Our Sinking Heritage

At the edge of Namata Village, in amongst the mangroves, we waited for our transport to arrive. The sky was dark and cloudy. We would travel by boat. It is one of two ways to get to Bau Island; the other is on foot at low tide.

Coming out of the mangroves we saw the island of Bau lying still in the distance, waiting patiently, as if she was expecting us for thousands of years. The rain pelted down so as we visited Mateiweilagi, the residence of the Vunivalu (High Chief) who is from the Cakobau Family. Unfortunately, the soil here is being washed away.

A sea wall had been constructed around the island. It is now damaged and chunks of the wall are broken off. It looked as if it had battled thousands of waves and is now weathered by time. I also learned that their fishing grounds have changed, there aren't any fish in the usual fishing areas.

Bau Island, which is a symbol of respect, chieftainship, and high authority, is slowly being eroded by the effects of climate change. If things continue this way, I’m afraid there won’t be anything left of Bau Island.

The island has witnessed centuries of traditions, ceremonies and events. Its people will eventually evacuate and move to the mainland and a change in culture will be inevitable. For the generations to come, Bau Island will be a home no more.

— Siobhan Turner

© Siobhan Turner

© Andrew Sheehy

© Christine Germano

© Andrew Sheehy

© Siobhan Turner

...the soil here is being washed away: