UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Incorporating the Archipelago:
The Imposition and Acculturation of the Solomon Islands State

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in

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by

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The Dissertation of Alexis Elizabeth Tucker Sade is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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DEDICATION

For my children and my mother

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Shaped by the intertwining effects of foreign imposition and local acculturation, the transformation of the southwestern Pacific archipelago into the Solomon Islands state is an entangled and on-going narrative of incorporation. Beginning in the colonial imagination, the territorial consolidation of the islands through imperial cartography, imprinted the archipelago on European maps paving the way for the triad of colonization, missionization, and modernization. Contraposed against diverse indigenous cultures, the imposition of European socio-political and

religious ideologies reframed local customs as deficient, initiating what has been an enduring process of reforming the people to fit the global imagination of the West. Inculcating a discourse of dysfunction, this self-disparaging characterization shapes local perception of the Solomon Islands encountered in even the most mundane aspects of everyday life including discussions about potholes. Regularly reaffirmed by anti-corruption initiatives, conservation efforts, government strengthening programs, and contemporary failed state discourse, the incorporation has imposed a quasi-benevolent project of reformation, turning the archipelago into a problem in constant need of solving. While the oppressive forces of imposition have been substantial, the people of the islands have played their own role in the formation of the Solomon Islands state via processes of local sense-making through acculturation. Newfound agency, emerging in some cases from the dissolution of customary socio-religious patterns, has provided local people opportunities to pragmatically incorporate aspects of imposed systems enabling engagement on culturally relevant terms. From reconfiguring political participation to reappropriating negative stereotypes, indigenous people have begun to transform the Solomon Islands state to reflect their contemporary Pacific Island realities. Moving beyond the label ‘failed state’, my project has aimed to understand how the state is variably and diversely manifested through multifaceted processes of incorporation, where political relations and negotiations embodied in politicians and revealed through everyday lived experiences transform the archipelago into the Solomon Islands.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"You will find this difficult, very hard to believe", my distinguished informant told me, "but after the former Prime Minister passed away, when I became a high-ranking politician and was fulfilling the office as he had taught me, something unbelievable happened". My informant described arriving at the National Parliament building, a beautiful, monolithic structure sitting high on a ridge overlooking Honiara and Iron Bottom Sound. Like every morning, members of the Royal Solomon Islands police force were there, conducting a security sweep, going room to room ensuring it was safe for the arriving Parliamentarians to commence the day's business. Down in town, a historic national event was taking place just off Point Cruz which meant that the legislative offices where emptier than usual as officials were taking part in the occasion. After conversing with his subordinate, on hand as a proxy at the event in town, my informant set about with the work he had to accomplish. "So there I was in the office, that Monday in the morning, 8 o'clock," he said, "I sat down and started to work and then there was a knock at the door [makes quiet knocking sounds] and again, knocking quietly". He described standing up, walking around his desk to the door and opening it. "It was quiet in the offices and so I wasn't expecting anyone," he explained. "I knew it was not my secretarial staff because they come in and out as they please." Opening the door, he expressed feeling shocked and overwhelmed to see the Prime Minister, the recently deceased founding father, standing before him. "What!"

he exclaimed, “I stood up, took his hands, and the former leader said ‘come, sit down’ in a soft voice and sat me down. Another four hours.”

The time span mattered; he was referencing another time he and the former leader had spoken for four hours – a meeting that would shape him into the national politician he would become. “When I crossed over, he held a session with me, four hours, locked door.” Promising to educate him in the art of politics, cultivating a spirit of nationalism, my informant remembered the leader saying to him, “I must convert you, so by the end of today you must be a convert”. At that time, the politician was a first-term Member of Parliament, having just switched to the opposition after a disagreement over what he considered to be questionable purchase orders on the government side. Having just “walked right over” to the side of the former leader, he described the ways in which his perspective changed. “I was the IMF-boy [laughing], I was Australia’s-boy, I was their boy,” he said citing a close relationship with internationals. His private conversation with the former Prime Minister changed all that. “He turned that around overnight,” the politician explained, “because he was nationalist person”. He went on to explain how the former Prime Minister “was opposed to the IMF economic agendas, very critical of how aid money is used in the country”. “He taught me about what was really going on” he recalled, “I didn’t ask those questions, it’s your money your aid, spend it how you want, that was how I thought”. He went on, “But the former leader changed that, he said ‘no, this is our country’ ‘if aid donors what to spend their money here, they spend it where we want it, to drive our development agendas not theirs’”.

“The former Prime Minister saw a lot of promise in me, even when I was not on his side he saw something in me, he saw potential,” my informant said, explaining their long-standing connection. “It must have been something special” he went on, recounting another supernatural incident just before the leader’s death. “He was very sick, maybe on his deathbed. He was at the National Referral Hospital and he was gravely ill. He told his associates that he wanted to see me. However, at that time I had a lot going on, many troubles, you know, and I was drinking heavily. I went and parked by the side of the road and slept. I was far away, way up the road to the east of town and no one knew where I was. The former leader really wanted to see me. He did something, and no one knows how, but he knew where I was. “He sent his subordinate to find me” he said, describing his whereabouts and the disbelief in the subordinate’s mind as he set out to find my informant that day. “He was surprised to see my car there and woke me up to go and see the boss.” He traced their intertwining paths over the years until that moment when he switched sides, from government to opposition, and was taken under the wing of the leader. “He was like a father to me, I was like his son and he taught me many things,” my distinguished informant said, “he converted me overnight”.

In that transformative meeting, where my informant was introduced to, as he describes, “what was really going on” in terms of the World Bank, IMF, ADB, and community donors and “what they were doing to the country,” the former Prime Minister turned back to their history. “He started,” the politician recollected, “with

Britain". Narrating what the former leader had told him, my informant began, "Do you see where they left us? Let's thank them for protecting us to become British Solomon Islands Protectorate, from our origins where we were killing ourselves, hunting each other's heads, so let's give them applause for helping us protecting us against ourselves. But they should have done more. Look at Fiji, they were prepared at independence. We did not fight for independence, like some claim, we were on the decolonization agenda of Britain before we knew anything about their plans. We were a burden to their budget, we were with African countries. Removed from their directory. They gave us away. We came into independence with only timber and coconut. The Chinese controlled commerce and the logging was controlled by Asians. Coconuts were controlled by foreign planters since long before. So what did they do? They left us, with a big independence handshake."

The politician openly acknowledged the problematic behavior of the former leader, saying he only espoused the "good qualities" of the founding father leaving another well-known politician to adopt his more "corrupt" tendencies. "But," he stressed, the leader had a "love for the country," calling him "a nationalist". That sense of nationalism was instilled in my distinguished informant, who, because of that meeting, "converted to the former leader's philosophy" adopting an "aggressive nationalist agenda". "That was the philosophy the former leader drove into me" he said, citing that the Australia officials were baffled. "They said 'he changed overnight, he suddenly changed' but I explained I am not anti-anything, but now I have adopted a serious nationalist agenda." He went on to explain how international cooperation is

necessary for security because "all our interests are more important, but they do not see it that way." The politician explained how at the beginning of the civil crisis Australia did not appear willing to come to the aid of the Solomon Islands because it did not serve their interests. "They did not see helping us as in line with their interests" he explained, "not until the Twin Towers did it dawn on them that they must attend to the crisis. We heard through the grapevine here that George Bush called Howard and said he would go in here if Howard did not. This was because Australia is protecting everyone's interest in the region – you know your American interests," he said. Acknowledging their assistance, my informant explained, "They brokered the agreement, but only where their interest was affected and that is the weakness. They are driven by national interests."

Describing what he believed prompted Australia's seemingly newfound interest in assisting the country overcome the civil conflict, my informant explained, "There was this theory, you know, after the Twin Towers, there was this theory that Solomon Islands could be used as a springboard for terrorism to Australia, it was a failed state here they say and terrorist activities could springboard to Australia, that was the theory, this converted them to intervene in the Solomon Islands." Believing Australia was acting out of self-interest, he said, "The danger with this policy, following only one's strategic interests, is that they will go as far as achieving their strategic interests but they will go no more. You see the underlying causes of the crisis are far, far deeper. If they were really interested they would help us, but not one thing

that caused the crisis was touched by aid. It remains[1]. It was left for us to address with meager resources to address." He explained that what the country really desires is "some respect". He said, "We know that they have helped us, but it has only been for their own interests, not ours. We want them to respect us and address the underlying issues for our long-term survival as a country. They are not; right now their actions are their own interest, the economic, commercial, strategic interests – they are all their own."

"I think he came to me because he was worried about the country," my informant explained, accounting for why the former leader had come back after his death to speak once again with the now distinguished politician. He said that if the former Prime Minister had been alive for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars he would have had a lot to comment on. Remembering past conversations, the politicians recounted the former leader saying, "These people are prepared to fight wars for democracy, why won't they fight the Chinese to free Taiwan. It is a democratic country. And they talk so much about this in New York. And the human rights violations by Chinese. But it is less recognized". The former leader, then Prime Minister, standing at the United Nations podium after Independence, did share his thoughts according to my informant. He said, the "PM told the developed world, 'you want to talk so much about democracy, then live up to your conscience. Stand up for

[1] The argument has been echoed by many researchers, politicians, and activists familiar with the Solomon Islands. Most recently, Page (2017) wrote in the *Diplomat* that, "even now, the causes of the Solomon Islands' conflict — uneven access to services, economic opportunities, and development spending — remain unaddressed". http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/no-development-without-peace-the-solomon-islands-example/

some principles'". "He would have loved to participate in these discussions" the politician said, citing the current international issues in the Middle East and beyond. Thinking back to the meeting, where the deceased former Prime Minister appeared to him in the flesh, my distinguished informant described how the founding father provided guidance and "a series of instructions" for the country. At that, after four hours with no interruption, the leader got up to leave, telling his protégé, "thank you, I am going back now, going to the village" and he quietly walked out of the office, closing the door behind him.

The Solomon Islands State

Part of the power inherent in the deployment of 'the state' is the ability to conceal the histories, ideologies, and domination which have shaped and inform the political relations behind it within the powerfully universalizing, "a-historical mask of legitimating illusion" (Abrams 2006: 123; Bourdieu 1994). From an archaeological perspective, 'the state', Gledhill (1988: 4) explains, "is posited as a universal, whose definition, whilst abstract and generalizing in appearance, often rests on an occidental vision of governmental power applied to a territorial political unit". Gledhill (ibid: 1) problematizes the assumption that there exists some "universal phenomenon" referred to as the state which, while existing in variable forms including those myriad political organizations referred to as early states, underpins all variations across space and time. The category of ancient states and modern states seemingly places the Western state at the pinnacle of political organization, intentionally evolutionist or not, with all other

forms striving, but failing to reach such heights. The state, then, can be viewed as the dual project of hegemonically ordering the world on the one hand through the promotion of a particular type of underlying political organization and on the other through the Eurocentric conceptualization of the world through a particular point of view presented as "rational", "technical" or "scientific". The state is a conceptualization of the political forms arising in Europe through complex historical trajectories and then applied to other formations to provide a sense of directional evolution or at least the point of "modernity".

The 'modern state' is the project of transforming the world into the system envisioned by European architects which fits the both the concrete needs, like resources and labor, of Western world, but also the moral philosophical view of sociocultural organization. The modern state is not a single, territorially bounded political organization in isolation, but rather a system of states made to conform to the Western social, political, and economic ideological framework. It arose historically as the ordering of a set of political entities transitioning from the "parcellized sovereignty of feudalism" to the concentrated empires and provinces that would form the foundation of the national states of Europe (Gill 2003: 97). This system of organization not only transformed Western countries, but as a result of the colonial and economic expansion of imperial Europe, reshaped the global socio-political order. Even with the apparent decline of Western imperialism in the mid-twentieth century, the hegemonic project of the modern state continued to encourage conformity in independence. As Hindness (2005: 245) puts it, "to be an independent state is not to be

subject to the rule of another state, but it is, nevertheless, subject to the regulatory regimes that operate within the system of states". And because the modern state is based on Western cultural norms, shaping the diverse peoples of the world into citizens of states, it has the power to homogenize populations to fit Eurocentric notions of personhood (ibid) or to create the Other which nonetheless brings all people into the fold (Said 1978).

The historical project of the modern state began in 1648 as the Treaties of Westphalia were signed, signaling the end of the Thirty Years War and, as a consequence, the emergence and formal recognition of the system of European national states modeled after the United Provinces (Arrighi and Silver 1999; Nelson 2006). The Treaties "rendered the medieval church and empire essentially irrelevant in real political terms" (Nelson 2006: 60) with territorial sovereignty being officially recognized and the nation-state becoming "the basic units of politics in the European-centered world system" (Arrighi and Silver 1999: 37). This world system, however, would not reach fruition until the end of the French Revolution and the defeat of Napoleon which secured British dominance in Europe. The expansion of the English commercial and colonial empire alongside the Peace of Vienna orchestrated by the British in 1815, which established the European balance of power through an interstate system becoming an "instrument of informal British rule", all cemented England's position as the new hegemonic power in the nineteenth century (ibid: 59). The territorial domains and networks of power which defined the imperial organization of Britain would expand the European-centered world system, established by the Dutch

in the 17th century, into a system of British global hegemony in the 19th century (ibid).

As the competition for economic dominance in Europe drove imperial powers outwardly, seeking resources and influence across the globe, their encounters with other populations, regardless of actual colonization, shaped the world to European standards. While places like much of Africa, the Pacific, India, and South East Asia were directly colonized or brought under European governance, other political entities like China, Thailand, and the Ottoman Empire, although "not subjected to direct imperial rule" were nonetheless impacted by European imperialism (Hindness 2005: 246). This imperialism defined the states in the world in terms of their own "standard of civilization" (Gong 1984) and divided the world into "distinct kinds of populations: the citizen populations of Western states; noncitizen populations governed by these states; and populations of states that were neither subject to direct rule nor recognized as full members of the states' system" (Hindness 2005: 246). The economic dominance of European powers in combination with their ubiquity on the world stage defined the rules of interaction, which meant to be a contender was to play on the field controlled by Western institutions and ideology including the standards of civilization which shaped even non-colonial realities (Donnelly 1998). For those formally incorporated within the imperial states, the waves of independence brought with it a new form of incorporation within the system of states. This subjected the newly independent countries to the regulatory dominance of the international community

receiving what Hardt and Negri (2000: 135 cited in Hindness 2005: 247) call "the poisoned gift of national liberation".

Problematizing self-determination, the liberation of colonial entities was more a process of institutional transfer and socioeconomic incorporation than meaningful leeway in developing a system of governance[2]. A country could determine their own path so long as it fit with the "standards of civilization" and the economic and political guidelines promoted by Western powers as the measures of legitimacy ensuring the recognition of state sovereignty. The British, wishing to free themselves from the costly colonial holdings post-WWII, sought to make functioning states by imposing the structures of governance from the West across the decolonizing world. "Presented as a technological universal of government" (Bayart 1989: 33) the Western liberal democratic state became the ideal model; this can be demonstrated by the statement by High Commissioner Sir David Trench (1961: 1 cited in Moore 2010: 6) at the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly to discuss Solomon Islands independence - "democratic political systems all vary slightly in their superficial forms, but not in their essentials: which have been tried over many centuries and proved to be in the best long term interests of the people who live under them". Feigning the presentation of independence, but acting as if "having no alternative and little imagination," (Bennett 2002: 7) the British administration imposed the Westminster system on the Solomon Islands. It did so as if it were a technical apparatus capable of "infinite variation," as opposed to being a cultural system developed in a very different

[2] See Dinnen (2007; 2008); Larmour (2005) for Solomon Islands specific arguments about institutional transfer as opposed to meaningful, culture-specific accommodation.

environment over hundreds of years (Macdonald 1982: 220 cited in Moore 2010: 7; Bennett 2002).

As the result of Western political and economic dominance first through colonization and then through modernization, contemporary hegemonic political legitimacy has come to be defined through "the Western imagination of the state" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001a: 10). This has fueled the global desire for achieving statehood with the number of states increasing dramatically as former colonies and colonial territories achieved independence (Aretxaga 2003; Lindstrom and White 1997). Merely being a 'state' has provided tangible benefits, for example, as Aretxaga (2003: 394) explained, "real capital" circulates "through the elusive body of the state in the form of international aid, development projects, and capitalist ventures of various kinds" (see also Arrighi and Silver 1999; Gupta and Sharma 2006; Mitchell 1999; Steinmetz 1999). This is not only a process of transforming global politics, but, as part of a larger project intertwined with neoliberal economics and Christian missionization, a transformation of the people incorporated within the system of states. It transformed indigenous cultural categories into "primitive" and indigenous people first into "subjects" and then, when deemed capable, into "citizens" (Hindness 2005; Hansen and Stepputat 2005).

In the Solomon Islands, the process and effect of becoming a state – starting in Mendana's time and continuing today – has transformed the way in which the diverse people of the archipelago not only view the world, but view themselves in the world.

During the pre-independence planning meetings when the idea of incorporating traditional political forms within the new government was proposed, one of the first indigenous leaders of the Solomon Islands remarked:

> "If we adopt these proposals... we will be turning the clock backwards. Our cultures, traditions and customs are primitive. The village discussions were held in the open and topics discussed were not topics involving this fast-moving world. These kinds of customary meetings took time and the participants were not in a hurry. They sit, chat, chew betelnut and passed the time as much they can. Their world was the slow everyday life—a big contrast to ours of this 20th century. If we adopt a constitution based on these lines, I fear we are going backwards instead of forwards" (Mamaloni 1969: 43 cited in Moore 2010: 12).

Like many other colonized regions of the world, however, the transformation of the people and cultures that make up the Solomon Islands was not wholesale. In many ways, because of fears of malaria and indigenous hostility, combined with more investment in other islands like Fiji, the British colonial incorporation of the Solomon Islands, while clearly determined (Bennett 2002), was nonetheless a more half-hearted affair. Not only were the number of officials limited, but their ability to enforce laws without indigenous retaliation was equally challenging (see Akin 1999a; Bennett 2002). British Protectorate officials always answered contestations with more force (Akin 1999a; Keesing 1992; Keesing and Corris 1980), but were not able to fully control the dispersed populations across hundreds of often densely forested islands. The islanders were no doubt attracted to the material goods provided by the merchant trade and the sense of liberation from customary taboos made possible by religious conversion, but the limited infrastructural development of the islands meant that

access was still more limited than elsewhere in the Pacific that had less challenging geography and more colonial interest. While missionary activities filled in many of the gaps, assisting the colonizers to "civilize" the people through communal living, 'brotherly love'[3], and education, there remained measurable opportunity for local practices to remain salient[4] and for localization of introduced customs. As Gledhill (1988: 4) notes about the proliferation of the state system through European colonization and subsequent modernization efforts, "even the most potent power infrastructure thus far encountered in human history has failed to reshape the world according to its own will and image."

In researching the interactions and expectations between local landowners, extractive industry interest groups, and international eco-tourists in the Solomon Islands, Hviding (2003: 543) made the point that "globalisation need not imply a process of homogenization". He demonstrates how in the postcolonial milieu mutual uncertainties lead to diverse outcomes wherein locals are not simply the "victims of one-sided pressures from global political economy" (ibid). Opportunities for pragmatic acculturation, innovation, and transformation are created as novel ways of being in the world are impressed upon local places. That, of course, is the nice way to talk about what also have been the enormously oppressive forces of Westernization

[3] Informants often referred to the arrival of Christians as the time when brotherly love took over from headhunting and warring clans.

[4] This is also truer in some places than others. For example, Akin (1999a) explains that the Kwaio people were often ignored by the colonial government because of their hostility which also meant that they did not receive services like medical facilities and schools. As well, because many of the missionaries themselves were converted Solomon Islanders, the potential for local reformulation was greater, again leaving room for traditional practices to remain

through colonization, missionization, and contemporary modernization and development efforts. While the temptation might be to view small, remote places far from the cosmopolitan global hubs as mere casualties of international forces, this necessarily excludes the possibility of seeing how the people in these places have adapted to political, economic, and social transformations. Some of this adaption has been assimilation, where the expectations, ideas, and values of Western society have become the norm, but rarely have these adoptions been wholesale, without some measure of local flavoring. Extending that to a political framework, it seems that while the globalization of hegemonic political discourse has resulted in a homogenization of the language of politics, the localization and, what Michelutti (2007: 639) calls, "vernacularization" of these ideas within diverse cultural and historical contexts problematizes the assumption in popular discourse of conceptual uniformity (see Dinnen 2008; Morton 2005; Paley 2002; Spencer 1997). Gledhill (ibid: 2) argues, in fact, that "a uniform notion of the 'modern' state may be unhelpful either for understanding current transformations of human realities or for clarifying the distinctiveness of past historical experiences at the social and cultural levels".

At the same time, to pretend as if the state was somehow the imagined political machinery of development discourse flexibly adopted in diverse cultural environments would be to deny the historical and contemporary ideological and structural domination embedded within the forms and functions of the state. The history of becoming a state is a history of incorporation, which for places like the Solomon Islands started with early imperialist explorers accompanied by the onslaught of

capitalism in the form of merchant ships, large-scale plantations, and blackbirding (Bennett 1987). Followed by colonists and missionaries acting on behalf of their own interests as much as they believed they were behaving justly and benevolently, the paternalism of 'civilization' was nonetheless oppressive depriving societies of their long-held traditions. As these societies, many of which were artificially constructed as territories fitting the desires and negotiations of imperial powers, were freed from colonial domination, they were readily shackled to the political economic world order through modernization schemes. These development agendas indebted countries from the outset, creating economic expectations which far out-reached real potential, blending neoliberalism with aid reliance in ways that enabled inequality and arguably corruption to prosper. Promoting economic liberalization as a pathway to democratization, tying fledgling countries to global markets with minimal safety nets while insisting upon government systems that were familiar rather than locally grounded, was a recipe for instability.

As is well known by now, maybe the most publicized circumstances save World War II, the Solomon Islands was not immune from the complex catastrophes that have been meted out across the globe resulting from historical Western domination and contemporary global political economic incorporation . Since civil conflict precipitated by a web of social, economic, and political factors erupted in 1998, the country has been continuously ranked as one of the most failed states in Oceania on the Fund for Peace Failed State Index. The Index outlines specific 'pathological' markers which define a 'failed state' – for example, the criminalization

or delegitimization of the state, a government which has lost control of the territory or the legitimate use of force, and an inability to interact as a full member of the international community. While the Index discusses specific, matter-of-fact issues plaguing the development of the institutional capacity and popular purchase of the state, which also have been mirrored in recent literature[5] on the Solomon Islands including the civil conflicts, secession attempts and territorial instability, political instability, and the problems of nationhood, it remains unclear what is the nature of the on-the-ground complex called 'the state'. In particular, the question remains in what ways does this nature, specifically in terms of governance and political legitimacy, relate to the label 'failed state', global hegemonic political ideology, historical experiences, acculturation and reconfiguration, and local "discourse of state deficit" (Aretxaga 2003: 396)?

A significant amount of recent work on the Solomon Islands has focused on the causes of the 1998-2003 civil conflict and disintegration of 'the state' and the effects of the Australian-led intervention known as the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Analyses of the conflict have implicated a convoluted interplay of tensions stemming from land tenure disputes, socioeconomic decline, charges of government corruption, and popular disenchantment with the political system (e.g. Allen 2013; Bennett 2002; Dinnen 2002; Fraenkel 2004; Kabutaulaka 2001; Moore 2004). Scholarship on the RAMSI intervention has shown that while the

[5] Civil conflicts see e.g. Allen 2012, Bennett 2002, Connell 2006, Fraenkel 2004, Moore 2004; secession attempts and territorial instability and politics see e.g. Dinnen and Firth 2008, Dureau 1998, Kabutaulaka 2002, 2004, Wainright 2003; the problems of nationhood see e.g. Feinberg 1990, Jourdan 1995, Scales 2005.

immediate intervention was successful in ending the violence, the subsequent state-building efforts have been less effective in creating a long-term solution because they have not addressed the root causes of the conflict (Aqorau 2008; Connell 2006; Dinnen 2008; McDougall 2004; see also Ottaway 2002). As Kabutaulaka (2004) states, the intervention in the Solomon Islands was precipitated by post-9/11 fears of transnational terrorist organizations taking root in the 'failed' states comprising the 'arc of instability' (May 2003) surrounding Australia (see also Allen and Dinnen 2010). Dinnen (2008: 8) found that the urgent focus on stemming threats of international terrorism redirects "attention away from the need for a sound analytical understanding of the processes involved and the particular ways in which local and global forces have shaped the capabilities of individual states". While policy discourse on international state-building has tended to approach 'failed' postcolonial states as aberrations from the 'ideal modern state' (Allen and Dinnen 2010; Hansen and Stepputat 2001a; Milliken and Krause 2002), Morton (2005: 377) has argued, rather than pathologizing these states, analyses should focus on the "failed universalization of the imported state".

To interrogate the label 'failed state' requires the understanding that the state means the historically specific, though universalized, 'ideal' Western state, which defines the current global field of political legitimacy. And yet, while this gives the concept its powerful, hallowed form, because 'the state', introduced in the Solomon Islands through decolonization, "rests on its own social foundations" (Bayart 1991: 53), the cultural content which constitutes the state form is "not epiphenomenal" to its

situated realization (Gupta and Sharma 2006: 279; Steinmetz 1999). Although the political and governmental institutions were in essence imposed through decolonization and 'development' confining, in part, the available "political opportunity structures" (Hay et al. 2006: 11), 'the state' as it exists in the Solomon Islands was not simply created *ex nihilo*. In other words, it was embedded within a cultural and historical context and, therefore, has been subject to nonuniform processes of both assimilation and acculturation. According to Hay et al. (2006:14), to study the state entails an examination of "the processes through which the state is conceived of on the one hand and the relationship between such conceptions and the institutions, processes and practices of the state on the other". Mirroring this approach, anthropological research on the state has aimed to challenge the assumption that the state is an ahistorical, "distinct, fixed, and unitary entity" (Sharma and Gupta 2006a: 8) illustrating how it has developed as a global pattern through European dominance as well as *in situ* lived reality. In particular, recent studies[6] have focused on situated experiences and manifestations of the state illuminated through everyday practices, bureaucracy, development projects, violence, NGOs, colonization, and creations of symbols and subjects.

My research aimed to get a sense of the state as the intertwining effects and processes of the incorporation of the archipelago within the state-system and the incorporation of ideological and institutional models of governance within the diverse cultural complex of the Solomon Islands. To talk about the archipelago as the state of

[6] (e.g. Aretxaga 2003; Coronil 1997; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Fuller and Benei 2000; Harvey 2005; Scott 1998; Shore 2005; Taussig 1997; Thomas 1990).

the Solomon Islands is to tell the story of colonization, missionization, and modernization – the triad that has dominated the recent histories in much of the world, commonly referred to as the Third World. The processes and effects of the triad, often resulting in widespread volatility, have transformed diverse cultural places, not as was expected by globalization-minded development imaginings, into a homogenous political economic world order, but rather into a range of new forms. This range is diverse and, while in some cases these mimic the structures and ideologies imposed upon them, assuming one-to-one comparison often leads to the ethnocentric evaluations that do little to represent reality or to improve conditions. Ethnocentrism is also the issue with calling these locales 'hybrids' not because they don't exhibit forms of intracultural mixing, blending ideologies and institutions to fit contemporary realities, but because the term most often implies that these systems lack coherence or reason that one might find in 'purely' traditional or Western systems. It subconsciously equates non-Western with 'untouched' or 'primitive' or 'pristine' and Western with 'modern' or 'advanced'. Hybrids become this 'not quite right one way or another' polity which again does little to explore the diverse lived realities both in terms of assimilation and acculturation on the ground.

In trying to understand what the complex existence labeled a 'failed state' was, my research approached the state from multiple and yet not exclusive points of view exploring how politics is an on-going process of negotiation and sense making. Building upon the wealth of research done on the political, economic, and social situations in the Solomon Islands, I aimed to approach the state as it manifests in and

is manifested by everyday practices. My approach has relied on both historical grounding and ethnographic experience to provide a more nuanced perspective on the Solomon Islands. As well, while I focus on everyday experiences I wanted to include actors in positions where the multilayered reality constituting the state is most readily experienced – within the formal political sphere. In an attempt to understand the relationship between governance practices and ideas of political legitimacy, I focused on a variety of state officials situated within the formal government institutions among hegemonic political discourse, the remnants of colonization, and diverse local forms of leadership and social organization. According to Gupta (1995: 388), the manner in which officials "negotiate the tensions inherent in their location in their daily practices both helps to create certain representations of the state and powerfully shape assessments of it, thereby affecting its legitimacy". In this vein, then, it is important to understand the architecture of the project called 'the state' through the objective and subjective practices of governance, the "ideology of state officials and the cultural discourse in which they participate" (Steinmetz 1999: 24; see also Wittersheim 1998).

The state is a process and effect far beyond the realm of formal governance structures, the political being constituted, as Spencer explains (1997: 9), "from mass rallies to village arguments, in some cases into the houses and families and through the particularity of everyday practice". In order to understand how the processes of incorporation and state-making have shaped the experiences of ordinary Solomon Islanders, my research extended beyond the administration. This was important not only to grasp everyday experience, but also to see the Solomon Islands itself as a

whole project of state-making. While the idea of a national state is how states in general are popularly conceived, in countries which originated in their current configuration through imperial cartography the process is reversed with peoplehood being created from state-making (or not). This has had myriad effects on the people of the Solomon Islands precipitating both positive and negative outcomes, part of which is a discourse of dysfunction which plagues much of the post-colonial developing world. The narrative doesn't end there though as the processes and effects constituting the state result from on-going negotiations. While the global has been imposed upon the people of the Solomon Islands, inculcating cultural frameworks and sociopolitical ideologies, the acculturation of the global within local Pacific Island realities has meant mutual transformation. My research aimed to explore some of the ways in which the state is lived in the contemporary Solomon Islands.

The state is a somewhat difficult focus of study given the range of associated issues including the fact that merely by studying it one is continuing the discursive practice in which it is realized and empowered. Anthropologists have approached the study of the state – much in the way we approach any topic in our field – by seeing how it is experienced and enacted in everyday life. Anthropological approaches have also promoted the view of the state as a culturally grounded, historical project which, in the same vein, has not been without appropriation. Rather than a technical universal of governance which, like a machine, must function in a particular way, the state is a model of political organization which has been assimilated within a tremendous diversity of sociocultural circumstances. The state, as a global phenomenon in much

of the developing world, is hard to divorce from associated systems of governance belonging to Western traditions. This is because the project of decolonization and development beginning after World War II focused on not only the subsumption of a broad range of communities within the state system, but also the adoption of the types of governance deemed legitimate to enact the state. Thus, while there has been an apparent homogenization (democratization) of political systems across the globe through the Euro-American projects in the mid-twentieth century onward, the assimilation of these orders within diverse sociocultural contexts meant the similarities are, quite often, in name and form rather than logic and function.

When studying the state, rather than presupposing how things should work (i.e. the idealize Western models), which for many non-Western countries invariably results in the assessment of deficit, a more functional approach to understanding politics would be one that, as Abeles (1997: 321) explains, "takes into consideration the exercise of power and its roots in a complex soil in which society and culture are inextricably bound." This calls for ethnographic studies of the ways in which states are realized within particular contexts, but also necessarily includes the consideration of the ways in which states are constituted externally (as a global system of states) in broader fields of power relations. To approach the study of a state in a particular context, we can think of the state as a set of relations in an on-going process of negotiating the organization of society and producing effects as a result. The negotiation of the state is both a contemporary and historical affair, with Western, global, and local influences at play. Moving beyond the label 'failed state', my project

aimed to understand sections of this complex interplay not with the intention of dismissing the serious challenges but rather to think about how states are enacted and experienced on the ground.

Methods

This dissertation is based on ethnographic research conducted in the Solomon Islands for a period of two years from 2011 – 2013 and a short return session during the summer of 2015, in total spanning 26-months. The majority of my research took place in Honiara, the capital town, located on the island of Guadalcanal. The project also included short-term village research in rural Guadalcanal, Malaita, Isabel, Savo, and Nggela. Participants in the project include a socioeconomic cross-section of urban and rural residents (indigenous Solomon Islanders and other non-indigenous people who consider themselves Solomon Islanders), international volunteers and consultants, government officials including public servants, political advisors and associates, traditional leaders (big men, chiefs, elders) and community leaders (community chiefs, neighborhood representatives), religious leadership, and politicians (national, provincial, local, and town council). Data was gathered from interviews including in-depth 'life history' interviews with current and former national and provincial politicians. Along with interviews, the project included hours of observations at National Parliament as well as participation in various government activities organized through ministries. I also attended a number of politically-themed conferences and government-related/sponsored social gatherings. To understand the lived experiences

of Solomon Islands politicians, however, much of my research was conducted outside the formal government settings. In some cases this was in a politician's home, in others it was at a local restaurant, bar, or sporting event. Understanding the relationship between their lives inside and outside their formal positions helped to shed light on the negotiations they face as they navigate the socio-political sphere in the Solomon Islands.

CHAPTER TWO

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF THE STATE

An outreach worker for a foreign non-governmental organization operating in the Solomon Islands was giving a presentation in a rural community far from the capital Honiara. The topic was about small-scale development opportunities available to villagers. This situation followed the typical pattern wherein fresh-faced recent graduates would travel to far off places in exotic environments seeking to make a difference, some in their own lives, but most in the lives of those deemed 'less-fortunate others'. The change in circumstance would be achieved by preaching the gospel of Western socioeconomics for the common man, the new capitalist evangelism. Instead of promoting some spiritual denomination, these development workers save souls in the name of everything from sanitation to microfinance. The newly converted dutifully falling in line like tiny cogs in the global capitalist machine, or that was the plan anyway. This young man introduced the project-of-the-moment being pushed by the NGO he worked for by sharing a parable he thought the small coastal villagers could relate to – about fishing. "Give a man a fish", he concluded, "and he will eat for a day, but teach a man to fish and he will eat for life". At that he smiled hopefully at the crowd concluding his sage remarks. The villagers who had gathered to hear him speak about the project sat quietly, contemplating the details of what the outreach worker had said. This continued until a middle-aged man slowly

stood up and said, “thank you for your story,” he paused and then continued, “but we already know how to fish, what we really need is an outboard motor.”

INTRODUCTION: Everyday Life in the Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands is the second largest independent country within Melanesia, made up of nine hundred twenty-two islands, sixty of which are inhabited. The islands are separated into provinces which are further divided into tribal-dialect regions—for example, Malaita is split into more than ten distinct groups including the Kwara’ae and the Kwaio. Within each of these regions exist smaller village groups usually based on kinship relations or religious affiliations. The current population of over half a million people is constituted of roughly eighty different ethno-linguistic groups with a macroethnic composition of over ninety-percent Melanesian and a small proportion of Polynesians indigenous to Tikopia, Temotu, and Rennell and Bellona. The most populous province is Malaita with over one hundred thousand inhabitants, while the smallest province is Rennell and Bellona with just over three thousand inhabitants. The capital city Honiara is located on Guadalcanal and has a population of over sixty thousand people making it the largest city and, in fact, the only truly urban area in the Solomon Islands. The majority of the population lives in rural areas continuing to practice subsistence farming, fishing, and relying on small, often quite distant, regional centers[1] for connection to larger economic opportunities.

[1] For example Auki on Malaita or Gizo in the Western Province

According to the United Nations Human Development Report (2015) which measures factors associated with economic, social, and political well-being, the Solomon Islands ranks 156th out of 188 countries profiled. The gross national income is just over $1500 per year although that number does not accurately reflect the typical annual income given the pronounced disparity between the wealthy and the poor. This disparity is caused by limited access to stable employment opportunities with only around a quarter[2] of the population above the age of fifteen participating in the formal workforce (Asian Development Bank 2016). Formal sector employment is dominated by agricultural and service positions with the main exports being timber, palm products, copra, cocoa, and fish. There are also mining projects however opportunities for employment have been limited by significant mismanagement by foreign company owners and local land disputes. Many people do find work outside the formal sector by providing services like house cleaning or construction, by producing and selling goods like betel nut, market items, arts and crafts, and customary valuables, or by working for others who have secured paid employment like bus conductors or government contracts. In rural areas, where around 80% of the population resides, people still rely heavily on subsistence farming, but are also able to find paid work albeit less frequently than urban and peri-urban dwellers.

Human development indicators like health, education, birth rates and life expectancy vary in the Solomon Islands but remain within the norms for the Asia Pacific region. UNICEF (2013) reports that the current life expectancy is just over 65

[2] 2009; likely has improved somewhat since then given the overall improvement of the economy in recent years

years with the birth rate remaining relatively high at an average of four children per woman. Over three-quarters of the population has access to improved drinking water sources, however, in rural areas improved sanitation facilities remain in short supply with only about 15% of the rural populace having access. Around 85% of the land in the Solomon Islands is still customarily tenured providing space for the subsistence gardening which makes up a large proportion of daily caloric intake. As the population has increased, mounting pressure has been placed on the people to produce enough food for both personal consumption and market crop. As well, given the increased reliance on rice as a dietary staple in both rural and urban areas in combination with the challenges of earning the money to purchase it have led to higher incidence of undernourishment. According to the Asian Development Bank (2016) between 2014 and 2016 around 11% of the population did not have a sufficient level of dietary energy consumption.

While Solomon Islanders, unlike many Pacific island residents, have greater access to a variety of locally-grown foods, the increasing preference for processed food products known for low nutrient, high fat, salt, and sugar content follows the regional trend. Favorites include tinned meat, white bread and rice, and snack crisps in place of more customary reef fish, root vegetables, and the many varieties of leafy greens introduced from Asia. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2010), the abandonment of traditional dietary practices has had a dramatic impact on the health of the Pacific region. The change in diet has not only led to nutrient deficiencies like iodine and vitamin A, but has also promoted a sharp increase in the

incidence of obesity and the associated diseases. The WHO (ibid) reports that around 40% of the Pacific region's populace has been diagnosed with noncommunicable disease including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension. Access to medical treatment in the Solomon Islands, especially to the maintenance treatment required to treat diseases like diabetes, remains challenging. While most provinces have medical facilities, these often lack infrastructure, staff, and treatments to adequately care for these conditions. As well, given the educational challenges in the country, patients often struggle to understand and adhere to medicinal and dietary regimes.

Education focused statistics in the Solomon Islands provide a positive, but also potentially misleading view of the reality of education in the country. Most areas have access to formal schooling, especially at the primary level, however attendance and achievement remain problematic. While enrollment at the primary school level tops 80%, actual attendance hovers around 65% and may be lower given the frequent cancellation of classes and absence of faculty. On occasion children will be out of school weeks past the end of school holidays because of infrastructure, faculty, or remuneration challenges. At the secondary level, UNICEF (ibid) reports that attendance drops below 30%. This is likely because of a variety of factors including placement test requirements, limited facilities, and increased school fees. Even if a child attends school, however, the issue of achievement presents another significant problem. According to the Stephen Close (2012) of the World Bank, functional illiteracy rates among those who have completed primary and even secondary

schooling remain high. This further complicates access to more recently introduced forms of human capital for a large section of the population in turn increasing the socioeconomic disparity already present in the country.

As with any other society, the everyday life in the Solomon Islands is more nuanced than can be captured by statistics and development indicators. While the majority of the population in the country remains materially impoverished, strong kinship and wantok relations have resulted in the almost complete absence of homelessness. These strong social relationships are maintained through the kinship system, but also through a wide variety of activities and institutions accessible to most of the population including sports teams, religious groups, art and culture collectives, and communal events like “Solo Icon”, a local talent competition modeled after the similarly-named American television show. These activities promote social cohesion and are present both in rural and urban areas. Young people, encouraged by NGOs, community leaders, or religious organizations, will often form youth groups in their neighborhoods. These youth groups will participate in everything from fundraising to community clean-up. While young people struggle to access solid educational opportunities and gainful employment, they are able to participate meaningfully in society in this way. These activities and institutions also can provide opportunities for experiencing life beyond the Solomon Islands through church-sponsored events or international sporting competitions.

Interest in the world outside of the Solomon Islands is fostered by the ubiquity of socially-connective technology and media. Since the cost of mobile phones and the talk, text, and data credit to make them function has gone down dramatically in recent years, access to this technology has greatly increased. Upwards of 70% of the population has access to mobile phone and internet service including people residing in rural areas where newly-built telecommunication towers have made socially-connective technology a reality. Even though many rural villages lack roads, electricity, and reliable transport, they are able to connect to the capital and beyond through this technology. As well, with the increased availability of laptop computers and cheap DVDs featuring Western and Asian movies and television shows, any village with a generator can now have its own theater. While exposure to foreign cultures, especially through media specifically designed to be appealing, has had an impact on local cultures, technology has also strengthened social ties by making them easier to maintain. There are challenges entailed in being so readily available, in particular for those who are a source of finance, but it appears that many Solomon Islanders are using technology to stay connected within customary networks while at the same time forging new ones.

Developing a sense of community and social cohesion through the maintenance of traditional relationships as well as the establishment of new ties is important in a society as diverse and relatively recently established as the Solomon Islands. While it is not uncommon for people to develop relationships across tribal, ethnic, and linguistic boundaries including intermarriage, there has always been the

potential for tensions especially as mounting socioeconomic stratification appears to advantage some groups more than others. This was the situation, exacerbated by regional economic decline, that precipitated the civil conflict from 1998 – 2003 and the decade-long intervention by the international community. More recently the country has experienced relative stability and the economic situation has begun to improve; however, there remain numerous social, political, and economic challenges. These challenges include operationalizing the system of governance imposed by the former colonial power and reinforced by international state-building activities in a tribal society where neoliberal ideology runs somewhat counter to cultural modes and expectations. This also entails the challenge of working out what it means to be a Solomon Islander in this diverse, colonially and legally-constituted polity. This was especially challenging given that there was no such designation prior to the European appellation and no unified struggle for independence to cement a collective identity or to provide the basis, as it had in the west, for a civil society or public to stand in opposition[3] to the colonial state and shape the independent administration.

In asking questions about what the state is, it is possible to describe the legal constitution establishing the polity and the prescribed structure and function of the institutions, including the governmental regime, which make it up; however, this type of abstract description of the state mostly recreates the idealized definition providing minimal explanation in the way of the lived experience of a population. Examining the

[3] There were a number of movements against the colonial administration including the Maasina and Moro movements, but those were not inclusive enough to incorporate large numbers of Solomon Islanders.

state abstractly becomes even more complicated when the political form itself was not developed within the culture, but rather introduced as part of a larger process of incorporation. The state is not only a local project of organization and control, but also a global process of assimilation into the politico-economic order, a system of states. As the state in the Solomon Islands is enacted, negotiated, and contested, an on-going process of mutual transformation occurs interweaving the multiple facets of the state within the fabric of society while also altering the pattern by virtue of its foreign foundations and continued contestation through incorporation and international interventionist activities. The state, it seems, is best conceptualized as a collection of ideas, functions, and structures which together form only a vaguely legible whole, a field of power relations. When approached as a singularity, the state reveals little about itself other than its own name. This complicates attempts to study the state in practice as a coherent or concrete whole.

