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Accounting practices as social technologies of colonialistic outreach from London, Washington, et Cetera

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ABSTRACT

Critical studies of accounting are a potential source of invigoration and action to abate lingering injustice and opportune the betterment of present and future life. In this study, we combine a foundation study of accounting usages over two centuries in the Kiribati Islands; and an exposé of these usages from the perspective of the *I-Kiribati* indigenes. The study is unusual in linking the history of a colony with the history of an emerging economy. We argue that colonisers espied economic, social and political benefits of colonialistic acts, and accounting usages were initiated and matured alongside these, to avail commerce and life's personal dealings, religion-making, and government and public policymaking. Several persisting inadequacies of these accounting usages are revealed. They derive mostly from how asymmetric power relations in various contexts have played important roles in ways that accounting usages were constituted and sustained, and that this continues to be the case. The indigenes have not been accounted to, nor have had ready access to information concerning them. The indigenes have shared in some benefits but only incidentally and invariably down the pecking order. The indigenes have been precluded, befuddled and amazed by the usages, which concomitantly have enabled successive colonisers to re-define, enclose, exploit, subject and neo-liberalise them.

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ABSTRACT (TE TAETAE NI KIRIBATI (GILBERTESE))

A tia I-Kiribati n noora aia mwakuri, butin aia waaki ma aia boutoka taan waikua, taan akawa, taan iokinibwai, mitinare ao ai taan kabuta te tautaeke n te korone irovia I-Matang, I-Amerika ao ai I-Tiabaan ma I-Tiaina are e kakoauaki bwa e a tia ni buokaki iai te I-Kiribati n ana waaki ni kabutan ana reirei, tararuaan ana bootan aomata, kaubwain abana ao ai kateimatoaan ana katei.

Ni maangan nako aia wawaki I-Abatera aikai ao teuana mai buakona bon kawakinan ke tararuaan temwane (accounting). Te maroro aio e boboto iaon tararuaan ma tauan mwiin te mwane ma iterana nako ake ea tia n rootaki iai te I-Kiribati.

Te maroro aei ena tiriburei man waei aia waaki I-Abatera ao n kaeti buren babaire ake a nako buaka ni kaineti ma kawakinan ao tararuaan kaubwain abana. Enan buoka te I-Kiribati bwa ena mwenga raoi ao riki bwa ena nako raoi ana reitaki ma te I-Abatera ni ireke n raoi ni kaetieti iaon kabonganaan kaubwain abana ao iaon mwaane ni buoka mai itinaniku.

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A teretere iango ibukin te maroro bwa:

- bukin tera ngkai te I-Kiribati e karako tibwana ni kaubwain abana ao n akea te kamatata nakoina mai iroun te tia kamwakuri bwa bukin tera ngkai ngaia te kabwane n uarereke boona.
- te I-Kiribati e memeere ana atatai iaon kawakinan ma tararuan kaubwaina ao bukin tera ngkai e karako ana kataneiai ma ana boutoka te I-Abatera n reiakinna bwa ena ata aron kawakinan ana mwane ke kaubwain abana.
- te kantaninga bwa te I-Kiribati ena titabo ao man tabe n rikirake tibwana man ana aanga ni karikirake ma ni iokinibwai nako ao man ana reitaki ma te I-Abatera n taai aikai ao aika ana rook.

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1. Introduction

This retrospective analysis is founded on accounting being a form of social technology (Boyce, 2000; J. Brown, 2009; Mellemvik et al., 1988). The analysis centres on remote islands, strewn across the Pacific Ocean, now forming the nation-state of Kiribati (/ˌkɪrɪˈbæti/). It examines habitual uses of accounting practices (hereafter, “accounting usages”) that have accompanied colonialism. This colonialism has taken some of the forms articulated by Horvath (1972) and has emanated from London, Washington and similar places far-away from the islands. It dates from the early 19th century and is continuing, although it has not involved permanent settlement. Thus, the 100,000 present occupants of the islands in question are predominantly *I-Kiribati* indigenes.

Of the three categories of historical writing in the taxonomy that Nietzsche (1949) advances, our study is mostly *critical*, rather than *monumental* or *antiquarian*. Our examination of accounting usages, and our subsequent evaluation of how inadequate they have been, is intended as a source of invigoration and action (see Macintosh, 2009). This applies to not only Kiribati but elsewhere also, through inspiring equivalent research. Such research can opportune the betterment of present and future life in what from Washington, London and other centres of neo-imperialism seem to be regarded as the world’s peripheral, least important societies. It can abate lingering injustices, humanise the condition of even these societies, and emancipate even the humblest members of the most dispersed communities in such societies. Thus, because of their potential for further, wider application, the perspectives, methods and concepts used in this historical account are relevant to an international readership. Among this readership, we would include scholars of accounting, colonialism and development; governmental and non-governmental organisations; and grassroots advocates for social justice.

“Inadequacies” is a value-laden term and infers taking a partisan position from which to evaluate conditions, circumstances, events and consequences. We lean towards *I-Kiribati* indigenes (including those of Banaba), although neither author is *I-Kiribati*. Correspondingly, we are critical of other peoples featuring in this history, comprising mostly *I-Matang* (i.e., fair-skinned indigenes of Europe) but also an increasing variety of other non-*I-Kiribati*. Their association with the islands, in proximity and at a distance, mostly derives from the circumstances related next. The accounting usages we report arose mostly through their activities, as continues to be the case. We considered the adequacy of these usages in terms of the power relations they foster being symmetric among the aforementioned types of people, and the ways the various interests of these people are served by the usages. Thus, inadequacies are associated with asymmetric power relations, disproportionate protection and furthering of interests, and the opportuning of subjection and exploitation of some people (i.e., in this case *I-Kiribati* as a whole) by other people (i.e., non-*I-Kiribati* in this case).

The circumstances of non-*I-Kiribati* being associated with the Kiribati Islands archipelago and Banaba dates from whaling in the 1820s. Between then and the 1890s, traders, religion-makers, labour recruiters and similar plied their many crafts and wielded significant influence among *I-Kiribati*. These activities and the nature of the influence took on further dimensions after 1892 whence the archipelago was annexed to the British Empire along with the Tuvalu archipelago. From 1900, Banaba was included in order to facilitate the infamous mining activities of “the phosphateers” (Williams and Macdonald, 1985, title page). They were present on Banaba (or Ocean Island) in various guises until 1980, this mining being conducted in conjunction with that on Nauru, a separate political territory 300 km to the west. Through further annexations, the Gilbert (now spelt Kiribati) and Ellice (now Tuvalu) Islands Colony² eventually comprised a vast oceanic territory, situated between Lat. 5° N and Lat. 11° S, and Long. 165° E and Long. 150° W (see Fig. 1). In 1979, all this territory, apart from the Tuvalu archipelago, was divested from that Empire as the Republic of Kiribati. The Republic is a frequent destination of influential representatives of aid organisations (i.e., supranational organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations and Asian Development Bank; aid arms of foreign governments; and non-governmental organisations); and non-*I-Kiribati* industrial fishing fleets fish the neighbouring ocean.

² Strictly speaking, the islands had protectorate status between 1892 and 1917. Significantly, *I-Kiribati* seem to have made no distinction between the statuses of protectorate and colony, referring to both as *Te Tautaeaka*; and, for simplicity, hereafter we use “colony” to refer to both.

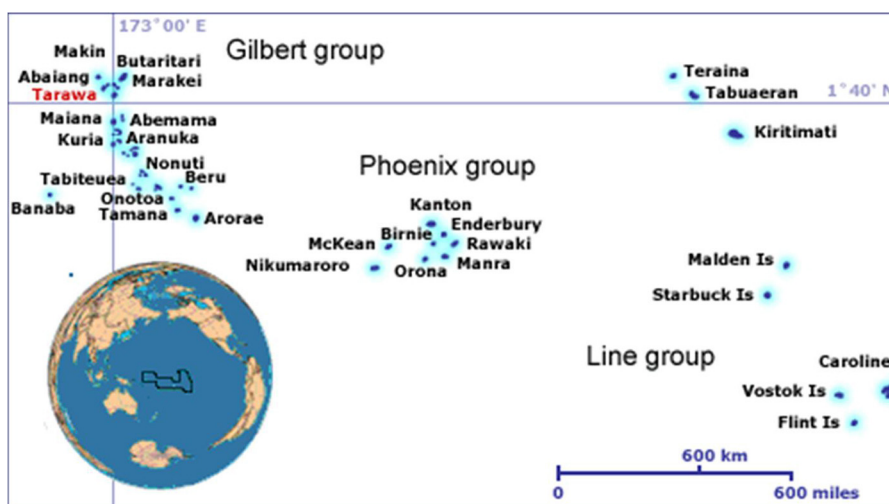


Fig. 1. Maps showing the Line, Gilbert (Kiribati) and Phoenix archipelagos in the Pacific Ocean, which comprise the Republic of Kiribati; and their situation in the Pacific Hemisphere.

Source: Kiribati National Tourism Office (2013).

The rest of the article comprises five sections. In Section 2, we set the scene methodologically; and in Section 3, we foreshadow themes we use from the accounting literature about territories that were once part of the British Empire. Section 4 is the foundation of our critical history. It comprises a series of sub-sections containing descriptive analyses, including particular conditions and qualities that in Section 5 we synthesise and interpret as inadequate. In Section 6, we draw conclusions and encourage further research.

2. Methodological considerations

The study is predicated on the popular, if inexact, assertion that “History Matters”. That is, on the idea that “Placing [accounting usages] in time—systematically situating particular moments (including the present) in a temporal sequence of events and processes—can greatly enrich our understanding of complex social dynamics” (Pierson, 2000, p. 72). Our approach is consistent with engaging in the history of “ordinary people in their local setting” (Burke, 1991, p. 238). The researchers focus on “the union of erudite knowledge and local memories[, producing] a historical knowledge of struggles [that they can use] tactically today” (Foucault, 1994, p. 42). Thus, although this article constitutes a foundation study of accounting in Kiribati, it does not stop there. We proceed to expose inadequacies and to reveal their perpetuation in how accounting usages and related matters are maintained and “developed”.

The idea of histories as genealogies is based on Nietzsche (2005). He was concerned with the details and accidents that are associated with every beginning, and was opposed to teleological histories: those founded on sequencing events causally to a formal end and uncovering “truths” about the past. These genealogies are represented in recent literature inspired by Foucault (1975). His mode of analysis is concerned with contingent turns of history and how the “truth” of the present has arisen (Macintosh, 2009). Being concerned for how knowledge and power are shaped, it proved suitable for analysing the place of accounting in the history of Kiribati. In particular, knowledge deriving externally and longitudinally in the 19th and 20th Centuries has combined and accumulated to induce the dynamic, situated knowledge and practices in place in the early 21st century.

Similar accounting studies (e.g., Davie, 2000; Maltby and Tsamenyi, 2010; Newbury, 2004) have been undertaken but not about Kiribati or a domain resembling it geographically and socially; Davie’s work about Fiji during informal and formal colonial times comes closest. None has taken such an extended longitudinal approach as to genealogise accountings used in a single setting from the present backwards to the earliest colonial times. Indeed, this study is surprisingly unusual in any discipline for linking the history of a colony with the history of an emerging economy (cf. Kapoor, 2004), and so for illuminating that colonialism and imperialism are not things past but persist, even in seemingly postcolonial circumstances. We believe that this illumination of how the past and present are connected is an important part of facilitating justice, betterment and emancipation.

Our study then can be considered as postcolonial critique, a theoretical tendency loosely comprised of wide-ranging investigations into power relations in various contexts, and the effects on the culture and economic condition of the colonised state (see Calás and Smircich, 1999). This tendency, like our study, extends to the formation of a colony through various mechanisms of control, and even to how now independent past colonies contend with newer forms of colonisation. Notable are critiques of globalised capitalist expansion and the actions of supranational organisations, particularly the IMF

and the World Bank. However, other methodological approaches also have appeal and to the (limited) extent to which we have been informed by other methodological frameworks we have been eclectic.

A non-Foucauldian use of the term genealogy is also important in this study. The alternative (non-philosophical) meaning of genealogy is in the everyday sense of the word. It is concerned with systems of kinship and compiling family lineages. In a more formal context it is used in what (once again in the broad usage) is referred to as cultural studies. In the study domain, genealogical relationships are vital to the constitutions of and interactions within Kiribati societies (Grimble, 1989; Lundsgaarde and Silverman, 1972). Thus, recognising such relationships is empathetic metaphorically to the local setting.

Regarding empirical materials, historians usually argue that primary sources—principally written documentation in accounting's case—are imperative, traditionally privileging them based on putative objectivity (see Merino, 1998). However, following her argument, “there is no reason to privilege primary over secondary sources” (1998, p. 607), concerned as we are to reflect an *I-Kiribati* culture and society in which writings of any sort have been considered unnecessary, and so are obviously rare. Consequently, performing this study has relied significantly on secondary sources (e.g., Couper, 1967; Macdonald, 1982a; Maude and Leeson, 1965; Sabatier, 1977). These derive from their authors' participant-observations since the turn of the 20th century, informed by older primary and secondary sources. As none was concerned with analysing accounting, we have taken circumstances and events they describe and analyse, and re-assessed, reinterpreted, elaborated and supplemented them in relevant ways; and brought the history up to the present by extending them.

This extension has involved drawing on more written sources, observing institutions and practices, and conducting discussions with informants. Between 1985 and 2009, the lead researcher undertook five social and working visits to Tarawa, Nikunau and Abaiang Islands. During his last visit, particular attention was paid to artefacts related to the secondary sources; and to observing “the present” on these islands. This is characterised by various human domestic, social and economic activities in among organisations engaged in trading, religious activities, government and aid. It is in these social structures, backwards through their precursors, that accounting usages are reported and criticised in this history. Away from the islands, the lead researcher heard countless anecdotal accounts from expatriate *I-Kiribati* and from *I-Matang* who had worked in Kiribati intermittently since the 1960s.

