

An Ethnographic Study of the State in Rural Solomon Islands: A Quest for
Autonomy in Global Dependencies

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Abstract

An Ethnographic Study of the State in Rural Solomon Islands (Lau, North Malaita): A Quest for Autonomy in Global Dependencies

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Concordia University and École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2016

This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Solomon Islands capital, Honiara (four months), and in the rural Lau Lagoon, Malaita Province (eight months). It examines how the Solomon Islands state, marked by a recent history of civil conflict and foreign military intervention, becomes visible in the everyday lives of rural and, to a lesser degree, urban non-elites; and how this visibility affects non-elite perceptions of the state as legitimate, dominant governing system. Non-elites are defined as those Solomon Islanders who often have only completed some primary/secondary education, whose first and primary language is their vernacular, and whose affluence is defined by their reliance on slash-and-burn agriculture, non-industrial fishing and micro-economic activities. Theoretically, this thesis draws on literature that defines the state through its ability to become invisible in everyday routines in such a way that state legitimacy and dominance as governing system are rarely questioned, and if they are only during temporary disruptions.

I propose that to understand to what extent and how the Solomon Islands state is integrated into everyday routines it is necessary to focus on mundane encounters with the state, its infrastructures and representatives as well as available alternatives; and to do so by prioritizing the perspective of the non-elites rather than the perspective of the disciplining state and state-focused members of (an urban) civil society. The Solomon Islands case is ideally suited for such an analysis because in this historically, linguistically and culturally diverse country the centralized state has been found to continuously struggle with diverging local conceptualizations of government and governance. My findings highlight that the Solomon Islands state has failed to become integrated into daily routines. Instead it is nearly continuously visible as a disruptive force. As a result non-elites continue to defy state-based unification and instead seek relative

autonomy from the state by emphasizing the dominance and legitimacy of village-centric governance. This quest for autonomy is, however, increasingly curtailed by dependency on foreign foods and goods, and therein by a dependency on the state as primary globally-recognized legitimate mediator of economic relations.

Keywords: State, infrastructures, bureaucracy, leadership, global dependencies, non-elites, village, Lau, Malaita, Solomon Islands

Résumé

Une étude ethnographique de l'État dans les îles Salomon rurales (Lau, Malaita du nord): une quête d'autonomie dans un contexte de dépendances globales

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Concordia University et École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2016

Cette thèse est basée sur des travaux ethnographiques sur le terrain, pendant quatre mois, dans la capitale des Îles Salomon, Honiara, et pendant huit mois, dans la lagune Lau rural (province de Malaita). Elle examine comment l'État des Îles Salomon, marqué par une histoire récente de conflits civils et par une intervention militaire étrangère, devient visible dans la vie quotidienne des non-élites rurales et, à un moindre degré, urbaines. En outre, elle analyse de quelle manière cette visibilité influence les non-élites dans leur perception de l'État en tant qu'institution gouvernementale légitime et dominante. Les non-élites sont définies comme les habitants des Îles Salomon ayant eu une certaine éducation primaire/secondaire, dont la langue principale est leur vernaculaire et dont la fortune est dépendante de l'agriculture sur brûlis, de la pêche non-industrielle et d'activités microéconomiques. Pour le côté théorique, cette thèse s'appuie sur la littérature définissant l'État par son aptitude à se rendre invisible dans les routines quotidiennes. Ainsi, la légitimité et la domination de l'État en tant qu'institution gouvernementale sont rarement mises en question ou seulement pendant des perturbations temporaires.

Pour comprendre comment et dans quelle mesure l'État des Îles Salomon est intégré dans des routines quotidiennes, il me paraît nécessaire de focaliser l'attention sur des contacts courants avec l'État, ses infrastructures, ses représentants ainsi que les alternatives possibles et de donner aussi la priorité à la perspective des non-élites plutôt qu'à la perspective de l'État disciplinaire et des membres urbaines de la société civile orientés vers l'État. Le cas des Îles Salomon est idéal pour une telle analyse: dans ce pays qui a une grande diversité historique, linguistique et culturelle, l'État centralisé a été perçu se débattant sans cesse contre des conceptualisations locales, divergentes du gouvernement et de la gouvernance. Mes conclusions soulignent que l'État des Îles Salomon n'a pas réussi à s'intégrer dans les routines quotidiennes. Il est plutôt presque constamment visible comme force perturbatrice. Par conséquent, les non-élites

continuent à s'opposer à l'unification centrée sur l'État et cherchent à garder une autonomie relative par rapport à l'État en accentuant la domination et la légitimité d'une gouvernance centrée sur le village. Cependant, cette quête d'autonomie est de plus en plus entravée par la dépendance des aliments et des produits étrangers, donc par la dépendance de l'État en tant que médiateur principal de relations économiques reconnu au niveau global.

