

## From Satawal to Cyberspace

Jan Lyall, *UNESCO Memory of the World Program*

*Opening address presented at the IASA 2008 Conference, Sydney, Australia*

I wish to commence by paying my respects to the Walangang and Gadigal people and their ancestors, the indigenous people of the land on which this museum is built.

It is a great honour to have been invited to deliver this opening address, but it is also somewhat of a daunting one as I have been away from the permanent workforce for nearly ten years. In addressing this impressive gathering of experts from around the world I had to ask myself “what did I learn in my years at the National Library of Australia and what have I learnt since that will enable me to offer you a few thoughts to set the scene for your deliberations over the next few days?”

While at the National Library of Australia (NLA) I managed its preservation program and Kevin Bradley, as head of the Sound Preservation and Technical Services area reported to me. During those years I developed a great admiration and respect for Kevin. I admired his:

- passion for the significance of the recorded sound,
- fierce determination to ensure that the NLA held a position at the forefront of technological developments,
- keen intelligence and
- ever increasing knowledge.

I congratulate him on his forthcoming role as your incoming president of IASA – I am certain that he will do a great job for you.

Very early on in our association Kevin alerted me to the many issues facing the NLA’s Oral History and Folklore collections. From the mid 1980s until the early 1990s I went into battle for him, arguing for the purchase of expensive equipment that many believed was unnecessary. There was a commonly held belief that the recorded sound collections were not mainstream and that there was no need to update the Library’s existing equipment. We fought and won that battle enabling the Library to move successfully from the analogue to the digital world. Kevin’s vast wealth of expertise is now an enormous asset to the Library. From those experiences I gained a good appreciation of the technological challenges of creating, preserving and providing access to recorded sound. I also learned of the many emotional and cultural sensitivities associated with interviewing a wide range of people. As a person who now conducts oral history interviews I am acutely aware of the value and role of the actual recording. I know the significance of:

- a silence
- a change in the tone of voice
- an expression of anger
- laughter
- tears

A transcript simply does not convey the same information.

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My ongoing association with the UNESCO Memory of the World program has made me acutely aware of the digital divide between developed and developing countries. I am very conscious of the difficulties and challenges faced by developing countries in preserving and providing access to their cultural heritage. I believe that Pacific Island nations, particularly those that are remote and sparsely populated, face unique challenges.

As I began pondering on the title of this conference – No Archive is an Island – I asked myself “is this really a valid statement?” It implies that no archive is isolated and that everyone is able to navigate from one archive to another. This is obviously an ideal situation and one to which we should all aspire, but one which is only possible if every archive is able to capture, preserve and provide access to its national heritage. In today’s world this means creating digital information, placing it on the Internet and providing access to it. In reality, for you, the situation is even more complicated, since your primary interests are with sound and audiovisual materials. How is it possible to capture the full extent of everything that the terms “sound” and “audiovisual” embrace?

An examination of the program for this conference and a study of its abstracts demonstrated to me that in the coming days not only will you be presented with possible solutions to many of these problems, but you will have many opportunities to share your experiences. The breadth of topics covered within IASA is awesome and I will not attempt to summarise them here. Chris Puplick in his impressive welcome speech to delegates on Sunday evening achieved that task in a far more eloquent and comprehensive manner than I could manage.

In thinking further about “islands” I remembered reading a book many years ago called *A Song for Satawal* by Kenneth Brower<sup>1</sup> that described the traditional navigational methods used for thousands of years by the navigators from the island of Satawal, that is now part of the Federated States of Micronesia. Long before Columbus and Magellan, before Europeans had even dared to venture beyond the sight of land, seafaring Pacific nations had discovered and colonised islands in the vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean. These navigators used no mechanical aids but employed knowledge of the sun, stars, currents, waves, cloud formations, birds and marine life to sail several hundred miles from one tiny coral atoll to another. They relied on memory, assisted by songs, to navigate these often treacherous seas. However memory alone was not enough – many years of experience were required before they were qualified and recognised as navigators.

