Zohd Dé Ishtar
Daughters of the Pacific
Spinifex Press, 1944

The Spirit of Resistance
The spirit of resistance is strong. We have wittessed the erosion of our culture, and we continue to yearn for the freedom and peace which was once our birthright. And, if all we can do in our lifetime is guarantee our children’s survival in a nuclear free and independent Pacific, then we will have achieved something.

Hilda Halleyard-Haravira, Aoteroa. (Halleyard-Haravira, 1986a)

Colonisation has taken many forms in the Pacific and has had many effects. Perhaps the most universal impact has been the distortion of the traditional gender-power relationship. Women’s power has been undermined under the impact of colonisation. Traditionally, even in the most patrilineal societies, women were respected, their contribution to their society acknowledged and sought after. Today, while they may still retain a strong voice in their immediate community, many are barred from involvement in decision making in the broader spheres. Women have been increasingly silenced. And yet there have always been voices that have refused to be muted. Indigenous women are moving back into their power, leading their people into a future of justice, and although their task will be difficult they have the determination to succeed.

Recognising cultural heritage as vital in ensuring their community’s survival, Indigenous people are reclaiming their customs. Women, however, have learnt that they must be selective in this process if they are to guard against the use of tradition to hinder their development, as women, within their societies. Fijian, Suliana Siwatibau (1989b) analyses this problem:

Culture has often been used as an excuse to ensure the continued domination of men over the women of their societies. If you look at the role that women play, not their status – their role, it is very important. In the subsistence societies in the rural areas, the role of women is extremely important. They are the main providers of food, main providers of requirements of the house like mats and pots. They are the ones responsible to see that the family survives, to see that children go to school, that the family health is taken care of and all that. So they are extremely important.

But when we come to the modern sector, men usually assert that the women’s position is in the home. This kind of assertion prevents women from participating more in the modern activities outside the home. They say that our culture places women as second to men. That they should be providing for and looking after the children, and therefore not participating in the modern sector, not participating in decision-making. And again, it is internalised by the women themselves, as well as being promoted by the men. All that helps to keep the women down. The situation in most of the countries for women is fairly similar. We are well behind men. We’re not as highly educated as men. We’re behind in the development process. Not only in participating in the decision-making, but in reaping the benefits like taking opportunities for jobs, opportunities for higher education. I think this is because the structures of society have prevented women from going as far as men, but also because these very structures and values have been internalised by women themselves.

Vanessa Griffen, also from Fiji, adds her voice:

Culture, or custom, is the commonest argument used against any call for a new image of women in the Pacific. Even aware women are confused about this question because in the postcolonial period, cultural identity is an important part of national rehabilitation and pride. We as women need to deal with this question and present a clear statement of custom and tradition in relation to the liberation of women (Griffen, 1985: p. 526).

Women are insisting that Pacific heritage does not, and should not, include the domination of women; that even where women’s status had been limited by social practices of the past it is possible to strengthen women’s position in the community while reclaiming their national heritage. Ni-Vanuatu women claim that:

The main reason for the subservient role in which women are cast is described by many who say it is the custom or the traditional way of things. Closer examination of it reveals that it is a glib and falsely attractive answer. Traditional practices are not unchanged. One need only look at the history of the Pacific over the past one hundred years to realise that custom practices have accommodated dramatic changes in the face of contact with Europeans, Blackbirding, Christianity, Colonialism, Self-government and Independence. Custom is being used as an instrument of oppression to deny women equality which is theirs as a moral right (Women of Vanuatu, 1973: p. 2).

The custom works hand-in-hand with the Church. The custom is corrupted by religion. Susanna Ounei-Kunsky. (Ounei, 1990)

The Christian Church has been one of the main perpetrators of male dominance in the region. Every colonising nation brought its own missionaries, disrupting Indigenous beliefs and instilling their own values. They came, they claimed, to “protect” the Indigenous from the increasing numbers of traders, gun-runners, beachcombers and others flooding into the region and to save the souls of “heathens”. No doubt they believed that they were acting in the best interests of the Indigenous people, but their distorted benevolence was displayed by their acts of violence. Perhaps a useful example would be the “War of Extermination” where the early Jesuit entered the Marianas Islands and within twenty-three years had all but wiped out the resisting Chamorro (Oliver, 1985: p. 337). Indigenous people have paid heavily for Christianity.