Instead, approaching the state as mosaic-like collection provides a framework for seeing the state both as a means of organization and administration and also the lived experience within that system. For example, on the one hand the state can exist by definition of legible borders, but the fluidity of those borders doesn't immediately negate the existence of a state but rather shapes how the state functions in any particular instance to organize (see Das and Poole 2004). In other words, the drawing of the borders on a map is a different experience than enforcing the border on the ground, but both of these fall under the guise of the state. Approaching the state as it is applied variably in the world frees us up from the trap of developing an ideal

definition of the state as, for example, an ahistorical and fixed entity, as well as from exerting that the state itself exists (see e.g. Abrams 1988, Corrigan and Sayer 1985, Mitchell 1999, Sharma and Gupta 2006a, and Trouillot 2001). Seeing the everyday experience of the state through the processes and instantiations wherein it is applied to organize the world gives us a sense of what the state, as that mosaic-like collection, is in a particular place and how it is part of a larger process of cultural sense and meaning making. As well, given that the modern state has a history and cultural baggage, like it or not, attached to it, this approach also enables us to see the effects of the state as a force of transformation both in terms of the application in specific places, but also as a hegemonic world order.

POTHOLES

Introduction

When I began my fieldwork I didn't envision that my research on the state in the Solomon Islands would entail an in-depth foray into the unglamorous, workaday world of potholes. As any ethnographer knows, however, the most revealing aspects of society are not what we might have expected them to be[4]. When one delves a little deeper into the topic of potholes, not only in Solomon Islands, but the world over, it becomes easier to grasp how the inclusivity and mundane salience of practical public infrastructure, in this case damage to it, provides an opportunity to see the lived experience of the state especially from the perspective of everyday people. The way

[4] As Trouillot (2001) says "sociocultural anthropology often arises from the banality of daily life"

people interact with these much-despised features of roads can shed light on everything from how they view their position in relation to the state to ideas about how the state functions and who is at the helm. In England, for example, some Londoners, like the so-called "guerrilla gardener"[5], have not only begun to plant flower mini-scapes in potholes throughout the city, they have also taken to drawing phalluses around long-ignored road damage with the hope that this would encourage city officials to take action[6]. This situation reveals a belief among the people that a state is, in part, an obligation to maintain public infrastructure[7] and individuals can take actions to encourage remediation rather than actually fixing the road themselves. It also demonstrates English ideas about public decency because they chose to draw phalluses, seemingly unrelated to potholes, to prompt action. While not exhaustive, this example illustrates the potential an exploration into the world of potholes has for examining the nature of society, politics, and the conceptualization of the state from an everyday perspective.

Seeking to understand the state from everyday experience has long been the approach employed by anthropologists. We have seen the state, so to speak, from research on everything from local-level development projects, like Gupta's (1995) ethnography on Sripal's kiln, which highlighted the interactions of everyday Indian

[5] see for example Webb 2012 "Guerilla gardener plants beautiful miniature flowerbeds in potholes blighting London's streets" http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2231849/Steve-Wheen-Pothole-gardener-creates-miniature-flowerbeds-potholes-Londons-streets.html

[6] see for example Bartlett 2015 "This man is painting penises on potholes so the council has to take action" https://www.indy100.com/article/this-man-is-painting-penises-on-potholes-so-the-council-has-to-take-action--ekSuZ63mgW

[7] And that a public exists that an individual is both a part of, but also independent from in the sense that they can take actions of their own will on behalf of a public problem.

citizens with local bureaucracy to the moral experience of the state through kinship as in Yang's (2005) study of the Bunun of rural Taiwan who refer to the state as *sasaipuk* meaning caretaker. These provide a view of the state less as a distinct, coherent institution, but rather as a collection of structures, functions, and ideas referred to as the state, made sense in local instantiations. It is negotiated and made sense of through the lived experiences of people as illustrated by Gupta (ibid) in the navigation through the bureaucratic structures populated by a range of personal motivations and interpretations. More directly related to potholes in particular, the state has also been examined from the position of how it is experienced and manifested in everyday life through material infrastructure. The physicality of infrastructure provides a tangible site of experience wherein abstract notions of the state manifest concretely in the material. Harvey (2005), for example, examined the manifestation of the Peruvian state through the different meanings attached to a road connecting Cusco and Ocongate. According to Harvey, this road, which has been seen as modern and liberating, provides a site for the everyday negotiation of power.

Constructed by state conscription of local laborers in the early 20th century, the road elicited both resentment for the lives and labor required for its construction and excitement because it offered new economic opportunities and access to markets, circumventing the landowning elite. The road, Harvey said, "is of the land and wrested from the land…it is a contested space", which may, it seems, be analogous to the Peruvian state itself (ibid: 134). The author describes the state as desirable which, similar to the description of the road, rendered people more legible, more easily

controlled and monitored, but also more connected to external sources of power, recognition, and legitimation - a point Aretxaga (2003) has made about the desirability of the state form the world over. When President Fujimori made an unexpected visit to the town of Ocongate, which while located along the road was not itself an economically important hub, the analogy between the state and the road was more clearly illustrated. Fujimori, the most important representative of the state as the head of the government, was also seen in his visit as dependent on the people, like the road's construction, with his "bigness" in relation to the abstract state challenged by virtue of this intimate interaction (ibid: 136). When viewed in a single frame, the effects or aspects of the state become concrete and tangible, just as the road itself at any one point is a section of hardened earth. Recognizing the road, not just as the ephemeral promises of modernity manifested by the path's extent beyond the horizon, but also as a collection of similarly-looking sections of hardened earth at any single point, brings the abstract into the realm of everyday.

The everyday experience of the state through the fractured reality of modernization, which on the one hand is highly-desirable for the ability to alter destiny while on the other is often no more than a fantasy easily dispossessed by experience, is illustrated in a later article by Harvey (2010) focused on concrete in particular. In this work, the author introduces us to the sleepy town of Nauta located in the Peruvian Amazon 100 kilometers south of Iquitos. Deprived of the chance to become a bustling port town when the fickle giant – the Amazon River – quite suddenly changed course, Nauta has been unrelenting in the quest to establish an

"overtly modern civic space in the jungle" (ibid: 33). Long awaiting an arterial road connecting them to the regional economic hub, Iquitos, the people of Nauta have attempted to accomplish this goal through the generous use of concrete, creating everything from concrete roads and public squares to concrete benches and tree planters. The appearance of stability and strength, however, is often betrayed in this tropical environment as the rapidly appearing cracks and bulges illustrate the concrete's inability to fully tame the encircling forest.

When the road from Iquitos to Nauta was finally completed, over 70 years after its initiation, it connected residents of the small town to the urban core of the region cementing its relationship to the wider community. The concrete road and its long history in Nauta is both an actual experience of government intervention and withdraw and also a metaphor for the state itself in Peru. The local people actively sought this apparently stable connection because of the promise of tourism and economic opportunity, but in the end, the road seemed to take more out than it has brought into Nauta. The professional class, now able to commute with ease, found jobs in Iquitos while the tourists, residents had long-hoped would arrive, never materialized because they were seeking a more "natural" place to experience the "real" Amazon rainforest. Some economic opportunities did come, however they were mostly in the form of extractive industries like logging and mining meaning that even more left. As a metaphor for the state, the concrete was highly sought-after because of its promise of strength, stability, and, in the case of the road, access, but in practice the concrete was a thin shell covering the complex social relations underlying or

incorporated within it. While it did provide relative stability, like the rainforest threatening to break through the concrete at any point, the state manifested as a present, yet potentially unstable power more often fulfilling promises to those at the head than the desires of those at the end.

In the Solomon Islands, like Nauta, the concrete roads represented progress and access, a move toward a different kind of future – one of inclusion in the wider world. While that kind of future has been clearly desirable to most people in the country, it was not necessarily being actively sought in Solomon Islands in the way that it was in Nauta. Analogous to the experience of decolonization where independence was desired and yet not coherently[8] fought for by a majority of Solomon Islanders, the modernization that the roads represent was more of a happening than a goal; another foreign imposition which had its desirable benefits but was also part of the incorporative project of neoliberal decolonization. The presence of effect in the absence of a feeling of agency which, according to my informants, emerged in part as a result of the colonial experience[9] and in part because of incoherence between culture and the introduced systems continues to shape the way Solomon Islanders

[8] This is not to say there were not important movements like the Maasina Rule (see Akin 1999a; Keesing 1982; 1992) which actively counter colonization, but rather that there was not an organized, pan-island effort and many people were hesitant about the ramification of independence (see Dureau 1998; Jourdan 1995)

[9] As two elderly informants living during the colonial period explained to me, they felt as though the British model was to discourage action and innovation among locals preferring instead to encourage obedience through a sort of paternalism. The colonizers would provide for the people as long as they waited quietly with, as one of my informants gestured, their hands together, palms up, raised outwardly waiting to be filled. It was their contention that prior to the colonial period Solomon Islanders were very resourceful and innovative (see Pawley 1982 for a more developed explanation of the precolonial political and social organization).

conceptualize, interact with, and enact the state including themselves as a population, as a body politic.

There are things associated with the introduction of foreign cultural practices – like concreting roads – which are appreciated among the population when present and mourned when lost. These have helped to engender the sense of an impersonal public especially in Honiara because the goods are shared given they lack local origins. At the same time, however, that absence of local foundations can in some ways negate the ability to act leaving the people to feel they have limited control over these goods and, in turn, to deny the existence of personal or specified obligations to fix problems. This is somewhat different in rural areas where the land remains customarily tenured[10] and, thus, the obligation is there just not a consistent structure for delegating the responsibilities. The consequences of the oscillation between roads, customary ownership, obligation, and action can been seen most clearly in peri-urban areas where the land follows a more customary pattern and the roads are concrete providing a space for novel resourcefulness against the more commonly encountered backdrop of inaction. But even this local innovation is subject to the type of critical assessment characteristic of a broader discourse of deficit[11] often applied to the pre- and post-colonial Solomon Islands.

[10] Although this is not meant to imply that this is not without frequent challenges especially in terms of land use.

[11] Aretxaga (2003: 396) explains that the discourse of state deficit arises from an apparently neglectful state which does not take care of its citizens. It carries with it an inherent assumption about how the state ought to function by those producing the discourse. I have extended the discourse to include ideas about cultural deficit (see 22) in explaining state deficit. Both of these external evaluations that have become internal to the Solomon Islands

This discourse stems, in part, from the lacking sense of agency over the function of foreign cultural practices and institutions. These no longer exist in a colonial milieu, but rather survive in the post-independence Solomon Islands where the country is supposed to belong to the people. "The people" being indigenous Solomon Islanders deemed as such at the moment of the enactment of the Constitution. The country, they are told, is now a reflection of themselves rather than of their colonial predecessors. While they continue to lack a strong sense of agency to effect change within constraints of the imposed systems, they are constantly reminded through the failed state discourse that the failures are their own, making any deficiency seem inherently so. Local reconfigurations made to create more culturally coherent and accessible systems are often, in turn, defined by Western minds[12] in terms of corruption furthering the seeming innateness of the flaws.

In Nauta, the flaws in the concrete road created by the rainforest environment are much railed against because they represent exclusion and a kind of savagery. People associated concrete with modernity, access, and connection to the state – something they self-consciously desired and yet struggled to achieve. That discourse about fear of being unmodern was also echoed when the contractor responsible for the last stretch of road into Nauta blamed its rapid deterioration on the local "savages" who did not know how to treat the concrete. So too are the flaws in the Solomon

[12] By this term I am implying both foreigners and also Western-minded, typically elite, locals.

Islands seen as reflective of a savage environment and, by analogy, a savage[13] people. Kabutaulaka (2015) explains how the racist and essentializing Western conception of Melanesians as savages has long plagued the region, even to the point of becoming internalized by indigenous Islanders. While this has had immeasurable detrimental consequences for self-esteem in the Solomon Islands (a function of Western hegemony the colonial world over), this identity has also been embraced both in terms of defining how people collectively see themselves, but also in how the people conceptualize the Solomon Islands state. The roads, therefore, are a site of encounter, where the state manifests in various forms in the lives of everyday people and for that reason can reflect and shape the conceptualization of the state as well as the identity of people themselves.

Potholes in Honiara

If you live in or have ever been to Honiara, you are no doubt well-acquainted with these rugged craters of worn away pavement pock-marking the main drag through town. Potholes dominate Kukum Highway/Mendana Avenue from Henderson in the east to Kakabona in the west causing it to resemble, especially during the rainy season, something closer to a meteor graveyard than a main road. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that there are very few roads, paved or dirt, in the capital and

[13] This is a fairly common characterization of people in Melanesia both in terms of interest by academics and also in popular configurations. An example came to light when the Solomon Islands was hosting the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2012 and a popular Cook Islander cartoonist depicted a Solomon woman becoming angry with some Cook Islanders looking on saying that she was mad because their designer dress was chosen over the Solomon design accidentally - http://www.solomontimes.com/news/cook-islands-paper-print-offensive-cartoon/7276

really only one that can be used to traverse Honiara. During peak hours, morning and evening rush and lunchtime, this relatively small thoroughfare with two lanes heading in each direction becomes jam packed with personal vehicles, local commuter vans and buses, commercial trucks, and the occasional military transport, mining equipment, or agricultural tractors. The traffic jams are, in large part, due to the influx of personal vehicles ordered from Japanese companies by the growing number of expats temporarily residing in the country and by more affluent locals able to purchase from these dealers. The relatively low cost of these vehicles, which would still be considered quite high in the US, in comparison to previous options for obtaining transport has made purchasing a private vehicle more attractive than relying on taxis or local buses as was common for all residents in the past. The significant increase in road traffic has meant that it is not uncommon to be stuck in traffic jams over very short distances lasting close to an hour. Depending on one's destination, in fact, it can often be faster to walk.

The dramatic road damage is both caused by and creates the traffic problem in Honiara generating perfect fodder for newspaper articles and popular discussions. It is a frequent focus of posts on the Forum Solomon Islands Facebook page[14] and is the subject of journalism in the country's newspapers including the prominent Solomon Star. In fact, the many potholes that encumber the main road are a favorite topic of conversation across nearly all demographics. Pothole discourse typically takes the form of one of two strands; either the focus is on the relationship between driving and

[14] Forum Solomon Islands is a public group on Facebook which provides a venue for Solomon Islanders and other invested parties to discuss matters of public concern.

potholes or is related to some aspect of fixing the problem. The former can be exemplified by a popular meme circulating through Facebook accounts across Solomon Islands which depicts an apparently generic road marred by potholes with the text "I am not drunk driving, officer, I am avoiding potholes". Another similarly-themed popular meme, showing two roads and referring to drunk driving was recently reposted on Facebook by a popular young musician. These intentionally humorous images, however, provide a remarkably accurate depiction of what it feels like to drive across town given that the preferred method of pothole avoidance in light traffic is sharp swerving.

Young men in particular enjoy showing off their well-honed driving skills which makes a ride down the main drag feel a bit like a roller coaster ride with hairpin weaves occasionally punctuated by abrupt breaking and slow rolls through unavoidable holes. This creates an interesting situation when one considers the recent adoption of the Breathalyzer test and more stringent enforcement of the laws prohibiting driving while intoxicated by the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force. It would be interesting to see if this trope has an impact on the legitimation of using the Breathalyzer. Future legal ramifications aside[15], what these potholes in part have provided is an opportunity to take the negative condition of the roads, and by extension the discourse of deficit associated with many aspects of the country, as a means for reimagining a positive, shared identity. While young people in the country

[15] This is not to say this is irrelevant; in fact, it would be interesting to research how the police approach this issue given the salience of this pothole discourse in Solomon society. It would be interesting to see if it had an impact on the employment of the Breathalyzer test or if the pothole discourse would actually be used as an excuse.

have little access to stable, efficacious educational or economic opportunities, and young men especially lack the possibility to secure esteem-building employment, these drivers are able to show off their prowess on the damaged roads. The damage to the road, rather than being defined only in terms of existing as a hindrance to success or a failure to function, now becomes an opportunity for pride or a "*Solomon way*" of being.

1. DYSFUNCTION: identifying the people and the state

This way of being shows up in the latter strand of pothole discourse focused on the issues surrounding remediation. This strand tends to be further divided into either conversations about the government or the companies hired to fill the holes. Discussions which focus on the government tend to be more explicitly critical and help to illustrate the state in an anonymous nature as will be shown later, however when the focus is on the companies this discourse appears to take on the character of a kind of folklore. In this case, the narrative itself is acting as a humorous take on what otherwise would be a negative evaluation about local failures to remediate the damage.

When the roads are in need of repair, either because of a severe weather event or just general wear and tear, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development will advertise that it seeks tenders for contracts. Companies will submit bids to the tender

board and a process[16] ensues to select the winning tender(s). Experience demonstrates that these companies do not necessarily need to prove that they can actually competently complete the work or that they are even an established company. Statements by then Honorable Clay Forau Soalaoi of Temotu Vatud during a Public Accounts Committee meeting highlight these issues:

> "This is about the point raised by the Honorable Member for Ngella about tender process. We have had problems in the past with people being awarded tenders and then failed miserably to carry out the work. Basically that was due to some of the people being given the tenders are without machines. They form up a group, bid for the job and after they are given the tender they then give it to somebody who has machines. (2008: 10)"

The work typically gets done, however the quality of the finished product varies greatly. While it may simply be the nature of the roads in this oceanic island environment, the potholes often quickly reappear, sometimes even larger than before they were repaired. Critical explanations for why this happens tend to point toward the unstable quality of the materials used including dirt and stones, the lack of tar or concrete, and the inexperience or intention of the workers completing the job.

These circumstances have promoted the development of a strand of pothole discourse among everyday people about how companies win the contracts for damage remediation and then fulfill the requirements therein. It might be best described as

[16] This is a matter embroiled in allegations of corruption and so I will not explicate further

"how to become a millionaire[17]" narratives because the folkloric commentary typically focuses on opportunism and racketeering. The shared storyline is that one of the best ways to get rich in the Solomon Islands is to win a government contract to fix the potholes. This is likely because there seems to be minimal oversight which means companies are able to do a substandard job making it an almost sure bet that the potholes would quickly reappear after the next rainstorm. This cycle then ensures that the company would have steady income and profitable enterprise for the foreseeable future. Although the premise may be factually sound, in everyday discussion it often takes on the character of a folktale recounting the devious deeds of a well-known and yet anonymous anti-hero protagonist. People know or can easily find out who has won the government contract and yet they will rarely speak about the individuals directly. While these narratives occasionally express genuine anger[18], often this discourse is more darkly humorous tying into that broader thread of self-disparaging discourse prevalent throughout Solomon Islands society.

This self-disparaging discourse which represents the Solomon Islands as dysfunctional can be seen in many aspects of society, including the way people describe driving on the damaged roads detailed above. It is rare to go through a full

[17] This comes from the local phrases like "hem must millionaire nao" (he must be a millionaire) or "supose yu lik becam millionaire" (if you want to become a millionaire)

[18] Among the educated elite this is much more common and they will also speak of specific individuals and/or companies rather than as anonymous actors. In casual environments however nearly everyone I spoke to – from the educated elite to government officials to everyday people – took part in these humorous narratives.

day without hearing at least one comment about "*way blo Solo*[19]" – a self-conscious evaluation referring to something made or done by a Solomon Islander that has been deemed dysfunctional. This discourse is applied to everything from the behavior of individual politicians or the government in general to the betel nut sellers and patrons on the side of the road. When, for example, the Festival of Pacific Arts 2012 was being hosted in the country the discourse of dysfunction was a daily feature in the newspapers and on the street. This will also be applied when Solomon Islanders are comparing themselves to other nationalities, most particularly those seen as white. In one experience, a man I was interviewing saw a foreigner asking their child to do something and when the child acquiesced he humorously reflected on what he deemed to be the difference between Solomon and white children. He said that it was amazing how you could just tell a white child to do something and they would listen, but with "Solomon kids you would tell them a number of times and they would just look at you confused like they don't speak your language". He went on to say this is why physical discipline is, by his calculation, necessary in the country; an example of the internalization[20] of the discourses of cultural deficit and dysfunction that have circulated since colonial times (see Kabutaulaka 2015).

[19] Literally, "the way things are done in Solomon Islands". This is an evaluative exclamation though and is applied when the speaker is assessing a situation or thing as being dysfunctional in some way. You would not hear it used referring positively to something even though it does reflect pride.

[20] By this I do not mean that colonization somehow is the precipitating factor for domestic violence, but rather that the explanation for why it happens was influenced by the colonial experience (i.e. cultural deficit necessitating domination). See Kanuha (2003) for a compelling explanation of the relationship between patriarchy and colonization, both of which have the same underlying domination mentality which justifies actions like violence against women. The author explicates the serious damage of colonization but cautions against idealizing precolonial times, rather calls us to examine the ways in which forms of dominance mirror each other to legitimize violence.

Colonial and missionary discourse have shaped how Solomon Islanders perceived themselves by negatively reframing customary practices and imposing a worldview that equated economic success, industriousness, and utility with morality. An example of the former can be seen in the Solomon Islands Pijin word referring to ancestors and traditional spirits is "*devol*" or in English "devil" or Satan (Burt 1994: 264-265). This transformation of ancestral spirits into devils was the work, according to White (1991), of Christian missionaries who sought conversion through undermining the traditional socio-religious system. This not only incorporated ancestor worship within the Christian religious order, it recast ancestral spirits as forces of evil in opposition to what was good, namely the path of Jesus (Burt 1994; Keesing 1982; White 1991). By not simply discarding traditional systems, but rather enveloping one inside the other, missionaries successfully negated the other as a rational choice. In other words, one's choices were now to be good or be evil. In contemporary Solomon Islands society, the belief in ancestral spirits is widespread however their overt worship is limited. While people continue to recognize the power of these spirits and seek to ward off their effects through various regionally-specific practices, they do so somewhat self-consciously often adding the caveat that they are Christians first and foremost.

The Western Christian socio-religious worldview was promoted not only through churches but also through the colonial educational system which was administered primarily through mission schools. These boarding schools would encourage the few students who could attend to learn basic academic skills like

reading, writing, and arithmetic but would focus significant attention on inculcating Western etiquette and values including "cleanliness and industry" (Boutilier 1978: 159 cited in Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992: 17). A common form of punishment for even the slightest offense in school was, as Sir Peter Kenilorea (2008: 73) detailed in his autobiography, hours of hard labor doing everything from clearing land to, in his case, "the construction of a culvert on the main road to Auki". Sir Peter Kenilorea shared a story wherein he was punished for cutting his fingernails during history class, an action which he believed to be perfectly reasonable given the morning check included fingernail inspection. He said that he remembered that day vividly because he not only learned not to cut his nails in class, but also that "Alvaro de Mendana was the European who 'discovered' the Solomon Islands" (ibid: 75). His punishment was two hours of hard labor in the garden, for committing what did not seem in his mind to be a punishable offense. At the end of this chapter, titled "School Life: Strict Discipline and Authority", Sir Peter Kenilorea reflected that, second only to "receiving Jesus Christ as his personal saviour", leaving the village aboard the MV *Nancy* in 1956 to attend King George VI School "completely changed my view of the world" (ibid: 93).

The idea that Solomon Islanders have a worldview somehow less than or deficient in comparison to a Western mindset persists today. While visiting a rural village I had the opportunity to listen to a presentation by a prominent women's organization in the Solomon Islands. The speaker, a local woman, shared the story of a man making a path. The man, she said, was fast in his clearing of the tangled understory to make way through the bush, but in this effort he had only made the

opening tall enough for him. In this way, while he was able to get through the bush, those who followed would be impeded if they were taller than the man who cleared the path in the first place. The lesson, she explained, was that Solomon Islanders only saw what was right in front of them (she drew an imaginary semicircle in front of herself) and lacked the ability to anticipate or plan for the future. She went on to apply this characterization to everything from monetary savings behavior to educational achievement. The flaw, therefore, was argued to be an innate quality of Solomon Islanders rather than a product of the inherent inequalities in the global capitalist system. This characterization can be combined with the common slang "*Masta Liu*"[21] in Pijin which is used to describe someone, usually a young man, who loiters (Jourdan 1995). Often it will be used as an answer to questions about one's employment (or lack thereof) which blames an individualized predisposition toward laziness rather than the lack of jobs or education in society. Both fit into a caricature of Solomon Islanders as being lazy and incapable or unwilling to change their circumstances, essentially blaming perceived failures on perceived flaws, neither of which were ostensibly[22] based on their own evaluation.

[21] Explanation of the term: *Masta* = an expert, and *Liu* = north Malaitan word meaning to wander around with nothing to do (Jourdan 1995: 220)

[22] I say this because it runs counter to what could just as easily be defined as a positive quality reflective of a worldview that opposes this by-the-clock mentality. Referred to as Island Time, there exists a strong sentiment in the Solomon Islands toward living in the moment and relaxing – not in a "lazy" conceptualization, but more in a "don't get caught up in the hurries of life" way. For example, it was seen as good for people to stop working and go back to the village for long periods of time for health and well-being. Taking care of sick or needy family and friends was also paramount to going to work. Similarly it was considered wrong to hoard away money or goods for yourself rather than sharing them with those in need at the moment. It is not so much that people cannot hold contradictory values, it is more that I could not locate the basis for these negative evaluations of behavior outside of Western origins.

This perception of a problematic present condition brought about by some perceived nature of Solomon Islanders is reflected in the manner in which some people talk about the decades under British imperial control. While it may be the case, as McDougall (2015: 470-471) concludes, that this colonial nostalgia is more about present concerns rather than "a real desire to return to the past" this discourse is nonetheless "palpable". Some informants spoke out-rightly about the colonial period citing the perception that public services functioned better and society was more "organized and well-mannered". Others made more veiled statements when discussing the colonial period in comparison to contemporary Solomon Islands. On a number of occasions, local informants told me some variant of this statement from an elderly man working in a religious institution a long time in Honiara: "Solomon people can't control themselves now". This in many ways echoes the statement cited above about indigenous children and also the comment (abbreviated) made to me by a middle-aged public service worker – "In the past it was better, first we had kastom and people followed because they were afraid. Then the British came and brought Christianity. We stopped killing each other and we went to school. Now people don't listen and follow rules. People spoil each other because they don't have any sense." Another example of this colonial nostalgia can be found in a commentary written by Briton and former Royal Solomon Islands Police Commissioner Frank Short CBE (June 4th, 2013) in the Solomon Times Newspaper:

> "As I write this piece its 60 years to the day of Her Majesty the Queen's accession to the Throne. I recall that on that occasion she wrote to express to all members of the Colonial Service her warm

> appreciation of their ability and devotion to duty in undertaking their manifold and responsible duties. The Colonial Service may have had its critics but I like to think that it was an age of service rather than domination and that many territories, including the then British Solomon Islands Protectorate, benefited from the work of the men and women from Britain and the Solomons who worked to improve the lives of many in the fields of administration and law, medical, nursing and veterinary services, scientific research, education, agriculture, engineering and transport, communications and irrigation. One only needs to read of a typical day on a tour of the outlying islands in the Solomon's Group by an Administrative Cadet to get some idea of a British system of administration and native court justice that has long been forgotten but a system which worked and, had it been retained, could have helped to 'nip problems in the bud' in respect of the events of a decade or so ago[23]."

Short (ibid) goes on to make the point that the colonial administration's work with what he termed "local courts" and "traditional village chiefs and headmen" worked well to solve problems like those confounding the country presently. He argued that more state-led intervention like that of the colonial order would keep "our [the police] eyes and ears on the ground, so to say, and to curtail problems by early effective action." Short served as the Commissioner for two years from 1997 – 1999 during which the civil conflict known as the "Tensions" erupted in Guadalcanal.

Like most other colonized countries, the discourse of deficit[24] or dysfunction did not end with the achievement of independence in the Solomon Islands, but rather

[23] Note that this is an excerpt of his remarks. The full version included a diary entry from a colonial agent.

[24] This is a specific concept (also cultural deficit) regarding perceived causes of limited educational success among socioeconomic disadvantaged and urban youth (see Valencia and Solorzano 1997; Foley 1997). Rather than uncovering the problems with the structure, these models blamed the home life, culture, and environment of the students. C. White (2014: 169) demonstrates how this model was applied to indigenous Fijians throughout the colonial period and beyond to explain educational problems, but even more so to justify "paternalistic reforms" of the culture.

was replaced (or reaffirmed) by the evaluative discourse about state and society failure in the era of modernization. Echoing the colonial rhetoric before, the failed state discourse is taken as matter of fact evaluations about inherent deficiencies of people to incorporate and operate systems of governance and economy. The function of Western hegemony was that these state/regime forms were presented as political universals and applied as "idealized and standardized models" of good governance (Larmour 2005: 1). When problems inevitably arise, the flaw is argued to be with the people, rather than the systems or mutual incoherence given that, according to their main proponents, these structures and functions have been proven not only effective but also moral by virtue of those proponents' own success. Hill (2005) argues that this modern failed state discourse, like the colonial project exoticizing the Orient detailed by Said (1978), is a function of Western hegemony which casts non-EuroAmerican socio-political communities into the position of deviant Other. Rather than viewing political systems as culturally constituted, modernization discourse presents the idealized Western state system as a technical universal of governance, like a machine whose functional success depends on the competence of the operator rather than the design of the technology. Presented in this manner, there are few options for challenging the legitimacy of the conclusion, leaving non-EuroAmerican cultures on the losing side of the dichotomy.

The internalization of racialized discourse associated with colonization and missionization alongside self-condemnation over real or perceived failures of the government, both of which focus blame on inherent qualities of people, are common

throughout the contemporary Solomons. It is so frequently encountered that in only a handful of interviews I conducted during my research does this discourse not appear in one form or another. While this discourse demonstrates the problematic internalization of negative stereotypes propagated by foreign actors[25], this self-disparaging discourse has also been, in some ways positively, reappropriated by the people as a unifying facet of their identity. On the one hand, as Kabutaulaka (2015) describes, Melanesians are appropriating the term "Melanesia", reconfiguring it from the negative connotations to create a positive, empowering identity, while on the other, as I experienced, they are reimagining the discourse of dysfunction as more of a positive way of being rather than as a failure to be something else. The conclusion seemed to be – "well if that is the way the world sees us than that is the way we are."

While this in many ways reinforces the ideological dominance of the West, the disparaging discourse has led to the development of a sense of humor and even pride in the apparent dysfunction. As Galinsky et al. (2003: 228) explains, social creativity, in this case the reappropriation of negative evaluations, "allows group members to improve the consensual value of their group by changing the way in which the group is perceived and judged by the stigmatized in-group or by the culture at large, or both". Social creativity as a coping strategy and/ or means of resistance has been employed by many stigmatized groups. Ybarra-Frausto (1989), for example, describes how the concept *rasquache* which on the one hand refers to a sense of backwardness, laziness, or dysfunction, has been, on the other hand, reappropriated to define a

[25] Which itself deserves its own study, but given the focus of this thesis will not be covered.

Chicano sensibility or way of being. *Rasquachismo*, like "Solo Style", has come to mean the underdog determination and particular aesthetic that is a source of pride and shared identity in the Chicano community as well as a means of resisting the ideological power of the dominant group in society.

In Solomon Islands society where cultural and linguistic differences are often more apparent than similarities[26], this discourse becomes something shared, an aspect of a collective Solomon identity. And in being employed in this way, it has become a basis for socio-political identity – a peoplehood. This makes the apparent dysfunction a matter of identity, in turn, becoming less an evaluation of dysfunction and more a darkly humorous commentary about the way things are (or are not) done. This, of course, does not diminish the devastating underlying sentiments which plague the Solomon Islander psyche, nor does it exclude the existence of real frustration with, for example, potholes the "size of washing tubs" as one informant put it. It does, however, demonstrate the existence of a shared sense of identity, a basis of commonality however small and problematic, for the diverse cultures incorporated through colonization and then modernization within the territorial boundaries of the Solomon Islands. While this is clearly not the most favorable foundation to build a socio-political identity upon, the foreign imposition of the category on the people provided a unique opportunity to see themselves as a body politic – something that even one of the first Prime Ministers of the country, Solomon Mamaloni[27], thought unlikely.

[26] Even though this sense of a divided society can also be yet another overly-simplistic negative evaluation imposed by foreign observers (see e.g. Kabutaulaka 2001).
[27] 1992: 10 cited in Kabutaulaka 2001

A Weapon of Resistance

Like *Rasquachismo*, "Way blo Solo" or "Solo Style" has also become more than a self-disparaging commentary that has helped to establish and define a sense of community; it is, to use Scott's (1985) conceptualization, a weapon of the weak. While it does not materially challenge Western dominance in the immediate, and in some ways may reinforce it[28], this discourse does complicate the ability of the powerful to singularly define and control the field[29] by reappropriating the imposed evaluative categories. Adopting the categories of the oppressor in order to mount opposition is nothing new in the Solomon Islands as evidenced, for example, by the Maasina Movement. Keesing (1997: 254; 1969; 1978; 1992) details how this pan-Malaita movement incorporated the role of paramount chief and adopted the administrative system of the colonial government establishing a "political counterorganization". This movement organized people, collected taxes, and formalized *kastom* placing itself in a position to negotiate with the British colonial administration demanding legitimacy and recognition. In the case of the discourse of dysfunction, it appears to be employed, even if un-self-consciously, as a means of resistance both in terms of reappropriating and, thus, revaluing the stigmatized

[28] By still relying on the categories developed in the West, thus legitimizing them and even more so by acknowledging negative evaluations as matters of fact

[29] Although, again, the powerful have created the field so even reconfiguring the available material is still relying on the definitions provided by the powerful. The powerful are in control by creating an environment where actors act, even if it is to dispute the claims of the powerful.

categories into a positive identity and also through justifying various degrees of inaction or excusing behaviors deemed problematic by foreign actors.

Since the early 2000s the Solomon Islands has been the site of international intervention and directed development which has limited or at least challenged the sovereignty and agency of the government. Political, governmental, and judicial officials were often persuaded to work closely with advisors and consultants whose task it was to strengthen the imposed functions and structures of Western governance; for better or worse depending on your perspective, this collaboration meant that politics could not so easily go on as a locally-determined endeavor. Since the assistance from Australia in particular was both financially lucrative and also based on a hierarchical social relationship, Solomon Islander counterparts did not feel that they could protest outright in many cases. Alternatively, the self-disparaging discourse worked as a means for covertly countering or reconfiguring the requests and actions of foreign and Western-minded local officials[30]. If, for example, it is continuously said that politicians in the country are corrupt then you are also making the space for the actions to happen or to be excused as inevitable. Politicians and government officials would frequently use this discourse as an explanation for why they continued to partake in practices their Western consultants advised against.

[30] I cannot include more specific examples out of concern for informants.

A Barrier to Directed Change

As illustrated through somewhat lighthearted discussions about potholes, inwardly-focused discourse of deficit and dysfunction enjoys measurable social salience and traction in the contemporary Solomon Islands. The self-disparaging discourse, which developed as colonization and missionization negatively recast customary practices in order to win socio-religious converts and was then cultivated post-independence through failed state theses, has seemingly been more of a barrier than a cause to change. This may be, on the one hand, because critical evaluations can promote inaction based on a sense of inevitability or fatalism or, on the other, distaste for change given that the critical evaluations arise from the subjective perspective of the original evaluator. These types of response have been used as a means of countering the actions colonial and neocolonial agents of directed change as seen in the Maasina Movement or covert politics in the current system. On the other hand, self-disparaging discourse may act as a barrier to directed change because it has engendered social creativity.

Solomon Islanders, intentionally or not, have long employed socially creative techniques in attempt to reduce the psychosocial detriment caused by this type of evaluative discourse. As evidenced above, the reappropriation of the stigmatizing labels has enabled contemporary Solomon Islanders to not only, at least in part, overcome them, but also to develop a collective identity. The social salience of this sense of commonality, fostered by both its darkly humorous tone and its rarity in this

diverse cultural environment, makes it hard to dispense with. Another socially creative technique resisting the ability of the dominant to completely define the field was described in White (1991: 109-110) wherein an indigenous priest baptized and then symbolically reburied ancestors thereby bringing them into the realm of Christian personhood. This was quite different than the approach employed by the expatriate priest who sought to alienate ancestral spirits as demons thereby evincing separation. While the assimilation of ancestral spirits demonstrates the inculcation of a Christian worldview, the refusal to deny their inclusion[31] from this new socio-religious order was, however small, an act of resistance (see also Keesing 1982).

A similar sort of resistant reframing can be seen in the post-independence Solomon Islands with the increasing salience of the "one man, one vote" principle from Western democracy. The slogan was taken to support the idea that everyone of legal age can vote once for whoever they chose without interference. Solomon Islanders will occasionally use this principle somewhat creatively to cast their vote in whichever constituency the candidate most likely to provide them with direct reciprocal gain is contesting. As I will argue later, this type of creativity demonstrates, on the one hand, subscription to Western democratic principles while, on the other, a form of calculation that challenges characterizations of this behavior as either wanton corruption or simply using preexisting cultural categories to inform voting behavior. Although this example, like all previous ones, entails change influenced by dominant actors, the key point is that in each case there has been at least some resistance to

[31] In the same way that a living person would be included – through baptism and symbolic rebirth

change in explicitly prescribed directions. Agency comes, not from making the imposed systems function nor from wholesale refusal, but from modification. In turn, however, the local reconfigurations (i.e. agentive expressions) are seen as an adulteration of the 'proper' function, whether it is called "corruption" or "hybridization", which then furthers the narrative of dysfunction as an inherent quality of the Solomon Islands.

While on the surface, a discussion about potholes, this discourse of dysfunction in all its iterations sheds light on the state in the Solomon Islands. On the one hand, the state was an act of incorporating diverse people under colonial rule and then defining them as Solomon Islanders through the enactment of the Constitution. The dysfunction, both as an external evaluation and local observation, became the part of the definition of what "Solomon Islands" meant especially given its creation as a country was hinged on imperialist take-over. This labeled the country first as incapable of autonomous governance; as needing to be 'civilized' (Hindness 2005). In the post-colonial era, the discourse identifies the state as existing through its inability to function properly as a system in this space, with even the space itself being contested. In discourse, the Solomon Islands state is the negative condition of administration and incorporation as opposed to indigenous modes of organization or the state as it is imagined in Western countries. At the same time this binds it to a broader Solomon identity fostered historically through missionization and colonization making it difficult, although not necessarily impossible, to transform the state by

external forces. The function and structure of the state system as it was intended[32] by its foreign proponents remain in many ways alien to a large portion of the population because of its (often obscured) ideological and cultural foundations. In turn, the culturally-relevant and yet pragmatic manner in which local people do interact with and conceptualize the state has been deemed corrupt or dysfunctional.

The locally-situated structures and functions of the state then take on this identity in a chain-reaction – the people enact, negotiate, and interact with the state in a locally coherent manner which, in turn, is deemed corrupt on the basis of the assumed 'proper' function of the system – making the 'dysfunctional' state the Solomon state. The effect of the state, imposed as if it were a culture-free, ahistorical universal, is to further the identification of the people of the Solomon Islands (or non-Western people more generally) as dysfunctional. The familiarity with this trope in the country helps to perpetuate the identification while also providing an everyday means of interacting with the system in practice. The state that is accessible to the people is, therefore, the state as dysfunctional. Something reflected in the fact that nearly every time I told someone in country I was studying "the state" or "politics" or "government" in the Solomon Islands they responded with a remark about "corruption" or failure. Because politics are necessarily intertwined within culture, to make a political system developed in particular culture function in any other requires either a reconfiguration of the political system (which in this case is deemed corruption) or a change in the receiving culture to more closely resemble the original

[32] or Romanticized

source. The pressure toward cultural transformation[33] or 'whitewashing' has been the colonial and neocolonial project, the subliminal message, the ideological domination attached to 'development' and 'state-building', and 'modernization'[34]. Part of the effect of the imposition of the Western state is the incoherence that arises from the incorporation of highly personalized societies within an administrative structure premised on depersonalization and rationalization.

2. INCOHERENCE: the problem with relations and agency

Talking about potholes is something Solomon Islanders like to do both as a humorous pastime as we have just seen, but also as a serious expression of grievance. Countless times I have traveled down the main road as a passenger in a personal vehicle, taxi, or bus listening to the driver lament the condition of the road and the incompetence of the government to remediate the problem. Unlike the anti-hero narratives about the contracted companies which tend to be darkly funny, these commentaries, focused on the government's role and responsibilities in relation to road maintenance, often take a hostile tone. The following letter from Honiara resident Jonathan Tebabusi Tobire to the editor of the Solomon Star newspaper (2016) illustrates the typical, albeit more stylized, commentary I encountered on the subject:

[33] See, for example, Fukuyama's (2008) article "State Building in the Solomon Islands" where he makes the case for political leaders to acquire more Western education, creating a class of elites that could undermine the wantok system which, by his assessment, was a major source of the country's instability.

[34] See Brigg 2009, Dinnen 2007; Firth and Dinnen 2008, Morgan and McLeod 2006

> **"**Dear Editor – Our situation is more critical than ever as we all face all nods day after day. Turning to the point that promises have been not fulfilled and development is not utilized to target our populace that need such development. Important mainstreams in the Government Ministries that contributed to the health, education and safety of our society has been neglected in such manner we are all affected and bear the consequences daily. Even policies has been drafted but not implemented due to lack of fund claimed by responsible authorities. Our capital Honiara is still striving to cooperative with the growing demand of the public seeing such tasks need to be done faithfully. For instance, our roads are one of the worst roads in the region comparing with our neighbours (Vanuatu, PNG & Fiji). Millions of dollars from tax payers money have been used for such road work but potholes kept surfacing. This is a big slap on our faces as millions of dollars have been wasted away…"

As I stated at the outset, pothole discourse focused on remediation typically follows one of two strands: either a darkly humorous narrative or an expression of grievance directed at the government. The latter strand, focused on government remediation, can be found everywhere roads exist in the Solomon Islands, but the character of these expressions and the agency they engender varies by the space in which they occur. The variation, it seems to me, is on the basis of the type of relationship that exists between the subjects involved including the everyday person, the government, and the land. The imposition of the Western bureaucratic administration first through colonization and then independence, introduced a socio-political environment of depersonalization and rationalization. This ran somewhat counter to the local mode of claiming attachment to a place or person by virtue of a lineage (however flexible) of personal relationships (Bennett 2002; White 2007). It was through existence or establishment of personal relationships and networks that obligation was established between parties as well. Neither of these types of

relationships needed to be stable and were often negotiated and flexible (see Scott 2000; McDougall 2005), but they did however require that the people involved were known to each other at least at some point along the line.