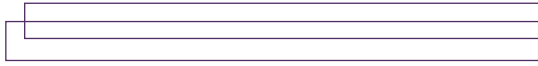
This book had made a huge impression on me and although my original copy had long since disappeared I decided to acquire another copy and to use the story of the traditional navigators from Micronesia as a metaphor for current day navigation between the archives of the world. These thoughts lead me to call my talk *From Satawal to Cyberspace*.

In the process of acquiring another copy of Kenneth Brower’s book from Amazon.com I became aware of another book on the same topic called *The Last Navigator* by Stephen Thomas<sup>2</sup>, who after college spent several years as a professional yacht captain and navigator. He logged over 30,000 miles in the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Caribbean, and Pacific. On one of his Pacific voyages he was introduced to a book called *We, the Navigators* by David Lewis<sup>3</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Brower, *A Song for Satawal*, New York, Harper and Row, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen D. Thomas, *The Last Navigator*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> David Lewis, *We, the Navigators, The Ancient Art of Landfinding in the Pacific*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Sir Derek Oulton, Editor, University of Hawai’i Press, 1994.



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a yachtsman and medical doctor, who had in the 1970s interviewed Micronesian navigators versed in the ancient navigational skills of their forefathers. Lewis documented these skills in his book. By the early 1980s the central Carolinian Islands, of which Satawal is one, were one of the few places remaining in the Pacific where these traditional skills were still practised.

Fascinated by these stories Stephen Thomas heard about a navigator from Satawal called Mau Piailug. Mau, as he was known, had become famous in the 1970s after his incredible 900 mile round trip voyage from Satawal to Saipan in a 27 foot outrigger sailing canoe. Following this in 1976 he made a further epic journey of 2,500 miles in Hokule'a, a replica of a Polynesian voyaging canoe from Maui to Tahiti. Again the voyage was made without charts or instruments. This voyage put him on the world scene after a documentary film was made about it by National Geographic.

In 1983 and 1984 Steve Thomas made field trips to Satawal where he hoped to meet Mau and to learn traditional navigational methods from him. Thomas achieved his goal but only because Mau was prepared to break with tradition and pass his knowledge on to “an outsider”. In the process he learnt their language and acquired a family. Mau became the Last Navigator in Thomas’s book of the same name.

Thanks to the existence of the Internet I quickly obtained a copy of each of the Brower and the Thomas books. I have used them to shape this presentation where I’ll attempt to show that the introduction of modern day technology to societies based on oral traditions results in the creation of “islands of memory” that will disappear unless action is taken to capture and preserve that knowledge.

It was disturbing for me to learn that so many of the traditional Pacific Island boat building, navigational and seafaring skills had been lost over the last century. I was deeply moved by Stephen Thomas’s statement that “on Satawal the ‘talk of the sea’ has been kept alive in the frail vessel of human memory, passed from father to son in a shining braid of talk”<sup>4</sup>. With the “modernisation” of navigation in Micronesia and the fact that it is no longer essential for the survival of the Satawalese to travel from one island to another, the message in his book is that this “talk of the sea” is unlikely to survive as an oral tradition and practice. It seems that the only way this knowledge can be preserved is by recording it in text or by making oral recordings.

This was done by Stephen Thomas but it is apparent that this is a poor substitute for the original knowledge since it is unlikely that the skills can be learnt from a study of these records. Years of sailing experience were necessary to develop skills as a navigator. On Satawal boys began their education at 5 or 6 years of age by learning the names of stars, and after much further training in all aspects of traditional navigation they may have been considered ready at 18 or 20 to take charge of a voyage on their own. It is interesting to note that the interest generated by the Polynesian voyage navigated by Mau has been a catalyst for a revival of these traditional practices and the formation of the Polynesian Voyaging Society. Several Polynesian voyages have been made since 1976, not all of which have been successful – one at least ending in tragedy.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen D. Thomas, *The Last Navigator*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1987, 5.

I have used some of the hundreds of images, taken in 1983 and '84, and reproduced on Stephen Thomas's website<sup>5</sup> to illustrate this presentation and here is one that demonstrates how a photograph is not really worth a thousand words, or songs – it leaves out more information than it contains.