For many, their sacred rites, icons and places have been destroyed.

Cathy Craigie, presents an Aboriginal perspective of the role of the missionaries in the colonising process. Her story resounds around the Pacific:

When the massacres and other atrocities stopped, the missionaries moved in around 1830. We were forbidden to speak our own language and practise our cultures. We were given English names and made to dress in attire that was unsuitable for our life-style. From the
Susanna Ouei (1990), from Kanaky, describes how the missionaries deliberately undermined the dignity of women:

Christianity has done a lot of destruction. In Ouea where my people are the people of that land, when the missionaries came they held a meeting that was the first segregation between men and women. The missionaries planted the women on one hand and the men on the other, and every day they talked to them. They said that women should obey the man. My mum told me, she’s seventy-eight years old, it was my grandmother who told her. It was never like that, that the women should obey the man. That was the beginning of indoctrination. The women would look at the ground, and whenever a woman would speak they would say, “Who will listen to that one?” Why does she react like that? It comes from the missionaries. They destroyed women’s power. They destroyed many things.

Missionaries were, she claims, directly responsible for the increasing violence directed towards women:

When I see how women are considered, I can’t handle the missionaries, or Christianity. Women are easily beaten and injured seriously by the husband or the boyfriend. Young women are raped and beaten. It is difficult because the position of women has been prescribed by Christianity, which said men are more important. In my home in Ouea, the missionaries have done a lot to destroy the status of women. I don’t want to idealise our society, that it was perfect, but without the missionaries, women had some dignity. That’s why it is important for us to organise, but it’s really difficult, especially in our colonial country where religion and custom go hand in hand (Ouei, 1990).

Deliberate attempts to destroy the spiritual basis of people’s attitudes towards themselves and their lands were universal in the Pacific. Cita Morei (1992) scans the history of Christianity in Belau:

Historically, the Spanish brought religion, but it was the Germans who destroyed Belauan religion. The Spanish didn’t have much influence in Belau. They just bring in priests. They establish the schools. The older people didn’t go, only the children went. The Spanish changed the Belauan marriage, a loose marriage, where women leave their husbands for another person. But the Spanish were only here for 14 years, from 1886 to 1899. They didn’t really come here – they were in Yap and travelled back and forth. We were kind of left behind. I think that was good. We weren’t so exposed as Guam or the Marianas. So Christianity didn’t penetrate our minds for that long.

Then the Germans were here from 1899 to 1914. When they came, they destroyed the Uleng, spirits’ house. A house built for the spirits. We were not to believe in the spirits. And women healers, they were taken, they destroy their houses too. These women who talk to the spirits every day. The Germans told them to give the money [they were paid for their services in turtle shell and rare, ancient stones, still used today] back to the people. My mother talk about these stories. The spirit house was smaller than an actual house. The spirit lives inside. They take food there, there is a place to put it, on the step, for the spirit to take.

Then we interpreted Christian values and saw that Belauan values are Christian values. We did not have to abandon one for the other, except for some practices of believing in the spirits and believing in magic. To use Olai, is magic. Meaning if you want to make someone like you, you use Olai; or if you want to kill the person, it is those kind of things. The Church says that you don’t believe in magic, that it is superstition, that it doesn’t really exist. But it didn’t succeed. Olai is still going on. There is still people who prepare betel nut and give it to someone so that they will like you, or preparing an Olai, to heal some bad disease. People now, they take the oil and bring it to the church so that the priest will bless it. It is a “holy oil”, so you can use it. I think that takes place of the Belauan magic. What the church does is magic too. The mystical use of the holy water, the holy oil, the candle. But it is one thing that they step, use of Olai to kill people – God is good, so you use it for doing good.