This article may attract criticism because of its significant foundation component. Kiribati shares with many other settings, geographical and otherwise, the obstacle of obscurity. Not many people know what it is and where it is, let alone about the accounting practiced there past and present, and the context of that practice. Thus, as a history, much of the article documents rather than evaluates, and so a rudimentary framework only is provided but one that can feed into deeper research. We suspect similar criticisms prevent equivalent foundations being laid for advanced work in other geographical settings. Underpinning many of these criticisms seem to be orthodox (Eurocentric) views that necessary characteristics of knowledge are threefold.

First, knowledge is packaged into (competing) theories that are generalisable to everywhere between Britain and Kiribati, in either direction. Second, researchers amassing these modern theories do so according to a social evolutionary theory perspective:

Baldly speaking, this is the theory that humans have evolved from primitive behaviours and primitive forms of social, political, and economic organisation to those of modern, civilised society. The theory contends that the broad evolutionary path will be followed over time by all human communities and, by implication, that the leaders in this development in recent centuries have undoubtedly been the countries of Europe. (Healy, 2007, p. 18)

And third, the accumulation of knowledge is associated with the Whig historian's idea of “progress”. It comprises advancement that takes humanity from dark circumstances characterised by tradition to the present enlightened, rationalistic, scientific and objective modernity. This advancement proceeds linearly, and is continuous and inevitable: it is embodied in notions of (economic) progress and development proceeding linearly (see Agger, 2006; Nietzsche, 2005; Pieterse, 1991, 2010; Tucker, 1999; Willis, 2011).

Applying these criticisms to the conduct and publication of research leads to the following conclusion. The only new knowledge worth researching and publishing for so-called international consumption is that which can contend for the lead in some sort of knowledge race. This would be restricted to knowledge gained from studies of so-called advanced societies that constitute Western civilisation (cf. Giddens, 1982; Hobson, 2012). In contrast, it is our contention that critical theory journals should be willing to depart from this conclusion, and its neo-colonial overtones, and publish materials that contain a certain amount of so-called foundation work from outside such societies (cf. Rakowski, 1993). While that indeed is what Section 4 comprises, Section 5 goes much further, criticising the Imperial Powers, past and present, and providing a source of invigoration and action regarding injustice, human welfare and emancipation, as aspired to in Section 1.

3. Themes from elsewhere in the Empire

Various studies have examined accounting usages elsewhere in the colonial and dominion empires ruled from London, and the political territories that emerged from them. Many cover four interrelated themes:

- How accounting has been globalised, first, through the commercial transfer of practices (e.g., Carnegie and Parker, 1996; Spraakman and Margret, 2005), and the governmental promulgation of legislation and standards (e.g., Chand and White,

- 2007; Tyrrall et al., 2007; Walton, 1986); and, second, by aid organisations championing particular financial practices, and notions of transparency and accountability (e.g., Jayasinghe and Uddin, 2010; Neu and Ocampo, 2007).
- How present day accountings have been derived, for example, from administrations, professional bodies and companies of colonial origin; with particular concerns in non-settler colonies about the (lack of) appropriateness or relevance of this colonial legacy to the allegedly independent nation of postcolonial times (e.g., Hove, 1986; Wallace and Briston, 1993).
 - The organisation, through professional bodies, of accounting, accounting education and accountants in colonies (e.g., Annisette, 2000; Bakre, 2013).
 - Accounting practices of colonial and postcolonial organisations, and how they have been implicated in control and subjugation of peoples indigenous to the lands brought under colonial control, many for settlement (e.g., Bush and Maltby, 2004; Hooper and Kearins, 2008; Kalpagam, 2000; Neu and Graham, 2006).

These themes vary in their relevance to Kiribati and *I-Kiribati*, as elaborated in Sections 4 and 5.

A further theme from the postcolonial literature (cf. Neu, 2000a) and emerging economies literature (cf. Wallace and Briston, 1993) is the breadth of accounting. Thus, the accounting we survey, analyse and interpret in Sections 4 and 5 fulfils transactional, distributive and ideological roles; and includes financing relations and incentive schemes. It comprises knowledge, skills and values that are impermanent. It entails collecting data, keeping books and calculative practices. It is used to convey specifications, meanings and similar for various purposes (e.g., to bound, empower, profit, surveil) asynchronously and over great distances (see Vollmer, 2003). In Section 4, we exemplify accounting used both within the far-flung domain that constitutes Kiribati, and between this remote domain and distant places in and around the Pacific, North America, Asia and Europe. This accounting has roots in, and has occasioned interactions among, many people. The various meanings those people derive from it are much broader than rationality, as rendered in neo-classical economic rhetoric.

Notwithstanding our scope, the accounting usages we survey comprise only those associated with the arrival in the Kiribati Islands archipelago of outsiders since the 19th century. We omit practices initiated earlier by *I-Kiribati*, such as oral records covering rights over lands, reefs, lagoons and ocean; secret knowledge, skills and magical beliefs; and, perhaps most important of all, genealogy. Arguably, they constitute forms of indigenous accounting (cf. Gallhofer et al., 2000). However, we shall put these matters in another article, given uncertainty surrounding what constitutes accounting in this sphere, and the form and extent to which it continues.

4. Origins and prolongation of accounting in Kiribati

Accounting usages are evident over nearly two centuries in the Kiribati Islands. This section analyses these usages descriptively. It is separated temporally into a series of sub-sections, roughly according to the political and social statuses accorded to the islands and their indigenes, and the corresponding nature of the domination and the aims that official colonisers had for *I-Kiribati*, as espoused mostly from afar. Thus, the main subsections, named after the predominant form of domination and with approximate dates, are:

- Informal colonialism (1820–1880s)
- Formal colonialism (1890–1970s)
- Neo-colonialism or Neo-imperialism (1980–present).

These sub-sections are further separated spatially, according to the activities of colonisers. Accounting usages associated with commerce and life's personal dealings, religion-making, and government and public policymaking are distinguished.

For much of the informal colonial period, *I-Matang* documents (e.g., General Act of 1885; Officer on Board the Said Ship, 1767) indicate that the Kiribati Islands archipelago was regarded from afar as just more of the “Mar del Sur” or “South Seas” (i.e., today's Central and South Pacific region). Concomitantly, *I-Kiribati*, who numbered about 35,000 (see Bedford et al., 1980), were regarded as just more indians, savages, heathens, natives and similar pejoratives. However, as traders, missionaries and, from the 1890s, colonial officials became familiar with *I-Kiribati* society, changes in this regard occurred, but only to such statuses as humble copra cutters, worshippers and subjects. Aims that *I-Matang* had for *I-Kiribati*, as formulated distantly in London, Berlin, Suva, etc., included pacification, suppression of their communal and tribal culture and customs, and civilisation. As they became more “civilised”, they would come to pay “tax copra” and supply community (i.e., unpaid) and paid labour (Macdonald, 1971), but would still needed fostering (Sabatier, 1977).

Having been in the ascendancy until the 1930s, the *I-Matang* aim of civilisation gave way to modernisation. Thus, from the 1940s until 1970s, *I-Kiribati* were exposed gradually to infrastructural, social, economic and political development, as determined predominantly by colonial officials, although eventually including governing themselves internally as one polity. However, even by the 1970s, colonial officials still struggled to envisage *I-Kiribati* as citizens of a modern sovereign country, despite this being inevitable for external reasons (Doran, 1960; Macdonald, 1982a; Morgan, 1980). Indeed, it seems that only in the post-Colony 1980s did national *I-Kiribati* leaders emerge in positions of governance. Thereafter, virtually all such official positions have come into *I-Kiribati* hands, female as well as male. Contemporaneously, *I-Kiribati* have identified themselves with the Kiribati nation state and its national institutions. Subsequently, an *I-Kiribati* élite has emerged comprising occupants of positions of formal authority in Republic Government bodies, religious organisations and significant businesses (Macdonald, 1996; MacKenzie, 2004): its members are not particularly wealthy but most have tertiary

education qualifications conferred by overseas universities. Consistent with neo-imperialism (see Horvath, 1972), it is through this élite that the influences of external, non-*I-Kiribati* have been channelled since the 1980s.

4.1. Informal colonialism (1820–1880s)

The term “informal colonialism” reflects the continuation in the Kiribati Islands archipelago of many independent polities, comprised of parts of islands, whole islands and small groups of islands, governed formally by *I-Kiribati*. The unwitting perpetrators of the informal colonialism that occurred were various *I-Matang* adventurers, notably commodity traders wanting oil and copra from *I-Kiribati*, and religion-makers intent on converting *I-Kiribati* to Christianity. The accounting usages they initiated are analysed in Sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. Conditions opportuning this form of colonial intervention emerged in the Kiribati and other island groups in the South and Central Pacific after the British Government founded a penal colony at Port Jackson (now Sydney); and its East India Company ceased impeding whaling ships from entering the Pacific. Contemporaneously, the extant Imperial Powers (i.e., Britain and France) maintained a background presence through warships visiting islands occasionally to encourage and maintain order, intervene in disputes and deter blackbirding (Couper, 1967; Davie, 2000; Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, 1974; Macdonald, 1982a; Maude, 1964; Sabatier, 1977; Ward, 1946).

Regarding the political autonomy of the various Gilbert Islands and parts of many of them, this derived from the stretches of ocean between them, and then self-sufficiency within them. It was notwithstanding that *I-Kiribati* communities were relatively homogeneous culturally, including speaking their present-day language, *te taetae ni Kiribati*, and subscribing to *te katei ni Kiribati* (i.e., the Kiribati way of life). Indeed, dating back several centuries, *mwaneaba* (\cong settlement meeting house) and *boti* (\cong clans) were prominent in the political systems across the archipelago, which *I-Kiribati* used to refer to as Tungaru (see Grimble, 1989; Maude, 1963).

4.1.1. Commodity traders

It is well documented that from the 1820s whaling and other ships gave rise to a passing trade (e.g., exchange of fresh provisions and sex for tobacco and trade goods) in the Kiribati Islands. Itinerant and resident trading eventuated, featuring coconut oil and copra in return for trade goods; and *I-Kiribati* participated in the Pacific labour trade (see Bollard, 1981; Couper, 1967; Davis, 1892; Firth, 1973; Horwood, 1994; Macdonald, 1982a; Maude, 1964; Maude and Doran, 1966; Maude and Leeson, 1965; Munro, 1987; Willmott, 2007).

The ships involved in the passing and itinerant trades would have used voyage accounting, as prescribed from homeports, and in the language of those homeports (e.g., English), where a ship's accounting records would be incorporated into the proprietor's main records. For example, Maude and Leeson (1965) refer to the papers of Robert Towns, a Sydney-based whaling ship owner and cite the net profits on the voyages of the ships *Bertha* and *Black Dog* from an *Aggregate Statement of Profits during the 3 Years 1855, 56 & 57*. Significantly, no accounting records came ashore, as recurs in equivalent offshore-type arrangements among the usages analysed throughout Section 4. Either that, or records held onshore were mostly subsidiary to, and in the same language as, records held elsewhere.

The commencement of onshore accounting usages by small trading companies was a result of the coconut oil trade being organised, first on the wetter northern islands and then southwards (including in Tuvalu). The accounting usages facilitated arms-length and principal-agent relationships over long distances and the extended travel/communication times they involved. The transactions, revenues, costs, profits, inventories and investments associated with these accounting usages increased in size and scope significantly after 1870 because copra replaced coconut oil as the form in which the commodity was traded. This replacement coincided with units (sticks or twists) of tobacco being superseded by units (nuts) of copra as the form of local currency, a situation that pertained for a century virtually, especially on Outer Islands³.

At times between 1870 and 1942,⁴ several large companies, with headquarters in distant places (e.g., Jaluit, Apia, Suva, Auckland, Sydney, San Francisco, Hamburg), situated significant trading headstations on Butaritari (and later Tarawa) and outstations on the other islands, and operated ships. Appointing agents (and other employees) was a matter about which the companies became increasingly careful. An agent's knowledge of administration and bookkeeping, and his reliability were important because significant amounts of capital were involved. There were also people trading on their own account or under the auspices of the Protestant missions; and selling their copra to company ships.

The trading-commodity companies' main accounting records were kept at their regional centres and headquarters, and subsidiary records were maintained at their headstations, and by their outstation agents. Agency, branch and proprietary capital⁵ were used to finance fixed assets and to carry trading stock/*kaako*. Inventories were significant because several months might elapse between ships calling to collect the copra that an outstation accumulated. Based on conventional

³ The location of the main trading centre and then the Colony/Republic Government's headquarters has varied between the islands of Butaritari (1840–1990s), Tarawa (1896–1908), Banaba (1908–1942) and Tarawa (1944–present). The term “Outer Islands” refers to all the other islands at these times.

⁴ In 1942, the British authorities and most *I-Matang* evacuated the Colony, and the islands came under the control of Japanese military forces. The Allies expelled the Japanese forces in 1944 and 1945, and British rule was soon restored.

⁵ There were no local banking arrangements in Kiribati until well into the Colony period, and even then they were created to facilitate governmental and personal money transfers (e.g., remittances from labourers on Banaba), rather than as a bank for commercial undertakings. The first commercial trading bank was established in 1970 (Macdonald, 1982a).

practices of the day and latter day records (as none survive from the time), a reasonable assumption is that accounting at trading stations comprised basic commercial bookkeeping for facilitating financial administration and making basic operating decisions. They would probably have included consignee accounts, with principals in turn maintaining consignment accounts (cf. [Spraakman and Margret, 2005](#)).

Notwithstanding possible German (from Samoa) and Chinese (through the On Chong Company – see [Willmott, 2007](#)) influences, most accounting knowledge, skills, methods and language originated one way or another from the British Isles. Accounting from there reached settlements in New England, British North America, Valparaíso (Chile), Oregon/California and New South Wales (e.g., see [Carnegie and Parker, 1996](#)). It spread from these places as whaling, indigenous trading, plantation agriculture, mining, etc. extended to the South Seas. In the Kiribati Islands, it was mostly the preserve of non-*I-Kiribati*, except that on the islands of Butaritari and Abemama, *uea* (\cong island chiefs) profited from it economically and politically.