Mots clés: État, infrastructures, bureaucratie, leadership, dépendances globales, non-élites, village, Lau, Malaita, Îles Salomon

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List of Abbreviations

CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency
CM: Campaign Manager
CDF: Constituency Development Fund
CDO: Constituency Development Officer
CFC: Christian Fellowship Church
DCC Government: Democratic Coalition for Change Government
FSII: Forum Solomon Islands International
GNI: Gross National Income
IFM: Isatabu Freedom Movement
JICA: Japan International Cooperation Agency
MEF: Malaita Eagle Force
MP: Member of Parliament
MPG: Malaita Provincial Government
MOU: Memorandum of Understanding
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
OBMs: Banana boats powered by outboard motor engines
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PNG: Papua New Guinea
PPF: Participating Police Force
RAMSI: Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
SBD: Solomon Islands Dollar
SDA: Seventh Day Adventist
SIBC: Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation
SICA: Solomon Islands Christian Association
SIEA: Solomon Islands Electricity Authority
SIG: Solomon Islands Government
SINU: Solomon Islands National University
SIPL: Solomon Islands Plantations Limited
SIWA: Solomon Islands Water Authority

SSEC: South Seas Evangelical Church

SSPM: Special Secretary to the Prime Minister

TRC: Truth and Reconciliation Commission

TSI: Transparency International's Solomon Islands chapter

UN: United Nations

WHO: World Health Organization

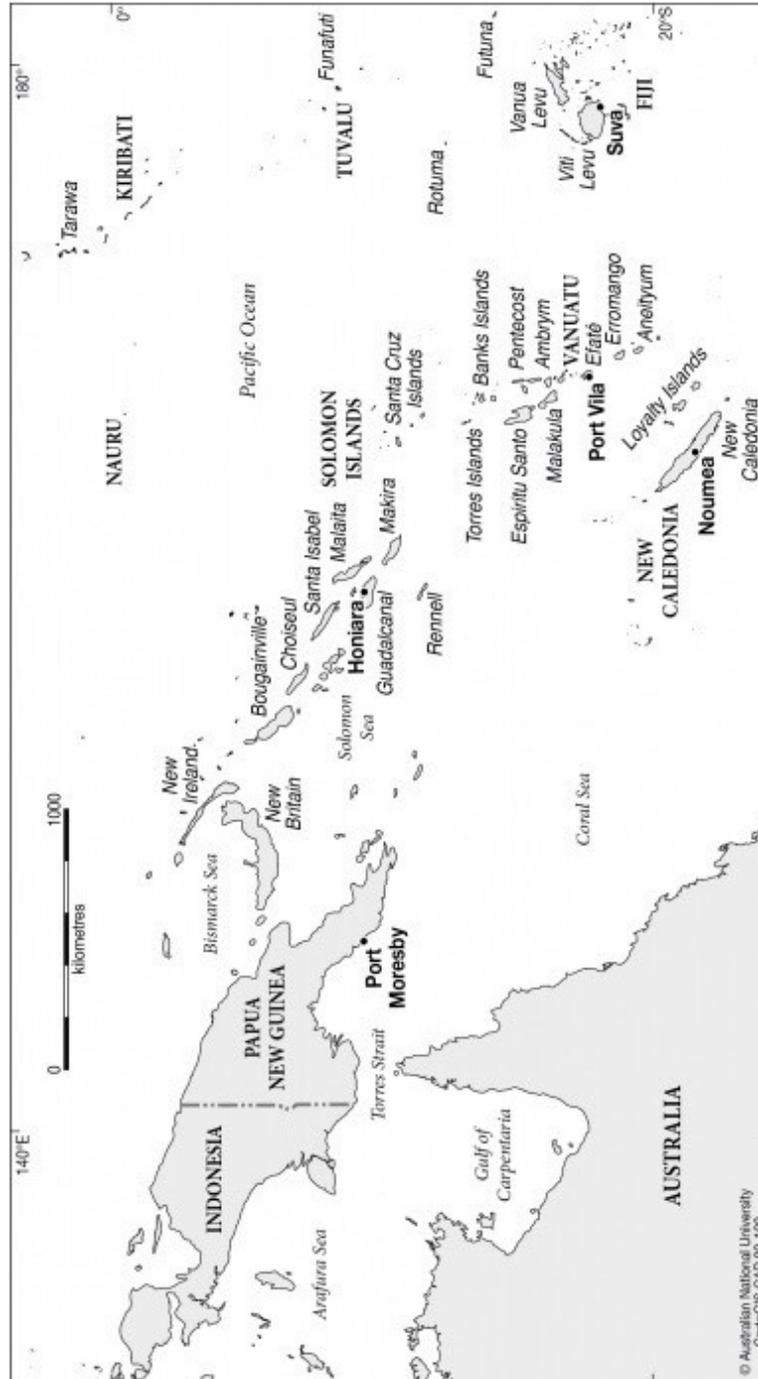
Note on Photographs and Maps

Except where otherwise noted all photographs were taken by me or by Geoffrey Hobbis. Since we completed our fieldwork alongside each other with one primary shared camera we have agreed to hold joint copyright for all photographs and to designate them as taken by “Stephanie and Geoffrey Hobbis”/“Geoffrey and Stephanie Hobbis.” More detail on our shared fieldwork is presented in chapter 1, the introduction to this thesis.

All maps were drawn by me unless otherwise indicated.