This personalized system remains intact continuing to shape how people interact with and conceptualize the world. This approach is also coexisting alongside and sometimes entangled with the impersonal structural logic of the administrative system creating a level of incoherence that is most visible and disabling in the urban and rural areas, but interestingly empowering in peri-urban locales. In urban and rural areas the connection of people to the land determines their agency to act on its behalf in the triangulated relationship with the infrastructure provided by the government. This is further complicated by another layer of interaction between people and the officials who occupy positions within the government. The personalization of these relationships often means that they do not provide a viable avenue for demanding remediation since potholes are a matter of public rather than private concern. The responsible party is then the government but it is unclear who that is other than the name of a position. The problem is tied to the impersonal government, a position which no specific person occupies in the Solomon Islands socio-political configuration. This then maintains 'the government' defined as an impersonal, rational actor as no different from its colonial predecessor – an anonymous recipient of taxes and provider. While this fits with the ideal bureaucratic Western state, the people in the Solomon Islands struggle to make the system (as imposed) function given that the obligation for individuals to make it work is weakened.

It does moderately function, but the functioning depends on whether or not the people working in the government are motivated to do their jobs because there is limited accountability otherwise. This is not to say that there are not many talented and excellent public servants, just that the "public" that they serve do not have the agency to hold them liable. The politicians who, according to the imposed logic, should hold the government officials accountable have no obligation to do so because their responsibility is one-to-one with their supporters (see Corbett and Wood 2013). The government officials, on the other hand, have no personal relationship to the people they serve because the logic of the system is that they are anonymous. This depersonalization and rationalization which is supposed to support the functioning of the Western bureaucratic system actually limits its accountability in this highly personalized socio-political environment. This is also why these positions are desirable and powerful, there is no one but those within the system to hold you accountable and your actions are anonymous. You can act as if no one knows you; this is the same logic that makes the "how to become a millionaire" narrative anti-hero protagonists possible – people know who they are, but the nature of their position is such that their identity is not a matter of their action in that position, especially when their position entails infrastructure on land that most who occupy are not customarily attached to as is the case in urban areas.

Interestingly, the cultural assumptions about agency and legitimacy in political function promoted by Western ideology, runs in some cases almost directly counter to

what everyday Solomon Islanders expect. The ideology behind the Western bureaucratic system was that an impartial, depersonalized government system would act in a rational manner to provide for the people without favoritism, nepotism, or clientelism. Government employees would operate based on a duty to their position as anonymous cogs in the wheel rather than individual people. They would be accountable to the system and politicians, elected by the people, would shape the direction the system would take based on the will of the people. In Solomon Islands, political organization and leadership, while variable, was based on establishing personal relationships through exchange. While the ritualized exchanges could in many ways be similar to an impartial system, the relationships they established were personal ones wherein reciprocal action would be expected. What held people accountable was this personal relationship between people and acting outside that relationship would surely undermine it. So in the contemporary situation, the Westerners press for a less personalized system arguing that would increase accountability and representation whereas Solomon Islanders are introducing personalization into the imposed system in order to have the same effect.

One effect of this depersonalization, highlighted by the discourse on pothole remediation in Honiara is the increased conceptualization of an impersonal public. Although the people have not yet developed a strong sense of communal agency, the orientation toward a larger community who rely on the road is present. This is a community of strangers united by the utilization of a shared resource rather than personal relationships. The multiple incorporations and alienations that led to the

emergence of the public were effects of statecraft during both colonial and post-independence periods. The evolution of the impersonal public as an interest group could form the basis of a more inclusive civil society where a diversity of people could come together for shared goals. Fostered by NGOs and religious institutions, new interest-based organizations have emerged uniting people, especially in Honiara, from disparate ethnolinguistic and socioeconomic groups. These organizations work to ensure, for example, the well-being of women and children in the country as well as to educate the public on issues surrounding health and social concerns. These help to inform a public opinion on relevant issues and have begun to further develop with the introduction of socially connective technology and platforms like Forum Solomon Islands. Emerging out of the Honiara social landscape, the public opinion will likely reflect the values of the urban elite who are in a position to broadcast their ideology more readily, something already reflected in the Forum discussions. And yet, because this does not necessarily map on to any existing social group, the public provides a platform somewhat divorced from specific identity categories.

Impersonal Relations in Urban Areas

Honiara was established as an urban center through a series of alienations from traditional landowners beginning with the purchase of land by European traders in the late nineteenth century. Early on, most of the land was being used for trade or plantation agriculture, but as a result of the Second World War Honiara became more developed. Initially, the Japanese built wartime infrastructure like the airfield, using

the country as a Pacific base until the Allied forces retook much of the Solomon Islands in 1942. The Americans also built substantial infrastructure to support the Pacific campaign turning Honiara from a colonial backwater to an important center first for war and then for the colonial administration. While the capital of the Protectorate was originally in Tulagi, after the war it was relocated to Honiara taking advantage of the infrastructure and airfield. Located just to the east of Honiara, this airfield would become Henderson International Airport named after a US Marine Corps Major who died dive-bombing a Japanese warship. The developing infrastructure and proximity to the plantations on the Guadalcanal plain made Honiara a draw for many rural island residents seeking waged employment. As more opportunities sprang up, migrants from across the Solomon Islands began not only working, but also settling in and around the urban capital.

The people arriving in Honiara sought accommodation both within the boundaries of the city, but also on the outskirts in areas where land was still under customary land tenure. Within the city limits people would either buy alienated land or occupy state-owned land in a temporary housing area under temporary occupancy licenses (see Foukona 2015). While this system has been undermined by inadequate administration, thousands of people occupy the land within Honiara in settlements although now they tend to be more informally established and unregulated. Unlike customary land tenure which, although not immutable, is based on a lineage of social relationships establishing one's right to use an area, the settlement of Honiara (not

including the peri-urban areas) has been based on a rationalized or legalized[35] approach to the land. When asked, people would say that they bought or occupy the land belonging to the government. When I would follow up by asking how the government acquired the land the respondents rarely knew even though they were aware of the claims by indigenous Guales. This, of course, was very different from rural areas wherein people would know their link to the land they occupied or would direct me to a source, like the chief or "instructed people" (Scott 2000: 58), who was responsible for maintaining that information.

The history of alienation which formed the urban capital means that the majority of residents in Honiara have an impersonal or rationalized relationship to the land which they occupy. This has opened up a space for a new kind of social relationship to form beyond the widely known designations of *tabu*[36], tribe, village, language group, *wantok*, and, in some cases, religious affiliation. The depersonalization of the relationship to the land has meant that majority-migrant population living in Honiara is communalized not by virtue of their relationship to one another (and by extension the land), but rather by their utilization of mutually vested resources like the roads. This forms the basis for the impersonal and yet communal social grouping 'the public'. On a smaller scale, the seeds of this impersonal public may have been planted through religious institutions, as McDougall (2016) has explained, and also plantation migrant worker communities. These organizations can

[35] Customary land tenure practices are also being transformed by this system leading landholders to seek titles of ownership for the land (see Allen 2012). This creates disputes not only over economic resources, but also identities as lineage histories often detail land rights (see e.g. Monson 2015).
[36] Kin relation

also promote a similar kind of impersonal relationship, but instead of a mutual investment in a resource or place, people are tied together by virtue of a shared belief or identity. This, though, creates public arenas more than a public sphere, as Freitag (1990) explains in India, where people can publicly express popularly shared values and ideology. In these cases then one needs to establish the social identity belonging to the shared system to gain entrance as opposed to the impersonal public which incorporates people more broadly by their investment in a shared resource or interest across identities.

This diverse incorporation means that individuals would be a part of the public sphere without necessarily adhering to any particular framework other than mutually vested interest in the polity. This communalization then provides a platform for the development of public opinion fostered by various displays (Freitag 1990). The problem, as was the case in India, is that it is not clear which symbols, practices, and ideology will inform public opinion in a vastly multicultural society (ibid). Often it will take on identity markers favored by the elites, thereby excluding minorities from shaping the values of the public sphere. In the Solomon Islands, this can be seen in the evolution of *kastom* as a shared post- or anti-colonial identity. Keesing (1989; 1993) explains how aspects of cultural practices were favored by elites both as a way to enhance their own legitimacy, but also as a means for discouraging challenges on the basis. *Kastom* would become a political condensation and simplification of the diverse ancestral practices and beliefs that exist in the Solomon Islands. The public ideology, developed in Honiara, reflects this generalized cultural representation

providing a means by which people can unite, but also potentially weakening their connection to the public community by virtue of the limited legitimacy of the shared symbols. Thus, even with the development of a public, the superficiality of connection both to the public ideology and to space in which it developed (Honiara) potentially undermines its expansion. It is seen somewhat in opposition to the rural areas, remaining a foreign entity even as it is practiced within the country. This becomes problematic in terms of agency wherein the right or the liability to act is often based on one's personal ties to a situation. If people do not feel individually connected to the public, the ability to establish a potent will is diminished even if there is mutual investment.

The existence of public goods like practical infrastructure, in this case roads, is based on the investment by the people through their payment of taxes either directly through licensing and registration or indirectly through bus and taxi fares. Although this is a form of exchange which establishes a relationship between the members of the public and the government, the depersonalization of the public is also related to an anonymization of the government and its operators in this instantiation. These relationships, between people and the land and the public and the government, can be problematic in terms of being able to act. In the first case, because everyday people in urban areas are not necessarily tied to the land and infrastructure on it through customary channels, they have limited authority and liability to remedy the problem themselves. Since the exchange providing them the ability to occupy a space or to have roads was with the government it did not create a personal obligatory relationship

since individuals were then ‘the public’ – the community of mutually vested users. And since the relationship was with ‘the government’ rather than a specific government official, it was not clear who to direct complaint toward other than this anonymous provider.

In this society where personal relationships are paramount, the depersonalization and anonymization which come from the incorporation of Western administrative systems have created a measure of incoherence. When people would refer to the government when expressing anger at the condition of the roads, I wondered who or what “the government” was when most people knew their Member of Parliament. At first I assumed that since people not only knew politicians personally but also a number of people occupying non-elected or appointed government posts that the government would have a more intimate connotation. On the contrary, when people would speak of “gavman” or government it was estranged from the known people that enacted it. The government, even after independence, was referred to as something foreign which is likely the result of its colonial foundations (see Akin 1999a).

The government was the British colonial administration which people were required to pay taxes to, but were, for the most part, excluded from higher positions of influence within the organization (see Moore 2010). After independence, while the government became populated by indigenous Solomon Islanders, the system itself remained foreign. This is also why many everyday people report feeling far removed

from the government, viewing it as disempowering and eroding traditional social organization and convoluted with colonial ideology (see Keesing 1994; Wairiu 2005). Therefore, people are paying taxes to the government just as they had during colonial times, and instead of establishing a reciprocal relationship with the people inside the indigenous-led government, it established a relationship with the anonymous organization. This anonymity could function in colonial times[37] as it was the basis of Western bureaucracy and was the expectations of those in charge, but in the Solomon Islands, accountability and obligation are typically supported by a person relationship thereby problematizing depersonalization.

Everyday constituents reported that they could not speak to their MPs about the problem because the relationship they have with their representative is one based on patronage where right to request comes from a vote of support. That vote obligated the representative to their constituents individually rather than to the whole constituency. Without a personal tie to the land, there is no basis for complaint to their Member of Parliament who can advocate on their behalf to the responsible agency. If the MP acted in favor of the whole constituency in neglect of personal requests of individual supporters then he/she would likely not survive the next election cycle (see Wood 2014). However, because the land was not the constituent's either, both the

[37] This is interesting though because it also led the people to interact with the government as they would a person or social grouping of people (like a family or a tribe). For example, when an unfortunate or harmful event was somehow linked to either government activity or individuals within the government people would demand retribution from "the government". Even after independence, the Kwaio, for example, were claiming compensation from the government for a range of problems including those which happened prior to independence making the government after independence the same as the colonial government (see Akin 1999a).

infrastructure and the government were impersonal as was the public who shared the road problematizing locally accessible avenues for action while also confounding people in terms of the cause of inaction. This is because based on cultural logic the failure to adequately remedy the problem seems unreasonable in the case of the urban areas. The system appeared to function during colonial times[38] and since there are no personal relationships at stake in the contemporary urban road, it was unclear what was holding up remediation. This obscurity opens the door for both humor and anger; and since the problem was no one's in particular, the humor and anger were anonymously directed even when the culprits were themselves known. Thus people can laugh about the failures of road work as they do in the case of the "how to become a millionaire" narratives and become genuinely angry with the incompetence of the government to solve the problem without actually referring to anyone. This is also why government officials and politicians will often participate in these conversations without a strong sense of irony.

This situation is somewhat different in rural areas, however, where people have much more personal stake in the roads on the basis of being customarily connected to the land. What is particularly interesting is how the connection to the land shapes people's perception of reasonableness of inaction. While government inaction to commence a project is met with the same frustration since this is typically in terms of funding road projects, it is only the first stumbling block in many when dealing with

[38] This also leads people to speak positively of colonial times when "things worked" and people were "accountable". The rules were "strict" but that kept people "in line". This follows the discourse of deficit or dysfunction described previously.

infrastructure projects. The bigger problems arise when selecting a company to complete the work and negotiating the land encroachment caused by the road construction. In these cases, since the relationships are personal the inaction is justifiable. People have the ability to act because it is their customarily tenured land, but because it is their land the action must meet with their requirements and anything less than that is not acceptable. Until it is acceptable to the parties involved, inaction is a reasonable state of affairs. As well, at the government level even though people have grounds to complain to their representative given that the land is a personal matter, their ability to speak with the MP is on the basis of whether or not they supported him/her. Even more confounding is the problem that even if they did support the MP, he/she is often customarily tied to the land through kinship, unlike Honiara MPs , and thus will be under significant pressure to support the wishes of his closest relatives. Not wanting to offend any of his/her voters means that the MP might steer well clear of these issues leaving little opportunity for everyday rural people to seek a higher resolution.

Responsibility on Rural Roads

While pothole discourse might be most frequently encountered in Honiara, rural areas are not necessarily excluded as those regions with roads often suffer from the same issues of disrepair and neglect characteristic of urban roadways. This provides an opportunity to compare the discussions about roads in urban and rural areas and how this discourse reflected the everyday effects of the state. This includes a

comparison of local expectations for interaction with the systemic expectations built into the system of government. Admittedly, the comparison in this case will be somewhat limited however since my research[39] on this topic was only on roads on one other island. That island was Malaita, where some of the most famously treacherous sections of road in the Solomon Islands can be found. This may be the case simply because it is one of the few islands outside of Guadalcanal that even has roads[40].

These are not the type of road people in the developed world might be more typically familiar with, but rather are rough dirt tracks traversing the island through difficult terrain in some places impassable during high tide or heavy rain. These are often underlain by uneven layers of fossilizing coral which is unforgiving on rubber tires made soft in the tropical heat. At certain times in the year, traveling even a few kilometers can take hours and often requires passengers to help dislodge a stuck vehicle or remove debris from the road. There are large trucks and some buses designated for transporting people and their personal goods and belongings, however many travelers rely on sharing a two-ton truck with a large load of commercial goods – everything from 10lbs bags of rice and boxes of tinned tuna to burlap sacks full of copra harvests and market produce. The trucks are loaded with these goods, often reaching or exceeding the weight limit of the vehicle, requiring passengers to then take positions on top of the load or on the roof of the cab. While ostensibly precarious, and on occasion dangerous as passengers have been seriously injured or killed by falling

[39] I also travelled some roads in and around Gizo in Western Province but I was not able to collect data on this topic at that time.
[40] The roads on Guadalcanal and Malaita account for 90% of all roads in the Solomon Islands .

trees, this mode of transportation is common with even the youngest travelers being highly adept at maintaining their position, while also jumping down to offer a helpful push when needed.

I experienced rural transport firsthand while traveling the North Road which links the regional center Auki with the villages on the northern border of the island. It was the beginning of June holiday and students attending boarding schools around Auki were heading back to their villages for the school break. The influx of passengers around the time of our departure meant that no transport vehicles were available and so we had to rely on the commercial trucks to travel north. Sitting atop two tons of rice with my legs tucked into the spare tire against the rear window of the truck's cab, I traveled northward with a heap of other passengers all of us weary from a long-day's wait in the sun while the truck was being loaded. The majority of riders were students ranging in age from primary school to teenagers. There were a few adult men who rode at the back of the truck with their legs hanging off the bed and, noticeably, no other adult females. The journey did not begin well as within ten minutes of departure a steep hill nearly overwhelmed the engine of the truck forcing us all to jump off mid-hill into the dense brush lining the track to lighten the load. We walked the rest of the way up where the truck, sputtering and spewing dark exhaust, waited to carry us onward.

This was only the beginning of our troubles, however, as over the course of the next twelve hours we would manage to get six flat tires on account of the terrible

condition of the road. The final tire blow-out happened late in the night on a stretch of road out of sight from any village. We had exhausted all spare tires and patching material forcing us to wait for help to arrive in the Malaitan bush in the dark of night. A small, single house nearby took all the girls and very young children in to sleep while the adult men, including the crew of drivers, disappeared into the forest, along with a box of Sol Brew[41] and bag of betelnut. Being left on the truck with a few elementary school-aged boys and my local guide, I became keenly aware of my role as the only adult female when rain forced us under the tarp covering the rice. With the silencing of the truck engine, the nocturnal sounds of the Pacific forest came to life encouraging the imagination to run wild. My guide had long since fallen asleep and as the darkness crept in so did the youngsters, originally having boasted brave faces, they were now huddled around me as if I were their mother. Preferring not to ponder what was or wasn't lurking among the dense, towering trees closing in around our little group I instead turned my mind toward potholes and the discussions I had encountered earlier in the day.

During one of many unscheduled stops along our way, I asked a group of locals, gathered to watch the goings-on[42], about the condition of the road and who was responsible for its maintenance. I had noticed tractors parked at people's houses within small villages here and there along the North Road, but none of which appeared to be actually working. I wondered who owned these vehicles and how they related to the condition of the road. The locals explained that the government, through the Ministry

[41] Local beer
[42] Including when I fell out of the truck trying to get down

of Infrastructure, was liable to organize and fund the road projects, but the arrangements often precipitated disputes as the roads passed through customary land. They explained that if a single company were contracted to fix the roads there was potential for problems. In some cases the problem was, just as with town roads, that the companies hired for the job were not actually capable of doing the work in the first place, but the larger problem seemed to revolve around the perception of fairness. The locals explained that they believed since the road passed through various people's land, there should be opportunities for everyone to benefit not just one single company[43]. This begat another strategy wherein each village wanted to take responsibility for the section of road which passed through their land, however, problems too would ensue. Some villages would not keep up the road in their section spurring other villages to complain and say they did not feel it was fair that they should work on the road when others weren't. Ultimately the problems were similar with town roads, inaction or incompetence; however the everyday sense-making of these two situations differed.

In town, when the roads were not fixed or the remediation was deemed subpar the responsibility fell on an anonymous actor; however, in rural areas the problem with negotiation or the quality of work was typically a personal one. The difference in these cases was the tenure of the land. In rural areas where people were tied to the land through personal relationships, what happened to the land also became a matter of personal concern. The effects of the state both in terms of government decisions and

[43] Companies often corresponded to either single villages or families within an area.

physical infrastructure could only encroach as far as the locals would allow. At issue was the fact that this infrastructure was a matter that went across many relationships leading to a much more convoluted entanglement of personal relationships to sort out. Because these issues stretch across many social groups they are often contentious and tied up in many other layers and histories of concerns (White 2007: 12). This would prove quite frequently to be disabling as in negotiations for action even the government itself was not necessarily exempt as being depersonalized in these instances. The system of state administration "the government" in both rural and urban contexts is alien, but the relationship of the people to the land in rural areas provided agency in the relationship regarding infrastructure. Along with making direct decisions about the land, this also meant that individuals could speak with their MP, if they voted for him/her about their concerns because the issues of the road were personal ones. This, as stated before, can often lead to disagreements over how the representative should solve the problem given he/she may have to mediate among supporters.

The personal nature of the relationships involved in rural roads meant that inaction was not seen as unreasonable as it was in urban areas, but rather was a reasonable situation when working out the social negotiations involved. This did not mean that people did not get frustrated, but that was directed at particular individuals, or interest blocs like clans or villages, based on their role in the inaction. So in the end, the nature of the relationship in rural and urban areas has led to a potentially disabling situation where an individual's actions are limited by the nature of their relationship to

the problem. In urban areas the potholes remain a problem because the people involved do not have a personal tie to the land which disables them from both remedying the problem themselves and also for directing their concerns to an accountable member of the administration. The depersonalization of the relationship between people, land, and government leave no one accountable for inaction. On the other hand, in rural areas the continuation of customary land tenure based on personal relationships means that any infrastructure projects themselves become personalized ventures[44]. And as one informant told me, when personal relationships are involved the best outcome is that no one is offended and has to pay compensation even if this means nothing gets done for a long time. While rural people can directly interact with their representative, because the politician too is intimately involved in the relationships, means that their ability to take action on behalf of their supporter is limited by virtue of being personally tied to other vested parties.

In both cases things do eventually seem to get done, but often after long periods of time, with variable results, or not without a lot of stress. This highlights a mismatch between the local sociopolitical norms and expectations which tend to be personalized versus the imposed system of governance structure which presumes impartiality. The fact that agency and accountability are tied more readily to the

[44] This has also become problematic in light of the state effect regarding conceptualizations of land ownership including the codification of customary land rights in the law. As Hviding (2015) illustrates, the social structures which preserved the land through collective agency also make it possible to undermine these rights as individuals interested in financial gains make agreements with logging companies. The effect of the state in these cases was in fact to protect these logging ventures by claiming no right to intercede. People do argue these cases in court but these arguments are using the state to undermine the customary system to supposedly uphold the customary system. This also problematizes the perception among people that the state is not a foreign entity.

personalized system, especially in the minds of everyday Solomon Islanders, means that imposed structures of the Western bureaucratic system of administration often flounder in this environment. While this depersonalization alongside land alienation has provided the opportunity for the emergent conceptualization of an impersonal public in Honiara, this has yet to prove empowering as the corresponding government actors are also anonymous in this configuration. People see themselves as a body politic using the same resources, but just as had been the case in colonial times, this relationship is one where the government is the anonymous recipient of taxes and provider of goods and services. The government, in fact, in all cases remains a foreign entity, a holdover from colonial times imposed upon the people incorporated within the state (Akin 1999a; Keesing 1982; Wairiu 2003). In rural areas where customary land tenure remains in place, albeit not uncontested, this is less problematic because people maintain a lot of agency, but when infrastructure from the state crosses sociocultural boundaries on the land it can create disabling negotiations. Things become interesting where the urban and the rural transition providing a space for alternative agency and innovation because of the unique circumstances.

Innovation in Peri-Urban Honiara

The area known as Kakabona just west of Honiara beyond the town boundary at White River is made up of a number of villages, including one by the same name. Unlike the incorporated land area of Honiara which has been alienated, although again

not without continued contestation[45], the land beyond the boundary maintained significant customary tenure[46] typically characterizing rural areas. Monson (2015) provides a detailed history of the Kakabona area explaining that it was primarily settled by the people of north-west Guadalcanal, increasing in intensity post-WWII when urban development in Honiara took off. As a local chief explained, the people were in the bush for a long time and then began moving down to the coast claiming the land and developing the hamlet villages found today. Post-WWII settlement of the area was precipitated by rural-urban migrants looking for places to live near the capital and plantations. The development was providing wage labor drawing in workers from across the Solomon Islands. Looking to capitalize on the situation, people claiming to be local landholders sold parcels to settlers, in some cases without proper consultation or permission[47]. The migrants coming to the capital and surrounding areas often intermarried with local Guales creating more complicated social networks that further exacerbated disputes. One of the biggest complaints I encountered with chiefs in the areas along the coast after the town boundary was, in fact, this problem of intercultural marriage. While they expressed caring for their new family members, they said it placed a tremendous amount of strain on the land issues.

[45] See Allen 2012

[46] This is a complicated statement because the system of customary tenure itself is disputed by various interests including the rights and procedures of selling the land (see Monson 2015). Even when some argue that land was rightfully (in both or either the customary and legal sense) sold, others may claim it was not. Because these transactions were on a smaller scale, when the tensions erupted it was easier to force individual families off of disputed land than, for example, the land settled within Honiara which is also contested. In those cases people are claiming payment rather than eviction (see Allen 2012).

[47] As Monson (2015: 442) explains, these transactions moved away from the traditional gift exchanges to commodity exchanges wherein senior individuals would receive cash for land. This increased the number of disputes because people were not aware of the exchange and did not receive a share of the payment.

The tensions around land issues in combination with larger socioeconomic factors precipitated a civil conflict which began with the forced eviction of many of these settlers from the Kakabona area (see Allen 2012; Bennett 2002; Kabutaulaka 2001; Moore 2004). Even though many of these settlers, while being mainly from Malaita, had intermarried with locals, they had to leave as self-proclaimed ethnic militias from further afield in Guadalcanal occupied the area. As a result of the conflict, much of the land occupied by settlers was abandoned by fear or force and then resettled by indigenous Guales. Disputes over land continue, itself an effect of the state, as the identity of the people through lineage and exchange narratives and the economic enticements of the capitalist economy are intertwined. Being in such close proximity to Honiara has brought with it the infrastructural development enjoyed by town residents including asphalted roads. Unlike the packed-dirt-over-fossilized-coral tracks found elsewhere, these roads enable vehicles to travel at relatively high speeds. Like the disputes over the land, the combination of the rural village lifestyle and the urban asphalted roads has created a uniquely challenging situation for local residents.

Driving out of Honiara to the west the transition out of town is marked by local landmarks like White River betelnut market or the raucous nightclub Kovuare – known for staying open until the sun comes up and likely precipitating problems on the road[48]. Concrete cinderblock structures give way to smaller, brightly colored wooden buildings and traditionally-styled leaf houses. Children, piglets, and chickens

[48] After leaving the club, intoxicated people either drive back to town or further west to drink at the beaches

can be seen running freely while women gather around roadside stalls selling plates of root vegetables and meat barbequed over oil drum fires. These businesses are quite lucrative as people traveling out of town to spend the day at the beach or sports tournament will stop for food along the way. While the roads are paved, in some cases even more nicely[49] than within the town boundary, one immediately notices that along with swerving around potholes a new category of road damage is present here, namely speed bump and dips. Unlike in-built speed detracting constructions, these features were not part of the original plan. Local residents, angered and frightened by the dangers posed by the speeding traffic and intoxicated drivers, took matters into their own hands either building earthen mounds or breaking the asphalt to form ragged dips.

In this somewhat uniquely-circumstanced space, on the boundary between the urban capital and the rural hinterlands, the fractured reality of modernization plays out in the drama surrounding the road. In these contestations it is possible to see the everyday experiences of the effects of the state both as a local and global project. The complementary projects of colonization and modernization established Honiara both as an exo-cultural space and as the center of this new culture called Solomon Islands. The urban capital represented the modern world in terms of its capitalist prospects, diverse population, and concrete infrastructure. Through this space more than any other in the archipelago the effects of the state flowed in and out via the political economic structures introduced through imperialism and maintained thereafter by

[49] This is also likely because the AusAid, New Zealand, and the Asian Development Bank funded rural road improvement projects in the area https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/33500/files/donor-report-2011.pdf

indigenous and international actors. As I said before, Honiara has often been perceived by everyday people as a sort of foreign place within their country. Being in close proximity to this space, Kakabona more readily felt the effects of incorporation both within the state as in state-building and within the global politico-economic capitalist systems. The state effects were especially marked in terms of the financial incentives and social transformations. This incorporation prompted the migration first of the indigenous Guales from the bush to the coastal villages and then of the opportunity-seekers from other islands in search of wage labor. The economic migrants altered customary land tenure in Kakabona both in terms of providing opportunities to commoditize the land and through intermarriage.

The coastal areas in and around Honiara had become important sites for both wartime and post-war activities supporting their development and growth. The importance of these hamlets, especially as Honiara became the administrative capital of the British Protectorate and the location of the Western Pacific High Commission after the war, prompted infrastructure projects like roads and schools. For locals in Kakabona their existence is at the margins of the state, where the rural way of life, a reality for over 80% of the population, meets the urban center and its global connections. And it is in this space that much of what was disabling in the rural and urban areas is up for negotiation. The historical experiences of intermarriage, the commoditization of land causing it to change hands and creating disputes over customary ownership brought into question the traditions which had shaped the area in the past. While not completely undermining the system, these situations provided the

opportunity to rethink and reshape customary practices in the contemporary space (McDougall 2016). The conflicts also threw into stark relief the tenuous arrangements enacted through the incorporative efforts in the name of the state and how easily these could be challenged. Small groups of ragtag militants armed with little more than WWII weapons managed to forcefully evict thousands from Guadalcanal settlements effectively sending the country into crisis (Allen 2012).

In the peri-urban environment while the effects of the state had provided modern infrastructure not yet accessible to most rural villagers, the land was still something belonging to the people. The contestations over the land both in selling it and in reclaiming ownership rights encouraged an environment of more individualized initiative where people were used to taking matters into their own hands or watching others do so. In this sense, neither customary practices nor the imposed governmental apparatus reigned supreme, creating an opportunity for local innovation and agency. When speeding vehicles grievously harmed local residents, they took a pragmatic approach reshaping the road to protect lives. It wasn't hybridization, another code term for dysfunction, but rather an innovation in a previously non-existent circumstance. While many refer to these bumps and dips as more evidence of dysfunction, just like the Peruvian engineer on the Nauta project claiming local are savages who don't know how to treat the road, others see it in a different light. Traveling across these intentionally damaged sections of road with a senior level statesman I asked what he thought as the truck shook and rattled over the damage and he replied: "it's a great idea, really solves the problem" and then laughed a hearty

chuckle at what he considered the “cheeky” inventiveness of the peri-urban people of Kakabona, Solomon Islands – not ones to be paved over by modernization or paralyzed by tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

PRAGMATISM AND THE STATE

After a nearly 18 hour ride on the deck of a rusty old cargo ship laying on a stack of corrugated copper roofing under a leaky, low-hanging tarp we arrived at a pristine bay. It had been a relatively uneventful ride, only a bit of rain, and I was pleased to see that four of our five crated piglets survived. We offloaded our cargo onto smaller fiberglass "banana" boats 15 feet below and although a mother cradling her 5 day old newborn made the descent look easy, my narrow miss of an unwelcome swim demonstrated her mastery. I was lucky being on my boat, while most peoples' were overloaded with roofing, rice, barrels of petrol, solar lamps, and so forth, leaving little room to sit, my boat had only two blue plastic barrels and a pig. Not the piglets I had been kindly led to believe would accompany me, but rather an angry overheated 300lb sow whose ties had worn deeply in her legs making them precariously loose and who was foaming at the mouth from dehydration. A few generous splashes of cooling seawater calmed her, but that may have been of little consequences since we were dropping her off for a funeral gift at a village on our way to our destination. At the mourning village we appeared to have exchanged the sow for a sea turtle, which while smaller and gentler, just made for a sad companion across this beautiful Solomon Islands bay.

As we neared land, the melancholy of the journey from the funeral village narrated only by the gurgling hum of a single 40-horse outboard motor was soon interrupted by the joyful exclamations of villagers awaiting our arrival. I had been to many villages in the Solomon Islands, but nothing came close to the reception we received as our fiberglass cadre carrying the spoils of victory approached the shore. A few days earlier I had asked to accompany my informants suspecting it would be worth the long trip after witnessing the excitement erupt among the group following confirmation that they would receive the promised goods and could deliver them back home. While it is common for children to swim out to greet arriving canoes, grown men could be seen hanging on the side of the boats smiling with delight as they guided them ashore. On the beach, women danced and sang songs donning matching red t-shirts they had received during the campaign two years earlier. The boats were unloaded in an orderly manner while the man responsible for making this all happen rested on a hammock quietly smoking a cigarette surrounded by his punch-drunk village-dwelling kin.

The cargo was laid out in piles gleaming in the midday sun awaiting the necessary speeches and ceremony before being meticulously presented to individuals and families based on their contribution to the effort. The whole village turned out for the occasion – even those who would not be allocated any of the cargo – because this was an event which was almost unimaginable. Never before had victory paid off in such a dramatic fashion and the arrival of much coveted copper roofing, solar panels, and a 75-horsepower engine proved the value of their risky strategic efforts. The

victory, as you might have already figured out, wasn't that of the headhunting days of old, but rather that of a national election. And the spoils were the promised goods fulfilling the material desires of those living the life of a rural Pacific Islander. The risk was not in the fact that they had participated in patronage politics or even that they had voted outside their constituency, both of which are common in the Solomon Islands, but rather that they had done so amid sometimes strong resistance from fellow villagers to support a candidate that was neither kin nor *wantok*, someone outside of the typical order of reciprocal social obligation, a businessman.

It is this relatively new, emerging opportunity that I am particularly interested in given that it appears to defy both hegemonic Western ideals and local expectations of socio-political organization. It is a multifaceted effect of the state as an imposition of political norms and procedures within a mismatched social environment which in certain spaces opened up previously non-existent opportunities for political participation, representation, and inclusion. Rather than being an example of "failed" democracy in the developing world, it seems that this dynamic means of ordering people may, in fact, be an example of the nascent emergence of a grassroots form of platform-based politics. A pragmatic order that reflects the influence of democratic ideology of an accountable, representative administration as well as local cultural logics of leadership and obligation and the contemporary socioeconomic realities of life in the island Pacific. Beyond the "not quite legitimate one way or the other"

discourse of hybridization[1] which seems to be the favored characterization of postcolonial political development, this ethnographic example demonstrates how the effect of the state and its structures actually function in place. Rather than relying on an idealized model of the function of the state, no doubt based on the Western liberal democratic ideology, this approach looks at the state as both a means of domination and platform for pragmatic acculturation.

INTRODUCTION: Evolution of Contemporary Politics

In 1960, with independence on the horizon, the British Protectorate administration created a Legislative Council which was made up of headmen, *ples men*[2], and local council leaders for the purpose of examining the plausibility of establishing a Westminster-style parliament in the Solomon Islands. The Council, six of whom were indigenous, determined that a system based on indigenous norms and values would likely be more successful given that, as Kabutaulaka (2008: 99) states, "the conventional Westminster system, with its emphasis on government and opposition, has the potential, in a culturally diverse Solomon Islands, of creating divisions along island, district or linguistic lines" (see also Paia[3] 1975). As well, maintaining a functioning and representative parliamentary system would require

[1] This is not to argue that hybridization itself does not occur, but rather that it is often employed in situations where the argument is more about dysfunction particularly referring to postcolonial localities. For example, the US Constitution is rarely referred to as a hybrid.
[2] Local Solomon Islanders who worked for the colonial administration, but were kept at lower ranks. "The term *ples men* was in reference to the fact that these men enforced the colonial government's laws at the local level, the *ples* (place) (Kabutaulaka 2008)."
[3] Paia (1975: 85-86) provides a counter-argument stating that Melanesian society, with its strongly encoded sense of reciprocity and obligation, was well-suited to adopt a centralized system of governance.

political parties; however, while political groups were being organized even before independence, their purpose and function has remained alien to the majority of the population. Kabutaulaka (2006: 105) explains the parties that have formed "tend to be small, organizationally thin, elite-based, highly personalized, and have few (if any) institutional or ideological links to the electorate". Since the country itself was a weak conglomeration of somewhat reluctant citizens who maintained tribal, regional, and linguistic alliances over a sense of national identity, any divisive threat to that tenuous arrangement had the potential to collapse the country. As Paia (1975: 83) explained, even those attempting to establish parties in the pre-independence era "found that 'primordial loyalties' and cleavages caused by individual interests (or group interests), coupled with élite competition, made the task difficult and painful, and the attempts came to naught".

The council ultimately concluded that adopting the Westminster-style parliamentary democracy from the British would be problematic given the context and instead proposed a committee system deemed more similar to the consensual decision-making style characteristic of Melanesia (Alasia 1997). In Melanesian societies, while there is great cultural diversity within the region problematizing sweeping generalizations, typically people tend to be less hierarchical with more flexible leadership structures than elsewhere in Oceania. According to White (2007: 3-4) "an important feature of most indigenous communities is adherence to egalitarian values that see power dependent on networks of exchange and personal reputation built up over time. This aspect of social organization is associated with consensus-style

decision-making rather than reliance on positions or authority or elite status". Chiefs or big men usually achieve this status through their generosity, community relation skills, and persuasiveness which entails that they are able to listen as much as they are able to lead. Rarely would a decision be made without careful consultation with elders and other prominent/relevant community members. Maintaining social cohesion and avoiding insult are of paramount importance in this socio-political system, even above arriving at a decision or accomplishing the stated end.

Amid all the evidence to the contrary and counter to Council's recommendation, at independence in 1978 the Solomon Islands, like neighboring Papua New Guinea and many other former colonies, adopted the Westminster Parliamentary and provincial system. This occurred even as the federal or committee systems, which would more evenly distribute power and unify the population, garnered more popular support throughout the islands (Alasia 1997; Dureau 1998; Scales 2005). The British Protectorate administration largely ignored requests to decentralize the power and proceeded with the establishment of central authority relying on a "top-down" approach to building the state (Bennett 2002; Wairiu 2003). For this reason, many people within the newly-independent country saw themselves as "the 'receivers' of nationalism rather than the 'builders' of a nation state" (Wairiu 2003: 10). This is what has contributed to the widespread feeling that even with independence and indigenous control, the state administration is something foreign, an ideological and institutional imposition regardless of leadership.

Why did they adopt this system?

The pressure to adopt a Western liberal democratic state modeled after that of the colonial power followed the global trend which defined decolonization and development in the 20th century. This trend began as the end of World War II ushered in an era of US hegemony marked by the dominance of the Western liberal democratic state form and "the twin pillars of U.S. hegemonic appeal to the Third World": decolonization and development (Arrighi and Silver 1999: 209). Not only was the focus on the revitalization and stabilization of Europe through the Marshall Plan, but also on the political and social stabilization and economic integration of the globe. This was, in part, accomplished through the creation of the United Nations which established the state as the legitimate form of political organization. As well, while the UN charter promoted the idea that all people had a right to choose their government and sought the restoration of sovereign rights and self-government to those who had lost them, it is clear from the charter that the model regime was the Western liberal democratic state. Like colonization had done before, the process of decolonization would see the delegitimization of indigenous modes of social and political order. As demonstrated by the ascendance of the modern state from its early European roots to the global political norm in the 20th century, the form of political (as well as social and economic) organization called "the state" became the ideologically-engendered common sense norm – the only legitimate political form. Through decolonization and development, including the creation of the UN, the state thus became not only a Western reality, but also a global one (Hindness 2005).

The success of this form may be the result, as Weber argued (2006: 57), of the "purely technical superiority" of the bureaucratic state over other forms of political and social organization; however, the dominance of the state form and Western liberal democratic regime appear more as a result of hegemonic power of the West. This power structured the possible fields of others' actions by promoting this system as the only really legitimate organizational scheme, thus pathologizing or antiquating other possibilities. The paradigmatic modern state – "a centralized and bureaucratically organized administrative and legal order run by an administrative staff, sovereignty, territoriality, and a monopoly of the legitimate use of force" – are distinctly Western in origin, grounded in the cultures and experiences of Europe (Gill 2003: 6). While it may be the case that the nature of the governmental regime (i.e. liberal democratic, military dictatorship, etc.) is not relevant to labeling a political community a state, leaving the door open for more political diversity, the pressure to adopt a Western-style democracy appears to be relevant for characterizing a state as one that is legitimate, functional, and practices 'good' governance.

The problem in distinguishing 'the state' from the Western liberal democratic state, in fact, lies in the notions of legitimacy and good governance. How does a sovereign state achieve its monopoly over the use of force or coercion? What are the characteristics which make this monopoly 'legitimate'? A major defining feature of the modern state was that the power of the state was not only rational (i.e. not based on personal characteristics, charisma, divine right, or religion which differentiated it from

so-called “traditional” political forms), but that was derived from the will of the people. In other words, legitimate monopolization of the use of force was defined through the consent of a community of citizens recognizing and obeying the authority of the state. According to Held (1989: 102), legitimacy entails that people agree to follow rules and, thus, “a legitimate political order is one that is normatively sanctioned by the population”. As well, given that the UN charter promoted the ideal that people should have the right to choose the form of government they lived under and deserved the right of self-government, political legitimacy appears to be synonymous with liberal democracy. After World War II, there were really only two dominant models for state building, both of which arose from a European model of the state – the Western capitalist state and the Eastern communist state. After the fall of communism and the ideological and economic ascendance of the capitalist West, “the only model still generally seen as viable lies in some variation of the Western state form” (Held 1989: 225).

As a result, not only was the state – a Western development which hinged on culturally specific ideas about legitimacy, liberty, personhood, identity, and citizenship – the political norm, but the Western liberal democratic state system was the hegemonic model. This further defined notions of legitimacy and established the characteristics of ‘good’ governance. This model was introduced to the ‘Third World’ mainly through decolonization wherein the former colonizers would transfer political institutions, like the representative Parliamentary democracy in the Solomon Islands, to their newly-independent colonies. The function of hegemony in this case was that

the state and governmental regimes were presented as universals and applied as "idealized and standardized models" (Larmour 2005: 1; see also White 2007). Because of this, even with the acknowledgement of the importance of including indigenous logics and practices in postcolonial political orders, most countries achieving independence readily or reluctantly adopted the regimes of their former colonizers. This was not only as a result of the realization of the political pressure to conform, but also as a necessity to be incorporated within the new global economic order which emerged post-WWII.

While introducing democratic political systems was an important consideration, the hallmark of the United States development model for the Third World was for these economies to become self-sustaining and integrate into the global market through the attraction of foreign investment capital (Arrighi and Silver 1999). Models of governance that differed from Western ideals – like the committee system proposed in the Solomon Islands – were deemed to be a potential hindrance to the economic liberalization and thus the establishment of Western democratic institutions and procedures became "a condition for support" from the IMF and World Bank (Poluha and Rosendahl 2002: 4). The idea was that if the economies were liberalized and became financially viable, then democracy would be able to thrive in these places just as it apparently had in the West. Political and economic systems that did not conform to these expectations were deemed counter-intuitive to so-called "good governance". According to Macdonald (1996: iii cited in Larmour 2005: 6), the approach of the World Bank and other donor institutions was "ideologically driven

and that standard checklists of good governance characteristics make insufficient allowance for cultural diversity, historical context, local economic circumstances or the dynamics of political process". Likewise, Poluha and Rosendahl (2002: 4) observe that "the Western promotion of democracy has been rather uniform and ethnocentric" valuing apparent institutional homogeneity rather than recognizing the importance of local development and ownership of the structures and processes of politics (see also Dinnen 2008; Hansen and Stepputat 2001a; Larmour 2005; Sharma and Gupta 2006a).