Another way that *I-Kiribati* became involved stemmed from many *I-Matang* and Chinese men trading more to support an alternative lifestyle than the pursuit of financial wealth, as reflected by 1900 in the number of traders exceeding what was commercially sustainable ([Couper, 1967](#); [Munro, 1987](#)). “Going native” included marrying *I-Kiribati* women, who then played significant roles in trading affairs (e.g., Ngangota Randell, Rakera Andrew). Usually, their mixed race descendants were groomed as traders or tradesmen, to inherit the business or to work for others (e.g., the Kum Kee, Murdoch, Redfern and Schutz families). Accounting was among the knowledge passed to wives, offspring and similar ([Horwood, 1994](#); [Macdonald, 1982a](#)).

Otherwise, probably being regarded as unfit to hold financial administration roles and perform the accounting, *I-Kiribati* were admitted only into the new commerce in a restricted fashion. “They were the toilers . . . whose rewards were largely subject to external authorities and controls” ([Munro, 1987](#), p. 81). They were mostly at the bottom of a hierarchy of dependence that ascended through commodity traders and maritime transporters to distant manufacturers. In any case, the accounting, being based on profit making and economic individualism, and conducted in English or other foreign languages, mostly precluded or befuddled them. *I-Kiribati* cultural restraints and ethics of reciprocity ran counter to this model. Indeed, it occasioned controversies between *I-Kiribati* and non-*I-Kiribati* about economic and related trading matters (e.g., copra prices and exchange rates for goods, quality of goods, and sales of firearms, alcohol and tobacco).

These controversies were much rarer than controversies over cultural and religious matters. However, one that is noteworthy, because of its political consequences, concerned the “clip system”. This system was an early form of rights trading. It entailed a trader advancing credit to a landowner against the right to harvest (or “clip”) coconuts from a parcel of land for the duration of the debt, which was ad infinitum potentially. Furthermore, these rights could be traded. By the 1890s, the debts incurred by *I-Kiribati* exceeded £7900 (\approx £640,000 at 2010 prices), as estimated variously from traders’ accounting records. It was more than the particulars that troubled *I-Kiribati*: it was the alien concepts involved, around secured credit, interest, liabilities and negotiable instruments; and the social injustice they felt at the hands of the *I-Matang* traders ([Macdonald, 1982a](#)).

The controversy arising from these debts precipitated formal intervention by British officials and annexation of the Colony. Resident Commissioner Swayne (1893–1895) diffused the situation by arranging for repayment of the debts and restoring the use of lands to owners. He established a native government on each island and made them responsible for the debts, through communal collection of copra (see Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2).

4.1.2. Religion-makers

Rival Protestant and Roman Catholic (RC) missions carried Christianity to the various island communities between 1857 and 1880, and changes of religious, social, cultural, economic and political natures ensued (see [Davis, 1892](#); [Goodall, 1954](#); [Grimble, 1957, 1989](#); [Macdonald, 1982a](#); [Sabatier, 1977](#)). Several incidental references by Sabatier to the administrative, budgeting and fund-raising activities of his RC colleagues, including coping with a “slender budget” (1977, p. 210) and “terrible financial difficulties” (1977, p. 318) exemplify financial administration of the missions; and generating local funds by the Protestants in particular was not trivial. However, the social accountings in the religion-makers’ messages were of even greater significance for *I-Kiribati*, who by 1890 were mostly members of one of these denominations.

Regarding the nature of these social accountings, axiomatic is that a new set of accountability-related concepts were conferred on *I-Kiribati*. The activities of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the southern Kiribati Islands provide an extreme example of how these new concepts fused with the previously ascendant solidarity that *I-Kiribati* had with social groups—known as *boti* and *utu*—based on connections by blood and adoption ([Lundsgaarde and Silverman, 1972](#)). This fusion greatly reshaped the flow of “financial” resources, incidental to reshaping many other aspects of life. The regional headquarters of LMS were in Samoa; and Samoans, whom it had trained as pastors, conducted its activities in the Kiribati Islands. Applying their theological and cultural knowledge, these pastors were able to transform the gerontocracies that governed each island district into theocracies virtually.

Social and economic accounting usages figured significantly: “strong emphasis [was put] on the rewards of Heaven and the punishments of Hell” ([Macdonald, 1982a](#), p. 43). *I-Kiribati* were exhorted to behave righteously in preparation for the Next World: on the Day of Reckoning, they would account for their Earthly behaviours to *leoa*, *te Atua* (i.e., Jehovah, the God of *I-Matang*). The pastors issued an extensive series of edicts (e.g., stipulating Sabbath observance; forbidding indigenous and RC religious practices; curtailing traditional behaviours, such as nakedness, *eiriki* and *tinaba* sexual relationships, adoption, abortion and infanticide, and performances of *mwaie* and *ruoia* (i.e., dance) ([Grimble, 1989](#); [Whincup, 2005](#))). These were so extensive that *te I-Kiribati* committed minor misdemeanours regularly, with consequences that blurred any sacred-secular

divide one might expect to find between church activities and church finances (cf. Laughlin, 1990). That is to say, the misdemeanours resulted in so many fines as to generate an abundant flow of “church copra”, and so significant surpluses of revenue compared with amounts needed to operate parsimoniously.

The pastors conducted activities with little interference from the LMS’s regional headquarters: *I-Matang* missionaries who visited from Samoa seemed generally impressed with what the pastors were achieving, and generally neglected to inspect their accounts. The pastors appropriated the surpluses to build imposing churches and grand dwellings for themselves. They indulged in self-aggrandisement, incurred generous living expenses for themselves and some *I-Kiribati* deacons, and led far more comfortable lives than their *I-Kiribati* congregations did (Macdonald, 1982a). That is until 1900, when William Goward arrived to establish a local LMS headquarters on Beru.

Goward evaluated the pastors as “inconsistent, incompetent and un-Christ-like” (Macdonald, 1982a, p. 89). Thus, he redirected the LMS’s revenue towards church facilities, religious activities and mission administration (see Goodall, 1954). However, the edicts and fines were extended; and LMS revenues were supplemented with requirements for *I-Kiribati* to pay tithe-like contributions and school fees in copra, and provide unpaid labour for construction work. Goward himself became a virtual “prince-bishop” heading a politico-religious regime of increased severity (Grimble, 1989; Macdonald, 1982a; Sabatier, 1977).

Then in 1918 the combined concerns of the Colony Government, the RC mission and his LMS principals became overwhelming and Goward’s tenure was curtailed. The Colony Government established a district headquarters in the southern Gilberts; and only then, a quarter of a century after their formal annexation, did the southern Gilberts exchange informal colonial rule by the LMS to formal colonial rule by the Colony Government (Grimble, 1957; Macdonald, 1982a). One reason for this delay may have been that these particular islands are drought-prone, and produce less copra, including for trading and paying taxes.

As for the LMS, George Eastman was appointed to lead the mission, which he did until 1947, supported by other *I-Matang* missionaries, and *I-Kiribati* pastors and deacons beneath. The LMS mellowed in its high-handedness, and was less involved overtly in politics. However, its representatives continued to be very influential, including in exhorting communities to raise funds for activities of the LMS, and then its successor, the Kiribati Protestant Church. Meanwhile, the RC mission, which had fared better in the northern islands, gained support gradually on most southern islands too, but never on Arorae and Tamana Islands. It was financed from external benefactions, supplemented by voluntary subscriptions from *I-Kiribati* (Sabatier, 1977).

4.2. Formal colonialism (1890–1970s)

The informal colonialism analysed in Section 4.1 brought the Kiribati Islands archipelago and its people closer together logistically (i.e., through shipping), as an outpost of Christendom and as an economy. Eventually, these conditions opportuned the formal colonialism covered in this section, but even so, it was primarily because of a stipulation in *Declaration between the Governments* (1886) that annexation eventuated (Macdonald, 1982a). The German Government pressed the British Government to honour this stipulation, wanting to secure the supply of *I-Kiribati* labour for plantations in Samoa (Munro and Firth, 1986, 1987, 1990). Intervening in conflicts over debts (see Section 4.1.1) and other local considerations were secondary.

The British Government’s main reason for not annexing sooner was that a financial burden would result (cf. Bush and Maltby, 2004; Davie, 2000; Neu, 2000b; Ward, 1946). Being wary still of subventions from London being required, resident commissioners were instructed to generate local revenues and to contain the Colony Government’s expenditure within these (Morgan, 1980). These instructions shaped the accounting used by the Colony Government, including to assure the Western Pacific High Commission (in Suva and later in Honiara) and British Government that:

- the affairs of the Colony were in order;
- no subventions were required by the Colony Government from Imperial funds, except as authorised in advance in London; and
- other than minimally, expenditures on the Kiribati Islands and Tuvalu archipelagos were not being funded from taxes and charges on the organisations extracting phosphate from Banaba.

The Colony Government’s annual accounts for 47 years from 1895 reported surpluses, denoting that it was self-sufficient; and this was repeated from 1950 to 1979. During the intervening years, including when the Colony Government was in exile (i.e., 1942–44), London provided subventions, subject to HM Treasury authorising detailed annual estimates.

Within the Colony itself, accounting usages figured in constituting the Colony; formulating, expressing and justifying Colony Government policies; officiating in governance, political economy and administrative processes; and drawing *I-Kiribati* into a web of formal colonialism (Macdonald, 1982a, 1996). Successive *I-Matang* officials used accounting extensively but understatedly, covertly and preclusively, particularly affecting *I-Kiribati*. It was a technology of colonial government and administrative imperialism, conducted in the language of that imperialism, English (cf. Horvath, 1972; Miller and Rose, 1990; Neu, 2000b). The usages favoured particular *I-Matang* interests, rather than the common or larger good, especially of *I-Kiribati* (cf. Kalpagam, 2000) (see Section 4.2.1).

An important factor in how the Colony Government contained expenditures and made surpluses was to initiate “indirect rule”, reflecting arrangements used in other colonies (e.g., see Bush and Maltby, 2004; Davie, 2000; Newbury, 2004). Either the bodies they designated initially as “native governments” on each island were amalgams of the island’s existing, autonomous gerontocracies; or they were new councils that the existing, autonomous *uea* of the island would head. These native governments have continued since, albeit subject to various changes, including being designated “island councils” since 1967 (see Section 4.2.2).

Details of phosphate mining are related in Section 4.2.3. Once mining began, the main issues for the Colony Government became facilitating the expropriation of Banaban land and the supply and supplicancy of *I-Kiribati* labour, and similar necessities to the mining’s success. Furthermore, the British Government had a financial stake in the mining from 1919, as a member of the British Phosphate Commission (BPC). After mining resumed in 1945—with the Colony Government’s headquarters located on Tarawa and the Banabans exiled to Rabi, Fiji—the phosphateers mostly relied on their own devices, although they remained dependant on the Colony Government regarding *I-Kiribati* labour.

In the 1930s, cooperatives were established as a second kind of *I-Kiribati* organisation on each island, following private traders getting into financial difficulties because of falling copra prices. The cooperatives were crucial for distributing trade goods and collecting copra on the islands (see Section 4.2.4). Subsequent to its restoration, the Colony Government banished the private copra/trade-goods companies, and took on the activities of buying copra and exporting it, and importing trade goods and wholesaling them. It also commenced various other activities of a commercial nature (e.g., shipping, construction, plant and vehicle maintenance, utilities, financial services).

Gradually, these commercial activities of the Colony Government were classified as forming part of infrastructure development and modernisation (see Section 4.2.5), which were in line with the British Government’s espousal in 1929 that colonies and peoples in the “developing world” should be “modernised” (Morgan, 1980). This policy was accompanied by a change to the requirement for the Colony Government to be self-sufficient, in that it could apply to London for capital grants towards social infrastructure. However, circumstances meant that it was the 1950s before a regular flow of grants was established, many to replicate projects and policies carried out in Britain and its other colonies and former colonies. This resulted in the Colony Government accumulating infrastructural assets and social resources that it had to find revenue to operate and maintain.

An integral part of modernisation was the idea of internal self-rule of colonies. This was initiated in Kiribati from 1967, and two types of bodies came to exist between then and 1979, with, respectively, legislative and executive powers and responsibilities. Some leading *I-Kiribati* were members of these and eventually they held executive positions as ministers. However, although these *I-Kiribati* could have been involved in public finance and accounting processes (e.g., resource allocation), in practice, they were not, according to Macdonald (1982a). His interpretation is that many *I-Matang* officials reserved accounting information to themselves and used accounting practices politically to deny these *I-Kiribati* from having real roles in policy formulation and its implementation.

4.2.1. Colony government accounting

The foundation of within-Colony control and extra-Colony assurance comprised annual estimates and budgeting, appropriations under the authority of the resident commissioner, budgetary control, financial returns and reports, audits, financial management, economic policymaking and planning, and taxation administration. Most of these functions gradually came together in the Colony Treasury. It was a vital link in a chain that, on paper at least, stretched from every remote island to London.