**Figure 1 - Dancers at Satawal Elementary School Graduation**

This is a great photo – but

- does the ceremony have a particular significance?
- why are the girls such a strange colour?
- what are they singing?
- are the dancers accompanied by musical instruments?
- if so what are they, how many are there? how are they made and what do they sound like?

Without that sort of detailed text and sound documentation it is little more than a pretty picture. To be fair, some of this information is provided in his book. For example, the strange skin colour is due to the application of turmeric which was used to make the skin lighter, but is this the true reason? and if so why is it desirable? Undoubtedly additional information would be available in Thomas's extensive collection of materials, ranging from unpublished papers, audiovisual and photographic materials, to slides and oral history transcripts that he donated to the University of Hawai'i. Information is also available in a different format from the website of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology<sup>6</sup>. It is to be hoped that much of the oral history he recorded while on Satawal is now in the public domain. I could not however discover any means of accessing it.

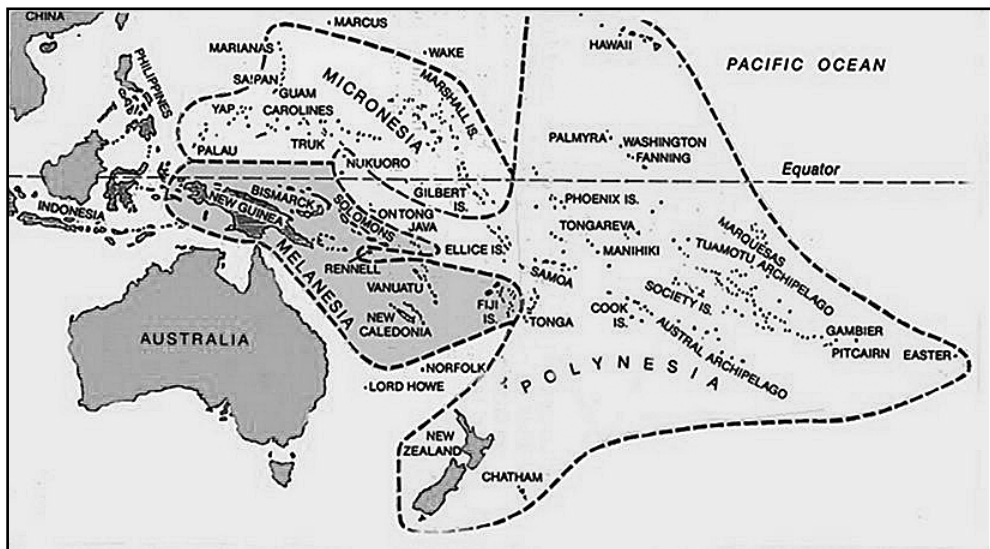
<sup>5</sup> Steve Thomas Traditional Micronesian Navigation Collection <http://digicoll.manoa.hawaii.edu/satawal/index.php>

<sup>6</sup> University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology  
<http://www.museum.upenn.edu/Navigation/Misc/contents.html>

In today's technological age, we all depend increasingly on modern means of communication to obtain information. However, if this access is unavailable, the people so denied will be as ignorant of this information as the present day young men of many Pacific islands are of their traditional navigational skills.

As a general rule few people have much knowledge of Pacific Island Countries. We only hear about them when disaster strikes; for example when there is political upheaval or when a cyclone hits, or maybe we know about the islands that are tourist destinations. We tend not to hear of destruction of the natural environments caused by tourism or the disappearance of islands as a result of rising sea levels.

The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest ocean with an area greater than all of the world's dry land put together and it covers one third of the earth's surface. It contains an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 islands, many of which are uninhabited. Most of the larger islands have at one time been under colonial rule. Islands lying to the south of the Tropic of Cancer, but excluding Australia are traditionally grouped into three divisions: Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. This is illustrated in Figure 2<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 2 – Oceania showing Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia**

The islands of Micronesia include the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Saipan, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Kiribati. The Federated States of Micronesia consists of the States of Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae. It consists of a 607 islands with a land area of 701 km<sup>2</sup> extending across an ocean expanse five times the size of France. The total population is about 110,000. Satawal lies almost in the middle of the Federated States of Micronesia at the very edge of Yap State. It is a tiny solitary coral atoll, 2 km long and up to 800 m wide – it has a population of about 500 and the native language is Satawalese. It is shown in Figure 3.