The anguish that results from this disinheritance is expressed by Maori, Hinewirangi Kohu (1987):

I’m not going to put down Christianity because I’m sure that Jesus Christ is there next to Papaimasuku and being beautiful. But when they came they sent Christianity first to destroy, to change, and then “civilise” the “barbaric and savage” peoples of Aotearoa. And I’m one of those and, in fact, I have become more savage than ever before. And they tried to tell us that we believed and felt deep in our hearts was wrong, was evil. They tried to tell us that our brown skin was evil. They taught us that we were too brown, too ugly, and they claimed our bodies, put clothes on right up to the neck and down to the ankles. We were a people of the land! We melted into the land!

Despite this major attack, Indigenous peoples have maintained and nurtured a strong spiritual connection with the land. According to Bernie Keldermans, Belauan spiritual beliefs continue through to the present, influencing the practices of daily life:

Our traditional religion, Motokgnei (which means “community”), teaches respect for nature. If you arrive at a river in the night you first throw in a stone to warn the river of your presence, then you go in yourself. You pray before filling the ground, and talk to the plants before picking them. The same respect extends to people (Caldecott, 1983: pp. 109–10).

Barbara Flick, a Gamalroi (Aboriginal) woman, puts Christianity into a historical perspective:

Maybe 70,000 years before Jesus was born we too had our own stories and religion. The stories tell us how the ancestors’ spirits travelled across the country and made the mountains, the rivers, the valleys and the oceans. Some of those ancestors’ spirits rested in places where the spirits now are, considered sacred sites by us (WWNFP, 1987: pp. 27–8).

In the reclamation of their indigenous cultures many Pacific peoples are rejecting Christianity or, having adopted it, are making changes that bring it into tune with the “Pacific Way”, as this statement from the Pacific Conference of Churches asserts:
We of the Churches of the Pacific want to preserve our rich heritage, identity and unique way of living. By many we are seen as a "drop in the vast ocean"; we believe that God has given us the right to be what and who we are (Myers, 1983: p. 13).

Today's Pacific is a very Christian one. Across the Pacific Indigenous people have incorporated Christianity into the framework of their traditional beliefs. Local medicine and magic is being practised, and contact made and kept with the ancestors' spirits and animal totems, by people who would be considered devoutly Christian. Rongelap, Lijon Eknihang (1986) relates her people's compromise:

We still believe in our medicine and spirits. The pastor reads in the Bible, that if you really believe in God then you will be against the spirit and against black magic, and all that. If you really believe in God. You can read that in the Bible. But sometimes when our baby is sick, and we couldn't do nothing, and some night we see the spirit and he's talking to us, and say, "I want you to go get that medicine". Will you walk the other way? Right. You will go in the way that he will take you. You will go and grab the thing and put them on (the baby). And then you will wake up and they're there. And so we can care our children and our friends and ourselves. That has happened to me and my mother, but not that many people. It happens from daughter to daughter.

The Christian Church is a main avenue for women's organisation and, having understood its history in the region, is actively making amends. Fijian, Suliama Siwatibau (1989b) suggests the delineation of Christianity from Indigenous culture is not so easy:

It's hard to differentiate what is imposed by Christianity and what was there before Christianity came. A lot of us have had Christianity for a long time. We have absorbed their values so much into our own structure.

She acknowledges that Christianity has played a role in the distortion of women's status in the region but, she emphasises:

Just how far the status of women has been influenced by Christianity, and how far it is inherent in our culture before Christianity, I can't say, but I do know that Christianity has had a lot of influence as to how women see themselves (Siwatibau, 1989b).