The imposition of Western neoliberal democratic ideology on a global scale has led to confounding situations locally for people having to navigate the spaces between variable and sometimes conflicting guidelines for ethical political action. In Indonesia, for example, Tidey (2016) attends ethnographically to the complexities of competing narratives of ethical behavior amid the changing matrix of governance resulting from extra-national neoliberal incorporation. The definition of "good governance" as promoted by organizations like the World Bank and IMF, rather than providing clarity actually increase the potential for "slippage" in an already "complex entanglement of state and family in Indonesia" (ibid: 673). This is because in Indonesia, family is at the root of both the framework of society and also the state establishing a discourse of duty and reciprocal obligation. The discourse of family at the level of kin relations is also potentially challenging to the Family-state narrative of the nation-state. What the neoliberal ideology interjects into this already complex ethical environment is not necessarily new ideas about goodness, but rather guidelines on what counts as corruption. This creates moral "being-in-the-world" entanglements

for civil servants who by some measures would be considered corrupt and yet "could simultaneously be 'perfect' civil servants, 'loyal' *anak*, or 'ethical' family members" (ibid). Similarly, in the Solomon Islands, the pressures to adopt the system of governance from the colonial power created an environment of ethical confusion promoting opportunistic behavior on the one hand and cynicism on the other.

What have the consequences been?

There were already a number of movements throughout the Solomon Islands challenging the centralized government arrangements prior to independence. These include the Fallowes Movement (1930) which claimed the British administration was ignoring the needs of rural people, the Belamantanga Movement (1948) for a higher standard of living and respect of custom led by Catholic ex-catechist Mateo Belamantanga from Guadalcanal, and the Moro Movement (1957), also on Guadalcanal, which advocated "social, political and economic autonomy, preservation of indigenous culture and the environment" (Wairiu and Tabo 2003: 182). The most famous movement beginning in the pre-independence Solomon Islands was the Maasina Rule (brotherly rule) on Malaita. This movement, led by Chief Aliki Nono'ohimae, began in 1945 in Are'are, Malaita shortly after the end of World War II. Leaders demanded power be devolved from the capital to the village level, recognition and respect for traditional systems, and better services and opportunities provided to rural villages (Keesing 1982; 1992). While the members of Fallowes, Belamantanga, Moro, and Maasina Rule were generally peaceful, the British colonial

administration used the full force of the law to disempower and delegitimize these movements including deporting Rev. Fallowes and imprisoning members of the Maasina Movement (Akin 1999a; Bennett 2002; Joseph and Beu 2008).

At independence, support for the centralized parliamentary government was anemic throughout the country with some regions, especially those which already had anti-colonial movements, even discussing secession. In the Western Province, for example, which is much nearer to Papua New Guinea and typically identifies more closely with Bougainville than the Eastern Solomons, support for the indigenous government was particularly weak (Dureau 1998). The Western Province had earlier tried to secede, but the movement was stopped by instituting the Provincial Government Act in 1981 which ostensibly gave more autonomy to the provinces (Bennett 2002). The provinces, however, were not able to develop their own constitutions and are allocated funds through relatively small grants provided by the provincial ministry of the national government. This "lightweight" system, while distributing some power to the provinces, has essentially maintained effectual power at the national level (Scales 2005: 143). Even with the Provincial Government Act, people feared the parliamentary government would centralize power and resources in the eastern portion of the country – also demonstrating the fragmented identity of the country (Kabutaulaka 2008). At independence, the Kwaio people of Malaita, for example, made minimal distinction between the new national government and the

former colonial administration seeing both as an enemy to Kwaio custom and culture (Akin 1999a[4]; see also Keesing 1982).

While calls for a federal system and the decentralization of power continued into the 1980s[5], leaders in the central government largely ignored these requests in light of the moderate economic prosperity the country was experiencing in the post-independence years (Alasia 1997). The argument for the value of a centralized and representative national government was further strengthened in the late 1980s when a civil war broke out in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. The violent civil conflict was over land tenure, compensation for environmental degradation, and mining revenues from the Bougainville Copper Limited mine in Panguna (May and Spriggs 1990). This civil war in Papua New Guinea demonstrated that even a fairly well-organized government with a relatively strong army and adequate resources could be challenged by a small, local militia (Bennett 2002). Although this apparently weakened the arguments for decentralization, the anti-nationalist ideas carried by residents of Bougainville, as well as, members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) seeking asylum in the Solomon Islands helped to fertilize the seeds of discontent which had long been planted (Bennett 2002; May and Spriggs 1990).

Widespread distrust of the government has been a hallmark of the Solomon Islands since before independence with officials being widely-believed to be

[4] Although, as Akin explains, the reasoning behind their initiation of compensation claims against the government in the 1980s after years of silence following the Bell Massacre may have been that some viewed this as an opportunity to "reformulate relations with the government" (ibid 43).
[5] And continue today as the draft of the Federal Constitution is well on its way to completion

inherently corrupt, elitist, and self-serving, however, most movements against the government had been peaceful (or at least easily contained[6]). Things changed dramatically in 1998 when, with the economy in decline and a mostly ineffective government, tensions heating over Malaitan settlers in rural Guadalcanal boiled over into the most violent civil conflict in Solomon Islands history. The violence erupted in rural Guadalcanal as groups of armed young men "disgruntled with successive governments' failure to address developmental issues and the demands of the Province" began forcibly evicting Malaitans who then fled to the capital, Honiara (Kabutaulaka 2001: 3). The unrest continued spreading to a number of locations within the country and although this was not entirely a movement against the state administration, it was in response to years of perceived corruption, policy favoritism, fiscal irresponsibility, and disregard of people in the rural areas (Moore 2004). The civil conflict caused the displacement of tens of thousands of Solomon Islanders and tensions continued for years with most efforts at resolution failing to take root amid longstanding political, economic, and ethnic problems. Once peace was finally achieved in 2003 the problems of rebuilding the economy, reforming the government, and restoring damaged social relations remained leaving many tensions simmering below the surface.

In terms of politics in particular, the consequence of adopting a centralized and potentially polarizing political system with little, if any, connection to local forms of socio-political organization has been that, according to Wairiu (2005: 410), "the

[6] The Western Breakaway Movement was a real threat to the independent government, but was stopped by the payment of compensation and the passage of the Provincial Government Act in 1981.

majority do not understand the structure and functions of the modern governance system"[7]. In a survey published in 2003, for example, Wairiu and Tabo (2003: 203-204) found that among their sample of rural communities eighty to ninety-percent of people reported not understanding or only partially understanding the imposed governance system. Leaders in the national government have done little to incorporate rural leadership structures into the administrative decision-making process which is especially problematic considering around eighty-five percent of the population lives in rural areas (Wairiu 2005; White 2006). Even though the colonial administration mainly adopted a policy of indirect rule which more widely dispersed the administrative powers of the state to rural areas, they did so by developing leadership structures that were not necessarily customary (see White 1997). Many of these structures, like the Area Councils, were weakened by the withdrawal of state support in the early years of independence as national leaders sought to concentrate power in their own hands (McDougall 2015). Part of the recommendation during talks of independence were that these Area Councils would elect Paramount Chiefs to represent clusters descent groups ensuring the local perspective be heard at the national level (Moore 2010). The imagined "Council of Chiefs" never reached fruition with the majority of power remaining at the national level (Moore 2010; White 1997). In the contemporary Solomon Islands, people often view the national government with

[7] I would add that this means beyond voting and meeting with their candidate if he/she wins a seat. As well, while people may not participate in civil society organizations, they will often talk politics and stay informed on the issues of the day. If we measured "participation" by awareness and interest relating to politics I think the cases could be made for very high levels of participation – much higher than in Western countries, for example.

suspicion believing modern state administration to be disempowering and "alienating people from their family or tribe, land and culture" (Wairiu 2005: 409).

There remains a strong skepticism of the national government in Honiara among rural people because they view the system as being run by elites who do not have their best interests at heart. The urban centralization of power is problematic in the eyes of the majority rural population who often make the case for decentralization (White 2007). According to Scales (2005: 142), most people in the Solomon Islands are wary that the national government will provide any resources or services to the rural areas stating that "when government operates without direct local participation, the budget is wasted without getting local results". Given that the cultural logic implicit within the imposed governance structures which is supposedly present to encourage accountability (notably - impersonality) lacks resonance within Melanesia,[8] it is not surprising that people have remodeled the system to fit the context. This explains why, for example, politics have remained highly personalized, as well as, why the most logical reason for electing a political official is on the basis of direct reciprocity in terms of resources and services allocated to individual constituents or villages.

The imposition of the Westminster parliamentary system has succeeded in the sense that it persists as the political regime more than three decades after independence, but it failed in terms of being adopted wholesale by the people of the

[8] And, as Dyson (1982) argues, outside of Western Europe more generally (cited in Larmour 1997)

Solomon Islands. Not only did the system lack cultural resonance with the population[9], but the independent country has not focused on inculcating subsequent generations into the purpose and function of the system through educational infrastructure. During the colonial period, the few available schools focused on indoctrinating British subjects in order to transform cultural norms; however, after independence this ideological education diminished in some ways weakening the imposed political systems, but also providing more culturally relevant opportunities for development. This is not to say that the only effect of the imposed state is top-down transformation, but rather that the effects of the state occur variably and dynamically precipitating changes on many levels (see McDougall 2015) . The Western state system has been acculturated by making sense of the imposed structures through readily accessible cultural logics, but, as I am arguing, not without transforming both in relation to the social and economic realities in the contemporary Pacific. In this way neither indigenous cultures, nor the imposed system remain unchanged[10] but rather the Western liberal democratic state has been pragmatically acculturated within the contemporary sociocultural environment creating examples of innovative and contextually-relevant politics.

[9] And any population with a culture different from that within which the political system developed

[10] Even in a hybrid state because it seems that the arguments about hybridity assume blending, but not necessarily with a change to the various parts. For example, it is often argued that members of parliament assume the cultural role of "big man" which is referred to as traditional, but fail to explain how the positions of MP and big man have been mutually transformed by this connection.

Contemporary Politics in the Solomon Islands

In the post-independence Solomon Islands, political alliances have most often been based on kinship and *wantok*[11] relationships – especially in the diversely-populated capital, Honiara (Kabutaulaka 1998). According to Brigg (2009: 152), the *wantok* system, which emerged from interisland migration during the colonial period, is best understood as a flexible "system of generalised obligations and supports" that can be found throughout Melanesia. These more personal political alliances have in some ways complicated the functioning of the imposed Western bureaucratic administration which presupposes impartiality. As Steeves (1996) explains, these relationships weaken the potential for platform-based political alliances creating what he calls an arena of "unbounded politics". This has made it difficult to establish policies and consistent directions within the government (Kabutaulaka 2006). *Wantokism* in concert with the liberal democratic system as seemingly placed individual political survival and the maintenance of alliances through direct reciprocity above the value of instituting policies that would potentially more broadly benefit the country. In tandem, the competing logics of the systems have often worked to undermine each other promoting an environment somewhat ripe for behavior considered by many to be problematic (Bennett 2002).

[11] People from similar language regions form groups called *wantoks*—literally 'one talk' in Pijin (Kabutaulaka 1998). According to Kabutaulaka (ibid: 135), "the concept of *wantok system* or *wantokism* advocates cooperation amongst those who speak the same language".

The persistence of the *wantok system* within the national government has promoted two specific issues: nepotism and personalized power. The *wantok* relationship, similar to a kinship system, establishes a number of reciprocal obligations (Turnbull 2002). This creates the problem of nepotism because officials who are elected by their allies are then expected to give their *wantoks* positions within the government or Public Service sector, blocking people outside these relationships from obtaining these posts (Kabutaulaka 1998; Morgan 2005). The elected officials are also oftentimes obligated to provide special services and financial aid to their village which is rooted somewhat in the traditional 'big-man' system[12] (Kabutaulaka 1998; Turnbull 2002). For example, according to Turnbull (2002: 194), "politicians are expected to pay school fees, contribute to feasts, pay for chartered flights and boats when people are sick, and transport those who have died in town back to their villages". These reciprocal obligations on the one hand are the more direct way in which everyday people benefit from the state, but on the other have over time resulted in allegations of corruption and embezzlement at all levels of the government, most notably, of former Prime Ministers (Alasia 1997; Bennett 2002; Fraenkel 2004; Kabutaulaka 1998; Turnbull 2002).

This personalized system combined with new access to material wealth provided by modern political economic incorporative actions have in some ways undermined the establishment of strong political parties and political alliances based on platforms (Bennett 2002; Kabutaulaka 2006). These parties outlive their individual

[12] The pervasiveness of pre-existing social forms in the modern government occurs throughout Melanesia creating a distinctly "Melanesian political culture" (Morgan 2005: 3).

members establishing a platform people can choose to support to achieve desired outcomes instead of specific candidates. The assumption in the Western system is that having parties made the political system more representative, impartial, and accountable, but this political ideology developed within the broader sociocultural environment wherein the structures make sense because they evolved within the system. For this reason, just like the state system, political structures and processes are not readily translated wholesale in different cultures. According to Kabutaulaka (2008: 104), "when voters cast their votes in national elections they are concerned more with electing individual MPs rather than the party to which the candidates belong, and which they hope will subsequently form a government". This fits with local political norms wherein personal obligations would promote accountability. Political leaders are expected to ensure returns for their specific voters[13] rather than for their entire constituency and they know exactly who those voters are[14]. The elected officials are supported based on their record or promises of reciprocity and constituents will often hold their Members of Parliament individually accountable for implementation of any government policies and reforms which affect them (Morgan 2005). For this reason, MPs have often be characterized as unresponsive, opportunistic, inefficient, or corrupt[15] by those who are not their direct supporters; however, among supporters those elected officials "who do not fulfill their obligations in these respects may be

[13] As most politicians worldwide are expected to as well

[14] This is not legal, as an electoral representative explained to me, but according to many informants, including Constituency Development Officers and a number of MPs themselves, it is commonplace for winners to have access to this information. "How else would we be able to provide for our supporters" one told me.

[15] Existing analyses of Solomon Islands political behavior seem to explain these practices as corruption, which they likely may be; however this characterization needs more explanation in relation to how these political actors and their constituents view the state (See e.g. Kabutaulaka 1998; 2008; Morgan 2005; Turnbull 2002).

subject to threats and violence" (ibid: 5). Most often the result is losing their seat in the Parliament; a common problem in the Solomons with turnover rate higher than 50% most election cycles (Corbett and Wood 2013; Fraenkel 2006).

Since politics remain a highly personalized affair, personalities and social relationships dictate who wins elections more so than platforms or political parties (Kabutaulaka 2006). This in turn has prompted a flourishing environment of distrust of the government[16] and disenchantment with relations who do not fulfill their reciprocal obligations. The desire to access material wealth, services, and projects has become intertwined with politics in the Solomon Islands given that the state administration and those occupying positions of influence within the system "are the most bankable avenues for resource distribution" (Morgan 2005: 4). This supports the perception of the government as purse or pot of wealth which can only be accessed by sending "your man" into a position. This is why being a MP within the ruling government and having a cabinet portfolio is coveted by supporters and candidates alike and further undermines the establishment of stable parties, especially from the top-down (Fraenkel 2006; Kabutaulaka 2006). At the same time, to cast the problems in the state administration in the Solomon Islands as cultural "backwardness" promoted by the *wantok* system simply perpetuates the discourse of dysfunction. This narrative places the Western liberal democracy as the moral pinnacle and ideological model, relegating deviations to subordinate positions. For many in the Solomon Islands, the *wantok*

[16] It is not the political parties necessarily promote more trust in the government, but it increases the chances that a voter would have at least one representative in the legislature whereas the personalized system does not if the candidate loses.

system may actually be more ethically acceptable than the impartial bureaucrat because it is based on an established relationship which entails accountability and reciprocity. In fact, as Brigg (2009: 156-159) argues, the expansion of an open *wantok* system[17] would likely provide culturally relevant and accessible means for building platforms, a national identity, and inclusion within the imposed structures of governance.

PRAGMATIC ACCULTURATION

Introduction

The institutions of the modern state in the Solomon Islands were not developed organically from cultural modes of interaction, organization, and economic activity. Rather, they were imposed upon the people of the islands through colonial incorporation including missionization, the establishment of a protectorate, and the democratization and development activities that came with independence. The approach taken by the British did little to introduce the vast majority of Solomon Islanders to the functioning of the political system although there were attempts during decolonization to make it more localized (Moore 2010). These suggestions, like a committee system or council of elders, might have made the government more accessible, but it is unclear whether these too would have been artificial constructs

[17] Brigg makes the point that the wantok system unlike the kinship system is a means to make connections outside of the traditional networks. As people form relations they extend obligations providing the grounds for working together on issues that affect everyone like corruption. As he argues, "the checks and balances internal to kinship-derived Melanesian social organisation can be mobilised against corruption and for good governance." (ibid: 159)

concentrating power in the hands of a select few rather that devolving power to the rural and everyday majority. There was a small class of elites who were incorporated within the administration starting in the 1950s, but the effects of their inclusion did not trickle down through the population making the national government – especially at the beginning of independence – an exclusive club. For everyday Solomon Islanders there are more approachable institutions at the local level through the provincial government, but these avenues have provided minimal access to the wealth of the state which is concentrated at the national level. The following statements from three former Provincial Members illustrate this point:

> "In the provincial government you are closer to the grassroots people, you know them and you don't get so high up that you can't sit down with them. This is why the people in the national government don't like us. We should work together to solve the problems of our people but they don't want to help us. They don't want to work with us or give us money because they want the people to think only they did the work. They want all the credit. They view us as a threat because we can contest for their seat in Parliament."

> "The provincial government has no teeth. You have ideas and plans for development but you cannot do anything because you have no funds. We have asked them [the national government] for more money and they say "yes" but then it never comes."

> "The people come to you for help, to ask you for school fees or boat fares. You want to help them because they are your people but you cannot because you don't have any money. It is a very small sum and we cannot do anything. The people say we are lying and hiding the money, but this is not true, there is no money."

Even with limited understanding of how the imposed liberal democratic system was intended to function, there is active participation in the political process with upwards of eighty-percent of eligible voters casting ballots in the most recent 2014

election (Solomon Star). This number exceeds participation in long-standing democracies, even those where voting is compulsory (ibid). The traction of representative politics amid widespread disconnection with the functional logic[18] of the system of national governance can be explained by the pragmatic ways in which people have aimed to gain access. Akin (1999: 35), cites examples from across Melanesia wherein local people have made sense of and interacted with government structures in culturally-relevant ways. His examples demonstrate how the state is brought down to the level of the people by treating the government and its officials as "a rival clan" (Strathern 1994), "a trading partner" (Lutkehaus 1991), and "a big man" (Clark 1997). By utilizing known rules and moral obligations of interaction, everyday people are able to participate in the imposed system in ways that are meaningful and accessible on a local level. At the same time, they have measurable outcomes like providing material development enabling the people to benefit from newly-emerging opportunities.

In the light of the variable environment, with different ideologies[19] promising access to tangible material benefit, but neither really panning out in isolation, Solomon Islanders have pragmatically acculturated[20] the imposed Western liberal democratic

[18] It always seems necessary to add the caveat that likely all representative democracies function differently than may have been intended. We speak of Western governments as if they are models, but it is hard to imagine that the intended function of a representational system was to be based on the financial capabilities of large corporations to sway public opinion to fit their goals.
[19] The ideology of the modern neoliberal order provides access to the material benefits of capitalist inclusion and the local cultural ideology of reciprocal obligations which makes personal relationships with those who have access to the government bankroll (and international slush funds) lucrative.
[20] Adopting this term from sociology (see Quah 2008), I am using this to mean that in this ideologically diverse environment, the people are taking aspects of one system to alter or introduce new agency in local models. Unlike the notion of hybridization which seems to imply the creation of a new system

values within the local systems of reciprocal obligation. Solomon Islanders have adapted to the needs of a contemporary environment where neither the traditional nor liberal democratic governance alone make sense. The systems, Brigg (2009: 159) states, "are already fused and entwined to the point where it is impossible and naïve to talk about separation." As I explained in Chapter Two, this has not happened without a marked amount of incoherence leading to paralysis in some cases, but like the peri-urban road alterations, there have been newfound opportunities for innovation and agency. This political pragmatism combined access to material wealth and flexibility with the accountability of the familiar model of reciprocity. Much of this was supported by the promotion of the liberal individualistic ideology through "one man, one vote" electoral strengthening campaigns and the vacuum created by unresponsive relations who had not fulfilled reciprocal obligations owed to their supporters.

> "We supported him for years because he was our big uncle. He would promise us many things; he would say that everyone would have a permanent house. Long time he was in office and nothing changed. He built himself a house, that is the thing, you know, when a person goes into government they build themselves a permanent house in their village. Our uncle time he would campaign would talk so much, but then when he went inside he would always say he was too busy to meet with us."
>
> "They go in on our backs and then they give us nothing in return. We don't ask for big things, we just want what we need."
>
> "He's is not like other MPs who open their houses. He hides and no one can find him when we need to ask for something like fare.

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through the combination of various parts, pragmatic acculturation does not need to be a means to an end (i.e. the creation of a political system), but rather can be a form of politics in itself. The practical nature of the process means that it can occur in different ways depending on what the moment calls for or what opportunity is presented. In other words, it is not the alteration of the "right way" to do things; rather it is the most reasonable way to reach a desired outcome given the available avenues at that moment. It is more dynamic than hybridization.

> His phone is always powered off and when he does answer he always says he is in a meeting."
>
> "He sees his supporters waiting outside and he runs the other way. We wait for him but he does not come and then we hear he has gone."
>
> "They keep saying that I have my own voice and I need to use it to say what I want. Shouldn't I be able to vote where I see fit – one man one vote right? All of these people go inside and get rich and we get nothing."

This situation has opened up new opportunities for non-traditional individuals to achieve political office and everyday Solomon Islanders to more readily access the tangible material benefits of the modern state system[21]. It has increased accountability in some senses by establishing a "political obligation" within the Western liberal democratic government, one informed by the reciprocal politics and kinship obligations of indigenous systems, but lasting, like representative politics, only as long as someone maintains their position within the government. On the one hand, this relies on a traditional leadership structure wherein "self-made men" gained prestige by their access to material goods and generosity in distribution, but lost influence as their access "dried up" (Bennett 2002: 2; White 2007). In this way either the politician himself/herself or the person 'bringing' that politician to the people can take on the role of 'big man' as a provider of wealth. This also incorporates the logic of social obligations existing within kinship and, more recently, *wantok* groups by extending membership, but only for so long as the person maintains the position. On the other hand it introduces flexibility into this system by enabling voters to support candidates

[21] This includes revenue received by the central government (internal sources and international aid/development funds), access to medical care and education through the payment of fees, movement through the payment of fares and access to engines and boats, and so forth.

outside traditional networks, seeking any candidates willing and able to provide returns. As well, by including candidates outside of typical kinship and *wantok* networks this order diminishes the problem of long-standing, complex, and entangled obligations from other social situations influence the present concerns. In other words, it begins to separate the realm of politics and government from other aspects of sociocultural life while at the same time without excluding the logic of traditional practices within it. Hence the conceptualization of a political obligation is one that was really only relevant within the realm of the modern government.

This chapter details one such opportunity which presented itself during the 2010 national elections wherein a foreign-born businessman[22] contested for a parliamentary seat. He was a first-time political candidate who decided that rather than negotiating with politicians it would likely be more productive to become a legislator himself.

The Opportunity

The businessman was a foreign-born citizen of the Solomon Islands who had built his reputation and success over a long period of time in the capital. He had come from another island group for the purpose of managing a business in Honiara for a wealthy overseas investor. Knowing the importance of personal social networks from his work elsewhere in Melanesia, the businessman carefully formed an inner circle of

[22] There have been a small number of prominent foreign-born businessmen who have contested and held seats in parliament, but for the most part MPs are indigenous Solomon Islanders.

trusted locals who would help him navigate the ins and outs of running a business in the Solomon Islands. When the chance to run for seat in Parliament presented itself, the businessman turned to his inner circle for advice on successfully campaigning. As the story is told[23], he was hesitant to run but was encouraged by a group of enthusiastic supporters. Since the seat was for a constituency in a highly-diverse capital, the businessman would need to secure a wide variety of voters to win. Like most urban Solomon Islanders, his trusted advisors had large kinship networks in their home villages, but since these were located in the rural areas of the country they would not be of much help to the campaign.

Then one of his inner circle suggested a solution which, while technically against the law, seemed justifiable on the basis of, as one of my informants put it "*wanfella man, wanfella vote*" (one man, one vote) arising from the rhetoric of public awareness campaigns targeted at voting fraud. The businessman's advisor explained that interested parties could come from rural areas and register to vote in his constituency[24] receiving their biometric voter id cards. When the election came around, they could then come back to town staying long enough to cast their votes and observe the outcome of the election. As is typical of securing voters in the Solomon Islands, this type of relationship would require direct reciprocity wherein the businessman would be expected to provide financial and material benefits to his

[23] This is a formulaic narrative told by most politicians and their supporters I interviewed when asked why they decided to contend for an elected position.
[24] It is not that unusual to vote in another constituency since many Honiara voters go "home" to their villages to vote, but they do so with assistance from the candidate that wants their vote (see e.g. http://www.solomonstarnews.com/news/national/5025-voters-flood-back-into-town). They are most often considering which vote will garner them the most returns or voting out of family obligation.

supporters. While so-called 'vote-buying' is common throughout the world (see e.g Finan and Schechter 2012; Schaffer 2007), in Melanesia the voter-MP arrangement is not a simple one-off exchange, but rather forms a patronage relationship that lasts as long as the politician retails their seat (see also Bjorkman 2014). This meant not only that the businessman be prepared to invest the time and means into maintaining such relationships, but that the voters be willing to bypass other opportunities for supporting candidates within their home constituencies with whom they were already connected through kinship and *wantok* relations and thus might be able to more readily trust to fulfill obligations. The question was – who would be willing to take the risk?

The Risks

As explained before, clientelism and patronage are quite common in the Solomon Islands, but they are not unique to the country or even the region as examples of vote-buying can be found in any country and in many places it is endemic. As Schaffer (2007: 2) explains, it is by no means a new phenomenon, but with the post-WWII globalization of democratic ideals, most places are now holding some kind of elections turning vote-buying into a "worldwide phenomenon". He cites credible reports of the practice occurring in all regions of the globe from Senegal, Africa to Florida, USA with voters exchanging their support for everything from whiskey and chickens to washing machines and coffins. The risk, however, is that while the practice of vote-buying is the status quo in the Solomons, it is also legally problematic. As is registering to vote in a constituency in which you don't actually

reside. Although rarely prosecuted, jealousy and political maneuvering has been known to push a case to trial especially if the defendant is a well-known businessman or lesser known brother of an elite politician.

While vote-buying within one's own constituency only need to be an individually organized affair, for this particular arrangement to make sense it would require a large number of willing participants. In other words, the risk needed to be worth the reward. For the businessman to be able to justify spending the money to transport these voters from their areas to town, provide room and board for the duration of their stays, and risk a range of potentially serious legal consequences, there would need to be a sufficiently large group to have an impact of the outcome of the election. Negotiating participation among voters was going to be more difficult than it might first appear as even expressing interest in potentially being involved could be perceived as insult to one's social (kin but also *wantok*) network. These networks mattered in that they were still the most reliable, as unreliable as they sometimes were, means of accessing material benefits, support, and opportunity in a wide variety of situations.

Acting outside one's social network without a large enough group to disperse individual culpability could damage reputations and even, in serious cases, lead to fracture (see McDougall 2015). For example, in another case not involving an outsider but rather two candidates from one village an informant emotionally recounted the costs of supporting a candidate who was opposing the incumbent candidate belonging

to his father's tribe. He explained how tensions ran so high that their previously close and loving father son relationship devolved into disdain culminating in the father threatening the son's life in a dangerous physical altercation. While the election campaigns themselves were short lived with both candidates losing, the fracture within the family was likely long-term not necessarily because of the outcome of the election but rather the arguments it caused. Immediately after the altercation the father disowned his son forcing the young man and his wife to flee their home village for the capital. The son explained how he had still not spoken with his father or family members, nor had he returned to his home island nearly four years on at the time of our interview. As the seriousness of this example demonstrates, securing a group of willing voters for the Honiara-based businessman was a potentially explosive situation to navigate in this highly-personal network environment.

An informant who worked on the campaign explained to me how this played out in his village:

> "Everyone knew this guy because he was a well-known businessman in town and because a few of our family members and *wantoks* worked for him. The sheriff[25] knew him well because he was like his right-hand man and so people believed that he must be true if the sheriff is supporting him. But that did not mean it was easy. I first started by talking casually with one person at a time usually telling stories the sheriff had told me of his generosity to his employees. I explained that he was not like some of the other businessmen, the Chinese newcomers, you know. He could be trusted. If they seemed interested I would come back and talk more. Then we had a pretty big

[25] This is an informal title which can refer to the father of a family or a senior male member of a tribe or village. He is typically someone that has "big man" qualities and can persuade people or is entrusted to make decisions for the group.

> group that included people from a few other villages too. The cousin of our big uncle[26] was also campaigning for a seat in our home constituency and big uncle was angry at our actions. He said we were not looking after our tribe." (I asked why he wasn't supporting his family member and he said that the man was too young and inexperienced, that he had no chance of winning anyway. He said he might have supported him if he had a better chance). "I explained to our people that we had long supported our family in elections with no returns. Our uncle who stayed in town was also a politician and a businessman, but he liked to talk. He always promised us things in the election, but when we went to find him to ask for help once he was elected he never had time for us. We would always gossip about him, but then we would still support him in elections. Years of not getting anything, you know. I told our people that we should take this chance because this guy was good and trustworthy; he had the resources to provide for us. He already sponsored our soccer team and we now have new uniforms." (He explained to me that he was chosen to work for the campaign because he was the coach of the soccer team and was also a school teacher. He was one of the few villagers that could read and write well and this made him very helpful when it came time to register).

Another informant explained to me what happened when she and others were leaving for town to register to vote in the businessman's constituency:

> "The people who organized the group were already in town and we were coming behind. We had to wait for the ship. When we tried to leave, our other *wantoks* and family members tried really hard to stop us. They were telling us we would go to prison to make us scared but we did not believe them. They even pushed us and stood in our way so we could not pass. Nothing was going to stop us though."

The last calculation the voters had to make was regarding the possibility of whether or not they would actually receive the promised benefits. This was challenging given that this businessman was not guaranteed to win and even if he did

[26] In the case of the speaker, the "big uncle" was his wife's mother's brother.

he was basically untested in terms of political patronage since he was a first time candidate. They could not rely upon a pre-existing social relationship which would help to increase the odds that their efforts would be reciprocated. While they were connected to the businessman through their social network, that connection was limited and untested. And if any of this proved true – he did not win or did not provide the material benefits promised – they would have to wait another four years at least to try again. They would not even have the option, as is possible in other countries, of pretending they supported another candidate because the Member of Parliament typically has access to the voting list of their supporters. Establishing a new relationship in the social network was clearly a serious risk, but a relationship that would have a substantial payout if it succeeded.

The Outcomes

The businessman won the election beating out the incumbent for his constituency and surprising voters. Speaking to supporters who permanently resided in this area of Honiara, they expressed pleasure in the businessman's win stating that they believed he would be a more fair and accountable representative than their previous members. When I asked them why, they said that he listens and makes time for them. I found this interesting because the businessman himself rarely met with his voters, especially not in the informal, social manner that most MPs are typically

required to[27]. It may have been that while he did not open his house to supporters as other MPs do, he created a special area for supporters and maintained a staff which made themselves available to hear the concerns and requests of the voters. One informant explained that their former MP was sick and often hard to find although he too had a meeting place but it was a bit more intimidating since it was a drinking establishment.

As described in the introduction, the risks paid off for the villagers with the businessman, and now MP, providing the promised material benefits to his supporters. I wondered if this created a lot of jealousy in the village and an informant responded:

> "Maybe at first people coveted the copper roofing and solar since they only had local roofs, but it seemed like everyone was happy. As well, when the businessman gave a small speech to us in town after he won, he told us to go home quietly and not make a big deal. He said that we should be happy, but we should not be loud and show off or party too much. I think maybe they thought that they could vote for him next time and get the same things. It wasn't like before when we would get only small things, if anything at all, and the MP would build himself and his close family new houses – permanent houses. Word spread too. At the big market in the other village, people were all talking about what we had done. When the next election came around, more people wanted to join in…people not from our village. We would travel together to town. We knew who the supporters were."

The businessman won his seat again in the most recent elections which is not an easy feat given the high turnover rate among politicians. Even well-established,

[27] MPs by socio-political necessity had to be available to their supporters. This meant that their houses were almost always open to their voters and they would often stay for days. On many occasions I visited politicians' houses and they were full of 20 – 100 people at a time. The MP himself was not often there – likely because his supporters were and they all wanted something. As well, MPs would benefit from certain practices, like chewing betel nut, because it was a way to connect with voters. One MP credited his continued political success on his ability to chew enormous amounts of betel nut, a so-called "betel nut master".

indigenous politicians can be readily unseated as was demonstrated by the incumbent Prime Minister in 2014 losing his seat in parliament within his own constituency. As informants explained, he was overconfident and lost sight of his people.

While many cited the businessman's ethnicity as contributing to his desirability as a candidate, what was particularly interesting in this case were the ways in which the businessman was temporarily incorporated into the kinship system, both to secure support and hedge against uncertainties. Informants would explain to me that the fact he was a foreigner meant that he would not be tied to any tribal, ethnic, and *wantok* loyalties that local politicians were. Since nepotism was a well-established practice in the country with even the Prime Ministers more or less blatantly taking part, it was not surprising that they thought being excluded from these obligations would be desirable. But this also meant that they could not rely on these types of social relations to ensure their own access to material benefits, contracts, and positions. Partly as a way to hedge against this insecurity they would also explain – although not in the same breath – that he was not really an outsider, he was a Melanesian of sort. They explained that he spent most of his time in Melanesia so he knew *kastom* really well and he was – "*man blong iumifella*" (one of us). This same narrative was also deployed when informants were reacting to accusations of participating in vote-buying. In other words, they used claims of nepotism to counter charges of clientelism. The flexibility and inclusiveness of networks is well-documented in the Solomon Islands (Scott 2000; McDougall 2005) and so the

incorporation of the businessman is not necessarily unique; however, what was interesting was how this related to the effect of the state.

The dynamism of networks is most often seen when people are establishing connections to the land for use rights. The incorporation of the islands within the global capitalist economy provided opportunities to participate in the sale of natural resources. Most notably in the Solomon Islands are the logging activities driven by the markets in Asia (Bennett 1987; 2002; Hviding 1996; 2003). The legal framework protecting the lands under customary tenure has sought to exclude the state from the rural economy by enshrining that tenure in the law. This has both brought the state in by making a typically flexible and oral tradition more codified, while also excluding the state by empowering villagers to make decisions about their own customary land and resources. This protects much of the land from national projects, but people do use this exclusion to take advantage locally of the economic opportunities afforded by the incorporation and the non-interference of the administration[28]. In order to overcome customary roadblocks, locals reconfigure lineage histories and reframe customary practices in ways that enable participation in the economy. In some configurations this means bringing people into the kinship network that otherwise would be outsiders or empowering people within the system that might otherwise needed to defer to or confer with other land custodians.

[28] And politicians have been known to use their connections in the government and with foreign interests to take advantage of customary tenure for personal gain especially in terms of logging (see Bennett 2002).

In a similar way, bringing the businessman into the network provided access to the political and economic benefits of the imposed state structures in a manner that was culturally coherent. It was different, however, than the more common practice of encouraging someone who was already a kin relation to run for office. It was incorporating the most financially-capable candidate into the social network short-term to provide better returns from the state. This example then demonstrates how the imposed and introduced systems are pragmatically applied to the local processes to create alternatives, opening the doors to previously unavailable avenues for achieving tangible outcomes. It is important not to assume here that new opportunities necessarily equate to positive outcomes, in that in some cases this can undermine more widespread accountability and enable ethically questionable behavior, but more so to see how these intertwinements provide agency not provided in this context by either the Western bureaucratic state or the customary socio-political systems.

ASSESSMENTS

As the indigenous political system of Solomon Islands continues to adapt, shaped by local forms of socio-political organization and the colonial and neo-colonial introduction of Western governmental institutions, newly-emerging possibilities of ordering people are providing previously non-existent opportunities for political participation, representation, and inclusion. This is made possible by the fact the political loyalties are often secured through direct interaction which enables participants to access support outside of established boundaries which in turn can

produce new definitions of order beyond constituent, resident, village local, *wantok*, etc. This new and dynamic order, while still influenced by the logic of reciprocal social obligations characteristic of Melanesia, is one grounded in shorter-term political outcomes and longer-term socio-political goals rather than kinship. In this way, the relationship that is formed by the arrangement is one based on obligations inherent in actually fulfilling campaign promises associated with the position rather than because of the pre-existing social relationship between the candidate and voter.

The logic of voting for one's relation was based on two premises: (1) that you were socially obligated to support your kin and *wantok* and (2) that regardless of actual behavior your family member or *wantok* was the most strategic person to support since they were the most likely to provide returns (Alasia 1997; Bennett 2002; Fraenkel 2004; Kabutaulaka 1998; Morgan 2005). Taking the risk of voting for someone outside of expected social relations demonstrates a strategic and conceptual shift in the minds of voters. These candidates had to provide the promised benefits for voters or they would be guaranteed to lose support to candidates promising better returns. This is a problem for all elected officials in the country, but the idea that voters would consider an outsider demonstrates the desire to access the fruits of incorporation and reframe a social network to do so. This also means that these outsider candidates had to have the ability to provide on those promises. Voters would choose candidates they believed would be most likely to provide returns for achieving the position – even if they did not get a cabinet portfolio. This helps to explain why in a recent study aimed at profiling politicians in the Solomon Islands, Corbett and Wood

(2013: 328) found that "the one group that has trended upwards is politicians with backgrounds in business… [reflecting] changes in the nature of campaigning and voters' financial expectations of candidates and MPs".

Being in a political position meant that politicians were obligated to the voters, and when they vacated the seat the obligation would cease to exist. This placed the value in the seat (representative) rather than in the individual occupying the seat – *you owe me because I got you in that seat rather than you're my uncle and I supported you to get into that seat and so now you can reciprocate and owe me.* In this way it reflects the influence, not wholesale adoption, of Western liberal democratic logic which places the power in the position rather than the person thereby planting the concept that constituents have the right to and should expect[29] something from their parliamentary seat, thus be represented. Although it may be the case that being "represented" in the Western liberal democratic sense has more to do with broad social interests like public safety, schooling, and infrastructure, the economic realities of life in the rural Pacific combined with the challenges of large-scale cooperation complicate this. Representation within the current state of the political environment means that it can contextually be conceptualized as being heard and receiving benefits even if those are in the form of paid school fees and not a new school system. Rather than, as Stokes (2006: 81) argues, introducing social and economic inequalities into politics "allowing politicians and governments to ignore the interests of poor people",

[29] McDougall (2015: 471- 472) explains that Solomon Islanders have sought to "harness the powers of the state" and the long-term engagement with the state beginning with colonization has shaped local expectations of how society and politics should be organized.

the practice of direct reciprocity in this case may actually increase accountability (see also Bjorkman 2014 for a similar argument from Mumbai).

While they are clearly voting for the individual, they are doing so strategically based on expected returns associated with a candidate ascending to the position not necessarily the person. The businessman belonged to them because he was their candidate for a position not because he was their relative or *wantok*. He became so after becoming their candidate and only for the time he occupied the position. And beyond that, because voters needed a sufficiently large group of participants to make the desired outcome plausible, they created a new network both concretely in terms of rallying supporters from their own villages, but also in terms of a community of supporters of this candidate. As a number of informants explained to me, knowing that someone was a supporter of this businessman made them feel more connected to that person, it made them easier to talk to since they "shared the same candidate". This new order, therefore has the ability to bring a culturally, socially, and economically diverse and sometimes divisive population together to support a single candidate. As well, given that they were willing to risk legal and social consequences to register and vote in another constituency demonstrates the inculcation of the belief that the government should provide for the people – not simply within their constituency – and the people can be as pragmatically strategic as the state administration if it serves their ends.

What this new type of ordering may present, facilitated by the pragmatic acculturation of the Western state, is the nascent emergence of a grassroots form of platform-based politics. This is a politics that reflects the influence of democratic ideology (or imaginary) of an accountable, representative government empowered by the people, local cultural logics of leadership and obligation, and the socioeconomic realities of life in the island Pacific. Although it is still a long distance from being a platform-based political system, this emerging order is one based in politics creating the concept of a political obligation. Instead of presuming that political function and organization has to conform to expectations implied in the imposed state or customary systems, considering how politics work pragmatically in place will likely provide more insight. While its logic is inspired by both in Western and local models – it is something transformed by the being-in-the-world (Tidey 2016) experience of everyday life. This order is still network affiliated, but based on the ability to provide a tangible outcome rather than a preexisting sense of familial or *wantok* obligation for the politician. In traditional politics a person becomes a leader by providing for feasts and exchanges, which itself is outcome-driven, but the ability to establish such a position was premised on being a member of the group. In this case, there still is a "bigman-style" system at work but it is benefitting the family member who connected the supporters and the candidate. In this way, the exchange good was the seat, with the person who connected voters to the candidate receiving the more customary status of big man from the successful transaction. The obligation from the seat, however, remained only within the realm of politics with the MP providing for his supporters only so long as he was in office.

This emerging behavior opens the possibility of participation by extending the social network, but not in a way that formally incorporates the outsider to an insider status. The kinship or *wantok* network becomes acquainted with a sponsor who is most likely able to provide for the group, and this sponsorship becomes more lucrative the larger the group is, promoting cohesion over individuation. While, according to White (2007: 12-13), the typical encounter with "the cash economy, intent on commodifying land and culture, tends to produce individualized interests that disconnect people from the checks and balances of collective governance," this behavior actually reigns in the cash economy within these structures. It makes the source of wealth the collectivity and the obligation to fulfill the promises the ascendance to a government position not a family relationship. In this way the pragmatic ordering establishes obligation as something belonging to the realm of politics rather than simply being the application of social (kinship) obligation to local politics. This not only opens up the opportunity for non-traditional candidates to seek office, but also for collectives to be extended and mobilized in ways that are politically and socially productive. Brigg (2009: 159) argues that applying an "entrenched and valued social institution that builds and sustains relationships among individuals and groups" within the liberal democratic system might very well be a productive means for establishing accountable governance and a shared sense of national identity.