<sup>7</sup> Jane's Micronesia Home page – <http://www.janeresture.com/michome/index.htm>



**Figure 3<sup>8</sup> – Federated States of Micronesia**

The central low lying Carolinian islands, which is a further subdivision of the islands of Micronesia, and which includes Satawal were among the most remote places on earth until relatively recent times. The people continued to live the way they had for centuries maintaining their canoe building, navigation and seafaring skills much longer than other Pacific Islanders. This was a result of several factors including, the islands:

- were not located on any of the major seafaring routes established by the early explorers, and consequently they were not used as ports of call for restocking of food or water,
- lacked good anchorages,
- lacked any natural resources to attract colonial powers,
- were so lacking in adequate food supplies that the inhabitants relied on trade with other islands for survival, and
- were not located in strategic enough positions for them to have been used as naval bases during the Second World War.

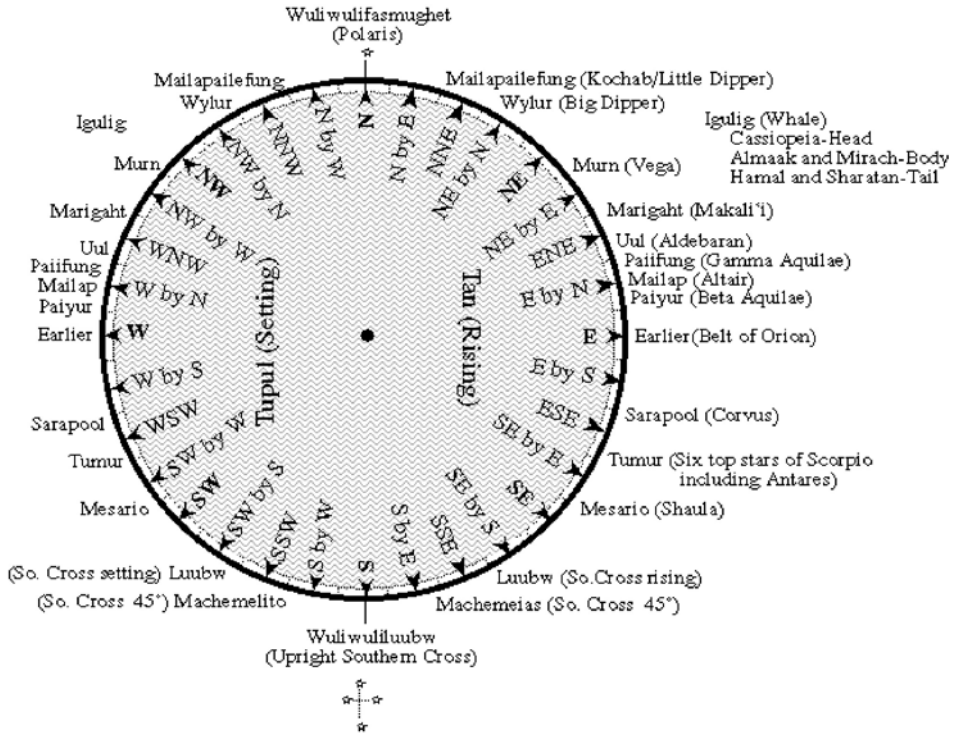
Many of the early European explorers and navigators marvelled at the superb design and speed of the ocean going canoes built by many Pacific Islanders. The Satawalese were amongst the last to retain the knowledge of how to construct and sail their outrigger canoes, which are acknowledged as being some of the best ever built. Many diagrams and plans are now available for the construction of such vessels but no such diagrams were used by the Satawalese – their designs had evolved over time to become perfectly suited to the local conditions. The knowledge of how to construct the various craft was passed down from father to son through stories, song and demonstration of the techniques. From an early age young boys played with toy canoes and watched their fathers make them. They also would have been onlookers as the real canoes were being constructed.