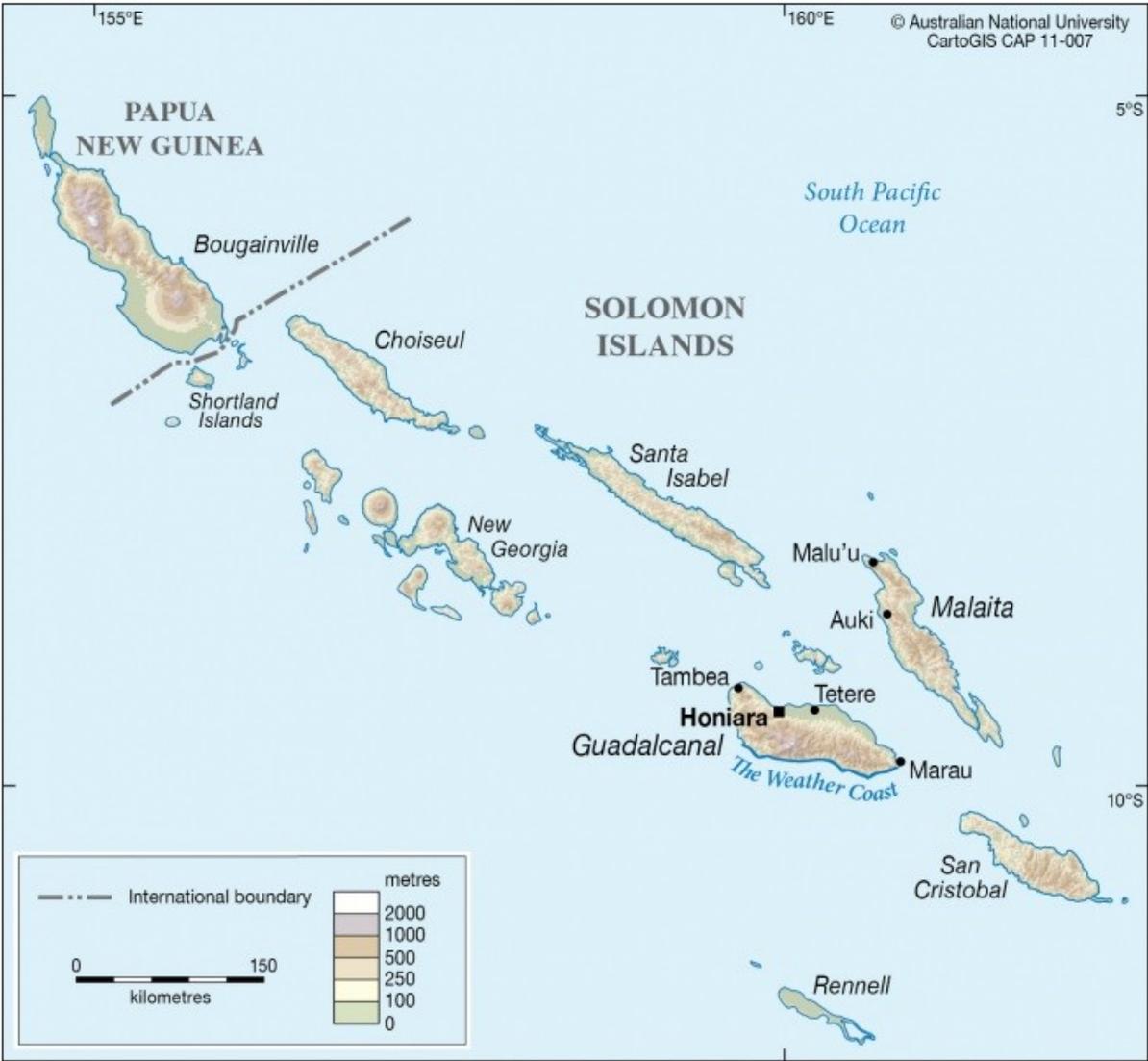
Maps

Map 1: Solomon Islands and its Regional Neighbours¹