Other noteworthy links in this chain were the solitary *I-Matang* officials located in the Outer Islands, far-away from Colony headquarters. They were re-designated from “government agent, interpreter and collector of revenue” to “district magistrate”; and then to “district officer” (hereafter “district officer”, for simplicity). By 1920, one was based in each of three districts covering the Kiribati Islands, with a fourth covering Tuvalu. Indeed, the chain is epitomised in advice about administrative reports that the resident commissioner and the colony treasurer issued to these district officers:

These returns [from the headquarters island in each district] summarise statistically the life and condition of the Colony ... for the preparation of the Colonial Annual Report [on Banaba] and for the information of the High Commissioner [in Suva] and Secretary of State [in London] on special subjects. (Grimble and Clarke, 1929, p. 28)

Initial influences on the accounting-related functions enumerated above included high commission staff in Suva, and former traders and phosphate mine staff, as the Colony Government employed *I-Matang* already in the vicinity. Subsequently, its officials were recruited increasingly from Britain, the dominions, and other colonies, especially after the Colonial Service was unified in the 1930s; and their experience of public administration elsewhere became influential. Between 1943 and 1955, HM Treasury supervised the Colony Government’s finances, and so had a direct influence on the accounting. As in other colonies, this supervision was a condition of British Government subventions and it attracted strong criticism for ineptitude (see Morgan, 1980). Thereafter, the annual estimates process and other accounting practices and records were elaborated and extended hand in glove with receiving infrastructural and social developmental capital. Reflecting practice across the Empire, “national development planning” featured in how this capital was deployed.

As the Colony Government grew, particularly from the 1950s, an abundance of paperwork arose and a growing battalion of local accounts clerks was employed, including a disproportionate number of Tuvaluans (Macdonald, 1982a). This clerking was virtually the limit of involvement of *I-Kiribati* in Colony Government accounting processes, other than at native

government level (see Section 4.2.2), even in 1979. It was not until the 1990s that the most senior positions in planning, accounting and control, auditing and tax all came into *I-Kiribati* hands (see Section 4.3.3).

4.2.2. Native governments

Native governments and later island councils were assigned to keep order on their islands, under a succession of regulatory codes of conduct; and charged with levying various taxes and collecting other revenues in copra and cash (see Couper, 1967; Grimble and Clarke, 1929; Macdonald, 1971, 1972, 1982a; Maude and Doran, 1966). The revenues were supplemented significantly and controversially (Correspondent, 1913) with as many as 78 days of compulsory, communal work from each adult, applied for native government and Colony Government purposes.

The native government of each island comprised *I-Kiribati* representatives and officials, overseen by the district officer in charge of the district in which the island was located. Among the officials was a “scribe” (later “treasurer”) who performed accounting, financial and banking tasks. He was appointed by the district officer, who also provided supervision on his intermittent visits to the island. Other than that, how scribes acquired the requisite knowledge and skills in the early days is not clear: some might have been descended from traders or learnt them within their church organisations. From the 1920s, scribes were trained at King George V School.⁶ The accounts and records were audited by the district officer as part of his oversight functions; and he used their contents to compile returns about the district for the Colony Treasury (see Section 4.2.1).

Relations between *I-Kiribati* and Colony Government officials resembled those that *I-Kiribati* had endured under the missionaries, and so one could imply that the religion-makers eased the way for the administrative impositions of formal colonialism (cf. Macdonald, 1982a). This colonialism was extended gradually as the Colony Government elaborated its ordinances, regulatory regime, accounting usages and structure of district officials. Concomitantly, the autonomy of native governments declined and *I-Kiribati* increasingly perceived them as mere extensions of the Colony Government, or *Te Tautauka*, about which they were also more wary (Macdonald, 1971).

This trend is exemplified by events between 1914 and 1917. Native governments were accounting for themselves as separate entities and authorised to retain surpluses, which on each island were designated as the “Island Fund”. These amounted to £17,000 (≈ £700,000 at 2012 prices) and were in the supposed safekeeping of the Colony Government. The Colony Government sequestered them on the pretext that the Sovereign’s Tax from the Kiribati Islands and Tuvalu (as distinct from Banaba) had yielded insufficient revenues to meet expenditures it incurred on these islands. This followed representations that principals of the phosphateers made in London in furtherance of their considerable interests on Banaba. Subsequently, native governments’ revenues and expenditures were included in the Colony Government’s budgets and accounts. Their expenditures were appropriated as part of the Colony Government’s annual estimates process and controlled as line items in its budget. All revenues that native governments collected were accounted for separately from their expenditures and handed over intact to district officers. The expenditures were paid from imprests, which district officers advanced to scribes and replenished intermittently as an adjunct to their audits.

From the 1930s, the Colony Government made successive but largely unsuccessful attempts to change *I-Kiribati* perceptions of native governments as extensions of *Te Tautauka*. One such attempt in the 1960s involved restoring arrangements whereby revenues that the now island councils collected were once again under their control, and so they could retain surpluses. However, this coincided with the Colony Government increasing social and infrastructural resources on islands, including stationing staff (e.g., teachers, health workers) and erecting structures that had to be maintained. Island councils had to meet recurrent expenditures on these staff and on maintaining these structures. These expenditures exceeded local revenues and left councils dependant on grants and subventions from the Colony Government. These grants and subventions entailed financially restrictive conditions, which meant a further loss of financial autonomy (Macdonald, 1972, 1982a).

4.2.3. Mining and distributing phosphate fertiliser

Phosphate was discovered in 1898 on Banaba, and mining ensued for the next 80 years in pursuit of British, Australian and New Zealand interests (Anghie, 1993; King and Sighra, 2004; Macdonald, 1982a, 1982b; Reyes, 1996; Thomas, 2007; Weeramantry, 1992; Williams and Macdonald, 1985). These sources focus on the mining, shipping and distribution of phosphate carried out exclusively by the BPC, supposedly in accordance with the *Nauru Island Agreement of 1919*. However, some of them indicate how the phosphateers of the pre-BPC period were influential enough to sway how the British Government ruled the Colony from afar, including its financial policies (see Section 4.2 and 4.2.2) (see also Fieldhouse, 1978).

The sources also address post-mining issues. These include legal proceedings (i.e., Rotan Tito and Others v. Attorney-General 1971 R. No. 3670; Rotan Tito and Others v. Waddell and Others (No. 2) 1973 R. No. 2013) over restoration of Banaba, compensation for Banabans and how mining revenues were allocated to the Colony/Republic Government. They also report the continuing plight of the Banabans, exiled as they are on Rabi. This island was purchased by the British Government in 1945 from Lever’s Pacific Plantations Ltd, being surplus to its requirements (Fieldhouse, 1978). The purchase was made

⁶ This school is still significant in the Republic. It was established to educate and train selected boys as clerks for native governments, the BPC, the Colony Government and, later, *boboti* (see Section 4.2.4). It soon took on purposes that are more academic and since the 1950s has catered for a broader audience, including girls.

without the Banabans' knowledge, even though they were going to be resettled there permanently after the war and the money used to finance the purchase had accumulated from pre-war phosphate royalties supposedly belonging to them.

We can add that in the 1980s the lion's share of the residual capital was paid to the Governments of Britain, Australia and New Zealand virtually in secret (see [House of Commons, 1997](#)). Moreover, we concur in the views that the BPC was:

- “an astonishingly immoral device with which to rob indigenous peoples whilst hiding [surplus value] from the League of Nations and the United Nations and the people of the ruling governments” ([Field, 2007](#), no page number)
- ruled from Melbourne by its senior staff and “something of a self-perpetuating oligarchy” ([Macdonald, 1982a](#), p. 275).

Accounting was implicated directly in this device and how it was ruled, reflecting:

- BPC's need to determine its costs, as defined in the Nauru Island Agreement, and so calculate its phosphate fertiliser prices;
- its aim to contain these costs; and
- its autonomy and intent on being secretive, including that its final accounts seem unavailable still⁷.

Exemplifying this is that the Nauru Island Agreement provided for the BPC's finances and accounts to be entirely separate (cf. [Neu, 2000b](#) re *partitioning* of military and land accounts in Canada), thus reinforcing the position that the partner governments, much less the Colony Government, were excluded from BPC's policymaking and operations. These were focused on fertiliser production and distribution, for the advancement of agriculture in Australia and New Zealand, to where 90% of the phosphate went. The fertiliser reached farmers at a price well below its market value (see [Weeramantry, 1992](#)). This reflected not only BPC's not-for-profit designation but also an efficient and controlled factory-like set up in its mines, ships and depots, which were all around Australia and New Zealand. Notwithstanding, mine-based salaried staff enjoyed an enviable standard of living on Banaba, and the Melbourne headquarters were lavish ([Macdonald, 1982a](#)). This contrasts with conditions of *I-Kiribati* and other labourers, who even by the 1960s were receiving a basic wage of only AU\$1 per day plus bonuses, rations and housing ([Couper, 1967](#)).

Furthermore, the costs defined in the Nauru Island Agreement gave the commissioners discretion over contributions to the Colony Government. Those they made were in lieu of any taxes (e.g., on profits and incomes) and duties (e.g., on imports) that might otherwise have been assessable on the BPC and its individual Banaba-based employees; and were only token. For example, in 1954, the contribution rate (at 1954 prices converted to present units) was a miserly AU\$1 per tonne of ore extracted, and in 1966 it was still a derisory AU\$4 per tonne ([Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, 1957, 1969](#)). This was despite the British-oriented Colony Government issuing various demands to the Australian/New Zealand-oriented BPC. As negotiations continued between these parties, relations went from “amicable horse-trading” ([Williams and Macdonald, 1985](#), p. 420) to being increasingly strained ([Macdonald, 1982a](#)); and London, Canberra and Wellington got involved.

Secrecy hampered the Colony Government's bargaining position: it received only an abridged version of the BPC annual accounting statements and was precluded from probing the accounting records. Then, the Nauruans gained independence and, with it, ownership of the ore remaining there. It was sold still by the BPC in Australia and New Zealand but at world market prices, and the Nauruans received the surplus. This prompted a corresponding change in the price of Banaban ore, and to surpluses for the BPC. Under the Nauru Island Agreement, it was obliged to make these over in increased contributions to the Colony Government and to the Banabans on distant Rabi. These contributions peaked at AU\$40 per tonne in 1975 ([Weeramantry, 1992](#)).

BPC's main accounting records were maintained in Melbourne, where its annual accounting statements were audited privately. The documents supplied to the three commissioners were elaborate and confidential (see [BPC, 1974](#)). They show tonnage mined, shipped and distributed; the costs of extraction and distribution operations, and unit costs; revenues derived from sales of ore to non-partner countries; and the amount of the moderate annual surpluses. Supporting schedules, tables and notes are included, all with a costing focus, giving the impression that the BPC pursued the idea of containing costs unflinchingly on behalf of its principals. However, costs of *I-Matang* managerial staff and other management items are not analysed, which casts suspicion on how economic they were. This corresponds with [Macdonald's \(1982a\)](#) observations about enviable conditions and lavishness.

The commissioners and senior staff had little regard for accountability, financial or otherwise, to British, Australian and New Zealand politicians and citizens outside of the agricultural lobby, and much less to Banabans and other *I-Kiribati*. Abridged versions of the annual accounts were published through partner governments but were always slight, despite gradually expanding over time. They were also difficult to locate among official papers. The British copies were catalogued among a miscellany of trading accounts of much smaller organisations operating in Great Britain (e.g., see pp. 30–31 of [House of Commons, 1940](#)); and classified under the Dominions Office, whereas the Colony Government's accounts were classified under the Colonial Office.

The Banabans were dissatisfied about how the increased receipts after 1967 were divided between them as landowners and Colony Government funds, engendering discontent that the Republic Government inherited. A further source of

⁷ Copies of these and other confidential items held in the National Archives in London are not accessible by the public until 30 years have elapsed since their production.

discontent is the dilapidated state in which their island remains. It transpired that the cost of “cleaning-up” was not provided for out of revenues. Thus, when operations ended, the BPC completed none of the substantial restoration work needed to re-inhabit the island. Indeed, the Banabans lost their judicial action in London on this matter, Sir Robert Megarry deeming it unreasonable to perform the work; this in an era when sensitivity to environmental considerations was increasing, including featuring in the accounting discipline. Furthermore, the £10 million that the Banabans were awarded as compensation in other respects turned out to be a minority proportion of the residual funds realised from winding up the BPC.

4.2.4. Cooperation in export, import and distribution

Fluctuations occurred in the copra trade from the 1880s to the 1940s, including significant financial reverses associated with the Great Depression. These reverses led District Officer [Maude \(1949\)](#) to intervene in the southern Kiribati Islands and establish *boboti*, a form of cooperatives. *I-Kiribati* were so enthusiastic about these that they spread quickly, hastening the demise of private trading and agency at island level, although private companies continued to handle exporting and importing until the Pacific War interrupted. When trade recommenced, the Colony Government Trade Scheme took over their functions (see Section [4.2.5](#)) and re-established *boboti* on each island. Not only did *boboti* prove vital to restoring Colony Government revenues, they continued to flourish until at least the 1980s on Tarawa, and even longer on Outer Islands, although gradually another form of cooperatives, *mrnrrn*, emerged at the grassroots level ([Couper, 1967, 1968](#); [Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, 1946](#); [Macdonald, 1982a](#); [Roniti, 1985](#)).

Boboti and then *mronron* appealed to *I-Kiribati* because they were characterised by social capital and based on a mentality of sharing and making distributions for social purposes. Particularly attractive were accounting and related considerations that included:

- methods of collective governance;
- notions of community savings providing capital;
- elimination of profits of private traders;
- prices for goods and copra set according to standardised calculations (usually as low as a 12.5% mark-up) agreed by members; and
- distributions of surpluses as cash bonuses to members, in proportion to purchases (Couper, 1967; Macdonald, 1982a).

However, post-war *boboti* were largely initiated by the Colony Government, which subscribed most of their capital in kind (e.g., store premises and start-up inventory). They were steeped in formal controls, which were rationalised by *I-Matang* officials on grounds of preventing failure. This included statutory provisions for registration and regulation; defining expenses to which gross profits could be applied; and oversight by *I-Matang* registrars and lesser officials in the Colony Government's Co-operative Division. Oversight included authorising annual estimates and distributions of profits; and auditing annual accounts. *I-Kiribati* scribes/managers appointed by the Division performed the accounting: they maintained records covering membership, transactions analysed by trade items and by members, copra received and shipped, cash and inventories (Maude, 1949). Scribes obtained the requisite knowledge and skills similarly to native government scribes (see Section 4.2.2).