The colonial process has affected not only belief systems, but also political and economic methods, as Indigenous people find themselves increasingly pressured and coerced into accepting the colonisers' values and behaviours. European, male hierarchical structures are replacing the more consensual forms of decision making. Still, Kokatha, Joan Wingfield (1988c) asserts many Indigenous peoples persist in their traditional ways:

Decisions are made in the Aboriginal community by consensus. If it's men's business, all the men get together and talk. If it's women's business, all the women get together. If it's something that affects the whole tribe, then they all get together and sit down and talk it through. And no one will leave until they all come to the same decision. That's where White society doesn't fit in with our traditional ways. Governments and mining companies expect us to make decisions there and then on the spot, and we can't do that, it's not our way. We shouldn't be made to change our ways. They've got to recognise that it's our way, that we're not being uncooperative, that we are protecting our interests. We've got to make the right decisions for our children and their children.

In many places the colonisers have used local customs to their advantage, superimposing their own structures upon the traditional, but, according to Bernie Keldermans (1986), women are increasingly questioning the dominance of men in politics:

In our culture we have male representatives, and I think we prolonged this with this system of election and democracy. We just assumed that [men] should lead the country. Maybe that was not the right idea. Now women are starting to ask themselves whether we should go into government. But I think there's a fear amongst men that women cannot do it. They say, "Now look at Anua, she's getting weaker - and see Thatcher: she's not so great either!". They think we can't do it in Belau.

Women, more than half the world's population, were, in 1990, represented by only 9.7 per cent of the world's parliamentarians and occupied just 3.5 per cent of cabinet-level positions, this drops to 1.6 per cent in the Asia/Pacific region. The figure for key political and economic ministers was lower still. In ninety countries there were no women ministers at all (Jamieson, 1990: p. 15). The majority of the world's decision-making power is in the hands of a small male elite of the White community - which, in itself, totals only 10 per cent of the world's population. Women's opinions and guidance simply are not being heard.

Hilda Lini from Vanuatu, one of the few women parliamentarians in the region, insists "that women can do it!":

Because of the new decision-making institutions that are foreign to the Pacific, women are just starting to enter into the political arena. But I do not agree with the idea that men can handle it better than women because I feel that the ideas are foreign to all of us. When the missionaries came in they took the men to be the ministers and church workers. It prepared them to be ahead of the women who remained in the background all the time. Today you will find that not many women are prepared to speak out in public. But because these systems are new to Pacific people, everyone - both women and men - can learn how to handle it (Johnson, G., 1983: p. 57).
As Pacific Island states have emerged from centuries of domination they have invariably maintained the structures imposed on them by their colonisers. They have been caught in a world order built on capital exploitation in which they have been unable to compete. Forced to invite financial "assistance" they have handed control of their local development over to the money lenders who set the agenda for their own benefit. Foreign governments, and corporate elite, intent as they are on making a profit, are seldom interested in the well-being of the people. Projects are designed to satisfy the donor rather than the needs of the recipients and may be linked to future projects or military concerns. Inevitably, budget deficits widen and the recipients become increasingly dependent on metropolitan powers, losing control over their social and foreign affairs. They often find themselves ensnared in international politics that are against their own interests and human rights diminish. Pacific Island nations are amongst the highest aid recipients per capita in the world.

Sue Culling reminds us that US President Richard Nixon was quoted as saying: "Let us remember that the main purpose of American aid is not to help other nations but to help ourselves" (Culling, 1987: p. 41). She argues that aid is invariably linked to efforts by the dominating country to maintain control over the internal socio-political issues of the smaller nations:

Foreign aid is an extension of the colonial process whereby the wealthy and powerful seek to exercise undue influence over poorer and less powerful nations ... The reason that aid is pumped into the Pacific is to safeguard the strategic interests of the West. After all it is much cheaper and easier to organise aid deals etc than it would be to have a standing army occupying the islands of the Pacific. Aid from Australia and New Zealand Governments to the Pacific has been seen very much as playing our part in the Western Alliance and contributing to US objectives ... The US and France pump millions into their remaining colonies every year ... apart from them Australia is the largest donor to the "independent" states ... the EBC is a very large donor ... and also Japan ... Apart from safeguarding the strategic interests of the West, foreign aid has even more benefits for us in the donor countries — it subsidises our exports and provides us with markets ... it also stimulates the development of new markets for our companies and it makes sure that the receivers of aid stay within the capitalist world market.