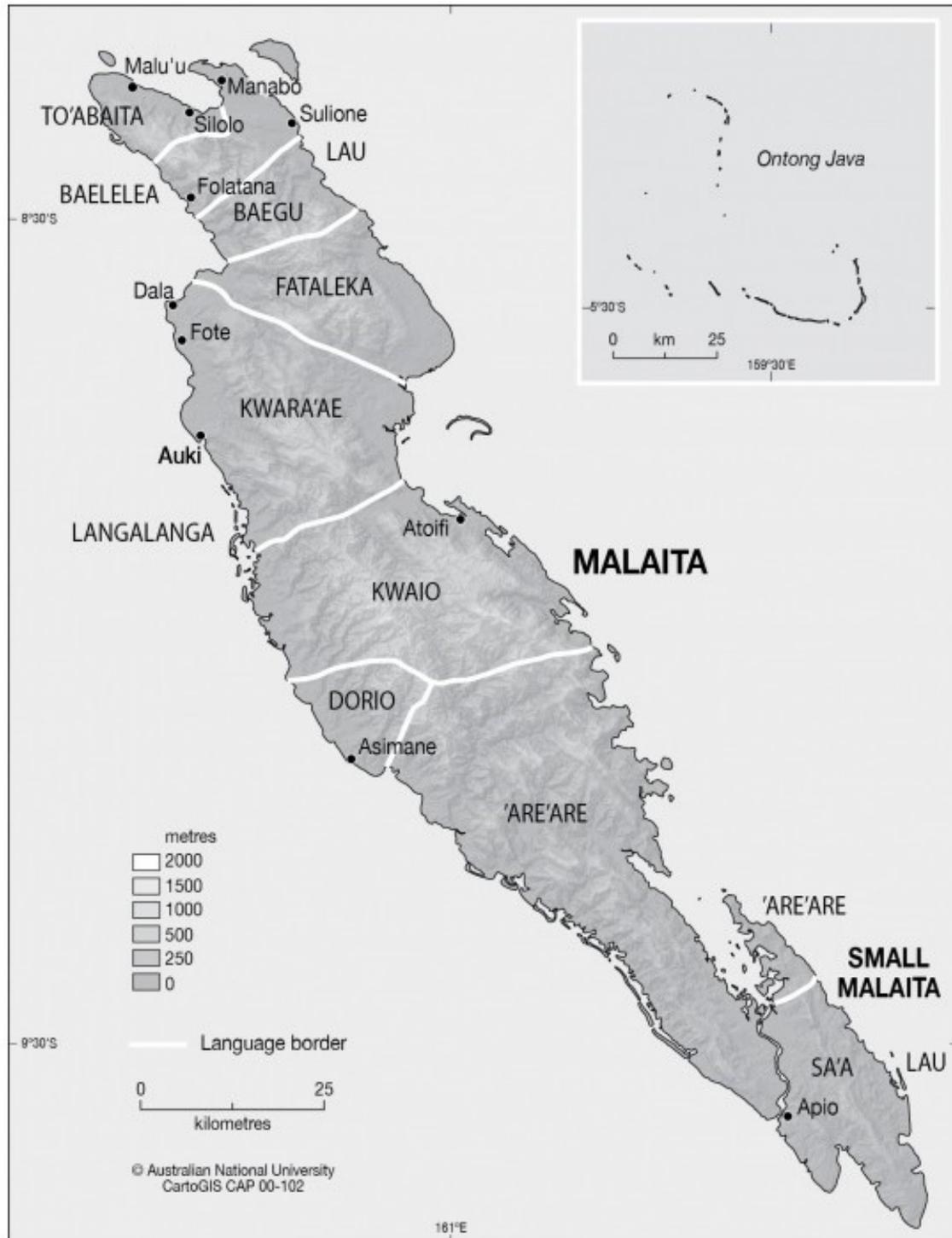
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Map 2: Solomon Islands²



