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Essay
STS300, “The environmental context”
Autumn session, 2004
Science, Technology & Society
University of Wollongong

**Ronald Running Amuck:
McDonald’s in Western Samoa**

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STS 300 Essay

Airplane Pilot: Here we are Mr. McDonald, we’ve landed in Western Samoa. We will be taxiing for only a short while.

Ronald McDonald: Thank you for the smooth flying Jim. It was Jim right? When we get home I will personally take you to the finest McDonald’s dinner you and your family could ever enjoy! How does that sound? ¹

Airplane Pilot: **[Stated with a hint of sarcasm]** Yes, it is Jim, and that sounds good to me Mr. McDonald.

Ronald: No, no, I’ve got a better idea! How about if you get us home safe and sound, I’ll bring you back here in a few months when we open the first McDonald’s in this little country. It will be the grandest of celebrations—all of our stores have quite the opening party you know. Kids, balloons, food, fun...what could be better?

Airplane Pilot: That would be great Mr. McDonald. I must say it is my intention to get us home in one piece after your meeting with the chief.

Ronald: Well I certainly hope you do, and I hope you can join in the celebration. I’d hate to think of what would happen to my fortunes if we didn’t make it home and Grimace took over the business. Ha, Grimace could never fit in my shoes, that biscuit-eating blob is far too big to fit in my shoes!

¹ Ronald McDonald is the icon of the largest global fast food chain, McDonald’s. His enthusiasm for fun is exhibited in his boisterous voice and constant activity/body language.

Airplane Pilot: Indeed he is Mr. McDonald. But we are stopped now and the chief awaits you at the front of the airport. See you tomorrow, and good luck at the meeting.

[Ronald walks into the airport and meets who he suspects is the chief at a waiting car. The following conversation ensues within the car, while travelling into the village where the new McDonald's restaurant is being proposed for construction]

Ronald McDonald: Well hello my friend! What a lovely day isn't it?!?!

Chief Tui: Greetings on behalf of the nation of Western Samoa and all its people. We welcome you. I am *ali'i* Tui.² You must be the one called Ronald.

Ronald: Well I hate to brag but yes it is me. And only Santa Claus is more recognised than myself.³ Not sure how he does it though. I appear on television, have been in a few movies, and even make personal appearances throughout the entire year! But, somehow Santa always wins the popularity contest! Oops, sorry about that, getting a bit emotional. I guess it's just my competitive nature.

Chief: Why worry about such things? Enjoy life, friends, and family. How was your flight?

Ronald: The plane ride was long, and probably about as boring as the Hamburgler's jokes—he tells terrible jokes, you know. **[The car ride becomes rough]**. Whoa! Your roads certainly aren't the like the ones I've grown to love back home! The roads are so smooth they literally glide you into the drive-thru! But I am here, you, chief are here...it's ok if I call you chief right? It's a happy meal kind of day!

Chief: Hmmm.⁴

Ronald: Sorry my friend, chief, perhaps I am going a bit too fast for you. So what is this thing on your shirt?⁵ **[Ronald points to a patch affixed to chief's shirt pocket]**

Chief: Flag of Western Samoa.⁶ We are independent, unified, and proud!⁷

Ronald: Oh, yes, indeed it is a flag. I should have known. Silly me, I must still be a bit jet-lagged. But to be so proud of your country...that's a great thing there chief. Anyway, perhaps we should talk business.

Chief: Yes, perhaps business. Your new restaurant brings us proposition for food, jobs, and growth. However, I have spoken with *aiga* and we have many concern of your request.⁸

² *Ali'i* is the Samoan word for chief.

³ McDonald's. 2004a. *About McDonald's*. Available at: www.mcdonalds.com

⁴ Chief is a bit startled by Ronald's fast-talking and jubilant behaviour, taking a moment to react.

⁵ Ronald is pointing at a patch affixed to the Chief's shirt.

⁶ Western Samoa became independent from New Zealand in 1962.

⁷ Smith, A.D. 1991. *National Identity*. Penguin Books, Ltd. London.

⁸ Spickard, P., J.L. Rondella, and D.H. Wright. 2002. *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*. University of Hawai'i Press. Honolulu.