What has been the effect of all those millions of aid dollars on the Pacific Island nations who have been at the receiving end? Their fragile subsistence economies have been made highly dependent on aid. They have stayed economically underdeveloped, and by that I mean the whole Pacific ... The people have lost control over their own affairs because the demands from outside have had to be listened to. Often governments have been kept in power because they have had access to aid dollars and, for many nations, their biggest export has been their people, going to get more of what the West has to offer (Culling, 1987: p. 41).

Aid, Aotearoa, Sue Culling stresses, is "being used as a weapon of foreign policy" (1987: p. 3):

For example, the US poured money into Belau since the War — the money has been for educating Belauan youths who now have expectations that stem from a different culture. And now they are leaving their island because Belau "has nothing and the US has everything"! This is what I mean by inappropriate development. The US has put no money into making Belau economically self-sufficient but they've pumped in money to support an administrative system of sixteen states for fifteen thousand people — the only employer is the Government. The US has made Belau dependent on it (Culling, 1988: p. 3).

Hilda Lini (1989) describes how foreign governments maintain control over the development programs of the region:

The Pacific has the largest per capita of aid, but it comes with very long strings and tentacles. Because our countries are very small, our Governments are sometimes subjected to having to accept conditions that are imposed on them. But there are countries who have decided to go their own way and make independent decisions, like, for example, Kiribati and Vanuatu, but they suffer heavily because of that. Vanuatu especially, for being the only non-aligned country in the Pacific. We don't want other people to dictate to us how we need to go about our own business.

The efforts of Vanuatu to remain a non-aligned nation illustrates this point. Hilda Lini (1989) describes the pressure put on the nation as a result of its foreign policies:

Before independence we were called "communists" because we had a liberation movement although its objectives were formulated by the people. Since independence, because we established relations with Cuba, we were called "the Cuba of the Pacific". And then, when we signed a fishing agreement with the Russians, we were called "the Russians of the Pacific". And since then, because we also established diplomatic relations with Libya, we were called "the Gaddafi of the Pacific". But we are a non-aligned country. We establish relations with Russia and the US. We establish relations with Taiwan and China. We establish relations with North Korea and South Korea. We don't want other people to dictate to us how we need to go about our own business. Of course, we have faced problems with this. Aid has been cut off because we have been outspoken.

Institutionalising economic control into the hands of foreign companies and the settler community has marginalised Indigenous peoples. Pacific nations are dependent on foreign investment, foreign aid and loans, and fluctuating export markets, to the detriment of their own local needs. A community's social structure is further distorted...
Daughters of the Pacific

by the creation of an educated, urban male elite who, protective of its privileges of power and wealth, support the capitalist development at the expense of women and rural dwellers. This new dominating class has been educated in the United States, Europe, Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand), where they’ve been well trained in the value systems of the dominant culture. Although some return to assist their people, and most don’t return at all (resulting in a drain of skills away from the community), many return to pick up where the colonisers left off. They benefit from the continuation of the status quo.

The sociological effect of this economic dependence has been considerable. The need for monetary income and the desire for the opportunities and material goods of the colonising nation has, in the absence of similar opportunities at home, led to massive migrations in search of employment. For example, there are now twice as many American Samoans in the US than are in the islands themselves, and the flow of Micronesians into Guam is increasing daily. Local communities have been distorted as the population moves from smaller, outlying islands to larger ones, from rural villages to urban centres and from island nations to cities in rim countries. There are benefits arising from this shift. For example, people living in the metropolitan nations support local development initiatives through money sent to relatives at home, and their involvement away from their home islands lessen the impact on the local environment and restricted infrastructure.