Given this formality, *I-Kiribati* might have regarded post-war *boboti* as they did native governments, as extensions of *Te Tautaeka* (i.e., the Colony Government), and been less enthusiastic (Roniti, 1985). However, this seemed not to happen while *boboti* were making surpluses. But, in the 1980s, poor trading conditions arose, deficits occurred and increasingly they were beset with poor accounting and financial management, and other organisational and personnel problems. *I-Kiribati* enthusiasm transferred to mronron and other micro-enterprises (see Section 4.3.6).

4.2.5. Social and infrastructural resources

The Great Depression triggered changes to British Government philosophy and policy about colonies' modernisation, and intervening in macroeconomic and social issues (Abbot, 1971; Morgan, 1980). Documented variously (Couper, 1967; Doran, 1960; Macdonald, 1982a; Maude, 1949; Maude and Doran, 1966) is that these changes had development consequences for the Colony but not until after the restoration, apart from the ill-fated project to settle the Phoenix Islands in the 1930s (Knudson, 1977).

Using capital grants from the Colonial Welfare and Development Fund and loan capital from the British Treasury, the Government Trade Scheme was established as an accounting entity separate from the Colony Government. It proved successful in restoring the copra trade and flows of governmental, church and private revenues in the Colony, including through recreating and capitalising post-war *boboti* (see Section 4.2.4). After an inauspicious start, attributed to officials being unfamiliar with commerce and more used to government bureaucracy, its operational and financial performance improved when an *I-Matang* manager experienced in Pacific commerce was appointed. Alongside commercial thinking, he introduced accounting and control systems more suited to a trading enterprise (Maude, 1949).

The successful financial performance of the Trade Scheme by the mid-1950s enabled repayment of the loan capital and establishment of the Producers' Development and Stabilisation Fund. This was the first of successive income equalisation and subsidy schemes aimed at countering the effects of fluctuating copra prices on *I-Kiribati* access to trade goods and ability to pay taxes. Soon after, the Trade Scheme was reorganised. Copra marketing and export became the responsibility of a Copra

Board. Importing and bulk distribution of trade goods became the responsibility of a *boboti*-owned but *I-Matang*-run, and somewhat monopolistic organisation called the Wholesale Society (Couper, 1967; Macdonald, 1982a; Roniti, 1985).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Colony Government implemented several more development projects, creating infrastructure and social amenities (e.g., wharfing facilities, roads, schools, medical facilities) on Tarawa. Among their multiplier effects was that demand grew for accounting systems and expertise, including *I-Matang* accountants and *I-Kiribati* accounts clerks. More significantly, they ignited an urban growth that has raged ever since. Hence, Tarawa's long-standing population of 3000 began rising, reaching 15,000 by 1975 and 50,000 in 2010 (Doran, 1960; Kiribati National Statistics Office, 2009; Macdonald, 1982a).

The British Government was the main source of the capital for these governmental, commercial and infrastructural expansions. Although phosphate proceeds were another potential source, none was forthcoming until the late 1960s, when the method of pricing phosphate changed (see Section 4.2.3). Some of the increased BPC contributions were used to finance capital and recurrent expenditures. However, most were used to increase the Revenue Equalisation Reserve Fund. It had been set up in the 1950s to smooth fluctuations in Colony Government revenue, and then to provide *I-Kiribati* with a legacy on which to draw after mining ended and independence was granted (see Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, 1957, 1974; Pretes and Petersen, 2004). It reflected the British Government's fear about colonies needing its aid to sustain welfare services after becoming independent (see Morgan, 1980).

In the early 1970s, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Development Authority was established. Based on ideas from other colonies (see Morgan, 1980), it brought all the Colony Government's commercial, quasi-commercial, capital construction and development project activities together in one supposed commercially-minded organisation. It was short-lived, however, with its accounting methods and processes (e.g., transfer pricing) being implicated in its characterisation as inefficient, monopolistic and "an all-consuming monster" (Macdonald, 1982a, p. 183). A score of separate organisations emerged from its dismantlement, with *I-Matang* staff mostly in charge. These were the forerunners of government-owned companies and statutory boards (e.g., Public Utilities Board) (see Section 4.3.2).

4.3. Neo-colonialism (1980–present)

The Kiribati Islands of the present are characterised by formal cultural activities; domestic choring and subsistence, copra production, employment and volunteer working; churches and religious activities; micro-, private and public enterprises engaged in mainly imports distribution and services; island councils, public services and the Republic Government; and aid activities, largely organised as discrete projects (see Macdonald, 1998). A further feature is an economy and society that has become increasingly monetarised (see Asian Development Bank, 2002). Previously in Section 4, widespread references are made to accounting usages in the areas just enumerated, and a steady increase is inferred in the number of separate accounting entities, and in the number of subsidiary accounting centres within many of these separate entities. Although most are referred to again below, we focus on usages in the governmental sphere, particularly those we evaluate as neo-colonial/imperial.

4.3.1. Constituting the republic

That inaugurating the present sovereign state seems itself to have been neo-colonial in nature may be inferred from Macdonald (1982a, 1986). The authorities in London envisaged the entire Colony constituting a new nation to be governed centrally from Tarawa. While net costs of retaining this and similar small colonies was a reason for their decolonisation, equally they wanted to avoid financial burdens that former colonies might present as independent countries (Morgan, 1980). Within the Colony, independence and its eventual form (i.e., as a sovereign state centred on Tarawa but without Tuvalu) found only moderate favour and conviction among *I-Matang* officials, let alone *I-Kiribati*, whose loyalty lay mostly with home islands (i.e., the particular island where their ancestors dwelt) (Macdonald, 1996).

The Constitution of Kiribati, 1979 was the state's founding document: it is still largely unchanged and highly significant. Although the *I-Kiribati* members of the internal self-rule bodies influenced some provisions (e.g., to choose a republic, rather than a commonwealth realm; recognising the enduring value of *I-Kiribati* heritage and traditions (see Hassall et al., 2011)), it is evident theirs was not as great as *I-Matang* officials was on Tarawa and in London. And while the latter's choices in matters of public finance, accounting, taxation and appropriation are arguably laudable—Chapter VIII of the constitution incorporates the principle of the separation of powers and the aphorism of representation of the People, and various provisions enshrined in England's Magna Carta of 1297 and Great Britain and Ireland's Bill of Rights, 1688—they are far from customary among *I-Kiribati*. The extant Public Finance (Control and Audit) Ordinance (1976) is even more significant to the endurance of accounting and control systems and processes associated with the Colony Government (see Section 4.2.1). The subordination of islands and island councils was reinforced by providing that their accounting continued as subsidiary to the Republic Government's budgeting and accounting systems (see Section 4.2.2).

For a decade or so after independence, these colonialistic provisions of the constitution and statutes were reinforced by *I-Matang* officials continuing in the uppermost administrative positions in ministries and parliamentary offices responsible for accounting-related functions. This was necessitated by virtually no *I-Kiribati* having become sufficiently versed under the Colony Government in theories, language, methods and other traits of the accounting and related practices that underlie these functions (see Section 4.2.1).

4.3.2. Exchanging colonial bonds for development partners

Jeremia Tabai was the Republic's first *Te Beretitenti*⁸ (1979–1991). The financial performance that his administration inherited from the Colony Government was difficult: annual recurrent expenditures on staff, consumables and asset maintenance had just surpassed AU\$15 m and the shortfall of revenue was several million dollars. This was largely attributable to phosphate mining royalties ending and the new expenditure effects of several modernising projects. In the independence settlement, the British Government agreed reluctantly to cover these with grants-in-aid. But various explicit and implicit conditions were attached to the grants, not the least being that *I-Matang* staff should continue in the uppermost official positions in accounting-related functions (see Section 4.3.1).

Jeremia's election was unexpected and resulted in changes in political and administrative personnel and to policies. He was anxious to symbolise independence from the former Imperial Power, sever colonial bonds, and promote *I-Kiribati* values, including in matters of economic activities and development (Jeremia, 1993). The changes in personnel were attempted notwithstanding difficulties that leading *I-Kiribati* had. They were inexperienced in policy formulation and strategic implementation (see Section 4.2.1); and poorly equipped to apply accountings in governance and managerial roles, let alone to adapt and revise them technically or socially (Macdonald, 1982a, 1996).

To increase revenue and contain recurrent expenditure, licence agreements were negotiated with foreign fleets to fish for tuna in Kiribati's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Roniti, 1987); and infrastructure construction and other modernising activities were severely curtailed. The licences soon generated unexpectedly high levels of revenue: indeed, although they fluctuate significantly according to fishing conditions, they have been substantial ever since, presently averaging AU\$30 m per annum. This revenue rendered the recurrent-expenditure reasons for curbing modernising activities far less relevant, particularly to subsequent Republic Government administrations.

Concomitantly, in trying to reduce dependence on the *I-Matang* officials remaining after independence, *I-Kiribati* leaders responded to approaches from a hotchpotch of supranational organisations, foreign governments, religious bodies and other external organisations involved in “development assistance”. These variously motivated organisations derive from a world aid industry that has grown profusely over the past few decades (see [Burall et al., 2006](#); [Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation, 2013](#)). Representing themselves latterly as “development partners” with the Republic Government, they have been eager to supply capital and expertise relating to infrastructure, institutions, facilities, systems, administration and accounting (e.g., see [Government of Kiribati, 2007](#), p. 54; Tables 16 and 17 in [World Bank, 2005](#), pp. 48–49). However, the “partnership” has not been of equals, and one consequence has been that, even if they wanted to, *I-Kiribati* politicians and officials could not resist the torrent of aid directed towards their country (cf. [Webster, 2008](#)).

Reported as worth over AU\$50 m annually in recent years (IMF, 2011), aid has covered a wide range of projects dispersed among many Republic Government organisational units but concentrated geographically on Tarawa. Collectively, the multiplicity of partners has assumed the mantle of the Colonial Welfare and Development Fund as virtually the only investors in public services and social enterprises, and significant investors in distributive and other enterprise activities. However, *I-Kiribati* have faced progressive increases in the annual burden of affording the recurrent expenditures arising from the accumulation of capital “assets”. These expenditures on staff, consumable goods and services, and maintenance have risen to over AU\$75 m per annum, an increase of about 160% in real terms since the mid-1980s. A further AU\$15 m is spent annually on grants, subsidies, fees and transfers to individuals (e.g., elderly persons, copra cutters), government-owned companies and statutory boards, and Pacific-region organisations. Indeed, recurrent budget demands for the past several years, especially on maintenance, renewals and operational consumables, have exceeded what has been afforded by the Republic Government in efforts to remain fiscally sustainable (cf. [de Janvry and Dethier, 2012](#)). This contrasts with the situation from 1985 to 2005, when the Republic Government recorded annual surpluses and swelled the Revenue Equalisation Reserve Fund.

4.3.3. Republic governmental accounting

The above financials and further evidence of the long-term financial effect of development assistance are available from accounting documents that ministries and public enterprises publish routinely. The documents fulfil various constitutional and related obligations that these bodies have to *Te Mwanekaba ni Maungatabu* (i.e., the popularly-elected legislature). They are produced from budgeting and accounting systems maintained to prepare estimates of revenue, expenditure and related matters; capture and analyse transactions; maintain order and control; and manage aid that is received in cash, as distinct from aid rendered in kind (see Section 4.3.4).

Having been based on systems taken over from *I-Matang* colonial administrators, these systems, while now mostly managed and operated by *I-Kiribati* personnel, have continued to be shaped by external interventions channelled through aid organisations. Mostly, the interventions arise from consultants visiting Tarawa, performing limited inquiries and forming opinions and recommendations of a technical and (rational) behavioural nature, void of the social and cultural considerations they might include if they were more familiar with *I-Kiribati*, their disposition to the systems and organisations, and the latter's historical inadequacies. Specific reasons for interventions vary from case to case but three broad reasons can be discerned, namely, to modernise, to accompany other developments and to overcome criticisms levelled at existing systems and practices.

⁸ This spelling reflects the local enunciation of *President*, in which office head of state and chief politician are combined.

The criticisms in question are not new, having been levelled regularly, even about the Colony Government (see Macdonald, 1982a). Typical evaluations are of systems and internal controls being unreliable and weak, reports being untimely, management of inventories and assets being poor, managerial and constitutional accountability being deficient, and accounting expertise being in short supply (e.g., see Government of Kiribati, 2010). The form of such criticisms implies that practices are neutral, acultural, not dependent on the conditions in which they are situated and replicable at or above certain standards anywhere. Having been evaluated as falling below these standards, recommendations are advanced about how to fix practices in Kiribati through cognitive and technical interventions.

Three forms of interventions are prevalent. The first is in the knowledge and skills of the *I-Kiribati* personnel managing and operating the systems and performing the practices. The most senior positions now occupied by these personnel only came into *I-Kiribati* hands in the mid-1990s, in part because of neglect by the Colony Government to educate and train *I-Kiribati* to fill these positions any earlier. Education and training interventions are invariably entrusted to non-*I-Kiribati* and often conducted outside of Kiribati. Many of the latter are mass tertiary education courses for undergraduates, which are usually dominated by private sector concepts and practices set in market economies quite unlike Kiribati. However, even courses staged in Kiribati often lack a localised curriculum, in content, method and qualification. Moreover, the emphasis of these interventions is on running systems technically and preparing accounts, not using or applying them (Dixon, 2004b). Related interventions of this sort are situated coaching of individuals and groups, and counterparting (i.e., the shadowing by a local person of an expatriate specialist from whom s/he will take over—see Leach, 1993).