Ronald: Well, what could possibly be of concern? I am just a clown making people everywhere happy, and hoping they enjoy a bit of food too. But I am not sure what this *aiga* is.

Chief: *Aiga* is Samoan. It represents our community of kinship and family relationships. Our *aiga* has concerns that you, an outsider, are a threat—a threat to our culture, traditions, and beliefs.⁹

Ronald: Whoa, chief! What? A threat?!?! I think it is quite on the contrary. I give you money for some of your land; I then employ your people, feed the public with the happiest food on earth, and make a little money for myself in the meantime!¹⁰ How could this possibly be a threat to you?

Chief: You bring big company to little nations all over world and remove traditions and beliefs, replaced with dangerous American culture.¹¹ You train Americans to buy, buy, and continue to buy.¹² It is such unhappiness.

Ronald: Wow, chief you have it all wrong! I merely provide something that the public wants, a burger and a smile. If people didn't want those things, I'd be out of business. Sure, I do commercials and advertise products, but in no way to I force anyone to buy a burger, nor do I 'train' anyone to buy them.

Chief: You see it your way, while I see it my way.

Ronald: I suppose so, but I'd hate to think I am disappointing people. Hey, Chief?

Chief: Yes?

Ronald: You mentioned your independence when I asked about your flag.

Chief: Yes, independent from New Zealand nearly 30 years. We are own nation now.

Ronald: Haven't you experienced capitalist growth since then? How has it been for you? Surely my restaurant is not the greatest of your concerns.

Chief: For many years, Samoa has seen capitalist outsiders like you. The wars and foreign militaries brought much money and growth.¹³ But not all was good. Some of *aiga* lived well, others did not. We saw places be built and things happen, but outsiders did not worry about our sufferings from their action. *Aiga* is concerned you will do the same. You push my people

⁹ Smith, A.D. 1983. *Theories of Nationalism*. Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc. New York.

¹⁰ Bishop, J.D. 2000. *Ethics and Capitalism: A Guide to the Issues*. In: Bishop, J.D. (Ed.) *Ethics and Capitalism*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto.

¹¹ Smart, B. 1999. *Resisting McDonaldisation: Theory, Process, and Critique*. In: Smart, B. (Ed.) *Resisting McDonaldisation*. SAGE Publications Ltd. London.

¹² Groarke, L. 2000. *Can Capitalism Save Itself? Some Ruminations on the Fate of Capitalism*. In: Bishop, J.D. (Ed.) *Ethics and Capitalism*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto.

¹³ Howard, M.C. and Durutalo, S. 1987. *The Political Economy of the South Pacific to 1945*. James Cook University. Queensland.

out of business.¹⁴ You create class system, make lots money, employ few, and have no concern for those in *aiga* that suffer.¹⁵

Ronald: Whoa, chief, not sure where that comes from! I am a clown with compassion. My company employs local people, uses local suppliers, and can even customise the menu to suit your people. We call it a 'multi-local' approach.¹⁶ **[Ronald looks out the car window at a passing hillside]** For example, look at that land over there toward the hills. I see a few trees, small gardens, a few animals, and many labourers working the land. Within the first few months of opening the restaurant, with a bit of land clearing and work, those labourers could be making money from cattle whose beef would be used in the Happy Meals they bought! How great would that be to make profitable money off the land, just by having cattle?

Chief: There is other value to that land. Money is good, but not everything. Unlike you, I see land with cultural, ecological, and ethical value.¹⁷ That land is part of my childhood, my nation's childhood, it is my nation's homeland.¹⁸ Even your friends agree that a tree may be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in value if left to grow.¹⁹

Ronald: My friends said that?!?! I hardly suspect Hamburgler or Grimace of saying that, but maybe Birdie knows something I don't. How is a tree that is not cut worth so much?

Chief: No, no. You see, your scientist friends in the U.S. have put a dollar value on other functions of an uncut tree...such as oxygen to breathe, shelter for animals, and other such things.

Ronald: Ha, ha! I knew none of *my* friends would have said that. A scientist maybe, but not my friends...did I tell you about my friend Grimace? He's not so smart. Oh nope, sorry, that was the airplane pilot I was talking to! Anyway, one time he really wanted the last box of biscuits and he told me he was willing to pay \$10 for a box of biscuits! Can you believe it? \$10! They usually sell for only \$2!