However, there are also disadvantages. Urbanisation has lead increasingly to social problems – drug- and alcohol-related problems, organised crime, domestic and street violence, poverty and localised environmental damage. A substantial growth in birth rates, coupled by a lack of infrastructure, further exacerbates the difficulties. High unemployment is not helped by skilled Europeans arriving in the region to dominate professional jobs.

And then there are the military relocations: people have lost their ancestral lands due to nuclear tests and military bases, such as the Pitjantjatjara people of Australia and the Marshallese of Kwajalein Atoll. They have been drawn to the urban centres in search of military construction jobs, as in Tahiti-Polynesia and the Philippines. And they have been forced from their fertile lands by transmigration programs, as with Kanaky (New Caledonia) and West Papua.

The rapid replacement of local structures with those of the metropolitan states has wrought havoc in the region. Local communities are having difficulty adapting to, and then keeping up with, the new methods. Suliana Siwatibau illustrates:

Amidst an interplay of colonial domination and big power interests, island countries of the Pacific are attempting to survive the transition from a subsistence and barter-based economy to the modern technological age of international trade, monetary exchange and cash-based economy. They have to grapple with difficult problems of lack of resources, skills and expertise and extreme isolation – in terms of international trade and communications as well as in terms of access to the centres of intellectual and technological creativity that propel modern economies (Siwatibau, 1988: p. 5).

This is deliberate. A colonial power does not institute systems that will enable the colonised to shift the burden of oppression. They were not created as a response to Indigenous needs, nor do they develop from the local situation. Under colonial structures only the coloniser is to benefit. Indigenous women are aware of the effects on their communities and, according to Louise Altsi (1989) from the Pacific Women’s Resource Bureau of the South Pacific Commission, they are far from happy:

Women are concerned about the multinationals which are coming into the country introducing new technologies, new ideas, and new ways of life. Pacific peoples are trying to adjust, but we are not helped to adjust. We are just left to cope for ourselves. This is where we have a lot of social problems. Women are very, very concerned. Some of them are actually becoming very angry. They are becoming very vocal.

The development process is controlled by men, to the detriment of women, as Suliana Siwatibau identifies:

Development plans are drawn up by men to meet goals set by men whose primary goal is economic development measurable by Gross National Product per capita. Pacific countries have yet to question how much their plans serve people’s development. A people-centred development would require a re-definition. In no country in Pacific Oceania have women made a substantial input into, or been fully considered in, development planning to date (Siwatibau, 1988: p. 5).

The result is that communities then miss out on the skills and foresight of half of their population. Indigenous Pacific women are warning that:

Without equal opportunities for women’s participation, development is impossible, for what kind of development country would it be that refused the benefits of development to one half of its population? It is such a society that will emerge in our countries if the role of women is not improved and their abilities and opinions brought to bear on the development process (Women of Vanuatu, 1973: p. 1).

Most countries have government agencies and churches which design and run programs directed at women but, while definitely beneficial, these are limited in scope, often reinforcing the traditional roles of cooking, sewing, hygiene and childcare. Binatia Iakofo (1989) describes the work of the Kiribati Women’s Fellowship:

It’s a time for women to gather for worship, sharing ideas, fundraising. The fellowship also does other things like development of basic skills for women. We are trying to promote women’s welfare and contribute to greater self-reliance in the community.

The National Council of Women attempts to assist women in identifying their problems and organising to alleviate them. Its success, however, is limited by lack of resources as women remain primarily ignored in development programs.