The idea and mobilization of a pragmatic political obligation helps to lay the conceptual groundwork which connects the actions and outcomes of voters'

experiences with the actions and outcomes of government. The connection in this particular case between the establishment of a political obligation and the creation of a community of supporters may pave the way for platform-based campaigns as people realize and utilize their shared goals – even if those are access to copper roofing and outboard motors[30]. This desire to create larger communities to achieve practical goals may serve to bring people across boundaries together providing more opportunities for people to interact in meaningful ways. Politicians seeking longer political lifespans may equally see the benefit of collectives that increase their ability to provide for voters promoting the formation of more stable political parties than have previously existed. Although this no doubt may promote rent-seeking behavior and may further empower the financially well-off excluding those without the ability to provide returns from contesting for office, it may also promote the idea that the representatives in the government should be accountable to the people. While in the short term the former points are more likely and will have problematic consequences, in the long run the ideological shift could promote a grassroots movement toward a system which is a contemporary Melanesian approach to democracy.

While foreign-funded or elite driven state-building/strengthening projects have becoming a mainstay in the Solomon Islands since the civil conflict ended, the fact remains that top-down approaches have consistently failed to engender a stable, representative, and effective political system. As Kabutaulaka (2006:104) explains,

[30] Let's not forget "The Rent is Too Damn High" Party in the US https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rent_Is_Too_Damn_High_Party

there is “a need to link institutional changes at the top to changes in political culture on the ground, and an enhancement of the masses’ understanding of the democratic process and the role that parties play in it”. Things that benefit the people can only do so as long as the people understand and can mobilize those opportunities. By emerging from the grassroots, this new order makes sense to the people not just in terms of existing logics of obligation, but also in terms of their own social and economic realities. In this way, they develop a sense of ownership of the political system which is a complicated process for a culturally diverse people incorporated within a postcolonial state enveloped in a world of states. The state is something that is imposed, a hegemonic ordering of the world, but to see the effect as something that can only be top-down misses the ways in which people dynamically participate in the process. Top-down approaches also favor the “failed state” conclusions which help us to understand more about the cultures making the assessments than the ways in which the receiving cultures have acculturated the state.

Chapter 3, in part, is currently being prepared for submission for publication in Anthropological Forum. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this material.

CHAPTER FOUR

STATESMEN

As part of the governance strengthening project supported by Australia through their various aid and assistance programs, individuals with current or former positions within the Australian government will hold workshops for Solomon Island state officials. In one case, recounted to me by a national politician, a Member of Parliament in Australia held a session for his counterparts in the Solomon's Parliament. The goal, according to my distinguished informant, was to share an example of what a representative should do as a Member of Parliament. "He was very interesting," said the politician "he really knew what he was talking about". The politician who told me the story had been in the Parliament for a few terms, making him a relatively successful MP by Solomon Islands standards. He had also been a minister in various posts giving him a lot of experience with the government. "He told us a really good joke, maybe you have heard it before" he said; he went on to describe a joke about a priest, politician, and someone else jumping off a cliff. He went on for quite some time and was laughing, which made me laugh, but then he asked me if I knew what it meant. I just nodded my head in confusion as it seemed neither of us got the joke. He then went on to tell me how at the end of the Australian MP's speech about being a good representative he opened up the floor for questions. My informant did not clarify what the intended topic of conversation was supposed to be, but one might assume it was along the lines of the presentation. The Solomon Islands MP said

that, upon the floor being opened for questions, the first one of his colleagues to ask a question said, "do you all Australian politicians have the same problem with '02s' like we do here?" (02s being the slang reference for an extramarital partner)

INTRODUCTION

Politicians and the State

The contemporary political landscape in the Solomon Islands has been shaped by a number of interwoven elements including local socio-political customs, colonial inculcations, religious conversions, the movement for the reinvigoration of kastom, and neoliberalism and capitalist incorporation. These elements form the political field in the archipelago[1] and the dispositions of those, like citizens, including the idea of citizenship itself, who act within it (Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Hindness 2005). The field presents the opportunity structures within which people operate informed also by the social, cultural, and economic factors impacting lived realities in the Islands. As described in Chapter Three, everyday people have pragmatically employed the local and introduced models to access the material wealth made possible by the consolidation of resources at the national level and inclusion within the global sphere. In many ways, however, their ability to achieve these ends depends upon those actors situated within the formal institutions of government whose positions must necessarily navigate among the elements of the field. The people who play the roles of

[1] I am using this term instead of 'Solomon Islands' at this moment to make the point that even the name and geographical boundary are themselves constitutive of the political field created through colonial and postcolonial activities.

government officials embody the political field, personifying the formative elements as both citizen and leader. While bureaucratic public servants enact the state (see Gupta 1995), in the Solomon Islands, where administrative institutions remain relatively weak and also absent in rural areas, political officials remain for many the most visible and accessible government figures. Politicians in most cases wield more influence than their public servant counterparts given they are both inexorably tied to the people via their position as representatives and in more powerful positions in terms of decision-making. As one politician, explaining to me his reasoning for contesting for Parliament, said, "I ran to speak on equal terms…you cannot have a serious debate with a politician if you are just an official". This may also be the case given the relative absence of state administration in the majority of the country, with public servants usually situated in Honiara or other semi-urban hubs.

For most Solomon Islanders, interactions with politicians are the most obvious experience with the state even though the effects of the state are diverse and widespread. Politicians typically interact with grassroots people through providing support for everyday necessities like schools fees and funerary expenses. This is often accomplished through the Rural Constituency Development Funds, which are used to support the people in villages outside of Honiara. These funds are typically one of the only sources of government support people receive and are distributed through the Member of Parliament for each constituency. People will seek out their representative in town or during a constituency tour to ask for assistance making politicians somewhat more accessible (unless they are hiding from their supporters when they

don't have resources) than one might expect. Politicians are also often at the crossroads between development projects, international actors, and ordinary Solomon Islanders. Given that government policy has little control over land under customary tenure, politicians can use their international and urban connections to influence decisions at the village level with minimal interference or oversight.

Political leaders not only reflect the elements that constitute the political landscape, but in many ways also personify and manifest 'the state' in the lives of ordinary people (Werbner 2004). According to Wittersheim (2005: 1) focusing on these leaders, who proceed along a life path where colonization, Christianity, and tradition are intertwined, can provide a more nuanced understanding of the contemporary political culture. State officials are often approached as "faceless figures" (Werbner 2004: 10) embedded within the "façade of its formal institutions" (Stolen 2005: 143), referred to as 'the government' without a clear conceptualization of who or what that means. These officials as "multiply positioned citizens" (Sharma and Gupta 2006a: 27) embody and enact the project of the state becoming both effects of the state project (as citizens and officials) and effect-producers through their actions. While operating within an imposed political structure infused with Western cultural logics, these people are, first and foremost, enculturated Solomon Islanders approaching the world in much the same way their constituents do. How they navigate and operationalize the imposed administrative system in light of what Olivier de Sardan (1999:48) has called a "schizophrenic situation", where the legitimacy of

behavior is contested between foreign and local ideologies, reflects and produces the state.

While officials are not the sole actors able to effect the state (see Trouillot 2001), to understand the modern state as an "ideological project" legitimizing domination, it should be useful to examine not only the effects that are produced, but also the actors which produce them (Abrams 2006: 76). On the one hand this includes the foreign influences like merchants, capitalists, imperialists, missionaries, and NGOs, but on the other local leaders who act within the apparatus of the state. Given that the local leaders in the Solomon Islands were shaped by and operate among both local and foreign forces, they can reflect the formative influences of others as well as manifest their own effects. State officials, while effect-producers, are not fully "free-willed subjects in almost complete control of their destiny, able to shape political realities in the image of their preference or volitions" (Hay et al 2006: 11), but are, in the Solomon Islands as elsewhere, situated among hegemonic political discourse (Larmour 2005; Macdonald 1998), colonial institutions and ideology (Keesing 1994; Kelly and Kaplan 2001), the constraints of the state-system (Bennett 2002; Kabutaulaka 2008), and local models of leadership and sociality (Kwa'ioloa and Burt 2012; White and Lindstrom 1997). Understanding subjective desires, biographies, and ideologies of individual officials alongside their formalized, yet varied, practices as state agents can provide unique insight into the negotiation, representation, and production of the state (Aretxaga 2003; Steinmetz 1999).

Aspects of State Formation in the Archipelago

The modern state in the Solomon Islands can be conceptualized as a multifaceted process and effect which on the one hand results from imposition and incorporation and on the other hand from acculturation. The process began in the 16th century when Alvaro de Mendana explored various islands in the archipelago, naming them after King Solomon when gold was discovered in waterways on Guadalcanal. Even though Mendana and his crew eventually left after failing to find the source of the gold, his discovery began the incorporation of the archipelago into the European world system. This process of statization included establishing the geographical boundary and name of the archipelago following the Western conception of socio-political organization (Bennett 1987; Moore 2010). The configuration of the Solomon Islands changed as German and British colonial powers negotiated the parsing of the Pacific in the 19th century demonstrating the European rather than indigenous organizational theory. The formalization of the Solomon Islands as a British Protectorate in 1893 established the framework of the state, crystallizing the geographical boundary of these ethnically and linguistically diverse islands into a single socio-political entity. In this way, not only is the administration of the state in the Solomon Islands, but the Solomon Islands as a territorial corporation itself a colonial configuration. The country was not established as a sovereign state unto itself, but rather as a dependent territory of the British Imperial state incorporated to placate the concerns of nearby Australian citizens (Bennett 1987).

The project of creating Solomon Islanders[2] was the transformation of people belonging to disparate ethnic and linguistic groups spread across the archipelago into subjects of the British Empire (Feinberg 1990; Moore 2010). This was not solely the work of the foreign administration of the Protectorate in the Solomons as their presence was somewhat minimal given the disinterest with which the British initiated colonization based on local hostilities and disease (Bennett 1987). There were foreign officers of the British state, but much of the limited administration of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was carried out under the guidance of District Officers by local councils and headmen (ibid). With such limited manpower resources the Protectorate alone could not acculturate the diverse population, instead relying on the influence of religious and economic institutions to shape the people. The civilizing mission which sought to "improve" – in other words make capable of individual autonomy in the liberal conceptualization[3] – the non-European populations in the Empire, was a project carried out by state and non-state actors alike. Because the ideological and institutional framework of the modern state is so intertwined with Western concepts of personhood, morality, rationality, liberty, and free-market economy, the experiences and interactions of the indigenous people of the archipelago with Westerners began to alter their worldview in a manner, intentionally or not, that fit the state project.

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[2] "The concept of Solomon Islands as a nation is a new phenomenon to the majority of our people. The identity of being a Solomon Islander becomes more real outside the Solomon Islands. At home it is more common for our people to identify themselves with the particular islands, districts or provinces from which we originated. There are certain symbols which represent our national identity, such our Constitution and national government, flag, anthem and the national capital of Honiara. But all these, except Honiara, came into being only since independence" (Saemala 1982: 65 cited in Moore 2010: 7)

[3] Hindness 2005: 248-249

The ideological and institutional seeds of the modern state were introduced alongside and as a part of the colonial project through economic and religious activities in the 19th and 20th centuries. The establishment of large-scale plantations in the islands introduced economic hierarchy[4] and the capitalist mode of production (Bennett 1987). This not only incorporated the diverse groups in the Solomon Islands into a single economic sphere, it also incorporated the country within the global neoliberal economic system dominated by Europe. The introduction of imported goods through mercantile activities along with the expectation that colonial subjects pay taxes increased the need for waged labor. Islanders would travel from their home villages seeking paid work at plantations mainly on Guadalcanal. This brought people together like never before prompting the development of Solomon Islands *Pijin*, the lingua franca, and the *wantok* system. Islanders seeking wages also became indentured servants working on British plantations in Fiji and Australia (Bennett 1987; Moore 2007). This introduced the migrants to Christianity through the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC) which they brought back to the Islands. The colonial education system inculcated the values of British industrial utilitarianism and liberalism which encouraged the betterment of society through strong moral character of individuals. As Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (1992) write, the focus of the school curriculum was on creating British colonial citizens as much as on providing academic

[4] This was both in the form of unequal access to wealth and resources on a global scale, but also on a local scale as Bennett (1987) explains, the coastal people were able to provide trade goods earning them more money than the bush people whose only access to cash was through labor. These laborers earned substantially less money than their coastal counterparts.

fundamentals like mathematics and literacy[5] (see also Asad 1973; Hindness 2005). This echoed the message of missionaries[6], in part because many of the few schools that existed were run by religious organizations, who introduced the moral worldview which corresponded to the neoliberal capitalist model creating self-governing subjects by virtue of social expectation.

Missionization and the State

The Christian missionization of the Solomon Islands began before the formal annexation of the archipelago with the mainline churches, the Catholics and Anglicans, arriving in the late-19th century and Methodists shortly thereafter (Joseph and Beu 2008). The missions, whether or not they worked directly with the Protectorate administration, supported the development of the modern state in a number of ways including by encouraging the relocation of people into villages, many along the coast, where they were also able to more readily access economically advantageous activities (Burt 1994; Keesing 1982). The pragmatic benefits including access to education, building alliances with powerful foreigners, and avoiding ancestral strictures, in fact, may have been one of the initial draws to Christianity (McDougall 2009: 483; see also Burt 1994; White 1991). Part of the conversion process was the promotion of communal living centered around places of Christian worship which not only separated people from ancestral practices, but also

[5] Which in and of themselves promote a specific kind of worldview
[6] While, for the most part, the religious institutions cooperated with the British authorities there were tensions as the colonial administration and the missions competed for power in rural areas (Hilliard 1978; White 1991).

incorporated them within the emerging socioeconomic sphere. As Burt (1994:104) explains, "the conversion of Solomon Islanders to Christianity played an important part in establishing British political control" in large part because it diminished their commitment to traditional practices paving the way for a new political order as well. As Islanders converted to Christianity the traditional political structures were diminished leaving a "power vacuum" (Joseph and Beu 2008: 2). This led the Melanesian Mission (Anglican), for example, to attempt to establish a governance structure that, although short-lived because of the annexation, would provide guidance for later counter-colonial movements[7] (ibid; White 1991).

The effects of the widespread conversion to Christianity were not only those originating in more pragmatic considerations, but were also the transformations of perspective; both of which in theory supported the modern liberal state. The pragmatic reasons for conversion incorporated people by relocating them not only physically – which enabled access to material wealth and other external influences – but also abstractly in terms of becoming a part of a larger community of Christians, of British subjects, and, later, of Solomon Islanders. Over time, this reorientation began to alter the way people saw themselves in the world, with the important caveat the effect was not wholesale homogenization. The adoption of a Christian perspective helped to support the establishment of the modern state by attempting to shape people into particular kinds of subjects necessary for Western bureaucracy and liberal self-

[7] While on the surface anti-state or anti-colonial movements, the Fallowes, Maasina, and other movements served to further the legitimacy not of the ruler, but the rules by which they ruled in adopting these themselves.

governance although this varied by denomination. Indigenous modes of social order supported by supernatural beliefs established specific rules and retributions to guide moral behavior which did not necessarily harmonize with Western ideology and institutions (Akin 1996; Burt 1994; Keesing 1992; McDougall 2009; White 1991). As indigenous converts and foreign missionaries encouraged locals to disconnect from their 'heathen' traditional practices, however, these regulations were undermined (Keesing 1982). By characterizing indigenous practices as morally unacceptable, as essentially evil, there were few alternatives but to adopt the Christian supernatural system. Not all Solomon Islanders converted (see Keesing ibid; Akin ibid), but given the tangible material benefits of conversion and the social costs of not (see Akin ibid), even though many people maintained some customary beliefs, nearly all people became Christians in name and practice.

Although Catholicism and Anglicanism supported forms of religious hierarchy and bureaucracy in some ways mapping on to a more traditional social order, other more recent Protestant denominations introduced an even more personalized supernatural relationship. This placed the moral responsibility on the individual which for some was positive because it freed them from the "onerous ancestral taboos" (McDougall 2009: 489), however for others it led to a sense of cultural decline and social immorality. Unlike traditional institutions, the Christian freedom encouraged "self-policing" (Eves 2011: 764; see also Robbins 2004) which historically was also the foundation for liberal ideology that informed the development of the modern state (Asad 2003). These Protestant denominations maintained specific expectations for

behavior, however it was up to the individual to adhere to and confess failures based on their own relationship with supernatural beings and self-examination. Sin was redeemable not so much through social sacrifice and retribution but through introspection and individual amelioration. It was an on-going process. These denominations did support the idea of religious leadership, but it was more in the way of teacher or guide, a knowledgeable source there to make sense of the lessons of the bible.

While many Melanesians initially adopted Christianity for utilitarian purposes "such as gaining access to education and medicine, seeking protection from enemy groups, avoiding angry ancestors, and forging alliances with powerful outsiders" (McDougall 2009: 483), the practice eventually led to certain transformations of ideas about moral personhood. For example, according to Robbins (2004: 124), among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea, the "second-stage" conversion process of gaining knowledge to "live their lives in Christian terms" not only democratized supernatural knowledge, something in traditional practices that was only available to a select few, but also led to personal experiences of conversion (see also Eves 2011: 759). This next step process of formation of the Christian ethical self, acknowledging and being accountable for one's own sin, developed a sense of interiority among converts shifting what was previously external experience and liability inward. Burt (1994) for example, cites the increased use of the concepts of 'backsliding' and 'born again' among Solomon Islanders highlighting the salience of the discourse of personal conviction, experience, and liability. Following the Protestant Christian ideology of

transformation or rupture, to be ‘born again’ “involves commitment to a process of self-fashioning through which individuals strive to change or reform themselves—to refrain from the sinful acts that have characterized their previous lives (Eves 2011: 759). For Solomon Islanders, this more broadly meant breaking from their past ‘heathen’ beliefs, which did promote the adoption of a Christian worldview, but not the complete separation from the customary beliefs as might be expected. Instead, people seemed to develop a sense of shame or increased fear about traditional beliefs even though some aspects like sorcery and deference to ancestors have remained relevant in everyday life in the archipelago.

Church and State

Religious conversion, while initially being pragmatic, once Christianity weakened connection to tradition through resettlement and the destruction of taboo, became an important source of identity prompting more dedicated adherence (McDougall 2009). The need to be baptized and ‘born-again’ into Christianity, which supports breaking from one’s past, not only freed one’s spiritual self to partake in a new supernatural relationship, but also because it concretely devalued many of the social norms and weakened taboos that were the foundation of socio-political life, opened up the potential for new configurations (Joseph and Beu 2008: 2). In this vein, the conversion narratives often characterized indigenous practices as existing before the ‘light of God’ in a pre-Christian past which, in Melanesia, ended with the arrival of

Europeans[8]. The process of religious conversion began during the same time period as colonial incorporation and economic development intertwining Christianity, whiteness, and the modern state[9] in the Solomon Islands. This may be why there need not be a clear separation between Christianity and the modern governance structures both resulting from Western imposition; they took on a similar configuration as the socio-political and religious systems in the pre-contact archipelago[10]. As Joseph and Beu (2008: 1) state, "Religion is a major part of Melanesian culture, especially in contrast with Western culture where an ethos of secularism and separation of religion from state is increasingly seen as normative". And while in the contemporary Solomon Islands 'religion' is 'Christianity' even though other forms exist, with upwards of 98% of Solomon Islanders identifying as Christian, this hasn't lent itself to political stability because of the potential for fracture along denominational or even intra-denominational lines (McDougall 2009).

The power of conversion to Christianity to inculcate the ideological framework of the modern state lay not only in the conversion itself which undermined previous politico-social structures and integrated Solomon Islanders into a global system, but also in the promotion of self-governing, not in an anarchical sense, but rather within the confines of social or religious guidelines. This self-policing in Christianity relates

[8] This may also be why even though there is an increasing awareness of the effects of colonization and anti-colonial or anti-Western mindset, people are reluctant to identify with religious beliefs predating Christianity. It is almost as if custom is everything but pre-Christian beliefs. In many ways this might point to the continued power of Western ideology even amid its supposed decline. The distaste for separating from Christianity may demonstrate why it is such a successful belief system in terms of adherents even amid the growing recognition of other cultural denigration by Western forces.

[9] See Kempf (2002) for an example of this interconnection and its effects in Madang Province Papua New Guinea

[10] See Gibbs (2005) for the same argument about Papua New Guinea.

to the liberal project of government in that it first incorporates people within the confines of moral Christian behavior – defining the field of acceptable actions – and then provides the sense of 'free action' or individual agency by holding each person accountable to God for their infractions. This enabled the possibility of somewhat variable interpretation and experience along with a sense of personal 'freedom' while supposedly maintaining order. This sense of personal transformation and moral accountability, which was a continuous process in maintaining a relationship with Christian supernatural beings, historically has shaped an understanding of liberal citizenship within the modern state. To be a stately person (i.e. citizen) entailed a personal relationship with the state just as protestant Christianity requires such a relationship with God. While promoting a sense of freewill, as Hindness (2005: 249) explained, "the institutions of representative democracy – which provide the predominant modern understanding of democracy – are clearly designed to ensure that citizens play a strictly circumscribed role in the government of the state to which they belong".

In this sense, neither God nor the state need exist as tangible things even if their effects are experienced as such, but rather were directions of orientation shaping behaviors that one was individually accountable for – something that ran somewhat counter to traditional sociality. Nonetheless, people have been markedly successful at incorporating and reconfiguring the belief system through denominationalism and syncretism. As well, both Christianity (broadly) and the state created or supported a social identity wherein people would be defined as a community by virtue of their

shared orientation. Because of the nature of the guidelines, a sense of innate similarity arose from the communalization of the personalized relationship. In other words, Christianity provided guidelines which promoted a personal relationship and when that relationship was communalized there emerged a sense of community coming from the individual rather than vice versa. This also made it possible to maintain customary networks and kinship given they were constituted communally. This is also what potentially caused fractures as these identities intertwined with denominations of Christianity being tied to cultural, tribal, or clan groupings. Maggio (2016: 78) also cites the possibility that there is a "connection between schism and breakaway from mainline churches in Honiara and the new identity of Solomon Islanders who, in creating or joining Pentecostal-type churches, are challenging their historical religious institution for the sake of individual, messianic, and indigenous independence". In this way, Christianity was providing new ways of interacting both as redefining citizenship and identity not as a prescription, but locally and contemporarily constituted.

Christianity and the state were something to identify with after the fact whereas many of the social structures like kinship systems and aspects of pre-Christian supernaturalism were the 'natural' condition. For example, if one was backsliding, what were they backsliding into? Tying into the discourse of dysfunction discussed in Chapter Two, this view also placed behaviors considered to be socially problematic like consuming large amounts of alcohol in a similar although not necessarily identical category as certain customary practices. The circulating possibilities have created a diverse dichotomy which must be navigated by Solomon

Islanders, in some ways a multilayered structure where at one level a person is this whereas at another level they identify as something different, neither of which is necessarily inconsistent. In the same way that one must seemingly choose between[11] darkness and light or right and wrong, there seems to always be this tension about what path one should take[12] while also being grounded in more concrete existence facilitated by the sociocultural systems. It is not so simple as to say that something is always positive or negative, as is the case with Westernization for example, but rather that is an on-going process of negotiation made possible by the imposition of political, economic, social, and religious systems. This may also be what has promoted the factionalization and schism of the churches tied both to explorations of how one experiences Christianity, but also in how Christianity is related to other meaningful cultural patterns like kinship and values like gender roles (see Maggio 2016).

The imposed state was something that one identified with, transforming people into citizens or Solomon Islanders in the same way the people converted from traditional belief systems into various denominations of Christian supernaturalism. This made these systems both oppressive impositions, but also sites for pragmatic acculturation and reconfiguration because they in some ways freed one from onerous taboos while also intermingled with the safety, albeit not fixed, of the communal social identity. As well, as described in Chapter Two, this can lead to paralysis because of incoherence surrounding expectation and agency. In both cases of state and

[11] See White (1991:8) for examples of this duality that can be encountered today echoing the writings of early missionaries characterizing life in the Pacific.
[12] For example, one of the most intense and on-going debates is about whether the Sabbath is on Saturday or Sunday. It rises to the level of claiming damnation for those who are on opposing positions.

religious imposition, there was little other choice but to acquiesce at some level given that the alternatives were potential damnation or social and economic isolation and were tied into broader hegemonic discourses inculcated through the colonial experience. In the socio-religious realm, many of the taboos were diminished, but the social structures like kinship relations and social expectations once tied to taboos remained. The conversion to Christianity alongside the colonial reconfiguration of political, social, and economic patterns created an environment where people had more freedom to determine their actions, but in a social setting were they were supported by and obligated to their family and, more recently, wantoks. Given that the 'natural' or 'customary' condition remained present[13], it was a choice people had to make not to adhere to customary beliefs rather than their disappearance, where the social ties to kinship underlain and intertwined the identification as a Christian, people could be assured of their afterlife in the Christian supernatural realm while also being gravely threatened by magic and poisoning in this life.

The weaving of social, economic, and political spheres in the Solomon Islands has meant that even as the Western system of state administration assumes separation, on-the-ground realties don't follow suit. At the same time, the assumption that political leaders of today are identical to past models of leadership is problematic given the upheavals that have happened in historical time. The experiences of past have shaped what it means to be a politician starting on the one hand with cultural

[13] Even if people no longer followed certain customary rules, customary culture was often seen as in existence. See for example Scott (2011) where the author explains that part of the purpose of the underground army in Makira is to protect the pure language and kastom that has diminished in the surface world.

leadership models more or less transformed by incorporation and on the other through the reality that role of statesman in the Solomon Islands began as a 'white man's' position within the administration. As Moore (2010: 6) states, "until 1951, no Solomon Islander had any say in the central administration of the Protectorate" deeply connecting the position with whiteness not only because the system was Western, but also that it was occupied for a significant period of time by exclusively white men. Being a politician in the Solomon Islands, has meant navigating through and adapting to an environment where expectations, lived realities, and ideologies confront one another in shaping them, Solomon Islanders, and the state in the process.

STATESMEN

Narrative of a Leader

> "I was born on the ground, in the bush, under the stars" "I was not born in a clinic" "I was born in the village" "I was born in the bush" "I was born near a tree, there was no doctor" "There was no hospital or nurse" "I had a simple childhood" "I am a village boy" "I grew up in the bush, I was naked, I played in the sea" "I climbed trees and I had no shoes" "I am from the village, the simple life" "I would go to the garden" "I would bathe in the river" "I did not go to school in the beginning" "I was playing in the river by myself, I had never been to school" "It was difficult for me, but those times of struggle helped me" "I am a village boy, a boy belonging to the bush, I started my life in a simple way, the custom way"

When I would ask current and former politicians in the Solomon Islands to tell me their story, how they came to be a politician, there seemed to be a similar, almost

formulaic narrative[14] to their account. The narratives began, as illustrated above, with the leaders explaining how simply they began their life, usually in the village, born without modern medical oversight or the comforts of 'civilization'. Without prompting, nearly all started at the beginning of their lives as if this simple start was a necessary part of their path to a political life. They would often stress how they began in "the bush" or "in the village" tying them to the "grassroots" of the Solomon Islands. They favored words like "custom" or "simple" citing the experiences of everyday village life like going to the garden, fishing in the sea, or traveling to mission stations. While this was often matter-of-factly true, when considered in light of the entire narrative this 'simple beginning' seemed to serve another purpose. On the one hand, this in many ways parallels the narrative of politicians across the globe seeking to appear as though they are one with their people. As Bailey (2001: 54) explains, political leaders "are looking for empathic identification with people who, they assume, probably see themselves as distant from, inferior to, not in touch with, and therefore distrustful of the high and mighty leader" (see also Corbett and Wood 2013). In this way it might reflect the influence of external political narratives on Solomon Islander leaders, but also mirrors important cultural values. Not exhibiting one's standing as higher than one's kinsfolk, in other words acting too important or showing off, is an important social value in the Solomon Islands. This can be illustrated by the following example from an informant talking about a government official, his uncle, who started behaving differently:

[14] White (1991) demonstrates how these types of narratives are especially informative in that they are ideological, illustrating both identity and history.

> "This man, he must have thought he was a whiteman or something. He was in the public service, but he acted so high. He would make everyone take their shoes off when they came inside his house, but if their feet were dirty he would even make the person wash them. People really gossiped about him and no one wanted to go to his house. He thought he was better than everyone else and his house was so nice."

On the other hand, this simple beginning when considered in context of the rest of the narrative seemed to also be setting the stage for a kind of transformation, calling, or even a separation. This may be related to the notion of a "calling" as described by Corbett (2013) among Pacific Island politicians more broadly wherein an individual believes they have been specifically selected to rise to power or to take a position of political service typically through supernatural means. The "calling from God" Corbett (ibid) identified among politicians demonstrated the close relationship between Christian religious beliefs and political discourse in Pacific Islands. Among Solomon Island politicians, while Christianity presumably played an important role in their lives, I did not encounter explicit religious-speak[15] as much as I encountered an effect of the introduction of Christianity, namely the conversion narrative. Instead of focusing on Christianity alone, this narrative style linked into broader and deeply intertwined themes in the country, especially those associated with modernity. The narrative, in these particular cases, functions by tying into the discourse detailed in Chapter Two that village life or what are described as more traditional lifeways in the

[15] When asking politicians their path to politics and experiences in politics almost no one cited religious affiliations – even those who were likely elected by virtue of belonging to specific churches. The only informants who explicitly spoke about the role of Christian spirituality were those whose path began in religious occupations or service. The more oft cited factor, according to my findings, for precipitating a move into politics was something to do with one's people, for example the desire to serve them or pressure from them to enter the political realm.

Solomon Islands are somehow ‘primitive’, ‘backward’, or ‘before the light of God’. Like the ‘noble savage’, they started out simple, not knowing any better, but through intervention and transformation became something ‘more advanced’ whether that be a Christian in a conversion narrative or a modern politician in a leader narrative. The transformation into a political leader was in some ways more than becoming an official just as becoming a Christian was more than adopting a new religion. Because Christianity and the modern political system were intertwined with Western imposition, part of the change could be described as adopting ‘whiteness’, but this was only one layer of the multilayered project of being a politician in the Solomon Islands.

Seeming to demonstrate the idea that they were somehow chosen or well-suited to become a leader, the next step in the narrative usually entailed a list of their successes. The story often started with schooling and then proceeded to professional experiences if there were any outside of being a politician. Even for those who attended only limited schooling and did not have much experience in the formal employment sector, there was always a moment in the narrative where they were recognized as special in some way in childhood. The idea that they stood out in some way in childhood, a feature of every single narrative, while on the one hand might again be a matter of fact, also may point to a desire for their success to be recognized as an individual achievement or quality, even if they are in some cases ascribing their performance to forces outside of themselves. This same sense of standing out was encountered in narratives from public servants, but not in accounts from chiefs who were more likely to point to people choosing them rather than them having unique or

stand-out qualities at a young age even if they acknowledge they had qualities as adults or chiefs that people valued. While politicians too spoke about the role of their people choosing them, this came later in the narrative when the step to becoming a politician began. In this way it also highlights a point of tension between wanting to be perceived as successful by virtue of one's own qualities or actions and wanting to be promoted by the will of others. The formula of the leader narrative in my experience satisfies both.

> "I did well in school" "my teachers said I was a good student" "I went to the mission school and I was a good student" "I wanted to do well in school" "I always earned high marks" "I did not go to school at first but I was good at other things in the village" "the missionaries found me to be good at understanding the bible" "the other children would listen to me" "they must have seen something in me when they found me in the bush that day" "some people say I was born a leader, I am not sure, but maybe they saw something in me I did not see in myself" "He saw something in me, all these other people were really senior, top level, but he asked me"

> "I was successful in my work" "I sat for the top exams" "I was promoted a number of times" "I worked for many years in the public service" "I enjoyed being a teacher" "I wanted to stay in the church because my life was there" "I had a good posting and I was happy" "I worked in the medical field and I was good at taking care of my patients" "I didn't think I would be a politician, I liked to study law" "I went overseas for university and I earned my degree" "I earned a scholarship as a top student" "I was planning to remain in the public service because I was successful, but then things changed"

In the latter set of statements, when leaders were describing their adult lives prior to becoming politicians, they often tried to stress the point that they were not

only successful, but also happy in what they were doing[16]. These statements were much more detailed when the individual had professional or religious-sector experience than when they did not, with the most common experience being public service (see also Corbett and Wood 2013). The politicians who had limited or no professional or religious-sector experience, of who I only interviewed five, just began with the moment the opportunity to become a politician presented itself. This may have been the case because the people knew that I was researching politics or because there is an assumption about what one is expected to hear in a politician's genealogy (even though I never asked specific questions about qualifications, preparation, or similar[17]). It may have also been because professionals in the Solomon Islands shared a similar pathway in life (see Corbett and Wood ibid), but I noticed this style of narrative differed among other types of leaders. When researching with chiefs I found that they were much more likely to include the work they had done outside the formal labor market, but this was not the case with politicians even if they too had been quite accomplished in this sector. Chiefs who had worked in the formal sector often spoke about "retiring" and becoming a chief. Religious leaders were much more likely to speak about their path as being one of a calling, but would, like chiefs, often point out that someone else saw the potential within them before they saw it in themselves. The politicians seemed to be making a categorical distinction which placed politics in the modern/formal/professional/non-customary sphere even if the on-the-ground distinctions were, for the most part, much less pronounced (see also Corbett and Wood

[16] I thought part of this might be related to the insecurity of the position as a politician as well. With few lasting beyond a single term, it was not the profession that it can be in other places (Corbett and Wood 2013).
[17] I always started with the same request – tell me your story.

ibid). This contradiction between the narrative and the lived experience helps to highlight the influence of foreign political ideology on shaping how politicians perceive their own roles and also the impact of imposing a foreign political system that was really only tacitly accepted by most people. When combined with religious discourse and the lack of separation between Christianity and politics it also serves to highlight the differentiation between Western/white and traditional/local even when, again, this does not map on to lived reality. This separation between politics and other aspects of society is something the West is familiar with, but as explained at the outset is not something characteristic of Melanesia. A similar framing can be seen in discussions about corruption in Chapter Five wherein people speak frequently of corruption and cite it as a major issue in society, but at the same time do not deem their own behavior as corrupt even as it would fit such characterization based on the contemporary good governance, transparency, and legitimacy discourse.

After this, came the decisive moment in their narrative, when the opportunity to become a leader presented itself. Again (apologies for redundancy) the arc of the storyline reaching a climax at the point of becoming a politician could be credited to the fact that I was asking them about how they became a politician, but there did also seem to be some other influences at work. For example, when I asked government officials, public servants, and chiefs about their own stories they did not seem to follow the same arc. There seemed to be no climax when permanent secretaries or ministerial workers described their path even if they were nearing retirement and, thus, had no further political aspirations. The only other group to share this arc were

religious leaders who, as mentioned before, tended to describe this moment in terms of a calling or discovery, but again it seemed to lack the spark encountered in the political narratives. The spark, it seemed to me, was something akin to the experience of baptism or being born again. For politicians, there seemed to be a transformation; they were becoming something different from their past, even if their past had led them this far, the title itself of 'politician' or 'member of parliament' potentially being transformative. Part of this moment was more tangible and somewhat less transformative – that their position entailed being selected by the people, recognized as a leader, a big man among their equals – even as they often stood apart from their people or they were reluctant to do so. Unlike the traditional leaders, however, they were becoming something brought by the British[18], from the 'whiteman', a title that belonged to another culture even if it is a familiar one in contemporary Solomon Islands. It was like putting on a mask or a suit which was superficially transformative even when the person would be from the same roots underneath. Inscribed in the individual versions of the transcript of these moments were the values formative of a politician in the Solomon Islands. Rather than singularly classed, the diversity and even contradictory nature of these values constituting politicians evinced the forces influencing not only political life, but much of the contemporary on-the-ground experience in the Solomon Islands.

> "I did not want to be a leader" "The people came and asked me" "at the meeting in my village they nominated me because they thought I was the best candidate" "my people threw my name into the hat and I

[18] Even as some of the terms denoting traditional leadership or the positions considered to be more customary may too have been introduced through colonization (see White 1997).

> was surprised" "I would never contest but the people begged me" "the people in my area said they needed someone they could trust" "It changed my life because I did not plan this" "I was out there with the people, digging ditches and making toilets, and then when the opportunity came, I thought I should contest and if it is the will of my people I will win, otherwise I will move on" "I did this for my people, they asked me and so I took the chance" "they had other leaders before, but they could not trust them, they said I was the person they could rely upon" "I did this for my people"

While 'big man' has been widely used to describe contemporary Melanesian politicians (see e.g. Alasia 1989), as explained by Robbins (2016) this often relies on an entrepreneurial characterization of these actors, negotiating the maximum returns through realpolitik. This does match up with much of the behavior defining regional politics, but it is not the whole story. Taking a fresh look at Burridge's (1975) classic article *The Melanesian Manager*, Robbins (ibid) challenges the common separation between ethical considerations and politics seeing the divide as an assumption which does not necessarily map on to the lived reality in many places. The Solomon Islands, as I explained in the introduction, is one such place where the political, social, and moral/religious/supernatural realms are deeply connected even as those connections are at times differentially presented. For Melanesia leaders, being a big man then is more than being an entrepreneur, it is, as Burridge (ibid: 86 -87) and Robbins (ibid: 27) argue, being "a symbol as well", "a symbol for others in his society to ponder". And when they consider the big man, the people see "one who both embodies and transcends the inherent and recurrent conflicts…to which his community is subject, and who reveals to others the kinds of moral conflicts in which they are involved" (Burridge ibid cited in Robbins ibid). It is not the case, however, that the big man is a

symbol or exemplar by virtue of his flawless or "saintly" morality, but rather, as Robbins (ibid) explains, precisely because of his failure to live up to or willful transgression of the ethical expectations. In this way, the big man or manager operates as both an entrepreneur providing returns for supporters, but also as an exemplary reflection of the ethical tensions in society. Combined with the historical experience and the modern political context, the big man politician can reveal the field in which he exists and operates.

The leader narrative illustrates the web of idealized values and tensions in the Solomon Islands by showing how politicians seek to characterize themselves. In the sense of being a traditional big man[19], the narrative elements that demonstrate these values are those associated with being one with the people and chosen by the people while also being outstanding – "first among equals" (Burridge 1975 cited in Dalton 2016: 45). According to Alasia (1989: 138), many of the traits characterizing contemporary big man can be traced to traditional political forms including those well-known from Kwara'ae: *fata'abu* (chief priest), *ramo* (chief warrior), and *aofia* (feast-giver). While the first on this list likely lends itself to more supernatural paths like becoming a religious practitioner, the latter two play a clear role in shaping the idealized big man. These qualities include being recognized as promising at a young age, potentially shaped by some divine will manifested in abilities, and being able to exert influence securing the support of his followers. In many cases the politicians

[19] Although this category itself has transformed over time through the colonial and missionization experiences as well as the increased articulations of diverse customs across the Islands as they were in some senses homogenized through the process of creating 'Solomon Islanders'.

would lean more toward one influence than another in their reporting, for example, some of my informants highlighted their prowess and abilities while others spoke in detail about how they have supported and are well-respected among their constituents. To be a successful big man politician, Alasia (ibid) explains, one must be known in his area and have a good record of providing returns for his supporters, successfully out-competing other big men MPs for government resources to pass on to voters. The tension to provide for supporters in order to survive to another term in a limited resource environment can turn persuasion through reciprocity into coercion. Dalton (2016) citing Burridge (1975) explains that when big men face resource scarcity in circumstances where they have substantial obligations, the temptation to resort to sorcery threats is high. As will be explained later, this is part of the reason that politicians describe one of their biggest threats as being *green leaf* or sorcery.

The other formative idealization of a modern politician is associated with the position of Member of Parliament as being or becoming *araikwao*[20] or 'whiteman'. As Alasia (1989) states, the reason there is this system in the region is by virtue of its introduction through colonization and independence making it foreign to the people of the country. Until just shortly before independence, most high-level positions were held by white people, with some positions like the Police Commissioner still being intermittently held by a white man. The conceptualization of being a Member of Parliament as being a transformation into whiteness or Western-ness can be illustrated by the contrast presented in their lives from starting life simply to reaching that

[20] Meaning foreigner, mostly referring to white or Western people as "waku" refers to Chinese/Asian

climactic moment of becoming a politician. While these also tie into the previous qualities of traditional big-man-ness in the desire to be one with the people, the climactic transformation rings similar to the moment of conversion as if they are becoming something else, a title that has no roots, but confers access to relatively significant power. There is this sense that one needs to disconnect or has disconnected from their past, but this creates a tension as if being pulled in different directions. One politician explained how torn he felt when his grandfather was dying he told his kin: "bury me with my head on, because now it does not matter, my knowledge is lost, we are Christian now, our past is gone".

Whiteness and Christianity had, through experience, become associated with a moral high ground, power, legitimacy, and beauty, intentionally or not, situating Solomon Islanders historically as deficient, amoral or immoral, and primitive (Kabutaulaka 2015). Hegemony fostered a reverence for Western ideas and whiteness, the consequence of colonization, missionization, and modernization, with access to power provided by state incorporation being something that made someone more Western. People who knew politicians intimately would often describe feeling differently about talking to them once they became a MP even if they were good friends or even closely related. "It is like they became someone different" one informant explained, "They were changed". When I asked what he meant he said he wasn't really sure "Maybe it was because he wears a suit" he said laughing.