The second common form of intervention is in the renewal and upgrading of the computer-ware on which some systems have been run since the 1980s. Computer systems are quite widespread as a result of a stream of separate aid projects performed since then by itinerant non-*I-Kiribati* consultants whom aid organisations have procured (e.g., see Asian Development Bank, 2011). However, specific education and training, if any, that accompanies new computer-ware often fails to provide enough clarity to the *I-Kiribati* expected to work with them. Furthermore, performing “uninstallations” of paraphernalia and routines that new systems were intended to supersede is usually beyond both the brief of the consultants, and the competence and immediate interests of the affected *I-Kiribati*; and so they continue. Thus, for example, remnants of cumbersome, paper-based operating routines, which became institutionalised under the Colony Government and its Development Authority, are still performed alongside practices and systems intended to replace them.

The third form of intervention comprises re-engineered structures and implementation of fashionable techniques (e.g., output budgeting, strengthened public financial management). These too are formulated, designed and implemented by consultants through projects (see Section 4.3.4). The same comments regarding education and training, and duplication apply to these structures and techniques as apply to computer systems.

In general, these interventions are informed invariably by philosophies, ideas, expectations, innovations, methods and technologies that have been fashioned as part of advances in accounting and related practices elsewhere (Dixon, 2004a). As this fashioning and these advances occur out of sight and mind of *I-Kiribati*, the interventions they experience usually represent discrete, and often befuddling, leaps to them. As little consideration is given to the possibility of technology transfer being context dependant and culture bound (see Leach, 1993), it is inevitable that prolonged expert interventions of these types have not overcome the matters they are intended to address. Indeed, it is arguable that the interventions have brought about conditions opportuning many of the criticisms that each new wave of external consultants identify, particularly ones alluding to ritualistic approaches to, and duplication of, procedures.

The diversification and growth of social, commercial and developmental activities undertaken in the name of the Republic Government, and the associated surge in the number and range of accounting entities, are further factors leaving its accounting open to criticism. The consequent demands for accounting expertise among *I-Kiribati* have stretched beyond reasonable expectations, especially as monetarisation of the economy generally has precipitated similar demands. Insufficient *I-Kiribati* are available to take advantage of tertiary education programmes in accounting that aid scholarships and similar could support; and opportunities to learn experientially from seniors are insufficient and incongruous (Dixon, 2004b). Demand generated by aid projects for local specialists in excess of their supply also applies to many other experts besides accountants.

4.3.4. Aid organisations

Accounting usages are very important in aid project administration and aid policy; and potentiate neo-colonial/imperial relations of domination (cf. Horvath, 1972; Neu, 2000a; Webster, 2008). Understandably, from a donor perspective, each aid organisation prescribes requirements on whoever is responsible for projects, resources and money. Although this can be staff, agents or other representatives either of the aid organisation or the Republic Government, it is not usually the latter. That is because the majority of aid to Kiribati is in kind. Thus, the representatives of particular aid organisations perform the accounting and then notify the Republic Government of projects and amounts for purposes of its development budgets and accounts. Presently, this aid totals about AU\$40 m annually.

In expressing a preference to render aid-in-kind, aid organisations often allude to the technical criticisms of Republic Government accounting enumerated in Section 4.3.3. However, considered from Tarawa, aid accounting is in such a parlous state that it is easy to understand why it might be beyond available *I-Kiribati* expertise. Since the Colonial Welfare and Development Fund, the number of funders has increased significantly, and their requirements have changed incessantly and diversified. Requirements vary widely across the projects that the Republic Government, or a particular ministry or government enterprise, or another accounting entity (e.g., a non-governmental organisation) has on its books.

Typically, the requirements that aid organisations prescribe cover project design and selection, budgetary approval and control, procurement, performance management, cash disbursement, accounting, reporting, compliance with laws and regulations in the organisation's headquarters jurisdiction, etc. Culturally, these requirements and the philosophies underpinning them are somewhat alien to *I-Kiribati*, in whatever roles they play (e.g., beneficiaries, recipients, agents, administrators). Within projects, these requirements are significant factors in giving non-*I-Kiribati* representatives of aid organisations the upper hand over *I-Kiribati* representing the Republic Government's interests in a project (cf. Miller and Rose, 1990). The various processes the requirements in question entail influence greatly what is done with money, how it is reported as being "for Kiribati", and the narrow, functional nature of the accountability and the upward direction in which it flows (i.e., it is hierarchical rather than wholistic) (cf. Laughlin, 1990; O'Dwyer and Unerman, 2010; Pallot, 2003).

The significance of accounting stretches even further as a by-product of projects that purport to "strengthen" particular institutions, boards and companies (e.g., see Dixon, 2004b); and in projects in which accounting features as a subject or outcome (e.g., budgeting for, and financial reporting and auditing of, the whole Republic Government). Indeed, there has been a series of projects over the past two decades arising from a global agenda based on neo-liberal policies and "structural adjustment" programmes. Championed chiefly by Washington Consensus organisations, the Manila-based Asian Development Bank, and aid departments of the Governments of Australia and New Zealand (cf. Annisette, 2004; Jayasinghe and Uddin, 2010; Neu and Ocampo, 2007), the Republic Government has acquiesced over these, with mixed results (see Dixon, 2004a). Thus, still high among macro matters in Kiribati of concern to these organisations are how projected expenditure in the medium to long term is excessive, compared with expected revenues; and the extent of governmental involvement, intervention and dependence (IMF, 2011). Ironically, these "problems" seem to have been precipitated by the collective activities of aid organisation, including amounts of aid-in-kind being disproportionate.

4.3.5. Religious bodies

A duopoly of religious denominations (see Section 4.1.2) continued until the 1950s, after which, particularly on Tarawa, several other Christian denominations became established, along with a Baha'i mission. Participation of *I-Kiribati* is a clearly visible component of many daily lives, matched by their significant contributions of time, goods and money. Thus, virtually all the denominations are growing, with the RC church being the largest single denomination. Another development is that church officials are now virtually all *I-Kiribati*. However, some denominations (e.g., the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints) rely on a steady stream of transient, foreign missionaries, with plenty of guidance to offer; and foreign volunteers are usually involved in any development assistance channelled through them.

Reminiscent of earlier times, church accounting encompasses obligations to donate money and volunteer labour, and to fund raise; and the private keeping of the actual accounts for administrative purposes. The significant amounts involved (and corresponding burden that many *I-Kiribati* bear) are evident on Tarawa. In 2009, the lead researcher observed a significant increase in churches, primary and secondary schools, theological colleges and clerical residences since 1985, and significant new builds and major renovations in progress. This has not only arisen from a trebling of the population but also from monetarisation and economic growth per capita: much money and volunteer labour has flowed into religious bodies. In contrast, on Outer Islands, where division between Protestants and Catholics still dominates, demographic and economic stagnation have taken their toll on religious buildings. For example, those visited on Nikunau, which date from the early 20th century, were decaying for lack of maintenance materials; and no new buildings were evident.

4.3.6. Enterprises

Considerable change has occurred among enterprise activities since the 1980s. Changes in cultural perceptions that arose from settlement on Tarawa and structural adjustment policies have brought about conditions making growth of privately organised trading possible. Whereas *boboti* and government bodies were dominant (see Sections 4.2.4 and 4.2.5), a thriving swarm of *mronron* and other micro-enterprises now dominate at the grassroots; and larger enterprises are a mix of private and governmental. This is overwhelmingly on Tarawa, where growth in import-export, distribution and trading in general has been considerable; whereas Outer Islands' economies are somewhat stagnant, with income from copra and remittances regressing. *Boboti's* dominance continued longer on Outer Islands, but eventually there too *mronron* and other micro-businesses are now vital to incomes being derived from copra and to the availability of basic imports. Offshore, tuna-fishing fleets are operating, but although they have brought about a passing trade on Tarawa (reminiscent of the whalers in the 1820s – see Section 4.1.1), they have no onshore facilities.

Mronron resemble *boboti* in being based on sharing, social purposes and social capital, but because of their size, informality and transitory nature, they are beyond the regulations and supervisory arrangements applying to *boboti* (see Section 4.2.4). They have equivalents in other Pacific Island groups (see A. A. Brown, 2009; Couper, 1968). Most are involved in imported groceries, which they buy in bulk and then deal in the smallest quantities at virtually all hours; some receive savings and provide small short-term loans (cf. Macdonald, 1982a). *Mronron* are regarded as belonging to their *I-Kiribati* members, who have other social bonds (e.g., living in the same village, being members of the same church congregation, being resident on Tarawa but with ancestral links to the same home island). The other micro-businesses resemble *mronron*, except that they are owned and operated within close families. Their proprietors sustain their cultural legitimacy by emphasising community service motives, basing them on modern activities (e.g., computer services, DVD hire, Internet cafés, car repairs, buses, eateries) and not flaunting private wealth that might accumulate.

The accounting practices of *mronron* revolve around pricing, handling cash, and the purchase, sale and replenishment of inventories, all for the collective benefit of members. However, the actual bookkeeping seems ritualistic and based on mimicry. Accounting is not used very much to provide reports, even for members; they seem satisfied to observe that a store is still functioning. Similar occurs with the other micro-businesses. Few of their operators seem cognisant of being liable for tax, and the tax authorities seem rarely to pursue them. Suppliers do not usually entertain applications for credit from any of these micro-businesses; and it would be rare for their operators to seek loans from either of the two banks, the ANZ Bank of Kiribati or the Development Bank of Kiribati. Failure is common, often because of lack of knowledge of business, administration, cash management and related skills (cf. Couper, 1967). However, *mronron* that cease are usually replaced quickly.

A few family-owned and operated micro-businesses have prospered into larger enterprises. They and other larger private businesses are now almost as significant as Republic Government enterprises are. Their capital derives variously, for example, from citizens of mixed race *I-Matang* and Chinese, retired *I-Kiribati* politicians and senior public servants, and businesses based in neighbouring countries. The expansion of banking and telecommunications in particular has mainly involved joint ventures between Pacific-region transnational companies or aid partners and the Republic Government (Tschoegl, 2003): the foreign parties to these ventures have supplied capital and *I-Matang* senior management expertise.

Accounting for the larger private businesses is usually out of public sight and reserved to the main proprietor, close family members and specialist accounting employees, if any. Their needs for accounting for external purposes stem from being subject to profits taxes, notwithstanding that the tax authorities only have so much expertise and time for enforcement. They also use conventional accounting statements in seeking loan capital and short-term loans from the bank(s).

A few of these private businesses are companies incorporated under the Companies Ordinance 1979, as indeed most of the Republic Government's enterprises now are, sometimes because of stalled attempts at privatisation. As in other former colonies (see Walton, 1986), the Companies Ordinance resembles the British equivalent. Companies must file annual returns and other documents with the companies' registrar, and they are open to public searches. The returns viewed by the lead researcher comprised a directors' report, profit and loss statement, balance sheet, and a report of an auditor (if one was appointed); occasionally, a cash flow statement had been volunteered. The records are in English. The measurements of transactions and performance they contain are framed in *I-Matang* concepts of economics and business (e.g., periodicity, entity recognition, using money as a unit of measurement and maintaining money capital). They attract little public interest, except from the banks and some other businesses.

The foreign companies whose fleets are fishing tuna under licence from the Republic Government (see Section 4.3.2) comprise a group of private enterprises of potentially great significance. As with the whalers (see Section 4.1.1) and phosphateers (see Section 4.2.3), their accounting records are maintained in their home countries but, unlike their secretive predecessors, some reports are published openly from these records (e.g., see Sanford Limited Sustainable Seafood, 2010). However, the reports do not disclose the tonnage and values of catches from Kiribati's EEZ, or recognise *I-Kiribati* as stakeholders. This is notwithstanding *I-Kiribati* having greater representation since 2005 by virtue of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

5. Inadequacies of accounting usages

Accounting usages have occasioned many inadequacies for *I-Kiribati* since the 1820s; and they persist as usages continue being applied and developed. Overarching is that the inadequacies derive mostly from how asymmetric power relations in various contexts have played important roles in ways accounting usages have been constituted (cf. Farjaudon and Morales, 2013). Mostly, non-*I-Kiribati* have initiated and matured the usages, be they associated with commerce and personal dealings, religion-making or government and public policy. They have been aligned with protecting (e.g., through confidentiality, compliance and assurance) and furthering non-*I-Kiribati* interests disproportionately, and opportuning subjection and exploitation of *I-Kiribati*.

Some inadequacies became apparent to *I-Kiribati*, occasioning protest or legal actions of mixed success (e.g., see Couper, 1968; Thomas, 2007; Williams and Macdonald, 1985). But mostly they remain obscure, notwithstanding how usages have clashed with *I-Kiribati* values and diminished *I-Kiribati* society. By articulating these inadequacies, we intend that lingering injustices can be abated, welfare can be bettered and emancipation can be extended among *I-Kiribati*, be they on Tarawa, living still on the most dispersed Outer Island communities or living elsewhere reluctantly and because of colonialistic acts.

Before articulating particular inadequacies, it must be acknowledged that *I-Kiribati* have derived benefits from many accounting usages. However, some of these benefits are themselves characterised by inadequacies. They have been incidental and ambiguous, and obtained down the pecking order. Some are dubious; or have drawbacks and brought about conditions opportuning distress.

Thus, in the area of commerce (see Sections 4.1.1, 4.2.3–4.2.5, 4.3.4, 4.3.6), *I-Kiribati* gained access to groceries, hardware, cloth, medicines, equipment, facilities, vehicles, services, waged employment, etc. However, these included guns and intoxicants: and wearing garments increased disease. Nowadays, the “advanced” technologies that have arrived are burdensome, difficult to maintain, and pollutive and unsustainable; in contrast to any local technologies they displaced and knowledge about which is lost. The distribution of coconut oil's value-added has been disproportionate, and the clip system was deceptive. *I-Kiribati* have been exploited as cheap labour, most obviously on the phosphate islands. *Boboti* were junior partners in transacting with the private duopoly of Burns-Philp and Carpenter, and then a succession of somewhat monopolistic Colony Government enterprises. Aid-financed commercial assets were centralised on Tarawa.