Perhaps with the detailed diagrams that are now available it would be possible to construct one of these canoes, but it would be impossible to sail it without using modern navigational

<sup>8</sup> Lonely Planet – <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/pacific/federated-states-of-micronesia>



aids. These are the skills learnt over many years by the Carolinian navigators. They rely on several methods, all memorised, including detailed knowledge of the position of the stars, represented as a star compass. This would have been illustrated on the beach using shells or stones to represent the various stars. One such paafu or star compass is shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4– Paafu – Mau’s star compass<sup>9</sup>**

The stars are only visible at night – during the day and on cloudy nights other systems had to be employed. It was necessary to identify cloud formations, to know the flight patterns of all birds, to understand the meaning of different types of waves, to recognise the movement of fish and to “read” the currents. There were songs to help the navigators remember everything. It is believed that originally the ability to navigate was knowledge passed down from legendary beings.

One interesting means of detecting a “land” wave was developed by the Gilbertese navigators who had discovered that the most sensitive organs of balance were the testicles. If the guiding swell was masked by other swells they would lie in the hollow of the hull and detect the imperceptible shiver of the canoe in their testicles<sup>10</sup>. This surely must be one technique that would be impossible to learn from a book!

It could be argued that these navigational and canoe building skills are of no real value in today’s technological age. I believe that it is important, if at all possible, to keep them alive. However, as a safeguard they should be well documented using a range of media – text, audio

<sup>9</sup> Polynesian Voyaging Society - <http://pvs.kcc.hawaii.edu/navigate/mauscompass.gif>

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Brower, *A Song for Satawal*, New York, Harper and Row, 1983, 86.

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and audiovisual. This will never replace or replicate the original but sometimes it is all that we can hope for.

In addition it is essential that this documentation be made available to all – to the world at large and importantly to the people whose culture it is. This is the issue of ‘cultural feedback’ – i.e. returning or providing access to the information to the places, people and cultures from where it originated. This will be discussed this afternoon by Lyons and Sands in their presentation on collaboration between the Caribbean and the USA; and by Alan Marett talking about providing access to Australian Indigenous communities to the material captured in the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia. It is also a feature of OLCAP – the Online Language Community Access program in Northern Australia to be discussed by Jason Lee in a presentation on Friday.

In relation to the information that exists about Satawal two questions arise:

- how easy is it for the people of Satawal to access the documentary record of their heritage? and
- how easy is it for us to read and listen to it?

To answer these questions I will describe my efforts to locate that information and to speculate, for that is about all I can do, on how the people on Satawal would go about accessing documented information about their heritage.

I derived a lot of my information from the two books I purchased about Satawal – one written by an American Stephen Thomas and the other by Kenneth Brower whom I assume to be American. Both provide good descriptions of the island, its people, lifestyle, customs, and some beliefs. However, most information concerns navigation and navigators, and particularly the navigator, Mau Pailug, who is largely responsible for the revitalisation of traditional navigational methods. It is interesting to note that Mau is recognised as atypical in that he was prepared to share his knowledge outside his family circle. Micronesian custom dictates otherwise. In fact, in both books it is often apparent that there is reluctance on the part of many Satawalese to talk about certain topics, particularly their beliefs and legends. The title of Brower’s book is *A Song for Satawal* – this is a reference to the song a navigator sings to assist in his voyage to Satawal. Brower asked a navigator to sing the song for him but was told;

“I better not – I could but better not. Those informations are the last thing we have in the family. It’s the backbone of everything”.

This is one of the issues that has to be confronted when recording heritage that belongs to a culture different from ones own – do we have any rights in expecting to be told all? I do not have time to explore this question but I suspect that it will be addressed by Richard Moyle in his presentation this afternoon.

My other source of information was the Internet. After several hours of searching, which used up almost all of my data allowance, I did not find much. The best website I found with references to information about the Pacific was that of the Library of the University of Hawai’i<sup>11</sup> However there was not much about Satawal apart from the Steve Thomas collection which is housed

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<sup>11</sup> Library of the University of Hawai’i <http://libweb.hawaii.edu/libdept/pacific/>.



there and which seems to be the most comprehensive body of information about Satawal that is easy to find.