The idea of becoming an MP as a transformation is also supported by the near constant effort to 'strengthen', 'develop', or 'train' elected officials in the art of governance by international Western influences. While the country was supposed to be transitioning to self-determination and independence, the pressure was always towards conformity with modernity itself being associated with the Western style of governance. Any moves to alter the system toward what might be a more culturally consistent configuration were met with charges of taking the country backward or inhibiting modernization. This became significantly more pronounced after the Tension crisis years when intervention became commonplace. The years of supportive interference and contradictory discourse between modernization/development and self-determination served to challenge the reverence for Western-ness or whiteness with a sense of resentment. The frustration is in part because of the shame created by the discourse of dysfunction that is so prevalent, but also in the sense of capability to run one's own country[21] and the strong sense of pride in local cultures that is emerging out from under the years of white ideological oppression. "I converted to nationalism, Solomon Islands first, after I became aware of what they were doing to us, how they put their own interests first", one politician said. This duality can be seen in the past in movements like Maasina and Fallowes, but can also be encountered among religious

[21] On a number of occasions I interviewed politicians who explained how they felt like white people were taking advantage of the country. This was everything from political reform to economic investment. Even speaking about research permits, my attention was directed toward a mostly-empty shelf where the published results of foreign research conducted in the Solomon Islands should have sat. As well, many foreign consultants worked in the country, and like anything else, some were reputable and others were not. They were exorbitantly paid and lived in what were basically mansions on the hills and would, according to my informants, spend their days lecturing their counterparts with no knowledge of local customs. "They come here and tell us what to do, insult us, and at the same time act in ways that are against our custom and culture". See also McDougall 2016a: 269 for a similar explanation.

practitioners who operate within the imposed system but express in overt and covert ways a sense of frustration with being guided by outsiders (see also McDougall 2016a). For most politicians, the reverence and resentment of Westerners sit side-by-side creating a tension that mirrors that in society, but is more pronounced given that by wearing the suit of whiteness, so to speak, one can access wealth and power like never before. Access to that power is made possible by the combination of Western incorporation and adopting whiteness with the traditional idealization of big man creating this character who must tread the waters among the convoluted field of imposition, acculturation, and custom.

Life of a Leader

Politicians navigate a multilayered environment which reflects the contemporary milieu, as modern-day big men in a society where access to the effects of incorporation like individuality, wealth, and travel are close at hand, but so is the everyday life, in the town and in the villages, the sociocultural fabric of the archipelago. Along with development and modernization, culture change, Christianity, and custom are constant themes in the country. On one level politicians are like colonists, foreigners, or expats adopting the ‘whiteman’ title as Member of Parliament, putting on the suit that makes them strangers to their own kin. This realm includes the complex discourses about Westerners or whiteness which are based on the morality of whiteness both in positive terms as associated with Christianity and in negative terms as associated with modernity, culture change, and so forth. Even these two categories

are intertwined as McDougall (2015) has described in terms of why people have chosen Islam over Christianity because of the problem of adherence. My informants would often speak of Western influence in positive terms via the discourse of dysfunction comparisons (i.e. Solomon Islands cultures are 'backwards') or development or modernity, but would also speak of these influences as negative in terms of cultural change, a loss of custom, the ways of young-people-these-days discourse and so forth. It reflects whiteness or Western-ness as a source of power from colonization, missionization, and modernization, but also as a source of resentment, culture change, and shame.

In this realm of modern politics, leaders have access to resources, some known to their people and some not, which result from incorporation within the state system. People who have never traveled beyond Melanesia are now spending weeks at conferences in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Entrusted with foreign-sourced funding for rural development, these people are now handling hundreds of thousands of dollars, deciding on how to use this money in their constituencies. They are now at the helm of running a political administration which was imposed and adopted, with variable levels of understanding in terms of the intended function and challenging traction more broadly in society. Like any democracy, among their ranks are the highly-educated and less so with the trend leaning toward being more education than the majority of society (Corbett and Wood 2013). While exceptionalism is normal for customary leaders, what makes them different than traditional big men is that the wealth and resources in this case are different, potentially hidden, foreign, and

unaccountable; much of the power of the system comes from outside making it less predictable. It also provides opportunities to act differently, to change. It is like the satchel of money given to the old man landowner for his timber as he sits in the open-air bar in the morning drinking a Sol Brew while a younger family member explains the contract. This exchange transaction seems familiar, but it is wildly out of proportion from past experience providing opportunities within and beyond traditional structures. Should one give a feast, pay school fees, fund the holiday celebrations or should one build themselves a permanent house or take an '02'? The power at this level does not have an equivalent, "it tastes different", but can in some ways be seen in the excesses tied to Westerners or Western influence. This is also part of what makes it magical, drawing the attention of sorcery and witchcraft.

On another level, politicians are inextricably tied to their people, having lived their lives with them either as a member of the village, church, or community, or having shared the town life with them in the market or at a betel nut stand. A politician is both very close and very far from his/her people. As one long time politician explained, "In Solomon Islands you are everything to everyone, you are their banker, their big man, their chief, they respect you but they expect something in return". As a big man, the politician is obligated to supporters and works to provide returns, something often reported as a politician's most important function. This is a great source of pride for any politician: "the people know I provide for them", "who else will help these people", "they don't know the grassroots people like I do", "I help my people". This is also a source of contention, both as Alasia (1989) explains because of

competition among standing MPs and their challengers over limited resources, but also among the anti-corruption discourse which characterizes what would be a positive cultural behavior as an illegal perversion of the legitimate means of democratic governance (see Larmour 2012). The action is at once a source of pride and shame, echoing the discourse of dysfunction as the politician navigates the world of what it means to serve one's people. Contemporary, hegemonic good governance discourse contradicts the local models of leadership in some ways undermining traditional accountability which in the end promotes rather than discourages problematic behavior. In some ways this is what those who McDougall (2009) interviewed about converting to Islam said about Protestant Christianity. The freedom corrupts, they argued, saying Christianity provided no rules and that adherents "rely too heavily on God's grace" rather than upholding moral laws (McDougall ibid: 486).

A servant of the people

It was late in the evening, close to 9 pm, and we were driving down a dirt road along one of the many hilltop ridges bordering the main town area of Honiara to the south. Coming up to the house, which was surrounded by a short wall and fence, we pulled straight into the driveway where the gate sat open seemingly for anyone to come inside. Exiting the car it was hard to see since no lights illuminated the rugged driveway, shaped by the cycle of heavy rains and hot days, and so I looked down intently as I made my way to the patio area. Weaving between cars and grass, I arrived at the poured-concrete floor underneath the house and was quite shocked to see how

many people were sitting there. The light coming from upstairs and the barbeque pit in kitchen a few yards away provided just enough glow to outline the faces of the forty or so people sitting calmly under the house. Most sat on the floor or on copra bags filled with local produce. A few younger men sat on an overturned boat to the side of the patio, while some children played with bottle caps on the floor. People appeared relaxed, chewing betel nut or smoking cigarettes while quietly talking to each other. I walked among the people as I headed for the stairway leading to the veranda. Halfway up the stairs I could see into the kitchen where a middle-aged woman tended the fire underneath a grill covered in fish while a younger female carried a pot full of rice. At the top of the stairs there were three plastic chairs on the veranda which we were invited to sit on by a girl no older than maybe six or seven. From my seat I could see inside the house, a Western-style house identical to those occupied by foreigners posted to the Solomon Islands. The difference between the foreigners' houses and this one was that this house had almost nothing inside. There were a few of those large colorful woven plastic traveling bags that can be found at any Chinese store and a single plastic chair like the one I was sitting on. The little girl who had directed us to sit was now dancing around on the hardwood floors disturbed only when her uncle, the MP, patted her on the shoulder smiling and directed her to bring us some limeade before coming outside to talk.

This scene, at different locations with different actors, played out over and over again as I conducted my research. Mostly we sat outside, a common practice in the Pacific, but sometimes we sat inside the empty houses on the floor, although often

even then we were sitting on or near the veranda. It was rare, in fact, to go to a politician's house when there were not at least a few people hanging out. Those from more distant constituencies had markedly fewer guests, but supporters needing everything from an evening meal to a water tank could still be found. A few politicians, especially those who were business people or long-time office-holders, would not encourage or allow supporters to come to their residences. Instead, they would either set up a satellite location or tell supporters to come to Parliament House or their office. Outside of the Parliament building, a magnificent structure built by foreign support, there was a large leaf house where constituents would wait to meet their MP. One politician even joked about sneaking out of Parliament as to not have to encounter their voters who inevitably want something. On the other hand, this same politician held himself to be a "betelnut master[22]", a quality he said was necessary for most politicians to be successful. What he meant was that to be a politician, one needed to be willing to spend a lot of time with people, listening to their concerns – even if this did not always map on to the politician's actual behavior. "This is Solomon Islands, whatever you do, you help people," one prominent politician told me. "The international community, Transparency will say their things, but that doesn't matter because the people will come with you because you helped them, you touched their lives," he said.

"It is too hard to be a politician, your wallet is always empty, but your house is always full" a politician told me. The life of the politician, it seemed, was to be a

[22] Someone able to chew large amounts of betel nut in a single sitting without becoming ill

servant of the people. “I don’t have a mobile phone because I had one before and it would ring day and night. When I would turn it off people said I was doing something wrong and trying to hide. So I just got rid of it”. Another long-time politician told me that he was getting too old and tired to do this work anymore. “The life of a politician is difficult and you are always tired. Someone always wants to talk with you and you have no time for yourself.” They expressed both a desire to help their people, but also a fear to go in public where requests would constantly be made of them. Speaking to the permanent secretaries and other public servants they would say that their minister would rarely be in the office because of obligation to their constituents. At Parliament, some members would give reports, usually guided by their assistants, while others would give impassioned, and yet polite speeches about various topics affecting the country. They knew their audience; the professional politicians would speak for effect, for example, one politician was a master of code switching. When he would switch between a standard version of English when highlighting his knowledge and sophistication on a subject like climate change or the economy and then intermittently switch to Pijin and slang Pijin as if to become closer to the other MPs. They played the political game, a few better than any others, but they all had similar rules[23]. They attended meetings, spoke at events, oversaw their ministries, and composed, debated, and approved legislation. During a speech at an event for public servants, a prominent politician pointed to the crest of the country citing the national motto “to lead is to

[23] This is not completely the case given that a few were seasoned politicians and businessmen who knew the political field well and could manipulate it to their needs. They would occasionally be brought down by their own corruption or self-assurance, but they did stand out from the others. These people also seemed to either tend toward becoming more ‘white’ or westernized or to be resentful of Westernization and seek to increase indigenous autonomy. Neither direction precipitated more or less potentially problematic behavior than the other as both groups had ‘members’ involved in scandals

serve". "It does not say to serve is to lead, it says to lead is to serve. Our duty is to our people". What it means to serve however is up for negotiation, with the survival of a politician dependent upon an ability to walk the tight rope of carefully measured expectations.

A fat man

> "The thing about politicians is that they go inside and become fat. Now they have money and they can eat all the time, especially at the restaurants. Look how fat they look in their suits. They don't work in the garden anymore; they drive around in their Hilux and eat all day. They are also men who like to drink beer, not all of them because they are *lotu*[24], but many of them. They get fat from the beer. That is what it means when you are a politician, you become a fat man"

While politicians are sometimes shy about spending too much time out in public, hesitant that their constituents might find them and request something they are not in a position to provide, there are certain places they frequent. They can often be found having lunch at one of the higher-end cafes, some connected to hotels others run by expats, where a meal costs more than most Solomon Islanders spend on a week's worth of food. In the evening you can find them at the hotel or casino restaurants, sometimes they are drinking as well. Going out to a restaurant is something that not many people can do in the Solomon Islands given the cost and being able to do so is a sign of wealth. Politicians would see people they know and say things like "let me take you out to eat with my wife" even if they never intended to take them out. It was like the trip with the Honorable cited in Chapter Five, they say it even if they don't

[24] Meaning religious (Christian); one who follows religious guidelines, most specifically referring to not drinking alcohol or chewing betel nut

follow through because saying it means they can do it. Fatness is both a positive characteristic, but it is also a sign of excess and laziness. The politician now has access to the Western world, a world of plenty, but also a place of temptation and greed; a source of intrigue for their constituents, especially those who have limited experience with Western lifestyles. The politician is symbolic of the tensions between the positive and negative characteristics of whiteness or Western-ness, but also in a way where he has access to the wealth and power unlike any other. This, along with other formative elements of political life in the Solomon Islands, makes the politician particularly prone to falling ill, attempting to be killed, or dying from sorcery and witchcraft.

The Dangers of Politics

Besides love and other jealousies, politics, as my informants explain, attracts more supernatural attention than most other things. Almost every politician had an account of people trying to poison them or undermine their ability to serve their people. As described by Foana'ota (2015), the problem of sorcery and witchcraft in the country is growing with the government currently unable to deal with the consequences. Foana'ota (ibid) explains how people use various types of sorcery from across the Islands, including *pela* from Western Province, *vele* from Guadalcanal, and *arua* from Malaita which are all more generally referred to as *greenleaf*. This type of sorcery cannot only make people ill and forgetful, it can also transform practitioners into other things enabling them to carry out their misdeeds. As cited later on, one politician told me that besides taking care of one's supporters, sorcery and witchcraft were the biggest concerns for politicians. And according to my findings, no politician

is exempt with even the most adamantly Christian and non-believing individuals still falling prey to supernatural encounters.

Part of this was the tensions associated with being a big man in a manner that mapped on to more traditional understanding of leadership. Being recognized or accepted as a leader often meant that one had a touch of divine will in them – making them exceptional. Very big men like the first Prime Ministers were believed to have especially strong power enabling them to live on past their death. One of the most well-known examples is that of Solomon Mamaloni who, after his passing, was in charge of the underground army in Makira (see Scott 2011). In life, as one informant explained to me, Mamaloni relied upon supernatural advice by consulting a "medium" as he "was not comfortable until he knows the future". The informant went on to explain how if someone looked over and saw Mamaloni "smiling amidst a no confidence motion or something big another group is planning then he will be consulting a medium". If he was smiling then they knew it would be all taken care of. "That is Solo, strange things happen" he said. He was known to appear after his death and was considered to be an important guide in the spiritual realm – recently reunited with the other founding father Sir Peter Kenilorea upon his passing.

Politicians have reported having encounters with deceased politicians through supernatural forces which can shape their goals in terms of what direction they believe they should take the country. This guidance can be beneficial, but politicians in consultation with leaders from the Anglican churches and other denominations have

expressed concern about the crossing-over between realms. Living practitioners of sorcery and witchcraft also posed a threat to politicians who are in a constant struggle over resources and the success of projects to maintain their seats. “He thinks he is such a big man, he thinks he is stronger than me, but he does not know that all the people are loyal to me. They do not follow him even though he is higher up, he does not know that the only reason they are with him is because they follow me”. This was the statement from a politician about another, closely-allied Member illustrating the tension among even those who are aligned. Recently, as cited by Foana’ota (ibid), politicians have ‘dropped dead’ while in office signalling the likelihood, according to popular estimation, that they were poisoned by supernatural means.

While whiteness is meant to make one immune from sorcery or witchcraft, the increasing interaction and accessibility of whiteness or Westernization and the localization and denominalization of Christian supernaturalism has challenged this divide. Part of this was that whiteness was no longer something just attached to white people, but rather has become something one can ‘wear’ or ‘adopt’ that makes you more powerful, while at the same time promoting a sense of resentment. Maybe as people began adopting the ways of white people, they realized the fallacy of the claim of supremacy while still being enveloped in the hegemonic world order. The insecurity around the order or the power made many things possible, detaching sorcery from custom and making it work on white people in the same way that whiteness could be detached. As the custom priest told me before attempting to heal what he believed was cursing me when my house was broken into, “You are white and I am a Christian, so I

am not sure if this will work; but magic from this island is especially strong so maybe that is why you have been affected. I believe in God and Jesus and I will pray for you first and we need to look to our Savior, but we must also speak to the ancestors and stop this magic."

But it was also the resentment of whiteness, the taste of what it meant and the realization of local pride, the excesses and false promises of modernity bounded to whiteness, the frustrated self-determination, and the local jealousies and desires for power – both as a big man and as a successful individual – that make sorcery and witchcraft so attracted to political life. It is in these spaces that the morality of society, the ethical tensions and debates, the discourses formative of people's worldviews, the global and the local[25] intertwined with colonization and modernity, the historical domination and narrative of development, and the meaning of Solomon Islander are worked out in public. The big man politician, the manager, the servant of the people, fat in his suit, white and black, supernatural and modern, exemplary in all his multilayered manifestations not only enacts the administration as a governor and embodies the tensions in society, but more importantly as a result of this complex existence is symbolic of the Solomon Islands state.

[25] Kempf (2002) illustrates how the Ngaing men of Papua New Guinea have creatively appropriated Christianity and the effects of incorporation, reconfiguring the disempowering colonial discourse of blackness and whiteness to access power through masculinity. Through masculinity rituals linked to Christian rites like the Crucifixion men are able to connect to an inner outerworld, a link to the modern world through their own passing from their own space in the world.

A Conclusion about Encountering Chiefs in a Search for the State

While my research on state actors focused primarily on politicians and some government officials, I found that I was also encountering chiefs in many interesting ways. Similar to McDougall's (2015) findings in Western Province, where she encountered neo-traditional institutions maintaining social order as the administrative functions of the state withdrew in the crisis years, I was encountering chiefs taking on the roles typically maintained by the officials of the state. Chiefs, rather than being the "premodern relics" they are often characterised as, were interacting with, enacting, and, in some cases, constituting aspects of the Solomon Islands state (Lindstrom and White 1997: 3). As McDougall (ibid) explains, rather than representing a "resilient" traditional institution, thinly veiled by the imposition of the modern state, the entangled relationship between custom, colonial history, and the modern state have shaped the contemporary socio-political reality. McDougall (ibid: 471-472) cites Oppermann's (2015) argument that little attention has been paid to how the administration of the state, although mostly absent, has "colonised the life worlds of ordinary villagers in Melanesia" leading them to enact the relations and functions of the state in their own communities. In line with these conclusions, this section examines how chiefs[26] figure in the contemporary political field Solomon Islands and how those ethnographic encounters might provide a way to conceptualize the state, not

[26] For a more comprehensive view of chiefs in various parts the Solomon Islands one might consider Cato Berg's (2008) "A Chief is a Chief Wherever He Goes: Land and Lines of Power in Vella Lavella, Solomon Islands ", Roger Keesing's (1968) Chiefs in a Chiefless Society: The Ideology of Modern Kwaio Politics, Michael Kwa'ioloa and Ben Burt's (2012) Chiefs' Country: Leadership and Politics in Honiara, Solomon Islands", and Geoffrey White's (1997) "The Discourse of Chiefs: Notes on a Melanesian Society.

as the universalized Western ideal, but as situated sets of relations "constructed through the cultural imagination and everyday practice of ordinary people" (Yang 2005:489) while at the same time influenced by incorporation within a larger state system.

Colonization and Traditional Leadership

The colonial history of the Solomon Islands began when giving in to pressures from New Zealand and Australia, the British finally declared the Solomon Islands a protectorate in 1893. In comparison with South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and other Pacific islands, the colonization was relatively benign[27] as the British believed there was little to gain from this colonial holding and the threat of Malaria was higher in the Solomons than in other parts of the Pacific. Probably the most marked impacts of colonization, which actually began years before formal incorporation, were the forced collectivization of disparate cultural and linguistic groups within one politically-constituted community and the large-scale interisland economic migration that followed the arrival of European companies in the 19th century. Both factors contributed to the destabilization of the country post-independence as Solomon Islanders, seeking to divorce their own identities from that of their colonizers while at the same trying to integrate their futures with that of the global political economy, often looked toward tradition for guidance. In the culturally and linguistically diverse Solomon Islands, this often meant highlighting differences. In some cases, the search

[27] This is not to say that colonization did not have an impact on the Solomon Islands. For example see Dureau 1998, Keesing and Corris 1980, and Keesing 1992.

for identity gave rise to disputes as descendants of traditional landowners sought economic gain by reclaiming their land from longtime settlers from other areas. While this movement toward self-determination and identification brought the factitious nature of the country to the forefront, it also had the impact of attracting discussion and legislative interest among indigenous political actors of the role traditional forms leadership might play in the postcolonial state.

Although there was significant interest in developing a postcolonial government that more appropriately reflected the cultural norms in the Solomon Islands, at independence the country adopted the system of their colonizers – a Westminster Parliamentary democracy. This form of government, based on a system of opposition and alliances, arguably did not provide the representation or participation in the political process that characterized Solomon Islands or, more broadly, Melanesian customs. Instead, this system engendered new grounds for disputes as emerging opportunities to access wealth pitted one cultural and/ or kinship group against another. This added to mounting tensions relating to uneven economic development and employment along with resentments seeded in colonial times over land use and settlement. The country reached the boiling point in 1998 when violence broke out on Guadalcanal. Indigenous Guale[28], mainly from rural parts of the island, began forcibly removing long time Malaitan residents from settlements just outside of Honiara causing Malaitans to seek refuge in town. Guale people residing in town, fearing retribution, fled town, along with many other Solomon Islanders, returning to

[28] One way to refer to indigenous people from Guadalcanal

rural areas away from the fighting. Conflicts occurred in many parts of the country but were, for the most part, situated on Guadalcanal. As the Tensions continued, Australia and other Pacific Islands countries including Fiji and New Zealand sought to find a solution.

Ultimately after numerous attempts at peace failed, the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) intervened and ended the conflicts in 2003. These events, both the Tensions and the subsequent intervention, are complicated socio-political issues for the Solomon Islands and the region as a whole and continue to be relevant grounds for discussion and debate. It was during this time that there was a proliferation of discourse on the failed state in the Solomon Islands and evaluations of state-building and peacemaking strategies. While some of this material was problematic[29], much of the research done was valuable in not only providing explanations for the myriad issues inciting the conflicts, but also in highlighting solutions and strategies for the future. In the years since peace was achieved there have been a range of different efforts made to overcome the damage done, reconcile, and clear a path forward. Although the government, foreign NGOs, and RAMSI have contributed significantly to that effort, much of the peace was achieved through grassroots efforts supported by religious institutions and women's organizations, as well as, customary peacemaking practices organized by local chiefs. It was in talking to various chiefs about their experiences during the civil conflict that I first began to see the roles that chiefs were playing in the modern Solomon Islands state.

[29] See, for example, Fukuyama (2008) and then Brigg's (2009) brilliant response

Contemporary chiefs

In the nearly four decades since the Solomon Islands was granted independence on July 7th, 1978 adopting the Westminster parliamentary and provincial system from the British, traditional political institutions and values have remained salient in the fabric of Solomon Islands' society and cultures. Rather than disappearing as relics of the past, chiefs have figured into pre- and post-independence discussions regarding local power and autonomy (Lindstrom and White 1997). In some cases, as in the Maasina Rule[30] movement, chiefs were seen as a force of opposition, a counter discourse in the struggle against colonial and foreign power. For example, a meeting held in Auki, Malaita in 1978 established 180 chiefly positions to act as upholders of custom in face of modernization. In the case of Isabel, detailed by Geoffrey White (1997), in the years following independence attempts were made to formally incorporate chiefs within the Provincial Assembly in the form of a Council of Chiefs. Rather than acting counter to religious institutions and modern governance structures, this association aimed to secure a public and empowered platform for "matters of traditional and custom" ("Council of Chiefs" resolution cited in White 1997: 241). Isabel Province, however, has proven rather unique in their movement toward the formal incorporation of chiefs within the government system. In fact, the most formalized positions chiefs have acquired in the government system of the Solomon Islands relate to land tenure and use.

[30] This movement, led by Chief Aliki Nono'ohimae, began in 1945 in Are'are, Malaita shortly after the end of World War II. Leaders demanded that power be devolved from the capital to the village level, recognition and respect for traditional systems, and better services and opportunities provided to rural villages. See Keesing (1992) for more details.

In 1985, the Local Courts Act appointed chiefs the role of magistrates in land disputes acknowledging their vital role in determining rightful landowners and also in resolving problems among villagers. Fulfillment of this role is quite common given that every customary chief I interviewed had participated in a land case. These cases took place either at the village level wherein they would mediate among landowners and help to determine the rightful landowner and/or at the level of the courts where chiefs would act as a witness or advisor. Given that upwards of 85% of the land in the Solomon Islands is still customarily owned, chiefs are frequently[31] called upon for their extensive genealogical knowledge which can be used to support a legally-binding decision. While chiefs remain vital in the process, recent moves have been made to bypass or exclude customary knowledge as villagers seeking individual profits are motivated to hire lawyers to challenge the legitimacy of conclusions of ownership based on chiefly knowledge of genealogy. In some cases the challenges are legitimate given that local leaders have been known to interpret land rights in ways that are self-benefitting or simply bypass community consultation altogether. It is not presently clear what role chiefs will continue to play with regard to land in the Solomon Islands as the relative value of their contribution is challenged by desires for Western material wealth and the commodification and codification of customary land rights.

While there have been and remain very few formal roles for chiefs in government, they are often included in important conversations and proceedings.

[31] Although, as I describe later, this is changing as the economy becomes more globally integrated

Chiefs, for example, play an important advisory role in Provincial Government meetings which take place in Honiara. Chiefs represented the concerns of their communities and consulted with Provincial Members regarding issues such as rural development projects and government accountability. Chiefs have also featured in the process of constitutional reform offering insight pertaining to the adoption of a federal constitution in the Solomon Islands. They are also, often necessarily, included in discussion of development since, as previously stated, they typically have knowledge of land use and ownership considerations and in some cases can act as a mediator between the local population and outside interests. Chiefs, for example, have been consulted for large-scale economic projects including the development and management of Gold Ridge Mine and the Tina River Hydro Development Project.

In most cases, however, chiefs are categorized as guardians of *kastom*[32], those who should be concerning themselves with matters that are outside the realm of the modern state or, in some cases, in opposition to it. As White (1997: 231) states "chiefs today are everywhere potent symbols – symbols of the indigenous and the traditional in contrast with the foreign and the modern. To talk of chiefs is to talk of 'custom'". While this accurately reflects how chiefs are perceived, including by chiefs themselves, this characterization of separate spheres between tradition and modernity may overlook the ways in which custom shapes the range of relations constituting the

[32] Which also places *kastom* as something outside of the modern state apparatus. In some ways this makes sense in that *kastom* was codified as the ideology of a counter-colonial anti-state movement which sought to delegitimize the state administration both in colonial and postcolonial times (see Akin 1999a). On the other hand, movements most notably the Maasina Movement adopted a state-like structure to withstand the imposition and undermine the foreign-developed administration. In this way, it too could be seen as informing the state in the Solomon Islands as much as the imposed ideology.

Solomon Islands state and the roles that chiefs play in these institutions, values, and practices. During a recent interview with a Member of Parliament, for example, the honorable stated that he believed chiefs were important for maintaining certain traditional values, but when I asked if they should play a role in governance he laughed. I asked why he laughed and he said, "many chiefs know nothing about the government…they know about the village, culture, *kastom,* and settling arguments – compensation". When the conversation turned back to his own experiences in government I was surprised when he said two of the top concerns of politicians in the Solomon Islands were reciprocity (materially providing for their voters) and *green leaf* (referring to being poisoned or killed by local sorcery). In this way it seems that contemporary customary practices feature largely in the politics of the country and, according to the MP's own assessment of the purview of chiefs, they appear well-placed to offer advice on such matters.

Encountering Chiefs

As I will describe in Chapter Five, rural village chiefs have begun to orient themselves to the project of the state by incorporating the police, even when they are unlikely to appear, in local matters. Another example of the role of chiefs in matters of peace and order can be seen in the emergence of the position of community chief. The sociopolitical model of "chief" has been revived in non-traditional[33] communities,

[33] By this I am referring to communities which are not necessarily organized around kinship or wantok relations. This typically relates to neighborhoods in regional centers and urban areas.

especially in urban neighborhoods, in order to provide order and important social services. Typically prompted by the community to lead, so-called community chiefs – who are not considered hereditary or customary by the entire population – play an important role in Solomon Islands society and in constituting the state. These community leadership positions emerged either because government services like policing were not being provided or were inadequate, or were developed in tandem with government agencies because the local population felt they could relate more to this system. In some places religious organizations promoted the creation of a community chief to bring peace and order to a community in ways that had not necessarily been achieved by church leaders. In other places, land disputes have been known to prevent community members from agreeing to elect a customary landowner as chief. In one case I was acquainted with, the village elected a neutral (non-landowning) elder as community chief. I asked why they needed a chief at all and they responded by saying that they needed someone to organize the village, to maintain order, and to represent the village to visitors and other communities. A chief, they said, tied them together as a community which was interesting given the intensity of land disputes in this particular locale. This coherence as a community, in this case, seemed to matter less as an inward reality given that the chief had no real power to assert[34] over the village since he owned no land, but rather as an outward expression of being a community among communities. The coherence provided by the chief acted as an assurance of their recognition by and participation within larger set of relations.

[34] He could reprimand the children and, in some cases, negotiate compensation. I asked if he was a big man and there was some hesitation. This man did not have much in the way of material wealth. He was always referred to as chief.

Thus, these chiefs provide a real or perceived sense of community, which in turn can provide order in complex and/or tenuous social arrangements

The success of this position can be demonstrated by the example of an elder friend of mine who is a community chief in White River. This area of Honiara was long known for violence, alcohol abuse, and crime and the police in the area were largely ineffective. Once this elder was elected as community chief he was able to bring peace and order to the area because as he explained "I knew the people, they weren't my wantoks, but they respected me because I listened to them". Rather than simply leading alone, he also chose a team[35] of community leaders which looked after the specific concerns of different demographics like youth and women. Along with the chief, these leaders recreated, but also re-envisioned, the web of social support that can be found in rural villages providing a sense of belonging while also holding members of the community accountable for their actions. Now, as the chief proudly told me, this area of Honiara is safe and one can walk around at night without concern. As well, he stated that counter to the reports which continually characterize the Solomon Islands as a country crippled by ethnic tensions, their neighborhood had shown otherwise. Made up of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, this area had become a community through the revival and reimagining of the chiefly model in urban Honiara. The importance of chiefs to communities has not gone unnoticed as the Commissioner of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force recently organized a

[35] While space does not allow for a detailed discussion of this here, it is so interesting how the transfer of particular types of bureaucracy from Western governance models to everyday life occurs in the Solomon Islands.

conference titled “Empowering the Chiefs Roles”. The Commissioner stated that he believed “exercising the chiefs’ power will serve to build respectful communities” (Toito’ona 2015).

Although certain state institutions such as police, schools, and clinics are becoming more widespread throughout the country, quite often they are absent, understaffed, or run by non-governmental organizations like churches. In many cases, tasks assigned to these institutions are often organized by the chiefs who either provide the services themselves[36] or act as liaisons for the provincial and national government. In other words, chiefs are fulfilling the promise of the state that people have come to expect since colonial incorporation. For example, a customary chief located not far outside the Honiara city boundary recounted to me how he had set up a medical clinic during the Tension years when most government-run social services had ceased. He said that his people were frightened to travel into the city for medical treatment and so he petitioned the government for support. When the government failed to act he took it upon himself to build a clinic and fostered an agreement with the government and a non-governmental organization to supply and staff the building. Interestingly, the people in his village were skeptical of his plans given that they had, as he explained, become accustomed to the state administration providing these services. Recognizing his duty as leader to provide for and protect his people, he readily took on this task even amid the naysaying to fulfill the promises of the state.

[36] As was the case with the teacher chief I met from the Polynesian Solomon Islands. He was a hereditary chief but also fulfilled the role of teacher and organized a school for his community.

This pragmatic approach to a problem, blending customary knowledge and moral guidance with modern human services provision is an important way in which the Solomon Islands has maintained social function amid disaster.

McDougall (2015) explores a similar situation arising from the Tensions as the formal state administration in Honiara collapsed, rural villages maintained stability through locally-situated and customarily-grounded frameworks. Her ethnographic research on the Pienuna Chiefs' Committee in Ranongga, Western Province demonstrated the "tenacity" of local leaders (ibid: 456). These local actors, whose positions had emerged as a result of the expansion of the state administration during the colonial period, were able to maintain function even as the central government and state infrastructure declined. Similarly, when an earthquake and tsunami devastated the Western Province in 2007, villages that had chiefs were better able to cope with the devastation and organize the process of rebuilding (Ride and Bretherton 2011). Research on community resilience following the tsunami found that while these institutions were often bypassed by international agencies, "customary governance (involving chiefs and elders) and ways of handling crises were seen as most likely to uphold peace in a time of tension" (ibid: 109). These examples demonstrate how traditionally ordained and/or recognized chiefs have been able to constitute the state as a provider of social welfare through appropriating and fulfilling associated roles. Social welfare, however, was nothing new for them given that according to a customary leader I interviewed it is the primary focus of chiefs.

What was particularly interesting given that these community services corresponded to chiefly duties was that the chiefs did not seem to want to say they "replaced" the government officials, but rather that they fulfilled the officials' roles and thus deserved to be compensated. The state, in other words, did not disappear through the failure of the government, nor did chiefs revert to the past wherein they organized the well-being of the community as a function of their status, but rather the chiefs believed themselves to be and effectively became a part of the state. They enacted the state as much as any other official both in terms of their incorporation within the state administration model of indirect rule promoted by colonization and their fulfilment of state services when the state administrative capacity weakened and withdrew from rural areas more recently. This is further supported by the fact that every chief I have interviewed over the years has expressed frustration over their continual exclusion from the formal political sphere either in terms of not be recognized through the creation of formal positions or through compensation for the work that they do that clearly furthers the project of the state. They do not see themselves, therefore, as acting solely as traditional leaders of the past as they are often characterized, but rather as part of a larger political project called the Solomon Islands state. This echoes McDougall's (2015) conclusions that rather than disappearing in favor of more seemingly more resilient customary institutions, state institutions and functions have become deeply ingrained in the sociopolitical fabric of the country intertwining with tradition to form a contemporary landscape shaped by both local and global influences.

Chiefs and the State

As my research into the state in the Solomon Islands progressed, I continued to encounter chiefs along the way. While chiefs were not often situated in positions of significant power, they featured largely in the everyday Solomon Islands, but also at important intersections between local, national, and global issues. This supported the conclusion that, even in the face of the apparently homogenizing forces associated with global politico-economic integration, chiefs have maintained and even redefined their relevance in the fabric of society. This finding, decades following White's (1997) experience that in the years post-independence there continued to be significant discourse on chiefs, raised the question: why hasn't there been more incorporation of chiefs (or at least traditional practices) within the modern government system in the Solomon Islands? Why do chiefs seem to remain "beneath the state" (Allen and Dinnen 2013 cited in Baines 2014)? The answers to this question are complex in that they are grounded in an intertwining web of tangible relations surrounding power, money, and reputation within the Solomon Islands, as well as, the global project of decolonization and development, but also in how we conceptualize the state. This conceptual problem relates to how we think about traditional and modern politics, with traditional typically meaning indigenous political systems and modern meaning some form of "the Western imagination of the state" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001a:10).

Domestic explanations for the apparent exclusion of chiefs from more substantial positions of power in the modern governance structure may come from

both top-down and bottom-up pressures present in the contemporary Solomon Islands. The top-down pressure emerges from how political power is achieved and maintained in many cultures throughout the Solomon Islands. The personalized and highly transitory nature of power, which requires forming and maintaining reciprocal relationships with individuals – including having the means to do so – makes achieving and holding on to power a difficult thing in Solomon Islands society. This can be seen in the high turnover rate among politicians with very few individuals ever winning more than one term in office (see Corbett and Wood 2013). The precariousness of power in combination with the general dissatisfaction and disengagement with politicians in the country means that anyone, including chiefs, who might challenge one's access to power is necessarily a threat. This could be seen during the Tensions when, according to Michael Kwa'ioloa (2012), chiefs were sometimes marginalized during the peace-building processes. This marginalization occurred as politicians, some of whom were also implicated as inciting the conflict, sought to gain notoriety and credit for ending the violence and providing compensation to the people (Kwa'ioloa and Burt 2012). They saw taking on the role typically belonging to chiefs as a means for ensuring their political survival in the next term; interestingly, that had the unintended consequence, however, of also maintaining the salience of chiefly roles and responsibilities in society regardless of who is fulfilling them.

Politicians are not the only party interested in minimizing the power of chiefs, as educated and financially successful elites have characterized chiefs as being

irrelevant or obstructive to economic progress and development. In the increasingly technical and business-dominated economy of the country, concerns over custom and land tenure (typically concerns of everyday people represented by the chief) are often seen as impediments to "progress". Elites, like politicians, do appear to favor chiefs as a cultural icon, but rarely as empowered and included leaders. When speaking of chiefs, they often focus on their "traditional" knowledge rather than their community building and strengthening abilities, their roles as service providers, and so forth. The idea promoted by elites that cultures of the Solomon Islands are somehow artifacts to be preserved rather than a relevant "modern" reality keeps chiefs from achieving formal legitimacy – as Larmour (1997) argues, they are victims of a new ideology. While in some sense the practice among elites of seeking chiefly titles empowers all chiefs by reaffirming it as a desirable position, it may also demonstrate how elites are able to mobilize aspects of their own culture in new ways as in the emergence of Paramount Chiefs.

From the bottom up, the formal recognition of chiefs is threatened by the increased access to wealth and promises of development (and the individualization of that access) made possible through direct transactions with MPs, businessmen, and foreign investors. Chiefs no longer are necessarily consulted to serve as mediators between local populations, especially in rural areas, and the interested parties. For example, in an area of the Solomons known for logging, a chief I interviewed lamented the relationship that had been formed between the MP and younger men in the village who signed an agreement allowing exclusive logging. This MP

intentionally bypassed the chief, who was more highly educated, and convinced the mostly illiterate young men to sign away their rights with what have proven to be false promises. This is a common narrative throughout the country and may also result from another threat to the recognition of chiefs – as Baines (2014) argues, the combination of "inadequate cultural education" and an increase influence of Western popular culture. The desire for Western consumer goods has been driven by widespread access to communication technologies, ease of travel to regional and urban centers, and the influence of expatriates, wealthy part-time resident half-castes, and the jet-setting Solomon Island elites. This desire has fueled the ability of predatory MPs, businessmen, and foreign investors to, in some cases, take advantage of rural landowners seeking the material benefits of a Western lifestyle.

The influence of Western values has also diminished the reputation of the position of chief as some chiefs themselves have been driven by personal desires to behave in ways which seem to delegitimize their own status. Everyday people expressed their frustration with certain chiefs, for example, who touted both customary and Christian behavior and yet were known to consume large amounts of alcohol and partake in extra-marital affairs. In one case while seeking out a particular hereditary chief I was told by his community members that I would not be able to find him in his area because his wife lived here and he was currently with his girlfriend. While this behavior has caused problems for chiefs, more serious challenges to the legitimacy of chiefs have come from using their positions of power for self-serving purposes. Since chiefs are often both prominent landowners and have significant knowledge of land

tenure in their area they have been known to sell logging, mining, and land development rights to outside investors without consulting their communities. According to local informants, a large swath of coastal land was recently sold by their chief to foreign investors to develop without the approval of other villagers. Probably the most conspicuous of this type of situation occurred at the area occupied by Gold Ridge Mine where a popular narrative thrives about a chief who negotiated a contract which benefitted him and then when the mine was abandoned lost his source of influence and income. In these cases chiefs become the subject of intense gossip which on the one hand delegitimizes the position of chief, but on the other also keeps "chief" as a powerful discourse in Solomon Islands society.

The other major limiting factor for chiefs ascending to positions of power within the government relate to the global phenomenon of decolonization and socioeconomic integration described in Chapter Three. The result of this push toward decolonization and development in the 20th century, as Larmour (1997: 276) explained, is that "centralized bureaucratic states have become the preeminent form of political organization" with the Western liberal democratic state system becoming the hegemonic model regime. The impact of Western hegemony and the imposition of the Western state institutions and economic structures have been two-fold: on the one hand, through decolonization and development, Western ideas and forms of political organization have become the global norm including the language of "good governance" such as representation, transparency, accountability, individualism and so forth. This pressure to adopt the state form promoted through decolonization,

development, economic incentives, legitimacy and recognition facilitated in large part by the creation of the United Nations, has led to an apparent trend of political homogeneity. This homogenization of the language of politics, social organization, and economics provides the appearance of uniformity; while the ideas – the universalized Western position – that undergird the dominant language, establishes the "yardsticks used to measure the 'goodness' of a particular government" (Poluha and Rosendahl 2002: 1).

The problem has been, however, that by privileging the Western regime as the ideal and presupposing that similarly classified state systems shared an affinity in their functional, structural, and symbolic characteristics, the cultural construction of the state is overlooked or, as is more often the case, leads to the conclusion of dysfunction – real or perceived state failure (see also Hill 2005). The assumption was that failed states were not functioning in the way that was expected either because of technical misunderstandings which could be solved by sending in highly-paid Western consultants to fix the mechanism of governance or the blatantly ethnocentric explanation that these states were hopeless failures because of the local population's inherent backwardness and inability to grasp the functioning of the system. This, in turn, overlooks the ways in which, for example, localities have innovated and pragmatically acculturated foreign systems to fit contemporary realities.

On the other hand, it has also led to recognition that that Western liberal democratic state system was not the technological universal of governance, easily

applied to any context in combination with economic liberalization. As Lindstrom and White (1997) underline, the promises of the grand narrative of modernization never really panned out. While similar in name, oftentimes in practice or in context, like any other component of culture these ideas take on different meanings, applications, and forms, as Bayart (1991: 53) notes, these states are embedded within specific cultural and historical contexts and, thus, have been "subject to multiple acts of re-appropriation". In this sense, the "modern" states are not replacements of "traditional" forms of sociopolitical organization, but rather often rely upon preexisting modes of organization in their constitution and everyday functions. Moreover, it opened the door to viewing state-making as an on-going process[37] wherein local political structures and leadership models have acculturated aspects of the Western state to serve the needs of the people on the ground. Paying attention to the "tenaciousness" of local actors, as McDougall (2015) calls for, enables us to see site-specific pragmatism, instead of static "resilience", of indigenous models in the face of global political economic incorporation.

Overall, there has been significant attention paid to what hasn't worked – which still uses the Western liberal democratic state as a metric. This has prevented a focus on the interesting ways the state has been constituted and is continually negotiated in diverse cultural, social, and temporal contexts. Rather than a technological solution or a wholesale cultural shift toward Western values, to understand the processes and effects of incorporation as a state requires an

[37] As Hansen and Steputtat (2001: 5) point out, "modern forms of the state are in a continuous process of construction".

understanding of its form and function within a particular area. According to Sharma and Gupta (2006a: 11), this entails paying "careful attention to the cultural construction of the state – that is, how people perceive the state, how their understandings are shaped by their particular locations…and how the state manifests itself in their lives". This leads us to bypass the problematic presupposition that we know what the state is on the basis of hegemonic universalized models – which don't necessarily even exist in the West – and ask what is the state in a particular context. It is at this intersection where we can better understand how the state in the Solomon Islands is constituted, mobilized, and experienced through the complex and everyday interactions of local, regional, global, contemporary, and historical forces.