In the area of religion-making (see Sections 4.1.2 and 4.3.5), *I-Kiribati* were familiarised with alternative sets of beliefs and fantasies, and written language, reading, writing, etc. However, District Officer Grimbale observed that, by the 1910s, church leaders had made *I-Kiribati* ashamed of their ancestry, history, legends and “practically of everything that ever happened to [their] race outside the chapel and the class room” (cited by Macdonald, 1982a, p. 133) (see also Grimbale, 1989, esp. pp. 314–333). These leaders lived opulently compared with their flock. Today, church organisations continue to hold members accountable to foreign gods and absorb substantial proportions of their meagre incomes: the education they provide is partialistic, even sectarian.

Through government (see Sections 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.4, 4.2.5 and 4.3.1–4.3.4), *I-Kiribati* have undergone “civilising” and “development”, including participating in education, employment, health and longevity, new cultural experiences and “democracy”. However, non-*I-Kiribati* governed the Colony with a mix of autocracy and paternalism. The civilising and developing was on terms they imposed, dictated, prescribed and influenced. They subjected native governments and *boboti* to often-excessive oversight. After several decades of not affording resources for social development, British and successor donors have deployed such resources centrally, along with the aforementioned commercial assets. The reasons for this choice were selfish; they included cost containment, comforts of officials, a single successor state to the Colony, compliance with Washington Consensus policies, exercising cultural hegemony, being photogenic and enabling neo-colonialism/imperialism. Even now, beliefs, values and priorities of *I-Kiribati* remain mostly side-lined.

Of greatest concern is that when the deployment commenced *I-Kiribati* were still as evenly dispersed on Outer Islands as Bedford et al. (1980) estimate for 1900. The past half century has been characterised by a continuing pattern of laissez-faire migration to and urbanisation of Tarawa. Consequences include degradation of Tarawa’s natural and built environments, and “a worrisome trend. [of]. increased economic frustration” (Asian Development Bank, 2006, p. 1); and Outer Islands’ societies being undermined. The population of Kiribati is now evenly divided between Tarawa and the Outer Islands. There is also economical, social and cultural division growing between Tarawa residents and Outer Island dwellers.

5.1. Accountability

In advanced economies and civilised societies, accountability is an essential characteristic in the evolution of accounting (cf. Jacobs, 2000; Neu, 2000a; Nyamori, 2009; O’Dwyer and Unerman, 2010). Despite rhetoric among non-*I-Kiribati* about civilising and advancing *I-Kiribati* society, a constant theme is that little sense of accountability to *I-Kiribati* has been fostered. Equally, *I-Kiribati* are unfamiliar with the general principle that they are owed accountability from institutions, no matter that they derive from *I-Matang* ideas and colonialism.

For example, accountability was absent in the days of church “administration” of various islands by missionaries sent to convey the allegedly “good” news of Jesus Christ, recruit converts, develop congregations and overcome brown Heathenism with white Christianity. Accounting usages were implicated in their activities spiritually and materially, often mundanely, but importantly nonetheless. If anything, the accountability fostered among *I-Kiribati* was that it should come from them and be to the God of *I-Matang* and his Earthly representatives. Answering for daily misdemeanours was accompanied by the fines through which church representatives accumulated wealth: no meaningful financial reporting or audits were undertaken (see Section 4.1.2).

Throughout the formal colonial period, *I-Kiribati* were assessed for taxes but their rights to representation were strictly limited, thus impairing exchanges of questions and answers between *I-Kiribati* as taxpayers and *I-Matang* in positions of authority. This lack of rights was consistent with the various subjugal statuses that *I-Matang* conferred on *I-Kiribati* (e.g., indians, commodities, toilers, colonial subjects). The BPC seems to have been a law unto itself, with no meaningful accountability between the Commission(ers) and the partner governments or supranational monitoring bodies (i.e., the League of Nations, etc.), let alone the Colony Government or *I-Kiribati* (cf. Maltby and Tsamenyi, 2010).

Recently, supranational organisations, particularly the IMF and Asian Development Bank, have been advocating strongly for more accountability. However, their pronouncements never quite clarify whether the accountability should flow to *I-Kiribati*. Besides, it seems improbable that accounting used to subjugate *I-Kiribati* for over a century is likely to empower them now. The purposes, elements (e.g., persons, organisations, institutions) and means (e.g., processes of governance, accounting, reporting, engagement, sanctioning) entailed in accountability are still culturally alien to *I-Kiribati*. The behaviours that accountability is supposed to evaluate, and issues it is supposed to inform, are less important to *I-Kiribati* than to non-*I-Kiribati*. In any case, as applied previously to *uea*, *unimane* (\cong eldersmen), and *I-Matang* missionaries and colonial officials, it is perceived as culturally inappropriate for someone to seem to challenge members of the present-day élite.

5.2. Opacity and secrecy

Concurrently with advocating on accountability, the same supranational organisations (i.e., the IMF and Asian Development Bank) frequently expound on transparency (e.g., see Carstens, 2005). However, for *I-Kiribati*, opacity and secrecy have characterised many accounting usages, not transparency. These conditions apply to accounting records, to information they generate and to activities that usages accompany. For some activities (e.g., whaling, tuna fishing), it has been unnecessary administratively to maintain records onshore, and advantage has been taken of this to secrete information and activities from *I-Kiribati*.

When onshore records have been necessary, involvements in usages have been restricted to distant principals and their mostly *non-I-Kiribati* agents in Kiribati; except for limited involvement of *I-Kiribati* as scribes, clerks, etc. Indeed, onshore usages can be distinguished between two forms. Either usages have revolved around self-contained accounting processes onshore, but which essentially were to assure outside source(s) (e.g., Colony Government accounting to assure the Western Pacific High Commissioner and British Government). Or usages have comprised information and controls that a “head office” has required from a headstation or branch, which are subsidiary to records and procedures at head office (e.g., BPC staff relayed data from Banaba to Melbourne). Nowadays, the majority of aid projects exemplify this, being aid-in-kind. Although some project incidentals are accounted for in Kiribati, with aid agency personnel mostly keeping some subsidiary records, the main accounting records are scattered distantly, according to the location of aid organisations’ regional offices and world headquarters.

Opacity and secrecy have almost been as great in cases of accounting information that supposedly is a matter of public record (e.g., biennial reports of the Colony Government, BPC’s annual summary accounting statements). *I-Kiribati* were precluded by the daunting prospect of approaching the Colony Government Offices or the impossibility of travelling to London to search among a welter of Parliamentary papers. In any case, subjugal statuses conferred on *I-Kiribati* (see Section 5.1) virtually throughout the informal and formal colonial periods did not entitle them to accounting information or other user-involvements in accounting usages. Exceptions were accounts provided orally by native governments and *boboti*, particularly in matters of levying taxes, setting copra prices and financing small community development projects.

I-Kiribati continue to have difficulties accessing the now much more voluminous public records on Tarawa (e.g., the national library and archives, the companies’ registry, the written proceedings of *Te Mwaneaba ni Maungatabu*). This is notwithstanding formal constitutional provisions, sovereignty of *I-Kiribati* citizens and specific legislation (e.g., the [Companies Ordinance, 1979](#)) (see Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.6). Tarawa may be closer than London, but Outer Islanders still have difficulties visiting there. For most everyone else the difficulties are institutional and cultural. Among other things, many *I-Kiribati* are bemused about laws, mostly received from the Colony Government, that confer entitlements to official information, including from the Republic Government, *Te Mwaneaba ni Maungatabu*, companies and aid organisations. This parallels a point made in Section 5.1 about unfamiliarity with being owed accountability from offices and organisations that date from colonial times, and from leaders and high office holders.

Even if these barriers were lowered, however, most *I-Kiribati* would continue to have trouble making sense of information that is founded on alien economic and social principles, including, among other things, time-based controls, competition, efficiency and material effectiveness; and that is provided in written report or similar form, particularly if it is in the English language, which reports usually are. The oral proceedings of *Te Mwaneaba ni Maungatabu* are an exception proving the rule. The debates among the Members of Parliament are mostly in *te taetae ni Kiribati* and are broadcast live and in other forms on Radio Kiribati (NB radio is far more important and accessible still than either newspapers or television). Audience engagement, particularly among older *I-Kiribati*, is remarkably high in the lead researcher’s experience (see also [Macdonald, 1998](#)). Indeed, they reminded him of formal discussions among *unimane* in the village *mwaneaba* attended by the whole village, which he witnessed on Nikunau in the 1980s and 1990s (but not in the 2000s alas) and [Kazama \(2001\)](#) reports from Tabiteuea South; and this seems part of the attraction for the audience. The other aspects that attract are the contributions of the members with whom audience members have ancestral and home island ties and details of consequence for their communities, rather than broad economic, social and financial matters and ideological issues.

As to the opacity and secrecy of the activities that accounting usages have accompanied, examples abound in commerce, religion-making and government. They apply in activities enabled by the capital that *I-Matang* and Chinese investors entrusted to companies and company agents in even the smallest villages on the remotest islands (see Section 4.1.1); and the capital sunk by successive private companies into mining Banaba, which was recouped in abundance when their interests were purchased for the BPC (see Section 4.2.3). The islanders did not know what the copra or the ore was used for, or how valuable it was. The purchase of the mining was conducted in Europe, out of sight of *I-Kiribati*: it was a major element in how the British Government recognised the military contributions it received in the Great War from New Zealand and Australia ([Macdonald, 1982b](#)).

The BPC itself provides the most glaring example of protecting and furthering interests secretly. The BPC was accorded the entirely misleading epithet of “not-for-profit”. It was an autonomous accounting entity and accounting information about its operations was secret from the Colony Government and supranational monitoring bodies and interested parties in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, let alone from *I-Kiribati*. The BPC’s costing policies were consistent with many of the dubious transfer pricing processes employed by many multinational corporations (e.g., see [Fieldhouse, 1978](#)). The remuneration and conditions of commissioners, managers and *I-Matang* staff far exceeded what *I-Kiribati* and other labourers, and Banaban landowners received (cf. [Maltby and Tsamenyi, 2010](#)). Indeed, misery was inflicted on the Banabans, and their grievances continue, particularly over the dilapidated state of Banaba and living in exile as a tiny ethnic minority under Fiji’s despotic regime.

Opacity and secrecy also apply to the accountings in which the British Government was involved as a coloniser (see Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.5). They continued even during internal-self-rule between 1967 and 1979. Although senior *I-Matang* officials must have been aware that *I-Kiribati* members of executive and legislative bodies were formally entitled to accounting information and be involved in accounting usages, they used budgets and similar to befuddle these *I-Kiribati*. Their reasons were some combination of personal interests and politics certainly, and probably extended to feelings of intellectual superiority and cultural hegemony, if not racial superiority.

5.3. Accounting about I-Kiribati

The notion of accounting usages opportuning transparency of all aspects of agency on behalf of *I-Kiribati*, and consequentially of accountability flowing to *I-Kiribati*, contrasts with the continuing corollary of much more accounting information being produced about *I-Kiribati* than being produced for *I-Kiribati* or supplied to *I-Kiribati* (cf. Jacobs, 2000; Nyamori, 2009). This inadequacy is epitomised in the quote from Grimble and Clarke (1929), two senior Colony Government officials, cited in Section 4.2.1: accounting and related calculative practices were used to summarise “the life and condition” of the enclosed space and inhabitants making up Kiribati, and this was done to inform an imperial élite in London.

Almost a century later, accounting information is generated about Kiribati and *I-Kiribati* and given to external parties, particularly the aforementioned hotchpotch of aid organisations, although members of the present-day *I-Kiribati* élite also partake of it. For example, within the multifaceted bureaucracy of the Republic Government, accounting practices feature operationally (e.g., to pay salaries, to vote appropriations), politically (e.g., gaming over recurrent budget votes among ministers and ministries) and ritualistically (e.g., following procedures to the letter and without regard to interpreting signals that data might contain). It mostly involve officials who are *I-Kiribati*. Over and above these within-government usages, accounting practices are part of the relations between these *I-Kiribati* officials and the non-*I-Kiribati* representatives of the various aid organisations. For example, supranational organisations are able to collate financial and related socio-economic data about Kiribati, as they do about all their member countries. They then produce and publish analyses of aspects of life in Kiribati (e.g., see IMF, 2011). Significant to Section 5.4 is the way they interpret the data and write their analyses: they imply that far more homogeneity exists in economics, culture, etc. among Kiribati and their other member countries/aid recipients than our study infers. This leads to standard external solutions being applied in attempts to solve Kiribati’s alleged problems.

5.4. Asymmetric relations

A continuous barrage of advice, lobbying, incentives and similar urgings emanates from aid organisations. The elements of this barrage sustain the asymmetrical relations and processes of exploitation and subjection that started with the arrival of whalers, traders, religion-makers and imperial warships, and continued with Colony Government officials (cf. Nyamori, 2009; Webster, 2008). These relations and related economic and political consequences derive from strong organisations using accounting to exercise power from a distance over people in a dependent environment (see Mellemvik et al., 1988; Neu and Graham, 2006; Nyamori, 2009), and so are consistent with various connotations of colonialism (Horvath, 1972; Willis, 2011). They are exemplified by how accounting usages enabled *I-Matang* Colony Government officials to:

- enclose and sustain administratively, as a British Colony, the numerous island communities that had existed previously as politically independent, self-governed territories;
- ensure that the Colony administration was financially self-sufficient and assure the colonising power that there would be no need for colonial subventions (cf. Bush and Maltby, 2004);
- effect indirect rule through collaboration with *I-Kiribati* involved in native governments and *boboti* (cf. Davie, 2000);
- subjugate *I-Kiribati* socially and politically, including re-defining their polities by bringing them together into a centralised nation state;
- provide the phosphateers on Banaba and Nauru with a precious and cheap labour force they could exploit; and
- administer specific grants for modernisation projects (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3.1).