Although women tend to do most of the work in the production of food crops,
programs aimed at improving food production are aimed at men. Traditional women's work in the food gardens, the main source of subsistence farming, has been largely ignored while development programs are directed towards cash crops. Recent improvements in the area of cash cropping and other male responsibilities (for example, land-clearing, house-building) has made "men's work" more efficient and less time-consuming and widened the division of labour between the sexes. Sulliana Siwatibau (1989b) tells a story of Fijian women that highlights the imbalance:

In Fiji an agricultural development aid project brought in tractors and machinery and ploughs and fertilizers. So who do you think benefited? The men. They drove the tractors, they ploughed the land. And the woman? Their role is to plough, coming after the ploughing - that's traditional. There was no consideration for the planting so they continued to plant by hand. And they had to get the water to irrigate the areas but there was nothing provided for irrigation so they had to continue to get buckets of water. And because the men could plough a lot more land there was more land to plant and water. And on top of all that they had to do all the housework and look after the children. If women were involved in the planning they would have said, "Let's get a pump so we can get water and let's get help for the planting so that it doesn't hold up the work". But no. So the men go plough the land and there's a lot more land ploughed but the rate of work altogether is slow because the women have to do the planting and watering and they still have to do that by hand. And now they've got so much more to do.

Inappropriate development increases the burden on women who already have their regular tasks: food marketing, gathering wood, fetching water, cooking and other household chores and caring for children. Women deserve a better deal, not least because subsistence farming is the principal food source of the region. Further, technological improvements in the fields of women's work would free more women to achieve an education that would benefit not only themselves but their nations.

Women often find themselves supporting both their families and the wider community, as Sulliana Siwatibau (1989b) explains:

Not only do women play an important role in running and keeping the family together but they also play a very important role in community development. For example, in Polinepe the women now go out and do the kind of work the government should be doing. Water supplies, toilets and general village development. They even have an appropriate technology section engaged in building schools for the government. But there's not even a National Council of Women there. Women are not given a say. And there are very few women in the civil service. And yet they have proved themselves.

In Suaia they have the village committees which are run by women. The Director of the Department of Health himself told me that without them his public health service would collapse. The village committees do all the work in the villages and that's the most important function of primary health care.

Women also come in to cater for the mistakes. You know, the government comes in and does all these big developments like putting in roads, big constructions around the place, and then the women have to deal with the mistakes that happen.
DAUGHTERS OF THE PACIFIC

for cement and the pipes - the women will raise that themselves. Thus, after twenty-five years in so-called "development" one faces the future knowing that some good things have happened but that the powerful systems - male, western, elite, or whatever - are still winning. We are being kept in our place, a place not defined by us (Lechte, 1988).

In the determination to regain control of their destiny, Indigenous peoples across the Pacific are initiating programs which recognize the essential and dynamic link between culture and development. Puanani Burgess (1994b) explains their intention:

Economic development is a force of great creativity. "Economy" means to protect the hearth, the heart of the home. It is through economic development that a people may step beyond the control of imperialistic forces. Without that power they remain forever at the beck and call of someone else's wants. The modern process of development, which separates culture from economy, strips a community of its wealth. Real service is enabling people to recapture their economic development, taking control of their lives back into their own hands.

In Hawai'i, Puanani Burgess is involved in a project that takes 2,000 Kanaka Maoli children into the kalo lo'i (taro fields) in the belief that taro, honoured throughout the Pacific as an ancestor, together with children hold the key to the survival of the culture. In Ka'ala Valley, the "womb" centre of O'ahu, children are being educated in their own people's spiritual, social and political values within a context aimed at re-establishing an economic basis to the community.

People come and go - the land, the mountains, night and day stay the same. One may fall in battle but another rushes in to fill the place.

Hilda Halayard-Harawira. Aotearoa. (Halayard-Harawira, 1990b)

At the cutting edge of change is the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) movement, a pan-Pacific network that unites village-based organisations, provincial governments, newly independent nations, and supporters, in the common goal of reasserting the inalienable rights of Indigenous peoples to their lands, cultures, languages, religions, and the protection of their heritage.