By viewing the category of modern as being as culturally contingent as the category traditional, we can ground discussions of the state in historical contexts which helps to unmask the relations of power which often underlie the discourses of "modern politics", "formal governance", and "failed state". Rather than excluding relations, institutions, and actors, in this case chiefs, on the basis of being "traditional", research on politics as an on-the-ground process approaches them as culturally and historically contingent phenomena. In other words, it is more insightful to consider the ways politics function in a particular place at a particular time, as opposed to, for example, taking chief to mean chief as it might have in the past or the state to mean the Western liberal democratic ideal, which in itself serves to further its power. Although chiefs play important roles in the Solomon Islands society, there are also concrete counterexamples challenging any overly simplistic conclusions about

politics and the position of chiefs therein. This enables us to highlight the complex relations that constitute the nature of the reality called state – not simply as a replacement of local modes of political organization or as a rejection of introduced models. Rather than focusing on what does not work on the basis of what an ideal model expects, we should be asking the question – what does X look like "on the ground"? After all, what is the positive referent of failed state? If the Western liberal democratic state has failed, what has succeeded in its place?

Chiefs in the contemporary Solomon Islands continue to play an important role not only in maintaining some of the cultural practices threatened by the homogenizing forces of the global political economy, but also in helping to shape a political reality that is seemingly more contextually appropriate and culturally relevant. This is not to say that the Solomon Islands is somehow "stuck" in the past, but rather that the notion that the Western liberal democratic state is a technical universal of governance easily applied to all countries of the world is itself a problematic and idealistic assumption. While the state form may be the dominant mode of organization, the function and meaning are better understood as an *in situ* process of sense-making wherein local culture and customs play an important role in constituting the state. As well, the modern state is not simply a thin veil laid over durable customary practices, but rather has transformed the socio-political landscape leading the state form to appear in village structures even when the administration of the state is markedly absent (see Oppermann 2015). Thus, this process is clearly not a one-way street of localizing imposed systems given that the state form itself is a cultural artifact and its imposition

is tied up with the colonial and neocolonial experience. However, by assuming that local appropriations of the state and associated systems of governance which diverge from their Western models are simply technical misapplications or hybridizations necessarily places non-Western countries in subordinate positions and devalues cultures not conforming to dominant patterns. This is in no way meant as saying the problems facing failed states are simply a matter of definition, but rather to complicate the approach taken toward understanding these situations and, possibly, to the actions meant to remedy them.

Chapter 4, in part, is currently being prepared for submission for publication of the material. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this material.

CHAPTER FIVE

POWER AND MANIFESTATIONS OF THE STATE

"The Chinese taught us corruption," an informant told me while making a hand gesture as if to pass money from his palm to mine. This man had a lot of experience both in the Honiara business world, but also in politics, not as a politician himself, but rather as an adviser of sorts. He was a 'grassroots' kind of guy with little desire to gain notoriety, instead preferring to spend his time with everyday people. His experience navigating these worlds, between the fast-paced world of business and politics and the more reserved lifeways of village Solomon Islands had made him keenly aware of the way things worked. I had been asking about the political process in the country and, as was nearly always the case in my research, the conversation turned to "corruption" as if the two were coterminous. He continued, "It is not something that we did before, not something that was part of our culture." If you want to get things done in politics or government or business he explained, then you are likely going to need to be able to do this, again gesturing to pass money secretively. It is because, he went on, "the Chinese came to start businesses and needed papers, they would pay the officials to help them and now the people in the government get used to the system. It takes so long the other way, so you need to either pay someone or know someone who works in the ministry." This is how "they do it in their culture" he explained and when they came here they brought it with them.

I asked if knowing someone and relying on those connections to facilitate or expedite a process was also considered "corruption". This was a question I often asked because there seemed to be a more complex relationship between the Western characterization of the behavior as nepotism and the actors on the ground – even if they too identified the behavior as problematic. He said "that is the normal way to get things done" because networks are so important and organized much of social life in the Solomon Islands. This is how people get contracts for work, projects for their village, legal papers to commence business, and even the electricity meter installed on their property. "You need to know the right people" he said, but when I asked if that was corruption he said he didn't think so, but wasn't sure. Turning back to the political process, he went on to explain that politicians rely on these networks to secure voter support and to provide for their constituents. "They ask people like me who are in the community what to do; we know people and how to get things done." People like my informant are often liaisons between voters and politicians and among the politicians themselves. "We know the grassroots people, we know how to talk with them" he explained "and we can talk with people quietly". These liaisons facilitate interactions including those between Members of Parliament during coalition negotiations, in some cases enabling an MP to switch group loyalties to ensure better outcomes – known locally as "grass-hopping".

When I asked politicians about changing party or coalition loyalty during negotiations they typically said that they supported the ideas of the other group, that they believed it would be better for their supporters if they went the other way, or they

would acknowledge that it was considered corrupt or problematic and point toward other people who, unlike themselves, participated in this behavior. For most Members of Parliament, providing direct returns for their supporters is necessary as a matter of political and social duty. As one MP explained, "My duty as a member is to provide for my constituents, when they come to me and ask for school fees, boat fare, or even bag rice and I say I don't have anything they don't believe me and I let them down. I even show them my wallet and my briefcase, empty." This type of response was echoed by nearly all politicians I interviewed. As described in Chapter Four, many MPs' houses were filled day and night with constituents seeking support and even if they did not come to their houses, MPs would have liaisons working with Constituency Development Officers (CDO) to assist voters at satellite locations. Two informants who were CDOs explained that they worked directly with constituents to ensure returns for their support, helping to distribute development funds and being available for questions or concerns from rural villagers.

"How do you decide who to give the money to?" I asked, to which my informants responded that the decision is based on who is in need and who has a good project proposal. "People come and ask for help or maybe we also go out and request that people submit plans for development projects" one informant explained. While politicians occasionally seemed somewhat reluctant to clarify who they were meeting or not meeting with in their constituency (although some were more forth-coming[1]

[1] This was either because they did not believe that meeting only with constituents who voted for them would be considered problematic or because they were not concerned about disclosing this information to me. There did seem to be a sense of internal conflict between Western notions of political behavior

than others on this point), when I asked constituents who would ask for things from their MP they replied, “Their supporters”. Most people reacted with surprise when I asked this question because it seemed somewhat common sense, as one informant explained, “You would feel shame to go and ask for support from your member if you did not vote for them. Maybe people do it, but I don’t think that many people do because they would be afraid.” When I asked if it was “corruption” to provide for supporters when they voted, most people declined to make the comparison. “They must help us because we helped them” was the most common response; although some did say that those candidates who “handed out cash” through their operatives on the nights before the elections were acting corrupt, while others said that was so their supporters could eat, chew betelnut, and, if they were in town, have bus fare.

The same reciprocal logic often applies to the coalitions formed in Parliament where members promise each other returns for working together. On the one hand they will typically refer to their own actions as being on the side of transparency while their colleagues’ actions are problematic. In one example an informant shared a case where he confronted a higher-ranking executive over the purchase of high-value items for new parliamentarians just a few months into the formation of a new government. The informant expressed his concern over what he considered an unreasonable expenditure. The executive responded, according to my informant, “I completely understand and I hear you, but I have 15 other people in this coalition to look after”.

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and local expectations. This turmoil faced by public servants navigating between worlds was also encountered by other researchers examining corruption including Olivier de Sardan (1999) and Tidey (2016) for example.

He went on "what will I say to those people? They will leave us if I do not deliver…I am sorry, I hear you, but I am going to have to go with them." My informant stated that he then told the executive he must resign given that the other members would no longer respect him. Fearing a collapse of the coalition, the executive "begged me to stay", according to the informant. Even though both agreed the behavior was problematic, it was considered less-so than the collapse of the coalition. Both considered themselves to be acting in the interest of the people, just through different avenues.

While the topic of corruption is a hot one in the Solomon Islands[2], it is a much more convoluted issue that it might first appear. As Theobald (1990: 1) states, corruption, when subjected to the "scrutiny of the social science lens, proves to be an elusive and complex phenomenon" that can be hard to distinguish from other forms of exchange. People in the Solomon Islands are well-aware of the word "corruption" and it can be frequently encountered in the newspapers, on the radio, and in conversations across the country. What remains vague is the classification of behaviors as being corrupt. It might seem fairly straightforward to characterize certain actions like embezzlement or bribery as corruption, but what about the more everyday types of behaviors one encounters like vote-buying or nepotism? The concept of "corruption" can be a challenging one because it implies that something is conducted in a manner that is contrary to a system, preventing that system from functioning. But what is the

[2] Larmour (2012: 12), for example, cites a Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) survey (2006: 2) which "found 62% of the rural population, and 46% of the urban population believed the government was corrupt. Yet focus groups found 'no universal agreement on what constituted corruption (and some tendency to challenge the conventional Western view of it)'"

system? Given that, typically, the system is the Western administrative apparatus imposed through decolonization and the evaluator is often a Western or Western-inspired NGO, this problematic of corruption serves to promote Western ideology through the discourse of "good governance". This raises questions about the connection between the system and the evaluation wherein the system seems to be characterized as inherently moral thereby making adulterations most likely immoral. Corruption also carries the connotation of being a negative or fraudulent practice, but that characterization often comes from an evaluative perspective rather than from the position of those involved in the transaction.

As illustrated in my examples, while people are aware of the word "corruption" they are often not clear on how it might apply to behavior they are involved in. As Kenilorea (2007 cited in Larmour 2012: 12) explained, "In most cases corrupt practices have become embedded in our way of life so much so that we do not even realize that our actions are corrupt." Throughout my research, corruption seemed to always be something that someone else[3] was doing – even if that behavior was identical to their own. Olivier de Sardan (1999), in his exploration of corruption in Africa, found that the prevalence and banality of corruption[4] amid its stigmatization was based on the embeddedness of its diverse social logics especially in corruption-

[3] This mirrors Olivier de Sardan's (1999: 34) sixth thesis.
[4] Olivier de Sardan (1999: 27-28) refers to the "corruption complex" which broadens the terms from its more strict sense to include a range of behaviors like nepotism, embezzlement, and influence-peddling. In this way, the author argues that it is possible to more readily find connections among the behaviors and to social practices which have been transformed and created in the process of modern state-building. In turn, these corruption-like behaviors create an environment where corruption is more likely to occur and will be very difficult to prevent.

like behaviors. It was not to say that "corruption" was somehow culturally-grounded, but rather that the variety of behaviors which promoted corrupt practices were part of the social fabric creating an environment where corruption could thrive. Those practicing the behaviors did not necessarily identify them as corrupt instead viewing their actions as existing within social norms and expectations. On the one hand the connection could be made with more customary practices associated with logics of exchange, but as Olivier de Sardan (ibid) explains, the moral economy of corruption is necessarily a post-colonial development deeply intertwined with the process of state-building in the modern era. Certain behaviors starting within the top tiers of society became embedded in the social, political, and economic fabric simply as the way things get done in ordinary experience. Parallel to Tidey's (2016) conclusions, this often placed those situated within the introduced systems in complicated or "schizophrenic" positions as their code of professional legitimacy often contradicted social legitimacy (Olivier de Sardan ibid: 48).

The salience of "corruption" as a concept and the dissonance with on-the-ground behaviors helps to highlight some of the effects of state incorporation in the Solomon Islands. On the one hand, the laundry list of happenings occurring through the process of colonial and independent state-building – for example, the centralization of power or the increase in foreign investment on the basis of being a state – created a politico-economic environment where the behaviors characterized as corrupt could arise. This was especially true given the administrative system was imposed with minimal consideration for either its cultural appropriateness or its

functionality in such a nascent political entity. Even for those well-versed in the form and function of the system, the lack of experience with this type of system or shared logics among the populace made administration difficult. On the other hand, local models for interaction and political behavior provided a different perspective on the roles and responsibilities of those in positions of influence and thus influenced the function of the state in practice. For example, the big-man and *wantok* systems promote a structure of reciprocity that provides opportunity structures for those desiring more influence and access to resources for those who might be in need of assistance. As well, they provided a sense of social obligation and/or social cohesion in situations where one might be somewhat removed from customary kinship networks as is the case with the *wantok* networks in urban areas.

The diverse logics at play intertwined to establish norms of political, economic, and even social interaction that, when measured against the expected function of the system based on Western models, could be considered corruption. The interplay of the systems has given rise to more straightforward instances of corruption like politicians embezzling funds from their own ministries through phony businesses or using their position in the government to smooth the process of selling logs from their constituency to Malaysian and Chinese interests. But the incorporation of the archipelago has also presented more vague situations like foreign governments vying for recognition on a global stage by providing development funds in exchange, albeit not admittedly, for votes of support. Add into this the ordinary means of interaction which are rooted both in more customary cultural practices, but also have arisen as the

result of dynamics of multiple systems at play in one space. While people know there is corruption and will readily point out who they believe to be behaving in corrupt ways, they will not, at the same time, recognize their own actions as fitting into that category. This is because "corruption" was introduced as a problem in the country by foreign or foreign-supported NGOs and state-building projects (see Larmour 2012). It was clear that "corruption" was a category of "bad" behaviors people were doing but what those behaviors were was not always clear because to the people doing them this was simply the everyday means of interaction. "Corruption" was something their neighbors from another island did, and then, only because they learned it from the Chinese.

INTRODUCTION

While the administrative apparatus governing the Solomon Islands is relatively limited and, in some cases, ineffectual, being matter-of-factly absent in many rural areas, the effects and ideas constituting the modern state are nonetheless present. In fact, it is hard not to encounter the material effects of the modern state almost anywhere you go from copper roofing provided by politicians accessing the wealth of incorporation[5] and reciprocating the benefit of being elected to govern to the Paralympic team competing at the London 2012 games with the Solomon Islands flag

[5] By this I could mean a number of things, but, for example, this could specifically refer to the Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF) which is maintained (currently) by Taiwanese aid. This also helps to illustrate the point that the internal state administrative apparatus itself doesn't need to create funds, from tax revenue for example, because often simply by being a state within the state system can attract large sums of funding (Aretxaga 2003; Tucker 2010).

emblazoned on their jerseys. Even in rural areas where the material effects of the state are somewhat less pronounced and the administrative services and officials are hard to find, manifestations of state exist. This is because the power of being a state does not rely solely on its multifaceted existence ascribed to a material reality, but exists also in its ability to conduct conduct as part of a larger government (Li 2007); that is, in the power of the modern state to orient and organize behaviors and mindsets of the people or population within the modern state. Given that the modern state is not a single political entity, but rather is a system of states with its roots in European ideology and practice, a powerful source of government is often outside of territorial borders in states like the Solomon Islands. Being a state, therefore, especially one emerging out of European imperial control, is itself a form of governing conduct spoken of as if it is liberation, a source of self-determination or autonomy, when it is, in fact, a means of encouraging specific actions (Foucault 2006). As Li (2007: 275-276) explains, according to Foucault's argument, "government operates by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations, and beliefs." It sets conditions so people, seemingly aimed at achieving their own self-interest, will strive to fulfill, without force or even persuasion necessarily, the optimal or improved conditions.

The power of the state lies in the fact that people act as if it existed orienting their behavior to the composite reality of political structures and ideologies mythically abstracted as "the state" (Foucault 2006: 142). State effects and ideas exist because people act and orient themselves as if the state did exist, thus, its reality and power are in the ideas and discourses held about the state. Foucault (ibid) explains that the

discourse of the state, which reduces the state to a certain number of functions, "is but one part of a broader process governing and shaping our very conduct and bringing it in line with various 'governing strategies'" (Hay et al. 2006: 14). These governing strategies work through disposition, that is "to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved"; these ends, not being a single goal, but rather "a whole series of specific finalities" (Foucault 2006: 137). The modern state can be thought of as a tactic of governmentality, an arrangement of people and resources, a means of circumscribing a population, but within a population given that it is a system of states. The governmentalization of the state transformed "the state" from a sovereign territory into a specific, although not unincorporated, population and defined what was "within the competence of the state" (ibid: 142). Becoming a "population" itself is a technique of government and so the act of becoming a state[6] was a means of conduct bringing people within the scope of the improvement of conditions. Many of these improvements or optimizations of the welfare of a population[7] can be seen in the manner in which states are judged to be liberal and successful – the failed or fragile state itself becoming the focus of a governmental program (Li 2007). Foucault (2006: 142) argued that the important contemporary focus should be "not so much the etatisation of society, as the 'governmentalization' of the state". In other words, we should examine the

[6] The paternalism of decolonization – liberal state and legitimacy – a country could determine their own future as a member of the international community of states as long as they conformed to certain standards (Hindness 2005). This was in some ways challenged by the right to self-determination (see Donnelly 1998), but not necessarily since the international community could punish non-conformists without violating sovereignty; for example, with sanctions.

[7] Which, again, is both internal to the state and external since "the modern state" is actually a set of relations between political entities called states. Population in contemporary development or modernization discourse can refer both to the people within a state and also all people on earth.

incorporation and redefinition of what is the state in practice based on the tactics of governmentality – developed in the 18th century through 'population' and leading to unprecedented control through the production of scientific or rational knowledge, for example, statistics[8]. (Foucault 2006: 143; Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005a).

The modern state has been impressed upon the world, especially the decolonizing areas, as a tactic of government, dispositioning people into distinct, and, again, not completely separate, populations to be governed by administrations within a circumscribed territory. Government, Foucault (2006: 140) explains, "has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its conditions, the increase of its wealth, longevity, and health, etc." While government is not internal to the state, the state serves to organize populations and provide a more centralized locus of particular problems and power. To govern is to be concerned with "men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with all its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc.; men in their relation to that other kind of things customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc.; lastly, men in their relation to that other kind of things accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, etc." (Foucault 2006: 136). The state, then serves to organize these concerns or problems of populations, not only within a single political territorial entity, but as a system of states in the modern state configuration. Thus, even if the

[8] Which demonstrated that populations had regularities and moved the focus away from the family on to economics since populations could not be reduced to families (Foucault 2006: 140).

administration of the particular state is not effective or present, the effects and ideas of the modern state and, thus, governmentality can be encountered.

How to Solve a Village 'Crime'

I was visiting a coastal village located on one of the more rural islands in the Solomon Islands, one without roads or electrification except in a small regional hub. The village relied on transport ships for access to other islands and to provide supplies, but travel to other villages was done on foot or by canoe. There was a small church and school along with a few household canteens selling basis necessities like laundry soap, navy biscuits, Pall Malls, cooking oil, and, if the time was right, Sol Brew. The village was clean, friendly, and well-organized according to the residents with most gardens located inland at various places known to each family. At the time I was there, 2012, the mobile phone tower was not reliable except in certain places and so you knew when someone had a phone call because they would be standing in that spot. Most adults and young adults had been to Honiara with some splitting their time between the village and town. Since work is often hard to come by in town and life is expensive there, most people return to the village where it is possible to live a materially simple existence even if the customs are seemingly more restrictive.

There had been some noise the night before, but relative to the blaring speakers, revelatory *spakamastas*[9], reluctant feast pigs, and prowling dog packs that characterize a predawn weekend morning in Honiara, it was barely enough to cause me to stir. When I awoke, however, I became aware of the seriousness of the events which had transpired overnight. An intoxicated young man, around 18 years old, had attempted to steal items from his own family's house becoming belligerent when he could not locate what he wanted and causing significant damage to the property. He had also threatened intervening family members with physical violence. In the morning, the chiefs and elders held a meeting to discuss what should be done to remedy the problem. While the discussion of compensation and public reconciliation were not unexpected, I was surprised when learning that the chiefs were deciding how and when to contact the police. What police? The closest police post was in the regional hub that was a fair distance by boat. When my house was robbed in Honiara, it took the police ten hours to come and they only came after many phone calls insisting on their presence. When a serious lead presented itself to us, the police said that if we wanted them to investigate it we would need to drive them ourselves or pay for a taxi since they did not have transport. We ended up setting up a sting operation ourselves, catching one of the culprits and delivering him to the policeman who had arrived on scene by taxi. They released him the following day awaiting trial wherein he promptly skipped town. About a month later we got word he had stolen and crashed a car in Western Province. The police caught him there, but he escaped while they were processing him by running out of the station – the officers too heavyset to run

[9] Solomon Islands Pijin term meaning one who drinks a lot of alcohol

after him. Needless to say, I had enough trouble trying to get the police to provide assistance in Honiara; I wondered how they would manage all the way out here. When I inquired about this they told me that the police have a boat that seems to work but they rarely have enough petrol (gas) to reach the village and almost never come. Then why call them, I thought.

In the past, chiefs along with village elders and family members would have dealt with this situation on their own weighing the severity of the offense with the value of a means of compensation and, in certain cases, with other forms of punishment (see Fifi'i 1989). As described in Chapter Four, to this day, chiefs continue the practice of maintaining peace and order in their villages through compensation and reconciliation with every chief across the Islands I met recollecting the countless times they carried out this task (see also McDougall 2015). So what did it mean that the chiefs in this rural village were seeking to involve the police, who were unlikely to even show up, in a matter seemingly easily resolved in-house? On the one hand, there have been challenges to chiefly authority to maintain order, but more often, whether formally or informally agreed, chiefs remain an important source of leadership and problem-solving especially at the village level (Lindstrom and White 1997). Along those lines, no one reported being concerned that the police would accuse them of acting outside their authority, but they did wonder what the correct approach would be. It seemed more the case that these chiefs were orienting themselves toward a larger project, viewing their roles as village leaders as one in a line of steps relating to order, peace, and justice. Even in this village, with a long

tradition of chiefs, rather than placing themselves at the top of the hierarchy, these chiefs were, in part, deferring to the idea of the state as a central locus of power. Calling the police even when they were unlikely to come and even when people reported being concerned that they might actually come demonstrated a belief of being a part of another order of things.

The orientation of the chiefs toward a greater whole or center of organization promoted the idea that a state existed, not only the in chiefs' minds, but, in turn, in the minds of everyday Solomon Islanders some of whom rarely ever encounter what are considered the formal institutions and actors of the state. So, even if the police never come, the fact that the chiefs sought to contact them helped to incorporate the village within the state and the state within the village. It manifested a sense of "the right way" or formal/legal manner in which to do something. According to White (1997: 233) "chiefs have historically been regarded as mediators of power, knowledge, and identity. In this mediating position, ideas about chiefs are inherently a source of innovation and incorporation." Chiefs have often been the first line of defense in a village, deciding on who can enter and so the role as mediator between the imposed practices and ideas and local customs is fitting. Ultimately the chiefs resolved the problem, and in many cases, when they do come, the police throughout the Solomon Islands will rely upon the chiefs to help sort out local matters or at least advise on what happened and how to proceed. Chiefs, by operating as mediator, thus become a part of the project of the state, promoting the idea of the state through their orientation toward it, but also in incorporating indigenous modes of peace and justice within the

criminal justice system in the Solomon Islands. While the latter point should be recognized as a means of local agency, at the same time, the role of chief itself and how traditional practices and knowledge can serve the population, are being enveloped, codified, and homogenized within the scope of the state (see Keesing 1982; 1992; White and Lindstrom 1997; White 1997).

The Human Condition of Rights

The Minister wanted me to accompany him on a constituency visit[10] he had been planning for quite some time. In fact, it is not clear that it even actually proceeded out of the development stages, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that he could talk about it, it was something he could do, and talking about it was an expression of his authority and ability. He liked to talk about it – what kind of boat, how long, which villages, etc. He would text message me about the plans seeing if I could confirm for this week or that week. Having spent a significant time researching with politicians, I was used to this kind of behavior. On one occasion, the Minister was discussing the tour plans with me and an informant friend, who was also a distant relative and confidant of the Minister's. My friend, a male just a few years younger than the middle-aged Minister, was not keen on my traveling with him, fearing his

[10] Members of Parliament use these constituency tours as a means to meet with supporters, provide material goods, and organize school fees, boat fares, and funeral expenses. They can occur at any time, but often coincide with upcoming elections – although not within the campaign. A lot of it is about making a show of stamina and charisma for supporters to encourage their continued support. Having a young, American, female researcher could, the Minister hinted, help to give the appearance that he was like a big or important man. He asked me to come as his guest to government events for the same reason and it was a good opportunity to participant observe the social side of governance.

intentions. Usually he would just let it go, deferring to the Minister not wishing to cause discomfort, but this time it was different. It was possible that the Minister was more forward on this occasion, joking in a manner that was maybe more suited to a familiar or friendly conversation, making my informant friend unable to stay quiet. It may have been masculine posturing, something I dealt with all too often, but either way a tense but light-hearted commentary ensued. My friend said aloud that it would be dangerous for me to travel with the Minister because he would make the boat engine break down and we would be stuck together. He continued on like this, all the while the Minister is laughing. The Minister then finally says, "she doesn't need protection from me or your protection, she does not need to be worried, she is an American, she has human rights".

In his article, "Human Rights: a new standard of civilization?" (1998: 3) Jack Donnelly traces how the moral distinctions[11] between "civilized" and "barbaric" peoples during the height of European imperialism were transformed into the "contemporary notions of internationally recognized human rights". The standard of civilization, which were used by colonial powers to justify the domination of the people who they deemed uncivilized or savage, like sub-Saharan Africa, also applied to places seen as "seats of ancient civilizations" and thus more "highly developed" like China (Lord Lugard 1922: 1 cited in Donnelly 1998: 4). While this did not justify colonial domination of China, the Middle East, and the Ottoman Empire, with Europe

[11] Distinctions, he explains, that were made by most large societies like China and the Ottoman empire differentiating on that basis of cultural values those who were considered inside as opposed to those deemed outsiders (1998: 2).

recognizing some measure of sovereignty, the imperialists did adopt a policy of extraterritoriality which excluded these places from inclusion within the "family of nations" (ibid: 4; see also Hindness 2005). Extraterritorial jurisdiction enabled Westerners living and operating within these areas to be exempt from the 'barbarism' practiced by locals while also recognizing the right of these countries to have authority over their own people. The standard of civilization was based on the idea of a society and government under which "white civilization" could exist and "established explicit ethical principles within the main-stream of positive international law". To be a so-called civilized state meant conforming to the norms of liberalism like the protection of life, dignity, and property and the prohibition of behaviors like slavery and infanticide. In combination with the 'scientifically-grounded superiority' of Western culture promoted by social Darwinism, this positivism made European domination of the uncivilized people of the world a "necessary expression" of reason (Donnelly 1998: 6).

After World War I, European thinking on their role as colonizers and as a 'superior civilization' was changing, from the rightful domination mindset in the 19th century to the paternalistic developmental discourse that really gained steam after the Second World War. Civilization was becoming something that could be attained when fostered under the right conditions. As Donnelly (ibid: 9-10) explains, "the British doctrine of the 'dual mandate' considered a colony to be held in trust 'on the one hand, for the advancement of the subject races, and on the other hand, for the development of its material resources for the benefit of mankind'. Although Western attitudes

remained profoundly condescending and the gap between reality and rhetorical self-justification was often immense, differences in civilizations were increasingly seen as historical artefacts to be eliminated over time." This idea of cultivating the 'savage peoples' of the colonial empire from barbarism to liberal enlightenment (Hindness 2005) is an undercurrent in the reflection, cited in Chapter Two, by former police commissioner Short wherein he described the colonial period as a time of "service" rather than "domination". The ability for the British empire to maintain its far flung colonies – many of them up to that point deemed too 'uncivilized' to grant independence – was compromised after the devastation of World War II.

In the aftermath of the War, both the British and the Solomon Islanders were changed by what they experienced (Bennett 2002; White and Lindstrom 1989). The Solomon Islanders watched the retreat of the British Protectorate administration when faced with Japanese advancement, while also seeing Americans both black and white fighting side by side. While the Solomon Islanders, like nearly all colonial subjects, had internalized the discourse of 'superiority' and 'righteousness' of 'civilized white people' securing the legitimacy of colonial domination, the experiences of the war provided an alternative perspective (however problematic given the American's own racism). For the British, as a member of the international community of states – the 'advanced civilization' who claimed to be united on the basis of their higher moral and intellectual standards – the realities of the horrors of war challenged the idea that Western nations were the sole purveyors of civility. As Donnelly (1998: 12) states, "the 'civilization' that brought the world the Holocaust, the Gulag, the atom bomb,

and two global wars of appalling destructiveness in barely 30 years found it increasingly difficult to suggest that Asians and Africans were too 'uncivilized' to join their ranks—especially as the other intellectual supports of imperialism were also crumbling". These experiences also precipitated the emergence of two international norms or standards of civilization – self-determination and human rights.

The colonized people of the world used the principle of self-determination to argue that they were capable of meeting the minimum requirement for statehood and incorporation within the international community. As the Enlightenment idea of progress intertwined with the increased recognition of the suffering that had been caused by Western powers the acceptance of extending sovereign equality gained traction (ibid). Self-determination became synonymous with decolonization, with colonial territories seeking "recognition as sovereign states, within colonial borders" (ibid: 13). The duty of the imperial powers to the rest of the world seemed to lie in granting sovereign rights of recognition to these countries, many of which they had created, as opposed to seeking justice or higher standards of humane behavior (ibid). Civilization came to mean sovereign equality, the lowest common denominator, which enabled the authoritarian and dictatorial regimes of the world to act with impunity claiming neo-colonialism if anyone tried to intervene (ibid). While the increasing recognition of hypocrisy in Westerners behavior, from imperialism and slavery to the myriad horrors of the World Wars, gave rise to a morally low-bar right to self-determination, there was also a re-emergence of an "underlying idea of universal rights" (ibid: 14). These rights refer "to the reasonable demands for personal security

and basic well-being that all individuals can make on the rest of humanity by virtue of their being members of the species *Homo sapiens*" (Messer 1993: 222). The idea of universal human rights came in some ways to clash with the concept of sovereign equality, as Donnelly (ibid: 14) explains:

> "International human rights appeal to a Lockean or liberal progressivist understanding of civilization and a social contract conception of the state as an instrument to realize the rights of its citizens. But this liberal standard of legitimacy—a government is entitled to full membership in international society to the extent that it implements internationally recognized human rights—faced the competing legal positivist (Hobbesian) theory of recognition, which grants membership in international society if a state controls its territory and discharges the international obligations it has undertaken."

While universal human rights discourse has aimed at making the world a more just place by guaranteeing standard protection for humanity within the international society, the seeming competition with self-determination as well as the moments of hypocrisy still present in Western countries problematized its uptake. Western countries did work hard to implement human rights protections in their own countries and foreign policies, maybe unsurprisingly since these rights were their own idea in the first place, but they also became a "standard subject in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy by the early 1980s" (ibid: 14). In this way, while universal human rights aimed to appeal to a higher moral ground, above the interests of any state or political entity, they still have become entangled with the experiences of Western imposition – something in the past that was not a humane undertaking. As well, Donnelly (ibid) explains how the promotion of democratic governance and the effective monitoring of local politics have both helped to increase the traction of human rights, as acting in

opposition often leads to measurable sanctions. This too though can be problematic given in some cases, like China, where global politico-economic situations make it challenging or distasteful to enforce sanctions on single countries in clear violation of such values (ibid). These universal human rights and the conceptions of democratic or representative governance, regardless of their intended non-particularistic appeal, are inevitably tied to specific political and economic goals as opposed to impartial imposition.

Tracing the evolution of universal human rights from their emergence after World War II to their contemporary iterations, one can again follow the trend outwardly from the West to the rest of the world. While these rights were transformed through historical, political, and socioeconomic experiences, leading to multiple 'generations' of rights and more widespread adoption, there remained concerns among countries, including those 'Third World' areas most vulnerable to external domination and internal manipulation. As Messer (1993: 223) explains, "many rejected the universalism of the Western human rights notions as ethnocentric and insisted that the rights of individuals could not be separated from their collective context. Indigenous peoples are now in the process of adding a "fourth generation" of indigenous rights, which will protect their rights to political self-determination and control over socioeconomic development-rights that are currently threatened within state frameworks". These circumstances can be encountered in the Solomon Islands, from the long-standing attempts to recognize indigenous rights to the experience of human rights as another Western ideological imposition in the sea of developmental and

modernization discourse that has characterized the last fifty years[12]. Speaking with an elder administrative member of the Church of Melanesia (Anglican) and political advisor, he explained "there is so much talk about rights – everyone has rights, everyone has their own rights: women's rights, children's rights, and, the most ridiculous, animal's rights. You want me to believe there are rights for animals like humans? How can we listen to this? How will a child obey their parents if they can run off and have rights? You can't tell me a dog has rights. Animal rights [laughs]".

Dolphins: Environmental or Ornamental

An ominous soundtrack accompanying the whirl of helicopter blades sets the tone as the scene begins with the white American dolphin activist Ric O'Barry with the group Earth Island Institute[13] (EII) flying into what his son and "most trusted lieutenant" Lincoln has called "the heart of darkness" or "the belly of the beast", maybe better known as Malaita, Solomon Islands (*Blood Dolphin$.* 2010: Ep 2 Act 3, 1:47). The dramatic tension had already been ratcheted up by the opening narration to the television show which began with the stereotypical sun-soaked, happy-black-skinned-child-filled, unspoilt, exotic-holiday-destination characterization and then abruptly punctuates the idyllic with pictures of skulls and the narrator's voice threatening "but look closer, the jungle canopy conceals a past drenched in blood" (ibid: Ep. 2 Act 1, 0:31). Vaguely citing a history of "headhunting" and "cannibalism"

[12] A satricial take on the imposition of "human rights" in the Pacific can also be encountered in Hau'ofa's (1983) Tales of the Tikongs.
[13] A US-based non-governmental organization focused on environmental issues. see website for more information http://www.earthisland.org/

then leaping to the recent civil conflicts, characterized only as "bitter ethnic violence and civil strife" and the American soldiers[14] who lost their lives in WWII, the narrator proclaims "given that history, it is no surprise that the Solomons today are notorious on a very different front" (ibid, 0:58). That front, the audience is informed, is the hunting and live-trading of dolphins. Possibly unaware of the intrusive and disquieting nature of their modus operandi, the narrator reminds us, as the helicopter blows in for a landing within the village Fanalei, that "negotiating a hunting moratorium with the dolphin villages will be a delicate undertaking" (ibid, 3:09).

The scene continues to unfold as the foreign film crew and activists surrounded by curious onlookers, giggling children, and local attachés enter the center of the village. While the Malaitans perspective on the purpose of the meeting is not expressed, the activists aim to discuss the terms of a deal to stop the dolphin hunt. The narrator explains that the EII crew was originally drawn to the country in 2006 by the trade in live wild dolphins sold to places like Dubai and Mexico spearheaded by a man named Chris Porter. Arguing that the trade relied on the relatively isolated practice of dolphin hunting, the narrator voices Ric O'Barry's claim – "Stop the hunt and the trade will wither away" (ibid, 2:49). O'Barry goes on to explain that "we want to create jobs for these people, dolphins are important, but people are important too. The

[14] - With no mention of any other soldiers or local counterparts who also were killed or injured in the fighting. This point was underlined when they were doing a test reconnaissance mission with their drone which they planned to use without a permit to spy on a local business owner. Activist Ric O'Barry, seeming to liken their own crusade to save the dolphins to the Allied Pacific campaign, stated "We did the test run at the US war Memorial in Guadalcanal and that was very very moving because there was a time when there was Japanese machine guns up there just mowing down these young kids trying to get up that hill" (Blood Dolphin$. 2010: Ep. 2 Act 4, 2:50)

best solution is to find sustainable alternatives; find ways for these folks to make a decent living" (ibid, 2:55).

On earlier visits to Malaita during this trip, the crew went to the northern, but linguistically-related, village of Bita'ama on the Lau Lagoon where dolphin hunting has also occurred. Lincoln O'Barry, who went on a "fact-finding" mission shortly before his father's arrival, shared his concerns about traveling to the village, noting "we're dealing with tribes that were only two generations ago headhunters" (ibid: Ep 2 Act 3, 4:04). He said he was nervous going to villages to negotiate saying "we are going to be in the middle of nowhere with all our gear sleeping on the floor in these villages, and you know hopefully we are not seen as the enemy, it's really a pins and needles kind of finesse thing" (ibid: Ep 2 Act 1, 3:29). Besides being, in his mind, the "heart of darkness" and steps away from headhunting, his nervousness was also, by his report, out of concerns for the well-being of the people. As he puts it, "what can you say when you're there, these people have nothing, and so if they see a dolphin go by" they could eat it for a week's sustenance (ibid: Ep 2 Act 3, 7:24).

Heading back to Bita'ama the second time, with his father in attendance, the crew (firstly) resorted to a helicopter having struggled to secure boat transport[15] after spying on a local Honiara businessman. The unauthorized and unwelcome behavior prompted a signed 'cease and desist' letter from members of Parliament and local

[15] Lincoln O'Barry, commenting on the difficulty in finding transport, stated that he wasn't sure if they were afraid of coming with them or afraid of going to Malaita (Blood Dolphin$. 2010: Ep 3 Act 1, 7:10) never once naming the possibility of their own intrusive, inappropriate, or legally-questionable behavior as a cause.

chiefs. At the last minute a previously unknown village representative, whose name was on the letter, shows up at the airport seeming to sort everything out in their favor, escorting them to his village in the north. The goal in going to the village, the elder O'Barry explains, is to negotiate an end to hunting that has been, by their assessment, brought back to life by Chris Porter's dolphin export activity. The live trade, they argue, has commodified the animal beyond local cultural exchange value. As the helicopter lands in the middle of the village sports field, the narrator explains that this is more than a fact finding mission – "as a representative of Earth Island Institute, he's [Ric O'Barry] been empowered to discuss the offer of modest financial grants to the village in exchange for a hunting moratorium" (ibid: Ep 3 Act 1, 8:53). O'Barry goes on to explain, "the best solution is to find sustainable alternatives, these folks need jobs and if we can create jobs for them it's probably the best way to shut down this dolphin slaughter" (ibid, 8:53). It is never made clear how they intend to create jobs in these villages, but they do offer money in exchange for cooperation.

Setting up the tension in the encounter, the narrator describes the Solomon Islands as a "surreal cultural landscape where nothing is ever as it seems" (ibid Ep 3 Act 1, 2:28) with the younger O'Barry saying that it is like nowhere else he has travelled given that you get a different story from everyone you talk to. On their previous visit to Bita'ama, while departing the village in the transport truck with Lincoln O'Barry, Chris Porter can be heard telling the villagers in broken Pijin not to worry, that he will keep bringing people to the village to help them, and if the people won't help, he will bring more (ibid: Ep 2 Act 3, 8:49). On this visit, where, we are

told, negotiations will take place, the village representative Emmanuel Tigi changes from his everyday clothes to his ceremonial attire to request the amount agree upon by the villagers. The narrator refers to this as a "bizarre turn of events" at the "open meeting" (ibid: Ep 3 Act 2, 0:39) as Tigi reads the written agreement stating that if Earth Island Institute requests that Bita'ama stop practicing their culture and customs surrounding dolphins then it will "cost 12 million US dollars a year" (ibid, 1:04). At that Ric O'Barry states to the gathered villagers that EII is "an environmental group not the World Bank" and explains later that he was surprised because he thought Tigi "wanted to cooperate; he first approached us and wanted to stop killing dolphins" but then at the meeting "became this other character" (ibid, 1:25).

Wandering off-stage at the village gathering, Ric O'Barry says little more than even though no agreement could be reached he was taking the villagers with him in his heart. He walks over to the camera where he explains that when Tigi read the communal statement "I felt a little bit ambushed there" citing that a "realistic" solution may not exist given that they don't have "a magic wand" (ibid, 2:19). Tigi, on the other hand, told the interviewer that he believed the amount to be realistic. In another village just outside his Gavutu compound, Chris Porter, is seen speaking to a Sunday church service reassuring them that he is not leaving and will make sure that any agreement with Ric O'Barry will provide for them. He refers to this meeting as a "reconciliation" (ibid, 3:40). The EII activists had also intended to support Porter's release of his captive dolphins but those negotiations fell through as well. The only possibility left, we are told, lies in Fanalei where we began. Even though negotiations

in Fanalei had already started with other members of the EII team, including local activist Lawrence Makili, the report of around 100 dolphins being killed the day before leads Ric O'Barry to conclude that "we thought we were going into harm's way to be perfectly frank" (ibid: Ep 3 Act 5, 0:59).

Flying into a small welcoming ceremony in Fanalei, Ric O'Barry expresses the "importance of showing up" explaining to the camera that "Earth Island will raise the money to subsidize the hunt if you will" (ibid, 2:15). He goes on to say "just because something is cultural or traditional doesn't mean it's okay to continue, times change and people change" (ibid, 2:20). At the village gathering, people were given the opportunity to ask questions. An older man stood up and said, "one of the elders of this village, he made an objection about your coming, he said that you don't try to listen to anybody, he has the foresight of seeing things between modernization and culture and custom, because he has the foresight the answers are with him" (ibid, 5:19). Ric O'Barry, facing the camera rather than speaking to the crowd says "it's not for me to judge what they do with their culture, if they are looking for an alternative we are here to support that effort" (ibid, 5:53). The comment portion scene of the negotiations is concluded with a statement by another older man, who cites his role as the village dolphin tallier. He says in Pijin that times change and they should stop now because nature is God's and we have to care for it. At that they prepare to sign the documents with the local translator ensuring everyone agrees stating in Pijin and Lau that the money paid to them will be for two years.

The scene in Fanalei ends with Lincoln O'Barry interpreting the emotional state of the Malaitan villagers the morning after the agreement saying "I saw just across all the faces in the village um in their eyes you just saw hope; a new world had basically been opened up for them" (ibid Ep 3 Act 6, 1:58). The Blood Dolphins (2010) "Solomons Mission" doesn't conclude there as one last scene plays out in the then newly-built Heritage Park Hotel at poolside bar in Honiara. The brother of Emmanuel Tigi, Michael Tolingikirio, whom Ric O'Barry had been acquainted with in Bita'ama, comes to meet with the crew for further discussions. Since the village meeting ended with a shot of Tigi saying "Bita'ama is the king place of dolphins in the world" and that if EII did not meet the agreement the villagers would "slaughter the dolphins of the whole earth", it was not clear how this would go (ibid: Ep 3 Act 2, 2:40). He explains that Bita'ama would be happy to foster an agreement like EII had done in other communities like Fanalei. In response to the renewed interest, O'Barry responds by saying "I'm surprised, I thought I had to come up with 12 million dollars" to which Tolingikirio says – "those were just emotional words; we want dolphins to survive and keep their life" (ibid: Ep 3 Act 6, 3:03). The television show ended on that statement – providing a sense of achievement that the EII crew seemed to believe was permanent.