I found many references to Pacific collections in a number of libraries and archives but in no case could I actually see or listen to material. I found no specific reference to Satawal or to the Satawalese language even though I know that it has been studied. The difficulty in finding information such as this will be discussed by Bird and Simons on Friday morning in a paper on Accessing the world's language resources.

The website of the College of Micronesia –FSM - Federated States of Micronesia, Yap State Campus Library<sup>12</sup> was quite good – its online library catalogue lists quite a lot of material dealing with Micronesian languages and culture, some of which is in CD, video or DVD formats. I emailed both its director and librarian seeking further information but received no reply.

My search was by no means comprehensive so I am not claiming that the information I found was the sum total of all that is available. However it does demonstrate the difficulties that have to be overcome and it points the way in which further research would have to be conducted. The heritage related information I found was related mainly to navigation with very little dealing with customs and beliefs. In addition there was quite a lot of factual data; the dates when significant (to white people) events occurred and a lot of statistics on subjects such as population, religions, roads, incomes etc. There was also a fair amount of chat concerning topics such as poor cell phone reception.

I did however come across a very interesting item on the very up to date Asian Development Bank Site<sup>13</sup> that gives an insight into the barriers that would have to be overcome by a Satawalese person interested in discovering what had been written about their local heritage.

The following was said by a 40 year old mother of four.

I have lived with my family here in Madrich community on Yap proper for the last 4 years. I grew up on Satawal, the furthest outer island of Yap. My husband and I have four children; the eldest of which is 18 years old and is in Guam attending high school. We came to stay here on Yap proper for our children to attend school. Education is of a better quality here than on Satawal.

While my immediate family here is currently only four people, I have to provide for up to 20 additional family members at any given time. I have only a small house, barely enough space for the family, but we always have more people staying with us. Many of the men and boys stay in the men's house in the community but come here to eat every day. I have to cook for everyone, usually rice and local food, and no one helps me with this and other household chores, such as getting firewood. Many of these people have come here to get medical treatment at the capital, or to attend school, and they stay with relatives, without giving our family any financial support.

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<sup>12</sup> College of Micronesia –FSM - Federated States of Micronesia, Yap State Campus Library  
<http://www.womfsm.fm/yap/>

<sup>13</sup> Asian Development Bank, Fighting poverty in Asia and the Pacific – Hardship in Micronesia.  
[http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Priorities\\_Poor/FSM/fsm0100.asp](http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Priorities_Poor/FSM/fsm0100.asp)

Because we have to buy so much food on only my husband's salary of \$85 a month, we never seem to have enough to pay for taxis, power, water, and tuition. My eldest son works to pay for my daughter's tuition.

I wish I had enough money to support my family here in Madrich and have enough to send supplies back to Satawal. I like to go and visit the island occasionally and bring supplies such as rice and canned meat, but it costs \$36 round trip.

Another concern I have is for my community back in Satawal. The youth in the community have little respect for their chiefs, and thus the traditional culture is slowly deteriorating. This is also why I want my children to go to school here because they are now used to more freedom and don't have enough respect for our traditional culture. Living on the island would be very difficult for them.

It was also reported that alcohol consumption by young men was a big problem and that suicide rates, mostly among young males, was increasing.

This story demonstrates that dramatic social changes have taken place on Satawal and have altered everything. Traditional navigation may have taken on a new meaning and have spread to Hawai'i where it has become almost a new "extreme sport" but on Satawal it is no longer part of daily life. Changing values have resulted in a conflict between an adherence to certain traditional customs, such as sharing, and the need to earn money to pay for commodities and education.

A further insight into cultural sensitivities in Micronesia, that explains some of the matters highlighted in this story, is revealed in a recent publication<sup>14</sup> concerning the implementation of the Strategy framework for promoting ICT literacy in the Asia Pacific region.

