they represented something completely out of the ordinary with regards to Solomon Islands popular music. Here was a group of young men playing a style of music not often heard in Honiara, and, judging by the reactions of the audience, not a very popular genre either. Their attitude was another thing separating them from the other bands I came across in Honiara, as was their style of music. I did not get the impression that they were a very popular band, and the Music Marathon was the first and last time I heard of this particular band. They did however make an impression on me, as they were unlike anything I encountered during my time in Honiara.

### **Can love songs be punk, ergo protest?**

When reggae arrived in Honiara, so did the traditional love songs, as we have examined in previous chapters. One question raised then was if the many love songs in fact were something completely different than what they could appear to be. Could it be that the love song is in itself a social commentary?

A love song can at first appear as something very innocent to a Western listener, simply a declaration of one's affection towards another person. A song like Apprentice's "Dedicate my Love" is a very typical love song, in that the male singer, or in this case singers, declare their love for a woman with a heartfelt song. However, when the Solomon Islands *kastom* regulating male and female interaction is taken into play, such a song enters a completely different dimension all together. The fact is that relations between men and women, especially those who are unwed, are regulated by strict rules and regulations in many parts of Solomon Islands society. Malaita in particular has a strong code against such particular interaction (Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003, Berg 2000), and the majority of the musicians do have their roots in Malaita, prompting a theory that many of the songs in fact are a form of protest. "In Malaita, and in general in the Solomon Islands, most adults maintain that talking about sex is taboo. *Kastom* (...) does not promote free conversations about sexuality between men and women" (Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003: 220), and from what I could make out, this appeared to be something which is still adhered to. Albeit, my informants were generally in their late 20s or early 30s, and as such they might interpret *kastom* in a different way than what the generation in their late teens are doing.

Given the fact that some of my informants were among those who first introduced the love songs to Solomon Islands, the argument that love songs are a form of dissent from established *kastom* could be made valid, as these – at least as I could observe – were more prone to follow *kastom*.

If the love songs are a form of protest, it falls well into the pattern of reggae as a means of musical protest (King 2002: 96-97), almost like a song of freedom, to put it in Bob Marley's words. The young musicians are in fact challenging the establishment of *kastom* and using words and 'codes' to get their message across, like the youth of Auki. However, most songs are not as raunchy as Nati Hatsoa's songs, instead they are heartfelt songs about love. When asked about a love song he had released, John Seda told me that it was the story of when his wife left him, and he desperately wanted her back. As such he wrote a song where he confessed his love in her in the hopes she would return to him. Obviously it worked, as he is happily married to this day. With this in mind, one can argue that the love songs do work as a commentary, simply by being what they are; declarations of one's love towards another person. When Sharzy told me he was



“sick of singing love songs”, it indicated that the songs also worked as a commercial interest, and not social commentaries. I still believe the image is far more diverse than this, as there are different degrees of love songs, from Sharzy and Apprentice’s ballads, to the more clouded imagery of Nati Hatsoa.

If we return to the youth of Auki, one can almost draw a parallel to a style of music with strong anti-authoritarian connotations; punk rock. Clearly, the difference from Sex Pistol’s “God Save the Queen” to Ronnie Williams’ “Island Girl” is clear, and one can question the decision to compare these two songs all together. Still, if the hypothesis of love songs as a form of punk in Solomon Islands, a music challenging the established *kastom*, is one to take into consideration, then these two songs might have something in common after all.

### Summary

Jourdan (1995b) states that, among others, music and popular culture are important vessels in what she calls “nation making” (1995b: 128) in Solomon Islands, in that music contributes to build a unique sense of national identity. From what I could gather this rings even more true today, fifteen years after Jourdan’s (1995b) argument was made. Since then the Solomons have been through a gruelling period of tensions, prompting them to more or less rebuilding society once more, some thirty years after independence from Great Britain.

Music has become a distinct part of Honiara culture and identity, and can be heard on every street corner, from virtually every taxi on the road and from the many clubs in downtown Honiara. In short, it can in many ways be viewed as one of their most important cultural commodities, given the multitude of artists and performers of this particular art form. Songs deal with a multitude of topics, some more controversial than others, while others are seemingly innocent, despite the fact that they could be viewed as a breach of *kastom* (i.e. love songs and songs with a hidden message, such as *Stiki Lole*).

The evolution of music has been going on since the days of World War II and the Guadalcanal campaign, with the emergence of stringbands, particularly in Honiara, but also as a phenomenon in the provinces. This new line of music seems to be one which was followed all

over the Pacific, with Papua New Guinea as a particular centre for stringband music (Crowdy 2001: 135), but a similar movement came about in Solomon Islands. Before this, gospel music had been introduced by missionaries (Webb 2005: 289), but when I talk of Solomon popular music, I count from the formation of the first stringbands. These bands laid the foundation for several distinct musical styles to evolve, particularly in what I have called ‘the Golden Years of Solomon Islands popular music’ in the first half of the 1990s, when Unisound Studios launched several bands who made it big in other parts of Melanesia, before the tension period between 1998 and 2003 in many ways halted the musical development in Honiara. After the end of *tenson* as the music scene was slowly rebuilt, there was a surge of musicians emerging. However, as new technologies and ideas emerged into the music scene it gradually evolved, much to the distaste of many of the musicians from the ‘Golden Age’, although many of them view this as a natural evolution in music, especially with regards to the fact that the teenagers of today are often born and brought up in Honiara, meaning that they gradually lose touch with the *kastom* and ways of their parents (Jourdan 2007: 37), something that makes them likely to perceive life differently than those who migrated to Honiara.