While the Memorandum of Understanding with the Lau-speaking villages of Fanalei, Walande, and Bita'ama led to a halt in the dolphin hunting in 2010, the agreements were not long-lasting. According to Oremus et al (2015), after the village

of Ata'a (not included in the EII agreement) killed over 100 dolphins in a hunt[16], the MoU broke-down leading Fanalei to resume hunting in 2013. Dolphin calling and hunting among the Lau-speaking people of Malaita has a long history going back, based on oral tradition, before the arrival of Europeans (Takekawa 1996 cited in Oremus et al 2015). People rely on these animals for protein, but prize them for their teeth which are used as bridewealth in marriage agreements and to make adornments like necklaces and head bands. While the practice may have diminished with the introduction of Christianity, which discouraged traditional customs like bride price, dolphin hunting was revived by indigenous Christian practitioners in the mid-twentieth century (ibid). When Fanalei resumed hunting in January 2013 more than 1000 dolphins were killed over the course of a few hunts. According to Oremus et al's (2015: 8) field interviews in the village at this time, the authors reported getting the "impression that the people of Fanalei were puzzled by the attention they attracted in resuming the recent dolphin hunt. To them, it seemed that the agreement with EII represented only a rather brief lapse in a long history of hunting. They explained that stopping the hunt had brought much tension in the village and that resuming it brought back peace among community members. Therefore, they made it clear that they intended to continue the hunt."

Discussions around Honiara at the time speculated about a number of precipitating factors including accusations of embezzlement, failure to fulfill payment

[16] The authors (ibid) speculated that this hunt may have been precipitated by the increased price dolphin teeth were fetching on the market in 2013 which may have been caused by the supply decrease from the moratorium.

promises, and the expiration of the agreement. Many in the Lau-speaking northern communities were already skeptical of foreigners coming with an interest in customary practices believing in some cases that they sought to steal knowledge for their own gain. According to media reports[17], the Fanalei community was claiming that EII did not pay the amount promised in the MoU while the EII position was that corruption within the community was the cause. The following letter to the editor of the Solomon Star (2013) newspaper written toward the end of the year by Jimmy Aikimane challenges the statements by another community member over the causes behind the resumption of the dolphin hunt in Fanalei:

> "DEAR EDITOR – You got it all wrong, Page 4 of Solomon Star Issue No. 5322 Thursday 31st October, 2013. Wilson Filei no longer speaks for our community of Fanalei. His recent remarks that the community is divided over resumption of hunting, come next hunting season, is far remote from any truth. The dolphin slaughter might have looked like a retaliation by the Fanalei villagers due to EII's lack of respect for the MOU signed with Fanalei and Walande communities, but actually IT IS NOT. The truth is that, at the end of the two years ban period (2010 – 2012), the people of Fanalei are now free to go on with their normal lives. This is all about life returning to normalcy for men, women and children in the community and that is exactly where the community is today. The community is very much looking forward to its next hunting season of the mammal so that the villagers can be able, through the sale dolphin products, to meet educational needs such as school fees, medical expenses, cultural obligations such as bride price, reconciliations and peace building work amongst families, tribes and church work at the community and parish levels as well as other important needs of the community. Lest you forget, this time round we are more sensitive in ensuring the interests of our community of Fanalei are well protected in any future deals with foreigners like EII. We are to ensure any deals contrary to the interests of our people will no longer be entertained or accepted. Lastly, let me say this to EII and the likes of Mark Berman, Lawrence Makili and

[17] Huffington Post (2013) January 25, reported on interviews conducted by Radio Australia and the Guardian. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/25/solomon-island-dolphin-slaughter_n_2551274.html

> Wilson Filei: You can fool us some of the time, but you cannot fool us all of the time. We are simply just sick and tired of your bulk of lies. Enough is enough. Come 2014 hunting season, we will prove to EII and the world once more the resumption of our traditional hunting practice of the mammal. Any attempts by environmental activists to stop the practice of dolphin hunting will not be tolerated. Our gains from dolphin hunting far outweighs our loses. We will not sacrifice our benefits for the enjoyment of a selfish few. Please stop your propaganda because we are firm and nothing will move us. We cannot be convinced by self-serving interests. Although we acknowledge the need to ensure sustainable harvesting, to STOP dolphin hunting is not an option for us. As dolphin hunting is our way of life, it is here to stay until the end of time."

In mid-2015, the article by Oremus, Leqata, and Baker (2015) examining the resumption of the dolphin hunt in 2013 was published in the Royal Society Open Science journal. This publication sparked renewed interest in the topic of dolphin hunting in the Solomon Islands with major Western newspapers including the Washington Post[18], the Guardian[19], and the New York Post[20] picking up the story. The article by Oremus et al (ibid) detailed the specifics of the practice including methods and cultural purposes, but dedicated most of their attention to scientific, statistical, and economic considerations. This included the molecular and morphological identification of the species hunted, tabulation of the catch records and estimations of total dolphins killed since records were available, and market price data for teeth in comparison to the expected increase based on inflation. The authors' conclusions were that while the local people had no interest in stopping or limiting their dolphin hunting, they were concerned over the 'by-catch' killing of dolphins by purse seiners –

[18] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2015/05/09/why-more-than-15000-dolphins-have-been-killed-in-solomon-islands-drive-hunts/?utm_term=.c83486f99de2

[19] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/07/solomon-islanders-kill-more-than-1600-dolphins-for-their-teeth

[20] http://nypost.com/2015/08/09/how-villagers-held-dolphins-hostage-for-charity-cash/

a statistic not reported in this research (ibid: 8). The article goes on to state that while the International Union for the Conservation of Nature does not recognize the species hunted by villagers as "vulnerable or endangered", this does not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the species' well-being in local populations (ibid: 8).

The article, sponsored by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, concludes by making a number of recommendations based on the resumption of the dolphin hunting in Fanalei and their assessment regarding threats to local populations of the hunted species. These follow:

> "Given this potential and our observation that the recent resumption of drive hunting showed no signs of abating, there is an urgent need to improve the monitoring of these catches, with the eventual objective of implementing a management procedure. First, there is a need to collect systematic records of all future hunts and, if possible, provide some verification through independent observers or photographic documentation. Second, samples from each hunt should be collected and archived, with the intent of confirming species identification and tracking changes in diversity and population identity over time, via genetic monitoring. Finally, surveys of local waters are also needed to estimate the abundance of dolphins around Malaita. These recommendations are consistent with the Whale and Dolphin Action Plan developed by the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the inter-governmental agency responsible for providing management advice on cetaceans in the region. In making these recommendations, we recognize that improved management of the hunt does not address the animal welfare concerns associated with drive hunting, although it might reduce the magnitude of the catches. Further reductions in catches might be achieved by providing an alternate, non-lethal value through dolphin-watching programmes or other ecotourism opportunities. Such programmes could take advantage of the local knowledge and skills available in the communities as a result of drive hunting, providing a more sustainable future for both the dolphins and the cultural traditions of the hunters." (ibid: 8)

For Bita'ama, the village on Lau Lagoon in the northern part of Malaita, the resumption of dolphin hunting like Fanalei was not the chosen path. Instead, villagers pinned their hopes on the promises of 'eco-tourism', a common, yet often empty, phrase in recent history in Solomon Islands (see Hviding and Bayliss Smith 2000; Hviding 2003). A few weeks after the renewed international media coverage of the resumption of the hunt in Fanalei two years earlier, in May 2015 the Solomon Star published two articles detailing the plans of Bita'ama villagers to develop a dolphin tourist attraction:

> "**Bita'ama turns dolphin criticisms into optimism**
> Published: 22 May 2015; By Ednal Palmer
>
> THEY were criticized and condemned internationally for killing dolphins, but Bita'ama community is turning that into pride. The North Malaita community under an Association formed (Bita'ama United Tribal Community Assembly Association, BUTCAA), is now preparing to showcase a well-designed concept to the world. A delegation from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism will be travelling to Bita'ama to witness what the community will offer. The one-day ceremony planned for Tuesday next week (May 26), involves presenting and demonstrating a dolphin preservation concept that will turn the dolphin killing site into a tourist attraction site. The government delegation will be taken into the village and shown the concept plan, paddled into the harbour and be shown how dolphins will be called for as part of the tourists attraction and discuss with BUTCAA how best the concept will be materialised with government assistance. "There is no looking back, the community through BUTCAA have turned the international outcry and gossip into a long term positive outcome," secretary of BUTCAA Michael A. Tolingikirio said. Mr Tolingikirio said since people were lured by Earth Island Institute (EII) from their cultural heritage and pride of killing dolphins with a housing project, people of Bita'ama continued to look at the positive side of things. "EII failed to fulfill their housing project for the community. They promised to help people build permanent homes. EII did provided a sawmill but that was it. Nothing happened. "But the people of Bita'ama never look back. We look at another option which is resurrecting that dolphin cultural (taboo) site. "We have a concept in

place and have presented the concept to the government through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. They agreed to come and discuss and see what we will be offering. “This is why the delegation will be coming and we are prepared to show the government the plan we have. “We rest our hope on the government to help us progress and advance the plan. Other aid donors who have been very vocal against dolphin killing should be happy and throw in their support towards this dream. “We hope when the concept is implemented, Bita’ama will become one of the world and country’s tourist destination sites because the traditional skills of calling dolphins will be part of the surprise package.” The government delegation that will be travelling to Bita’ama will include Member of Parliament for North Malaita Jimmy Lusibaea, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, SIVB CEO and others. Mr Tolingikirio added that the visit is also part of preparation for a dolphin festival they will be staging on a date to be confirmed after the delegation visited Bita’ama. The festival is expected to become an annual event to attract tourists and people. The secretary extended an open invitation to people from surrounding communities to join the program planned for next Tuesday at Bita’ama village. “People in the surrounding areas and anywhere are welcome to join the program next week.””

“**Bita’ama ends dolphin torture, now plans to move into tourism**
Published: 29 May 2015; By Denver Newter

People of Bita’ama in North Malaita Malaita have promised to cease killing of dolphins for food consumption and plans to convert their traditional hunting of dolphins to become a tourism attraction. This was revealed during a high level delegation visit led by Culture and Tourism Minister Bartholomew Parapolo to Bita’ama village on Tuesday. The delegation included Permanent Secretary John Wasi, Tourism Director Barney Sivoro, Chief Executive officer for Solomon Island Visitors Bureau (SIVB) Josefa Tuamoto, SIVB Board Chairman Wilson Ne’e, an Officer from Ausaid, MCT Consultant Andrew Nihopara and three seniors Ministry officers. During the visit, the delegation was given an opportunity to visit few tourism operators in Bita’ama, the historical sites and the proposed development site where three tribes in Bita’ama have allocated for development. Speaking to the Solomon Star during the visit Movin Kuta a rep for Suri tribe said, that three tribes of Bita’ama have agreed to stop the hunting of dolphins. “Now we are looking into turning this dolphin hunting to become something that can give benefits back into our community,” Mr Kuta said. He said in 2011 Bitaa’ma community had signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Earth Island to stop

> hunting of dolphin. “Since 2011 we sign an MOU with Earth Island Institute to stop the physical hunting of dolphin until today. “This was agreed and signed by three tribes here in Bita’ama to stop the hunt of dolphins, now we’ll swim with the dolphins promoting it as our friend but no more killing of dolphins in Bitaama,” he said. He added since the MOU was signed with Earth islands to stop dolphin harvesting Bita’ama people were frustrated because some conditions inside the MOU was not considered by the Earth Islands. “But now people have agreed not to harvest or kill dolphins but to promote it dolphins so that visitors can come and watch it,” he said. He acknowledged the visit by the high level delegation which goes in line with their development plan. “This visit is important to us to see our plans in transforming this dolphin harvesting to become a tourism attraction.” The rep from Suri tribe added they are looking into economically harvesting of dolphins to bring income for Bita’ama community. Permanent Secretary Wasi told the people of Bita’ama said, that North Malaita people are hardworking people. “Bita’ama you are hardworking people and can make things happen to generate an income in your community. “Our purpose of visit here is to see a product in your community and see operators and how the Ministry can assist them this year,” Mr Wasi said. He told the gathering that Bita’ama will be included in the Ministry’s program this year. “I would like to assure Bita’ama community that operators here will be included in the MCT program. This year we have a local consultant that will visit the community and conduct and profile of your product. “So please first you must be united and let us work together. We have seen that there are many issues that needed to be addressed like infrastructure and so my ministry will liaises with responsible ministry concern to address these issues,” Mr Wasi said. He added, the Ministry will also work closely with Malaita provincial government to carry out the awareness program and tourism training in rural areas. “Here you have all the products like dolphins hunting which my Ministry will try to help in turning dolphin hunting to become one of the tourism attractions in Malaita. Therefore my Ministry will partner with you to start off our work here so that we can be able to achieve our plans and visions in Bita’ama,” Mr Wasi.”

For the Lau-speaking villagers of Fanalei, Walande, and Bita’ama as well as the villagers surrounding Chris Porter’s Gavutu Island operation, dolphins became a site of intertwining encounters between the local and the global. According to Takekawa (2000), oral history on the tradition of dolphin hunting explains how it was

introduced to Malaita from the Polynesian atoll of Ontong Java stating that it was discontinued for a time period, which while not specified, corresponded with the coming of Christian missionaries. This, as mentioned before, was likely because converts were encouraged to separate themselves from customary practices. During the Maasina movement, the practiced was revived by the vicar of Fanalei, William Masura, and other chiefs in 1948 and then introduced to northern Lau-speaking villages by Father Martin Fia within the decade (ibid: 4). In this way, the resurrection of the hunt itself was an act of resistance, a reclamation of tradition in opposition to the homogenizing forces of colonial incorporation and conversion. It was not, however, a rejection of Christianity given that the resumption was instigated by local Christian leaders who understood the relationship of custom and Christianity through a localized lens, one that could exist without the wholesale cultural whitewashing of Westernization. While globalizing forces are transformative, they are not necessarily exclusively homogenizing as the global is often reimagined and reconstituted within the local as much as the opposite is true (Hviding 2003).

For contemporary rural Melanesians, interest in the richness these areas have to offer and the increasing ease of access has meant, as Hviding (2003: 544) points out, their everyday lives are "not just engaged in, but more fundamentally constituted by, activities of an exogenous nature." Takekawa (ibid) explains that while other villages, like Bita'ama, Ata'a, Sulufou, and Walande, practice dolphin hunting, Fanalei has always been the preeminent and most consistent hunting village. The history of suspension and resumption of the dolphin hunt in Fanalei and elsewhere was

influenced by forces outside of the village shaping the moral world within which the hunt was made sense of. For the Lau-speaking villagers, the dolphins have always been a source of food, but more importantly were a source of wealth and ornamentation through their teeth. The traditional value was paralleled by the newer practices of exporting them for decoration and entertainment in that both prized dolphins for their ornamental and exchange value. In this way, the exogenous desires fit within the scope of local beliefs and practices creating a complementary relationship even if, as illustrated by Porter's reconciliation scene there is often significant uncertainty. Indeed, according to some villagers in Bita'ama, the hunting of dolphins had subsided until the arrival of Chris Porter's live export operations and even then remained sporadic (Blood Dolphin$. 2010; Oremus et al 2015). Dolphin hunting in villages outside Fanalei, while seeming to have occurred in pre-contact times, owed much more of its existence to the influence of foreigners both as a means of opposition during colonization and as a source of revenue in the contemporary world.

Then, in 2006, when dolphin rights activists became aware of Porter's operation and subsequently of the local hunts, the discourse transformed. The dolphin, no longer just a source of subsistence and wealth, became a site for moral contention and modern problem-solving – something that echoed the experiences of colonization and conversion. When foreigners arrived, the dolphin hunt was recast as an unethical behavior standing in opposition to their morality whether it was Christianity or conservation. The similarity between the two is striking given in both cases the

villagers were presented as not knowing any better, having no other options, or existing before the saving grace of "knowledge" whether that be religious or scientific enlightenment. The conservationists sought to return the Islands and surrounding waters to a "pristine state" (Hviding 2003: 549) which in many ways is analogous to the idea of a primitive moral condition a state in which the missionaries often imagined they found the place. The European imaginary of the Pacific, as Kabutaulaka (2015: 115) explains, was "influenced by the concept of the "Noble Savage," which glorified a "natural life" that was seen as uncorrupted by civilization and therefore represented humans' innate goodness." Both the missionaries and the conservationists have approached the country paternally, as if they were going to teach the Islanders not to make the same mistakes their people had made whether it be in sins against God or the environment. These foreigners would teach the Solomon Islanders what was "right"[21] so that they would stop killing each other or stop killing dolphins. During Christian missionization that attack was not so much specifically focused on dolphin hunting, but rather sought to diminish all customary practices as a way to separate indigenous people from their beliefs. The environmentalist discourse contained two interrelated branches of attack: non-human animal welfare and conservation. Both branches promoted a view of the environment as something harmed by human behaviors and something that merited human intervention.

[21] See McDougall (2016) for another example of foreigners coming with the intention of teaching the Solomon Islanders the "right way" of living. A thematic discourse that can be found in both religious and development sectors in the country.

Even with the relative absence of administrative state institutions, the effects of the state in these rural locales can be encountered in the experiences of the dolphin villages, in the stability of the indigenous rationale and in the dynamism or pragmatism of their associated behaviors. Dolphin teeth have always had a commodity value, used to make valuables to pay bride price and adorn ritual participants, with most teeth collected in Fanalei being traded away similar to red-shell money in Langalanga (Cooper 1971 cited in Takekawa 2000). While Christianity diminished the moral value of customary practices in turn collapsing the market for hunting dolphins, once the practice was revived within a counter-colonial movement, the value quickly returned. As well, since the arrival of Christianity coincided with the increased access to paid work, the decrease in intertribal fighting and retaliatory killing, and access to some health-related promotions, both the subsequent increase in population and access to material wealth helped the dolphin market thrive. At the same time, as people began desiring cash money and imported material goods as part of bride price, the market was also threatened by changing times. When the practice of live exporting dolphins was introduced, fetching hundreds of thousands of dollars per dolphin, this likely helped to reinvigorate the dolphin commodity market. The global fascination with dolphins, thus, helped to fuel the commodification of dolphins that had long existed in Malaita.

This same global fascination with dolphins has been supported by both nonhuman animal welfare advocates and scientific environmentalists. Just as missionization followed imperialism outwardly from the west so too did the modern

moralization of dolphins follow their increasing commodification. Hviding (2003: 543) traces a parallel trend in the forests of the Solomon Islands where the "compressed globalization" of the international extractive industries, eco-tourists, and environmental advocates in direct interactions with traditional landowners created an environment rife with uncertainty. The loggers coming mainly from East and South East Asia sought to exploit the natural resources feeding a market hungry for tropical hardwood while the environmentalists and eco-tourists came in search of unspoilt, primitive landscapes. Hviding (2003) makes the point that while the narrative is often that locals are victimized or bamboozled by economic activities and willingly saved by conservation operations, the reality sees markedly more pragmatism and agency on the side of the Solomon Islanders. When this narrative is compared to the dolphin experience, the only real difference is the subject as the formula stays almost entirely the same.

In both cases it begins as an economic issue with a local item becoming commodified on a global market attracting interest in materials that were previously valuable only locally or not at all. Just as the standards of civilization went through transformations beginning in imperial times leading to the contemporary rights discourse, the economic activities became intertwined with the changing morality of the West. While the imperial period saw enormous extraction of material and labor resources from the non-Western world, the new ideas around morality in the post-World War era spawned the ideology of self-determination and human rights (Donnelly 1998). Self-determination, on the one hand, promoted political economic

development and modernization while, on the other, human rights discourse focused on quality of life and well-being. The combination of these brought both capitalism and conservation to their doorstep just as a century earlier the transformations in Europe brought colonization and Christianity.

From a moral perspective the activities of conservationists were both for the supposed good of a higher moral principle and also for the perceived benefit of the indigenous people. Based on the dominant discourse illustrated by the television show Blood Dolphin$. (2010), both the dolphins and the people were in need of saving. The missionaries promoted their religion, propagating their worldview by saving the souls of "heathen" people just as the conservationists are doing the same by ending the "barbaric" practices of "primitive" people by providing them with a "decent" living. This not only furthered the Western worldview that they were acting morally by protecting the well-being of the dolphin, but also that there was a right way to earn money and live one's life that the indigenous people were simply unaware of. Even if the intrinsic value of a dolphin's life did not gain currency, Solomon Islanders became well-aware of the moral discourse of conservation. This promoted behaviors that in the first place aimed to participate in the socioeconomic world[22] by surface-level conformity, but in the long run, like conversion, may lead to more marked cosmological shifts. The proposed solution was always something along the lines of

[22] By this I mean in appearance of valuing Western ideas over traditional practices – like buying into the idea that it is morally wrong to kill dolphins (notice the headline from the Solomon Star cited above – "Dolphin Torture") and by adopting the conservationist point of view to attract tourists to their eco-touristic enterprises (believing, for example, that they can make more money from tourists than from selling live or dead dolphins.)

eco-tourism – exploiting the "primitivism" of both the landscape and the people, trapped in an idyllic imagination, but without the explicit "heathen, barbarism" of yesteryear – even if, as the show clearly demonstrated, playing it up as a real threat makes it seem all the more exciting for the "civilized" adventurers from the Western world (see Hviding 2003; Stasch 2014).

For the indigenous Solomon Islanders, the interest is both a benefit in attracting new sources of income, from the capitalists and the environmentalists, and also a threat to their cultural practices and agency. The new income from the capitalists is straightforward and can be problematic if the resources are diminished or if, as Hviding (2003), the internal disputes and consumption undermine the foundation of the community. From the environmentalists, the income can be from enterprise like tourism, but it also comes from "grants" or "development funds" which basically pay local people to keep their place in a specific condition preferred by the conservationists. In the cases of Fanalei, Walande, and Bita'ama, EII gave financial grants directly to the villagers to stop them from hunting dolphins, commoditizing the animals as much as Chris Porter had. When the agreed two-year period ceased, the communities once again commenced hunting, seemingly unwilling to renegotiate the moratorium since EII reportedly had not fulfilled their promises. Based on the television show (Blood Dolphin$. 2010), it seemed like EII representatives were never aware that they did introduce a paying job into the village – not killing dolphins – and when one does not get paid, they unsurprisingly stop working.

The attention that Fanalei garnered when they resumed the hunt also revealed the interconnection between the conceptualization of moral or civilized behavior and the conclusions from the scientific community. In the article by Oremus et al (2015), the authors walked a path weaving among discourses of indigenous autonomy and cultural relativism, welfare and rights, and scientific environmentalism. Their conclusion satisfied all three elements stating that the hunt will unlikely abate as people practice their traditional culture, and while it won't necessarily improve the suffering the animals experience, more studies will help to protect the species not currently threatened, but potentially so. It becomes a problem to be solved, a tally to be taken to not only see the survival of the indigenous practices of the rural villagers, but also of the dolphins. If the practices of the villagers seem to threaten the tally of the species, then the force of the scientific conclusion will merit action to eliminate the problem. For Bita'ama since it was never clearly a vital part of their economy, they did not resume hunting, instead taking the ecotourism route. This move matter-of-factly brought the state into the village by way of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, promoting the village as a place to visit. It further brought the Western worldview promoted through the state by adopting the popular, scientifically-supported conclusion that dolphins should be protected. A promise to both the villagers themselves in terms of economic possibility, but also to the wider world in terms of popular morality – the bad press that came from the resumption of hunting could be hidden by the story of preservation. In the end, both the villagers and the dolphins are saved by the gospel of ecotourism, but as is the reality, both are still commodities now incorporated within the system.

The differences between the villages demonstrate that it is not necessarily a uniform outcome however. As Hviding (2003: 544) explains, this process closely resembles the experience of missionization, wherein the "'local' engages creatively with and consistently modifies the 'global'". This is the case with power which, unlike total control which achieves conformity through intense violence and on-going repression, requires the ability to act. Agency is conducted or disposed to particular possibilities amid myriad outcomes and works on those actions to regulate the conditions of life. While governmental interventions "seldom reform the world according to plan…they do change things" (Li 2007: 276). If power is conceived as "a relation of 'reciprocal incitation and struggle,'" then the discourse around dolphins which did not exist prior to the coming of the Europeans could be seen as a manifestation of power (Foucault 1982: 222 cited in ibid). Even though the villagers in Fanalei resumed the hunt, as they explained, for the same reasons they always hunted, it is now also seen through the lens of both a counter-colonial and counter-contemporary Western ideological intervention. It is a marked category of behavior, one that carries with it the connotations of primitivism, indigenous rights, and environmentalism. Even as the administrative institutions of the state remain relatively absent in these areas, the effects of the imposition of the state and the incorporation of the state-systems are widely felt, providing new opportunities while transforming, recasting, and dispositioning the actions of even the most rural people in the Solomon Islands.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Standing at the bar, as across the counter attendants in black-tie were mixing colorful cocktails while popping caps off SolBrew bottles crowded atop serving trays, I observed a scene more familiar than strange in the contemporary Solomon Islands. The bar was situated in the far back corner of a large, two-story entertainment establishment named after an iconic American tradition. The newly-built bar and grill was located in one of the largest casinos in town, owned by long-time Chinese residents of Solomon Islands. Just over five years prior, this very casino had been badly damaged in riots where mostly young men, angry over what was perceived to be businesses meddling in the elections, burnt much of Chinatown and nearby Chinese-owned companies. Now, sitting in this spirited cosmopolitan atmosphere, the violence of the past seemed a distant memory even though by many accounts it simmers underneath a thin veil of peace. The establishment had a large dining area on the ground floor, with smaller tables lining a second story balcony which bordered the interior. At the front of the building there was a large, brightly-lit stage where entertainers, brought from the Philippines, would perform popular songs and choreographed dances. Like actors in a cruise-ship ballroom sing-a-long, the Filipino artists, clad in sequins and spandex, engaged members of the crowd in dancing as

other audience members, both male and female, came forward to put dollars in their clothing.

The center tables were occupied by a number of large groups enjoying their individual gatherings over tables filled with food and alcoholic beverages. These included public servants, out with their co-workers celebrating the end of the workweek, Chinese business owners from other establishments around town reaffirming shared cultural ties, and a national politician and his associates, showing Malaysian loggers a good time out around Honiara. There are really only two places, in fact, where one can encounter the timber industry workers in town, namely, Henderson Airport and nightclubs. There were other smaller collections and couples, mostly affluent business and government officials, with a few middle-aged European or Australian consultants among their ranks. While it might seem like this was the expected crowd at an evening establishment such as this one, the scene taking place inside was only half the story. The orchestrated entertainment in the main hall, where slightly-overweight salaried employees donning work-day worn suits and Hawaiian shirts danced in a familiar rhythm alongside underpaid migrant labor and deal-making fat cats, gave way to a scene transformed outside. To the left of the neon-lit stage, a windowless door to the outdoor patio swung open and closed as notably younger patrons and staff came and went from the bar. While they occasionally stood against the wall, hiding in the darkness as they admired the artistry of the entertainers or giggled at the intoxicated silliness of the older patrons (likely family members to some), they seemed most interested in quickly returning to their places on the patio.

There are no windows in the building making it impossible to see what is going on in one section while hanging out in another. This divide between the inside and outside becomes more pronounced when one exits the door to the patio, trading a professional's happy hour disco for a raucous nightclub. The outdoor area is significantly smaller than the inside with plastic tables and chairs crammed against the wall along the outer rim overlooking the sea. The entire area is packed with the bodies of inebriated young adults and teenagers swigging beer and liquor-based premixes while lit cigarettes are haphazardly dangled from their hands ready to burn inattentive passers-by. There is another entrance to the patio from the unpaved parking lot shared with the other casino buildings including a hotel, sports bar, and the gaming hall. A few wooden stairs, guarded by a bouncer gazing wearily at the crowd, leads out to the sea wall where, just beyond the beams of the halogen entry light sit young men and women obscuring themselves in the shadows. Not wanting to come in, either because of financial constraints or fear of being spotted by a family member, they resign themselves to observing the night's events from the darkness, making themselves known by a whistle or call only when they see someone they recognize coming or going. Nonetheless, they are there, enjoying the nightlife, hanging with friends, drinking black-market beer and chewing betelnut while the sounds of the crashing waves compete with the modern dance beats from the patio DJ to score the night.

The outdoor patio nightclub is a mix of younger people, even though older people do occasionally join the revelry, the ones who like this type of nightclub more

often frequent other establishments in town. The typical crowd includes the children of more well-to-do Solomon Islanders and those with access to social or financial capital which enables entrance. It has been these young people, including half-caste Australian and Chinese Solomon Islands youth, who have precipitated some marked changes in social behavior since the ceasing of violence in the early 2000s. Influenced by access to popular Western culture, young people have transformed among other things their manner of dress going from more conservative styles to mimicking the sexually-provocative and hip-hop trends seen in the US and Australia. While it could just be a matter of young people testing the boundaries of their social milieu, a prevalent practice since the dawn of time, their eagerness to participate alongside their conspicuous consumption of social media technology has somewhat changed the rules. No longer are they merely trying on the styles of far-flung foreign ideas, now one can see young people actively engaged in making their own rules, ones that integrate aspects of local cultures and global trends. And this isn't limited to fashion or music, with newly formed young women's organizations, inspired by international movements, promoting feminist discourse for the Melanesian palate – pushing the envelope but from a Pacific Island rather than Western point-of-view. While in some cases it might be facilitated by interactions with young expat Australians and New Zealanders, working in the 'Sollies' as volunteers or on short-term contracts, but there is less intermingling than one might expect. This can been seen on the dancefloor in the center of the patio, where a circle of white people dance and laugh amongst themselves. Sitting off to the side, a small group of American service members in

Honiara on a reclamation mission smirk at the dancers while keeping a watchful eye on the entrance for signs of an unlikely ambush.

While the atmosphere is friendly, and nearly everyone is well on their way to intoxication, cautious divisions remain between old and young, expat and local, contemporary and custom, Melanesian and Polynesian, *lotu* and *spakamasta*, subject and colonizer, *waku* and *araikwao,* Malaita and Guadalcanal, village and town, past and future, archipelago and Solomon Islands. As tension builds, one can feel it, like electricity in the air before the cyclone makes landfall; many nights it ends in fights with beer bottles cracked against skulls, insults hurled like weapons, bloodied faces and broken windshields. Tonight, however, the evening's mounting pressure climaxed in jubilant midnight catharsis at the percussive opening (a bass rhythm accompanied by drumming water-filled glass bottles) punctuated by the distinctive flute riff and the words "Traveling in a fried-out combie, on a hippie trail head full of zombie". At that the whole crowd exploded in cheers as eager participants pushed their way on to the dancefloor shaking their bodies until, in unison, they belted out the chorus "Do you come from the land down under, where women glow and men plunder?[1]" Nothing seems to bring people together in the Solomon Islands like that song, itself a product of local sense-making in a globalized world.

Leaving shortly after the song, I said goodnight to the son of Chinese immigrant who now runs a popular pizza joint and the granddaughter of a former

[1] Lyrics from Men at Work's 1982 hit "Land Down Under"

leader of the country, wishing my countrymen good luck and waving goodbye to the expat NGO workers still dancing the night away, I walked past a younger generation gently steering them out of my way as I tried not to get burned by their cigarettes. With a final glance at my *tabu*[2] hiding in the corner giggling at me, I walked back through the door where the party continued as the singers serenaded the audience with Celine Dion. I headed for the entrance nodding a polite yet uncomfortable hello to the Member of Parliament (on account of what was likely taking place at his table) before proceeding to the door. Walking outside I heard a familiar voice, cheerfully calling my name; it was the Minister. He smiled and said my name, having clearly enjoyed more than a few rounds before arriving here, he went on, "What are you doing next week? Are you free?" "Yes," I replied, as I always had. "Good, good, I have secured a boat so I will go for the constituency visit then and you can accompany me for your research." Asking me a few more times whether or not I was free, finally satisfied with my answer he went inside and I went home. But not before stopping at roadside chicken to get some local food piled inside a Styrofoam container from the women cooking over oil drum fires through the fence at the hospital housing.

In "Blurred Boundaries: the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state," Gupta (1995: 392), in making the case for why we must situate the state within the "context in which it is realized," asserts that there exists no "Archimedean point" from which we can observe the state, "only numerous situated knowledges". In citing Haraway (1988) on this point, Gupta is making the argument

[2] Family relation

that the construction of perspective is dependent upon the positionality of the actor. And more so, that this can lead to varied conceptualizations of the state as diversely-situated actors will imagine it based on their own lived experiences. What is the state then? Is it some objective reality standing behind the subjective imaginings engendered through everyday experiences? Or is it the myriad relations, negotiations, and interactions of power, subjectively produced yet often presented as if impartial, concrete matters-of-fact (part of the power in employing the title "state")? In "Maddening States," Aretxaga (2003: 399) writes, "the state as phenomenological reality is produced through discourses and practices of power, produced in local encounters at the everyday level, and produced through the discourses of public culture, rituals of mourning and celebration, and encounters with bureaucracies, monuments, organization of space, etc." Citing Brown (1995: 174), Aretxaga proceeds (ibid), "The paradox of what we call the state is at once an incoherent, multifaceted ensemble of power relations and a vehicle of massive domination…despite the almost unavoidable tendency to speak of the state as an 'it' the domain we call the state is not a thing, system or subject, but a significantly unbounded terrain of powers and techniques, an ensemble of discourses, rules and practices cohabiting in limiting, tension ridden, often contradictory relation to each other."

With this in mind, I wondered what "the state" in "failed state" was in the context of Solomon Islands. It was not that I was somehow naïve to the real challenges facing the country, from the struggle to engender a sense of unity among a diverse

body politic to the underlying economic, social, and political factors, still yet to be resolved, which precipitated the 1998-2003 civil conflicts. It was more a desire to understand what the measure of a successful state was in comparison to the on-the-ground lived experiences in the Solomon Islands and what the nature of the relations, which informed those experiences, was. How has the development of the Solomon Islands state out of the diverse archipelago itself been a process of dynamic negotiations of power, with the "failed state" label representative of that on-going negotiation? In particular, I was interested in how the interaction of the local and the global through historical experiences, contemporary relations, everyday encounters manifested as the Solomon Islands state. What were the processes and effects of incorporation, both in terms of imposition and acculturation? Approaching the state as an on-going, but historically-grounded project to organize society and negotiate power, my research aimed to shed light on the effects of intertwining socio-political ideologies and institutions. In the archipelago, the state is almost always encountered as both a local and Western configuration as even the name "Solomon Islands" is itself a product of such entanglements. The local acculturations I experienced in everyday life challenged, as Hviding (2003) described, the portrayal of Solomon Islanders as mere victims of globalization, instead illuminating the ways in which locals assert their perspectives into global transactions. And while I do not want to downplay the pragmatism and innovation that I encountered, it is also important not to diminish the layers of historical and contemporary oppression that have transformed and continue to shape the Solomon Islands.

The multifaceted entanglements, the relations, negotiations, and ideas manifesting as the state, tangibly experienced in everyday life and yet potentially transformative in nature were what I aimed to grasp. Knowing that it would not be possible to cover all the myriad angles from which the state could be viewed, my project ultimately focused on four areas which represented a range of interconnected perspectives. These sites – from the potholes marring the main road from Henderson to Kakabona to pragmatic political opportunism resulting in new roofs and new relations, from the conversions of big men navigating the dangerous moral waters between whiteness and custom to debates over the value of dead vs. living dolphins – existed across the spectrum. Along with knowing that it would not be possible to cover all manifestations, I was always well aware that my project would necessarily remain incomplete, without a concrete conclusion of what the state is because the state is not a static entity, but an on-going process of power relations, legitimation, and legibility. The conclusions I was able to draw reference a sampling of the experiences of incorporation to date, an ethnography of the on-the-ground lived realities in the archipelago as the people wrestled with what it meant to be the contemporary Solomon Islands, a process that was determined as much by foreign imposition as it has been by local acculturation.

The incorporation of the diverse people of the archipelago within the political territory of the Solomon Islands was a process beginning in the imperial age. Named for the fabled land of King Solomon, the islands while having been occupied for thousands (and possibly tens of thousands) years prior to the arrival of Europeans were

‘discovered’ and mapped, making them legible in the Western conception of the world. The process of being drawn into the European world system was multifaceted with outside interests engaging with the people on different levels based on their end goal. Those seeking financial gain employed an extractive approach, taking what they needed from the country to enrich their own purse. This took the form of, for example, blackbirding, the migrant labor trade which indentured thousands of Pacific Islanders to toil away on the foreign-owned plantations in Fiji and Australia along with other economic activities like mining and processing. This approach also included large scale fishing operations which exploited the rich waters around the islands and the plantations which exploited the fertile soil and cheap local labor. Those with political motives, while in many cases intertwined with financial interests were generally concerned with power and influence over the organization, administration, and defense of large populations. Their accumulative approach sought to bring diverse peoples together under a single imperial banner, ensuring their loyalty to the cause through persuasion, coercion, and force. In the case of the British this meant civilizing the people of the global Empire through ideological inculcation and culturally destructive policies. Those with socio-religious motives, saving the souls of humanity as they saw fit, employed a transfigurative approach bringing supernatural salvation through social engineering.

In the history of incorporation, a common theme ran through each process, one being that the people of the archipelago were in one way or another deficient. In terms of the financially minded, they maintained a belief that they were justified in taking

the wealth of the country – from the fish in the sea to the nutrients in the soil and the energy of the laborers. For the politically and religiously motivated, there was a sense that the people needed saving, civilizing, cleansing, and order. Through colonial activities or conversion, colonists and missionaries categorized the cultural lifeways of the indigenous islanders as lacking vital qualities or, in some cases, perverse. Precipitating the discourse of dysfunction, the consistent characterization of the ideas and actions of the people as problematic and in need of adjustment would, in part, define the incorporative process of the state as a project of transformation. As the people of the archipelago were brought on board, they became passengers, riding the waves of moral and political evolution in the West. This meant being subjected to new trends in ethics and social organization as they arose and were exported across the globe. Whether it be ideas about self-determination, democracy, and legitimate governance or conceptions of how natural resources ought to be utilized, the process of incorporation translated into an environment of on-going imposition. The key words of any given moment from ‘corruption’ to ‘conservation’, from ‘good governance’ to ‘rights’ fueling newfound development goals to make life better. There always seems to be a new and innovative project being implemented to achieve what, in essence, has been a long-standing goal – changing the people of the archipelago to fit the global imagination of the West.

While the oppressive forces of imposition were substantial, the people of the islands played their own parts in the formation of the state via processes of local sense-making through acculturation. From establishing indigenous counter-colonial

movements to becoming leaders within religious institutions enabling a more localized perspective on Christianity, the islanders have made sense of the Western introductions through culturally coherent means. The process of imposition in certain circumstances undermined traditional cultural systems enabling the islanders to break out of previous social patterns forming new ones more suited to their contemporary conditions. This newly emerging agency did not lead to a wholesale adoption of the imposed ideologies, but rather promoted a sense of participating in the modern order on one's own terms, typically in a way that corresponded to the realities of everyday life in Oceania. Being remarkably politically active citizens, the Solomon Islanders engaged with the imposed administrative system in a manner which gave them access to resources through culturally-salient and yet pragmatic channels. In many cases, this led to competing logics of legitimacy wherein the conceptualizations of things like 'government' could be something on the one hand very familiar while on the other remaining an alien imposition. Disparate conceptualizations, in turn, affected the ways in which people, both locals and foreigners, engaged with the politics and the expectations which guided those interactions.

After a long conversation with a local teacher and political organizer, for example, who had explained to me the intricacies and considerations involved in electing someone to office and securing support, I asked about what an MP should be doing. He explained that it was about taking care of his constituents and ensuring the needs of his voters were met – something echoed by most politicians I interviewed. The teacher was addressing charges that this kind of behavior was corruption

prompting me to ask what an MP's job description was in the government such that others might classify their typical actions as problematic. He was silent and looked visibly uncomfortable at not having an answer. This was not the first time I encountered what seemed to be a disconnect between conceptions of government. Politicians would often talk about government as something far removed from themselves even as they worked within its architecture. There exists, it seems, two conceptions of government, one which is well known through the local political process in the islands, from village meetings where candidates provide tea, biscuits, and betelnut to backroom sessions around hotel dining tables where elected officials decide on their path forward, and one which is not. As if a colonial phantom, regardless of who is running the system, there is a 'ghost in the machine' of the political infrastructure. Intertwined with a history of colonial oppression, where no Solomon Islander held a position in the government until the mid-twentieth century, and consistently under surveillance from state-building and development missions, the system remains an artifact of imposition even as locals sit at the helm.

Variations in conceptualization can, and often do, lead to incoherence as dueling frameworks differentially shape the field of engagement. While this can result in paralysis, feeding the discourse of dysfunction, the disruption of ideological systems can also result in the emergence of new sources of agency. Unencumbered by stringent social structures but respectful of traditions and eager to reinvigorate customary practices, everyday people are renegotiating what it means to be a Solomon Islander in the Twenty-first century. Re-imagining what has been a profoundly

negative characterization, people of the archipelago have begun to appropriate the discourse of dysfunction, transforming it into the island-time, resourceful, can-do spirit of '*Solo Style*' or '*Way blo Solo*'. Similarly, as Kabutaulaka (2015) has described, the people of the region are redefining what it means to be Melanesian, crafting a culturally-relevant, forward-looking, and regionally-cohesive vision for the future of the Southwestern Pacific. Part of this has included banding together for economic development and political cooperation as well as being leaders in the movement for a free West Papua. While there has been increased local focus, Solomon Islanders have also readily adopted aspects of Western culture, from styles of dress to social and political role models. This process has not been simply out of awe or emulation of the West, but rather entails the innovative incorporation of foreign elements as locals see fit within their vision of who they want to be.

If, as Abrams (2006: 125) argued, "the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice…it is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is," those relations of power organizing and conducting society, then in the archipelago it is a story of incorporation. The state, on the one hand, masked the processes and effects of incorporation through imposition, transforming the people and place into the Solomon Islands. This was a process of colonization and conversion, integrating the indigenous people of the archipelago within the social, economic, and political world order emerging from European evolutions starting in the 17th century and continuing to this day. And, on the other hand, the state masks the incorporative processes and effects of acculturation wherein introduced political

practices are integrated within local relations of power and society. The *in situ* everyday sense-making that provides a means for interaction and also opportunities for indigenous innovation. Situated among the competing, converging, and transforming relations, negotiating the tensions created through the experiences of incorporation are those contemporary "Melanesian managers" (Burridge 1975). Existing by virtue of both forms of incorporation, these politicians must constantly walk the schizophrenic tight-rope of their political survival ensuring they have the right form of exchange currency while also negotiating between competing conceptions of legitimacy. Amid narratives of nationalism and globalization, these leaders must chart a path forward which satisfies the demands of all interested parties, as task that all too often proves insurmountable as they are constantly faced with the basic material needs of their constituents. As they navigate the treacherous waters of relative morality, shaped by entanglements of Western religiosity and the excesses of whiteness intertwined with conceptions of *kastom* and traditional spirituality, these politicians reflect the tensions inherent in society – a quality that ultimately makes them so appealing. They are, in the end, the face on the mask of the state embodying the ephemeral promises of modernity punctuated by the colonial memories and concrete realities of life in the contemporary Island Pacific.

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