In talking about the Federated States of Micronesia it was said "Each of the country's four states has a different language and culture. Traditionally the state of Yap had a caste-like social system with high-status villages, each of which had an affiliated low-status village. In the past those who came from low-status villages worked without pay for those with higher status. In exchange those with higher status offered care and protection to those subservient to them. The traditional hierarchical social system has been gradually breaking down, and capable people from low-status villages could rise to senior positions in society. Nonetheless, the traditional system continued to affect contemporary life, with individuals from low-status villages still likely to defer to those with higher status. Persons from low-status backgrounds tended to be less assertive in advocating for their communities' needs with the government. As a result, low-status communities sometimes continued to be underserved"

When I was preparing this talk I did not know that Cheryl Stanborough from the National Archives of Yap would be attending this conference. She confirmed the continued operation of the caste system and was able to answer some of my unanswered questions, but my findings remain basically unaltered.

The answers to my two questions:

- how easy is it for the people of Satawal to access the documentary record of their heritage? and

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<sup>14</sup> Strategy framework for promoting ICT literacy in the Asia-Pacific region. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok, 2008, 40pp. ISBN 978-92-9223-188-0 (e-publication) <http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/188/>

- how easy is it for us to read and listen to it?  
are pretty straightforward.

### **For the Satawalese**

- They face many challenges in acquiring information from the Internet due to several issues ranging from – financial constraints, cultural practices, educational barriers, lack of technological skills, poor Internet connections and lack of publicly available computers.
- It probably is not possible for them to purchase books on Satawal but they may be able to do so from Yap, assuming that they can afford to do so. They should however be able to source material from the Yap State Campus Library.

### **For us**

- Information on the Internet is often difficult to locate, is limited and frequently is out of date.
- Extensive information is available, in a range of print and electronic publications, on navigation without charts or instruments.
- Other heritage related information, such as customs, beliefs and traditions is more limited but both the Brower and Thomas books provide good introductions.
- Additional material exists in many collections in various parts of the world and could be accessed by a serious researcher.

One way of looking at this situation is to say that – the surprising thing is not that we know so little but that we know so much. Satawal is a remote, tiny Pacific island atoll with a tiny population and yet we know quite a lot about it. I concluded that some information about Satawal had indeed moved into cyberspace but that it was most unlikely that people on Satawal could navigate a path to access it.

Many factors contributed to the current situation but the role played by modern media and the search for a good story cannot be overlooked. The publicity surrounding Mau's voyage from Satawal to Saipan in the early 1970s brought him to the attention of the organisers of the American Bicentennial celebrations who were planning a voyage in a traditional Polynesian canoe from Hawai'i to Tahiti, without using charts or instruments. They approached Mau who was prepared to break with tradition and use his skills outside his family circle to navigate that voyage which was documented in a film. That publicity was a catalyst for the creation of the Polynesian Voyaging Society and a renaissance in voyaging, canoe building and traditional navigation that continues to today. It also resulted in Kenneth Brower and Stephen Thomas becoming aware of Satawal and other central Carolinian islands and their subsequent travels and books. Although all of this has resulted in an increased awareness of traditional navigational techniques there is not necessarily an increase in the preservation of other aspects of the cultural heritage of Satawal. There is an urgent need to develop reliable strategies to ensure the survival and preservation of all such significant cultural heritage.

An excellent analysis of the challenges faced by Pacific island nations in preserving their cultural heritage was presented by Setareki Tale<sup>15</sup> at a recent meeting of the UNESCO

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<sup>15</sup> Setareki Tale, "Memory of the World – The Pacific Perspective" paper presented at The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, National Library of Australia, Canberra, Australia, 19 – 22 February, 2008 <http://www.amw.org.au/mow2008/mow/speakerPapers/TalePaper.pdf>

Memory of the World Programme in Canberra. He summarised the situation as:

- the culture and history is contained in oral histories and legends, many of which are disappearing as the younger generations adopt a more modern lifestyle,
- cultural matters arising from having most of their culture in intangible forms – such as song, dance and stories; and having much of their culture recorded by "outsiders". This may involve interpretation that is inaccurate,
- technological matters – poor electricity supplies, low take up rate of Internet access (using CIA figures about 15% of the population),
- poor communication between islands,
- environmental matters – heritage at risk due to poor weather, cyclones, high humidity, and rising sea levels (parts of Tuvalu have already disappeared beneath the ocean),
- lack of skills – staff in archives, libraries and museums (often the same institution) having a lower level of training than similar workers elsewhere,
- lack of funds – inadequate funds to
  - organise and manage archives
  - pay staff
  - train staff
  - create collections (by recording etc)
- build appropriate buildings with suitable environmental control
- house collections,
- low populations dispersed over many islands,
- vast distances between the islands,
- difficulty and high cost associated with travel between islands.