They are further exemplified by accounting usages in today’s aid sector. Thus, following on from an aid organisation rendering an analysis, recommendations, etc., its representatives lobby *I-Kiribati* in middle and upper administrative and political positions to sanction these under the seal of the Republic Government. The aid organisation’s representatives continue to feature prominently and decisively in any subsequent actions. These are usually framed as a project(s), with the aid organisation(s) also providing means of finance and of procuring physical inputs (e.g., consultants, advisors, trainers, construction materials, hardware, vehicles and plant). The project(s) would be formally attached to a particular ministry or similar, and some of its prominent *I-Kiribati* staff would be involved. However, invariably they and any *I-Kiribati* procured for the project are junior partners to the aid organisation’s external nominees (e.g., see Asian Development Bank, 2011). This exemplifies that it is through members of the recently emerged *I-Kiribati* élite that the influences of external, non-*I-Kiribati* are now channelled (cf. Horvath, 1972; Nyamori, 2009). Otherwise, as in the Colony Government period (see Section 4.2.1), *I-Kiribati* do not figure much as citizens, taxpayers, service users, customers of enterprises and similar.

The low-level of *I-Kiribati* involvement is notwithstanding that the processes just described are continually imposing new “dependencies” upon *I-Kiribati*, significantly at the macro-level of investment strategy. Physically, financially and through accounting methods, projects result in aid organisations having an overwhelming influence over where capital is allocated, and so over the extent and direction of development. The sheer volume of recommended and actual projects, and the burden of the recurrent costs of completed projects, jeopardise the Republic Government’s fragile administrative and fiscal sustainability (see Sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.4) (cf. de Janvry and Dethier, 2012; Neu and Ocampo, 2007). Furthermore, taking account of all projects underway each year across the entire Republic Government and their cumulative effect over several

years, the advice and actions packaged into projects have multifaceted implications and vital consequences for grassroots *I-Kiribati* and Kiribati as a nation, national economy, society and ecosystem. Hence, development of Kiribati continues as a neo-colonial project, in which accounting is implicated; and the general circumstances are consistent with neo-imperialism (see Horvath, 1972; Webster, 2008).

5.5. Accounting development

The most visible developments of accounting have been occurring within the Republic Government. Its record-keeping systems and processes are mostly non-*I-Kiribati*-initiated, deriving from colonial, postcolonial and neo-liberal ideas (e.g., centralised representative governance, corporate transparency and individualised accountability—see Jayasinghe and Uddin, 2010). Of particular interest is a succession of projects outlined in Section 4.3.4 that have involved both renovating accounting systems and processes, and designing and installing new ones. They have affected the entire Republic Government or particular ministries, institutions, boards and companies; allegedly either to “strengthen” them, or to corporatise or privatise them (see Sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.5). The contents of these projects have been presented to *I-Kiribati* as technical and procedural; indeed, from personal conversations and official documents (e.g., Asian Development Bank, 2011; Government of Kiribati, 2010), many of the non-*Kiribati* involved in the projects seem to regard them thus. These non-*I-Kiribati* can seem oblivious to or apathetic about accounting being a form of social technology (Boyce, 2000; J. Brown, 2009; Mellemvik et al., 1988), and so blithe about issues of preclusion, befuddlement, etc. This is notwithstanding that beneath many projects are particular concerns and methods that aid organisation principals seem to have in mind. Most seem ideologically grounded, particularly on neo-liberalism, as expressed vigorously by the more influential aid organisations (e.g., see Asian Development Bank, 2006; IMF, 2011).

Concomitantly, the information and actions arising from the new or revised systems and processes mean that accounting usages continue to favour external parties. This is notwithstanding that *I-Kiribati* are now prominent in routines, including transaction processing and report collation. These particular *I-Kiribati* may be better versed than their predecessors were in theories, language and other traits of accounting, finance, auditing, etc. However, as outlined in Section 4.3.3, their technical accounting education is not ideal. Furthermore, their accounting education has rarely extended to economic, socio-political and cultural aspects, at least not in ways aligned to their prior experiential learning (Dixon, 2004b). Thus, in government, larger organisations and aid activities particularly, accounting usages continue to be significant in perpetuating *I-Kiribati*’s circumstances of neo-colonial subjects, notwithstanding their official position as citizens of a sovereign state.

5.6. Anti-culture

I-Kiribati involved (restrictively) in earlier accounting usages encountered beliefs, values, ideology, and forms of governing, accountability and making decisions that exhibited marked contrasts to *I-Kiribati* equivalents, if any, in *te katei ni Kiribati*, hence being befuddled and amazed. Kinship was fundamental and, in contrast to “modern” *I-Matang* societies, remains significant. It is culturally alien to operate a market, use transfer pricing or make economic gain from *utu* (\cong very extended family) and others. For example, if a canoe returns to the shore of an Outer Island with an excess of fish, this is given to *utu* and neighbours: it is not sold, even to cover “costs” (cf. Couper, 1967).

These circumstances of befuddlement and amazement continue. On modern-day Tarawa (but not Outer Islands), the canoe scenario differs to some extent: many small craft comprise cash-based enterprises that sell produce at roadside fish stalls. However, there is still a yawning chasm separating *I-Kiribati* beliefs, etc. from those in particular of the neo-liberal inclined aid organisations, which for some time have been decrying provisions in *te katei* as flawed, economically and otherwise (e.g., see de Zamaroczy, 2001). Their various representatives (e.g., consultants installing computer-ware, and designing and implementing structures and techniques – see Section 4.3.3) tend to ignore *te katei* and not concern themselves over whether practices and usages are responsive to *I-Kiribati*.

These organisations have also used their itinerant representatives to propagate “private accounting” as a model of rational conduct. This accounting constitutes and reflects private individual ownership, corporate ownership and ownership (as distinct from stewardship and trusteeship) by government. It is accounting through which members of society are reduced, on the one hand, to labour resources, to be exploited; and, on the other hand, to suppliers and individual customers, to be dealt with on a *caveat emptor* basis. This private accounting seems associated with attempts to suppress, on ideological grounds, cooperative forms that capital, entities, and distributive and re-distributive behaviour might take. Suppressing these arrangements is contrary to *I-Kiribati* having long favoured *boboti* and now *mronron* as means to organise commerce and personal dealings. It is also contrary to the resource rental income received from foreign fishing fleets exploiting the EEZ fishery being shared, for example, by paying copra cutters more for their trifling amounts of copra than it is worth abroad and by creating (or not eliminating) jobs in government organisations.

For the financial numbers, organisational structures, etc. arising from this private accounting to be meaningful, *I-Kiribati* would have to assume various roles associated with the market-oriented, global society that supposedly exists in modern countries (e.g., citizen-consumers, represented-taxpayers, freethinkers, governors, directors, managers, stakeholders and capitalists). That aid organisations expect *I-Kiribati* to play these roles, and to adapt to their technology and ascribe to their ideology, is consistent with cultural hegemony and neo-colonialism.

6. Conclusions

We have analysed the genealogy of today's accounting practices in Kiribati. They trace from accounting usages accompanying what *I-Matang* understand as commerce, religion-making and government. Indeed, accounting calculations were part of decisions by respective parties about whether and how to extend trade and mission work there, and to annex the Kiribati Islands as a Colony. This was in the 19th century; and since then, accounting usages have been instituted and elaborated mainly by *I-Matang* and other non-*I-Kiribati* (see Section 4).

By themselves, 19th century trading and religion-making, and 20th century mining and British colonialism in Kiribati could each be “fascinating” and “curious”, with a smear of historical injustice. Similarly, activities of aid organisations and the government of a sovereign state in an “emerging economy” could be illuminating topics from the perspectives of the present, and suggestive of “improvements”. However, we have chosen to juxtapose them, taking a risk perhaps of ending up with a sprawling jumble of circumstances, events, issues and people that cries out for more spatial and temporal separation than we have afforded them. Instead, we believe the result is a truly integrated, longitudinal study, informed by and comparable to earlier studies elsewhere; and one of international significance.

The study links the history of a colony with the history of an emerging economy. It demonstrates the importance and significance of retrospective analysis. It reveals undercurrents that from decade to decade have been running among the various circumstances, events, issues and people featuring in it. It identifies some important inadequacies that continue to affect *I-Kiribati*. Concomitantly, there is much in the study (e.g., perspectives, methods, concepts) with potential application elsewhere, and so this work is important to diverse readers, in different ways.

It is important to record the story of accounting among the people in a country that, because of alleged global warming, faces an uncertain long-term future. The story contains elements that demonstrate how behaviour in the past shapes what exists today, not based on any simplistic teleological analysis but how accidents and the imposition of systems from outside a society affect that society. It calls into question using accounting that seems suited to some societies—those that are “more complex”, “more developed” and resource rich—in other simpler, less developed and resource poorer societies, especially ones coagulated into postcolonial states in externally contrived ways.

By illuminating accounting usages in particular spatial and temporal contexts but within the one geographical setting, this critical history should enable reflection about comparable and contrasting usages in other settings. For example, because it examines accounting in economics-related roles, the history illuminates at a micro-level of (knowledgeable) human actors where “aborigines”, “natives” and “indigenous peoples” have stood as landowners, as labour and as social beings with spiritual as well as secular characteristics (cf. Kearins and Hooper, 2002; Neu and Graham, 2006). Concomitantly, the history illuminates at a macro-level, circumstances of economic development, “nation construction” and governmentality in an “emerging economy” (cf. Kalpagam, 2000). These terms are applied widely by “developed nation” outsiders to frame social systems (Tucker, 1999), thus implying that this illumination has potential in reflecting about usages in other settings.

In Section 3, we enumerated four interrelated themes identified in the literature. Regarding the theme of accounting practices of colonial and postcolonial organisations, our study is far more longitudinal than those that have preceded it, including reaching the present day. It provides further insights into how, in a context of particularly *I-Matang*-dominated activities in the Pacific region, accounting usages have been implicated in control and subjection of *I-Kiribati*, affecting most (*I-Matang*) categories into which human society is separated, including politics, economics, culture, religion and demographics.

Regarding the present day, some have argued that former colonies have inherited a legacy of inappropriate accounting and related technologies (e.g., see Hove, 1986). Implicit in such arguments is that colonialism ended when independence or sovereignty was accorded to a colony. We question this implicit assumption, by explaining not only how present day accountings have been derived from colonialistic outreach by people from various places with various motives, but also that that is how, in the present day, accountings are continuing to develop, at least in Kiribati. British colonial officials did leave Kiribati at independence but they were superseded in various colonialistic activities by aid organisation representatives. They have continued with accounting usages that the colonial officials relinquished, further adapting them and initiating new ones to be relevant for their purposes, and to achieve objectives they consider desirable (cf. Miller and Rose, 1990). “Inappropriateness” is irrelevant as a characteristic, as we are not, at least in the case of Kiribati, dealing with an independent, autonomous, sovereign nation. Kiribati is a territory subject to neo-imperialism, with members of an *I-Kiribati* élite as the sometimes unwitting, junior partners to non-*I-Kiribati* carrying out macro policies from a distance.

Regarding the other themes, we have said little directly about the organisation of accounting, accounting education and accountants within professional bodies in Kiribati. However, we imply that what has occurred (and not occurred) in this area has been consistent with limiting the knowledge and involvement of *I-Kiribati* in accounting usages. This has helped maintain what we interpret in Section 5 as inadequacies as far as *I-Kiribati* are concerned, and advantageous circumstances as far as non-*I-Kiribati* engaged colonially are concerned. Similarly, while international accounting standards have gone unmentioned, because of being a non-issue in Kiribati, we have implied much that can be associated with the theme of accounting going global. British colonial officials enacted constitutional and legislative provisions often replicated or adapted from elsewhere; this included constituting and maturing governmental institutions. The continuing activities, through aid organisations, of reformers (i.e., advocates for structurally adjusting the Kiribati economy and its governmental institutions) are based on a global template inspired by neo-liberalism. Over and above that, however, aid organisation accounting is diffuse, and affects how aid to Kiribati and for *I-Kiribati* is allocated.

This history prompts a great many further questions. Further research to do with Kiribati might examine and criticise:

- the societal consequences for *I-Kiribati* of the accounting usages catalogued here;
- the (indigenous) accounting that existed, not only within *utu* but also in relation to *te katei ni Kiribati*, gerontocracies and so on; and what has become of it;
- the detail of the accounting now used in commerce, to govern, and by religious and aid organisations;
- the value of the phosphate that was expropriated, how that value was distributed (e.g., equivalent to Weeramantry (1992) in regard to Nauru), and what re-distributions should still take place; and
- how commercial fishing is accounted for, where, and by and for whom; how its value is being distributed; and how accounting information can be adapted for use by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

Further afield, tracing accounting in neighbouring countries might enlighten their populations, and complement Pacific wide studies of labour trades, aid, trade, population movements and so on. It may highlight to these populations (and those working with them) how, when, where and why history matters, including in shaping, evaluating, criticising or exposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (e.g., see Kelsey, 2010).

Regarding the participants in this further research, we suggest students of accounting, especially from Pacific Island and neighbouring Pacific Hemisphere domains, and including their undergraduates. Presently, undergraduates from the islands of the periphery are referred to textbooks that are not only about accounting in North America, Britain, Australia, New Zealand or similar but also deal with life in these places matter-of-factly. Thus, in being expected to learn about accounting, which is challenging enough, they are obliged to grapple with learning what for them are perplexing contexts, manufacturing snowshoes, governing metropolitan territories and farming sheep are among the contexts the lead researcher has come across in learning and assessment materials used on Tarawa). Meanwhile, they have had to depend for their histories on the likes of Arthur Grimble and us (see Baldacchino, 2004). Of course, in line with what Baldacchino has to say, for such indigenous research to eventuate about “unimportant islands” and similar domains caught up in backwash effects⁹ of “developed country” research, the gatekeepers of refereed publications must open the gates to such research.

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⁹ The term *backwash effects* was devised in relation to development. It refers to negative effects that growth and development at the centre can have on conditions at the periphery, including by draining resources from the periphery to the core (see Couper, 1967).

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