Chief: What if those biscuits were a tree, a stream, or an animal? Perhaps you are willing to pay extra for that limited resource. Perhaps the willingness to pay is closer to the true value than the price you know of.²⁰

Ronald: Okay, chief, you got a little philosophical on me there. Not sure I follow you, but lets move on...what else is on your mind, chief?

Chief: Many of my people have seen your home. They say they have seen your 'golden arches' everywhere²¹—rubbish on the street. You *will* be responsible for any rubbish from your

¹⁴ Korten, D.C. 2001. *When Corporations Rule the World, Second Edition*. Kumarian Press, Ltd. and Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

¹⁵ Bishop, J.D. 2000. *Ethics and Capitalism: A Guide to the Issues*. In: Bishop, J.D. (Ed.) *Ethics and Capitalism*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto. AND Hunt, E.K. 2003. *Property and Prophets: The Evolution of Economic Institutions and Ideologies*. M.E. Sharpe. New York.

¹⁶ 'Multi-local' is term used by McDonald's, as presented in: Watson, J.L. 1997. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.

¹⁷ Palmer, R. and J. Skea. 1998. *Valuing the Environment*. ESRC Global Environmental Change Programme, Report of a Seminar Held at Curch House West Minster.

¹⁸ Guibernau, M. 1996. *Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the 20th Century*. Polity Press. Cambridge.

¹⁹ Beder, S. 1996. *The Nature of Sustainable Development*. Scribe Publications. Newham.

²⁰ Spash, C. 1997. Ethics and Environmental Attitudes With Implications for Economic Valuation. *Journal of Environmental Management*. Volume 50: 403-416.

restaurant and won't litter. We are a nation of pride, and will not tolerate outsiders disposing rubbish on our homeland.²²

Ronald: You don't mean *I am* responsible for what people do with their rubbish? The Germans made this same accusation a few years ago! They wanted to charge a tax on all packaging that was not refundable.²³ What an unfair tax that was! They have no idea how impossible this request was.

Chief: Not so unfair or impossible if you are the one creating the rubbish.

Ronald: Those unfair environmental taxes and policies can make big businesses like mine collapse.²⁴ Then people become unemployed...and at what cost? I want to make people happy, and I want people employed.

Chief: How else you make sure our streets stay free of your rubbish?

Ronald: Well, if littering is the problem, then fine the person that litters! That's how the polluter-pays-principle works.²⁵ If I pollute that small stream over there, then well, you can tax me for it...and I accept that. But, you cannot tax me for their littering! Wow, chief, it sounds to me like you are playing a real game of hardball here.

Chief: I do not understand.

Ronald: You don't understand hardball? How about baseball?

Chief: Oh yes! Baseball! I enjoy the baseball!

Ronald: What do you say we put aside the business stuff for a while? Lets talk baseball! What's your favourite team? Oh, I just love the Yankees.....

Epilogue: The events written here may not accurately represent the true happenings when McDonald's negotiated constructing a new restaurant in Western Samoa. But it can be assured that at least a few of these issues were considered in the minds of some of the stakeholders...most likely baseball. However, in 1996, McDonald's opened their first restaurant in Western Samoa.²⁶

²¹ The 'golden arches' are a trademark of McDonald's.

²² Kedourie. E. argues that nationalism can leave individuals unwilling to compromise fundamental principles, as discussed in Smith, A.D. 1983. *Theories of Nationalism*. Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc. New York.

²³ Packaging World Magazine. 1995. Disposables Blitzed: Germany Now Targets Fast Food Ware. Available at: www.packworld.com/articles/Departments/135.html

²⁴ While this is a common belief, the following US EPA report investigated and concluded otherwise: Arnold, F.S., A.S. Forrest, and S.R. Dujack. 1999. *Environmental Protection is it bad for the Economy: A non-technical Summary of the Literature*. US Environmental Protection Agency. Washington, D.C.

²⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 1989. *Economic Instruments for Environmental Protection*. Paris.

²⁶ McDonalds. 2004b. *MacPack: The Answers to all your Questions About McDonald's*. Available at: www.mcdonalds.com.au