This is a daunting list of challenges and it is difficult to identify potential solutions. A closer examination of activities that have already been conducted demonstrates an abundance of surveys, usually conducted by outside “experts” who tend to earn as much for one week’s work as an indigenous person would earn in a year. Most of these surveys produce reports emphasising the seriousness of the situation but rarely is there any follow up on any of their recommendations. Several UNESCO activities and programs aim to provide guidance and assistance but in reality few, if any, are of real benefit.

There is the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA) for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)<sup>16</sup>. In January 2005, a high-level United Nations (UN) meeting was convened in Mauritius to review the implementation of and refine the 1994 Barbados Programme. The principal negotiated outputs of the meeting were a strategy document and a political declaration. It was claimed that particular attention was being given to often marginalised dimensions such as culture, youth and outer islands. I was unable to find any activity in the Pacific resulting from this program.

2008 is the United Nations International Year of Languages – again no benefit appears to have flowed into the Pacific from this initiative.

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<sup>16</sup> UNESCO Mauritius Strategy - [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=12115&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12115&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

I can do no more than to briefly mention a few suggestions that could help in raising awareness to the importance of fragile cultural heritage in the Pacific and elsewhere.

The first is the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>17</sup> which was adopted in 2003. In its preamble it refers to all of the existing UN and UNESCO instruments relating to human rights, traditional culture and cultural diversity. The purposes of the Convention are to:

- safeguard the intangible cultural heritage;
- ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- raise awareness of the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;
- provide for international cooperation and assistance.

To date from the Pacific only Vanuatu and Tonga have become signatories to this convention and Australia is reconsidering its former decision not to sign. It is interesting to note that in addition to Australia, other countries that have not signed include Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. Concern has been expressed by these countries in relation to their obligations to their indigenous communities.

Time prevents me from talking in depth about the benefits of being a signatory to this convention but it certainly places commitments on governments to preserve their intangible cultural heritage.

Another UNESCO activity that has potential to raise awareness to the significance of cultural heritage is its Memory of the World (MoW) Programme<sup>18</sup> that has its origins in 1992 when Federico Mayor, the then Director General, was so appalled by the destruction of the documentary heritage of the former Yugoslavia, caused by civil unrest, that he introduced the MoW Programme to safeguard the documentary heritage of humanity.

A major component of this program is the creation of Memory of the World Registers at national, regional and international levels. These registers recognise documents of significance that exist at the three levels – international, regional and national. The international register is comparable to the World Heritage List.

The objectives of the MoW program are to identify, to raise awareness of, to preserve and to provide access to documentary heritage material of world significance. The definition of documentary heritage is very broad and includes: print materials – books, newspapers, journals etc; manuscript materials on all media; photographs; film; video; sound recordings; digital media; music scores etc.


Strict application of criteria is employed before any material is listed on any register. The primary criterion is significance and since the implementation of the Programme all criteria have been refined to become as objective as possible. Benefits of listing on a register relate

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<sup>17</sup> UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage - <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00006>

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=1538&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1538&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

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primarily to raising awareness – it demonstrates that the listed material has been assessed by UNESCO to be of great significance. This has been successfully used as a very powerful argument to preserve such material if it is threatened with destruction or disposal.

In closing I could not possibly use any better words than those used in the promotion of this conference.

“The survival of sound and audiovisual archives is dependent on the exchange of ideas, shared standards, similar technological approaches and mutual support. The conference will explore the activities, achievements, interconnections and relationships between individuals and institutions active in the field of sound and audiovisual collections”.

I have no magic words to assist you in this task and I apologise for concentrating on only this part of the world but it provides an extreme example of the problems and challenges that exist elsewhere. I wish you successful navigation between the various conference topics, enabling you to develop viable channels between your varied professional specialisations.