Women, ever prominent in the movement, have been instrumental in challenging the colonisers' structures in a way that connects issues, as Fijian, Vanessa Griffen (1988a) explains:

Women's involvement in pressuring for a nuclear free and independent Pacific has been very much part of the Pacific women's movement. We are used to working regionally, but we are not a continent. We are very many island nations. And there's a particular problem and a particular strength that we gain from actually bridging the ocean that divides us, and meeting as small countries, often with very little money, but getting together to discuss the issues that concern us. We had two very important meetings in the 1970s, particularly in 1975, that was the ATOM [Against Testing on Micronesia] conference. It was the first time that we were able to get together people from all over the Pacific countries, not just peace groups but independence groups. People came from Micronesia we had never met before: we had never heard of the experience of Bikini from anyone from Micronesia. People came from the French territories, Australia and Aotearoa.

That meeting changed how we approached the nuclear testing and environmental issues, because the Micronesians forced us to understand more about their political status under the US, as well as the continuing effects of US testing. And the people of the French colonial territories also explained to us the degree of repressing they had in the French territories. And the Indigenous people of Australia and Aotearoa taught us about their struggles. So the connections between political status and nuclear issues was made. As we have had continuing meetings in the Pacific there has been a genuine understanding that these things cannot be separated.

And there's also been a question of social justice. That, if we are for peace, we cannot ignore what has happened to Pacific people's land. And so our movement came to be for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific. We were against nuclear testing, we were against colonial domination and we were for the struggles of Indigenous peoples in White dominated societies, for their culture, language and land rights to be recognised.

When we have had women's conferences we have constantly had that perspective. So this changes our idea of women's issues. In our first conference women came just wanting to discuss "women's issues" separately. But we learnt to see the connection between nuclear testing and colonialism and discussed economic exploitation and financial and other dependence of Pacific countries on the first world.

This meant that whenever we were in international forums we brought up the nuclear issue, it is an issue where we can bridge gaps between ourselves as women. It has been one issue that we have always understood, particularly the effects on women personally, in that they bear children. Women, once they hear about nuclear testing, the genetic effects, have always understood. Pacific women in different countries have been involved in specific local actions against nuclear testing or for a nuclear free Pacific. Women are very much part of the anti-nuclear organisations, and are very much part of the network that keeps the nuclear free and independent movements going.

Hilda Halayard-Harawira (1990b), who has been involved in the NFIP since its beginnings, stresses the potential that the movement has to bring substantial change not only to the Pacific, but to the world:

Our movement encompasses many issues. We are united by the threats to the well-being of the Pacific. For me the NFIP movement is a liberation movement, a survival movement. It is a people's struggle, a grassroots movement. It encompasses all social, political, cultural, and economic considerations for Pacific peoples. It is each country working on its own issues in their regions and networking with each other. That is the NFIP movement. The NFIP movement will go where we take it. It will be what we make it. We can make NFIP go forward into new, uncharted areas.

THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE
Pacific peoples, with women in a prominent role, have maintained their culture, sustained their land, organised their people – all against incredible odds. They are survivors. They have endured. They are rising now from the chaos and confusion, the havoc wreaked by the greedy, and their passion ensures that their visions of justice for their peoples, and their ocean, will prosper.
References


DAUGHTERS OF THE PACIFIC

Chin, Sue. (1983, January 1). “We are sick and tired of being guinea pigs.” International Examiner. Seattle, USA.


Griffen, Vanessa. (1986b). Interview by Stephanie Mills, on behalf of Zohl d'Eishtar, Sydney, Australia.


Kohu, Hinewirangi. (1987). Speech recorded by Zohl d'Eishtar at University of California, Los Angeles, USA.


DAUGHTERS OF THE PACIFIC


DAUGHTERS OF THE PACIFIC


REFERENCES


Toyosaki, Hiromitsu. (1986). Good-bye Rongelap! Tokyo, Japan: Taikiji Shoban Publishing
DAUGHTERS OF THE PACIFIC

Co. (Photographic essay, with text in Japanese and English.)

Further Reading

Edwards, Carol and Peter Reid (Eds.). (1989). Lost Children: Thirteen Australians taken from their Aboriginal families tell of the struggle to find their natural parents. Sydney: Doubleday.

264

265
DAUGHTERS OF THE PACIFIC