Although Island Style is still the preferred musical expression for most recordings from Solomon Islands, we can observe an evolution from the 90s, in that this particular style has moved into the realm of hip hop and R&B, mixing these influences together with their music, something which creates a new kind of Island Style, featuring more beats and less reggae influence. However, it still has the distinct flavour of the past, which makes it an interesting brand to follow.

There is no doubt that music has evolved enormously since the days of Edwin Sitori and Fred Maedola, and new heroes are emerging, often aided by the large sharing of music taking place every day in Honiara, where recordings are spreading fast through the help of digital media. In a country where a home computer is rare among the general population, the digital revolution has gained a large following, and teenagers today are very familiar with this technology, and are quick to use it, particularly with regards to music and recording. Professional studios are slowly losing ground, much like the case is in the West, and the music scene, in my opinion, is becoming more or less an informal arena, and the consumers of music are quick to response to local music.

This is evident on the radio as well, since most music played is produced and recorded locally, and people will call the radio stations asking to hear their favourite local artists. The Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) estimated that they in the late 1990s played roughly one-third local and two-thirds foreign music (Seward 1999:26), and from what I could gather the figure has not gone down in the new century. In fact, most of the music played on the commercial radio stations, like Paoa FM and Z-FM appeared to be local, with foreign music consisting mostly of regional recordings from other Pacific artists.

As such, music might be experiencing a third Golden Age in Solomon Islands, with new artists breaking ground every month.

## Epilogue

When I first came to Honiara in the fall of 2008 my main focus was to gain a good understanding of the music scene at that particular period of time. I wanted to look at how music was created, facilitated, and distributed. It was never going to be an easy task, as Honiara is everything but an easy city to navigate. Although it is relatively small geographically, the ethnic and cultural geography is massive, and one has to be aware of all aspects of town life, such as *kastom* and the concept of *wantok*. For someone like me, a foreigner coming from a different culture, this was not always easy. Studying music in some ways is like studying “the complex whole” (Tylor 1968 in Hylland-Eriksen 1998: 17) of Solomon Islands culture, as so many aspect of the culture seems linked to the creation of popular music.

Popular music in Solomon Islands, by and large, is not “an agitprop in which a political message (...) acts as an instructor for the masses on a specific theme” (Seward 1999: 33), although there are instances of political music from Solomon Islands. Instead the music can function as a representation or image of events or happenings in the musician’s life (Seward 1999: 27), as is often a tradition in Melanesian culture (Lindstrom & White 1993: ). This was evident during my fieldwork, as songs would often take on a personal connotation, dealing with specifics, both events and places. Still, these particulars seemed to ring true with listeners as well, as if they recognized the struggles of the musician.

Distribution of music can be seen in relations with distribution of information (Lindstrom 1990) or the distribution of commodities and gifts (Malinowski 1922, Mauss 1950), as nationally produced music appears to be spread as a commodity in itself. From what I could make out, there appeared to be some form of status, particularly among young people, to possess a large collection of music. This commodity is spread largely through informal networks, particularly through *wantok*, and the means of distribution has evolved with the introduction of new technological advances.

In the 1980s and -90s the preferred way of distribution was through audiocassettes (Seward 1999: 27), where local shops would sell audiocassettes with different music. Prior to the

introduction of the cassette, vinyl LPs were being used, but most people did not have access to this, as this often required electricity. As such the radio became the most important medium for music. Today the situation is quite different, as access to digital equipment for recording, as well as an increase in computers, have enabled musicians to digitalize their recordings in MP3-format, a process that is far more inexpensive than transferring the music to a audiocassette or CD. Now, music is largely sold on CDs, and this is also a preferred medium for the consumer, although more and more now have access to MP3-players and mobile phones with MP3-compatibility. However, these are usually recordable CDs where MP3s have been transferred to them and then distributed.

Another medium of distribution, with a large potential, is the use of websites with viral videos, particularly YouTube. Already in 2008 there was a large amount of songs from Solomon Islands present on this website, and as we write 2010 the number is even more impressive. A search on YouTube for “Solomon Islands music” reveals around 900 videos, and many of these are music videos by various artists. Of these, the most popular one is a video by the Isabel girl group “Sisiva”, called “*Neuban Melanesian Music*”, which in June of 2010 had been seen a total of 124.172 times, and is highly commented as well. Another one is the video “*Ramukanji*” by the fairly new group “O.N.E.T.O.X.”, viewed 71.278 times, with comments coming in from all over the world. As one viewer, oliboy12, comments, “this song is amazing , i used to live in papua new guinea where it was huge and then in australia in my boarding school , i even have people in england listening to it , im think MTV HMMM” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wa4pwa72zAo>).

YouTube, combined with the fact that Solomon Islands music now being distributed on iTunes – the world’s largest digital music store – can pave the way for Solomon Islands musicians to gain an audience outside of their own shores. The Internet, where anyone can distribute their music, poses, in my view, a revolution for Solomon Islands artists, in that they now can gain followings all over the world. However, many artists are still highly sceptical towards publishing their music on the World Wide Web, because they are afraid that it might get ‘stolen’, like the case was in 1992 with “*Sweet Lullaby*”. As one young musician told me after we had a talk about the issue surrounding “*Sweet Lullaby*”: “I’m working on an idea on having a

website with samples of my music. But after this, I am not sure anymore. I don't want anyone in Australia or Europe to steal my music and make a lot of money off it. I want my music to be my own."

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