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Map 3: Malaita and its Language Groups³

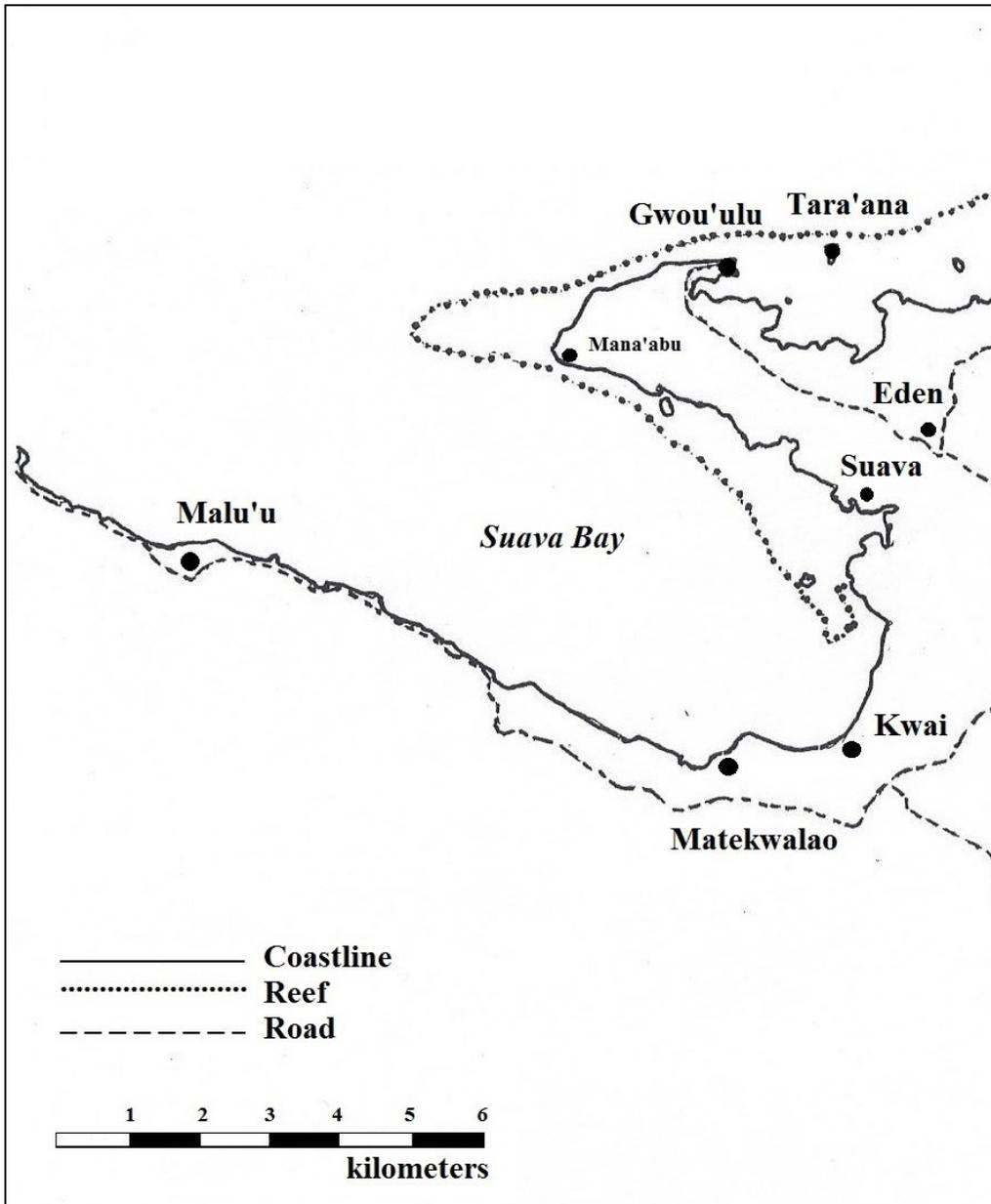


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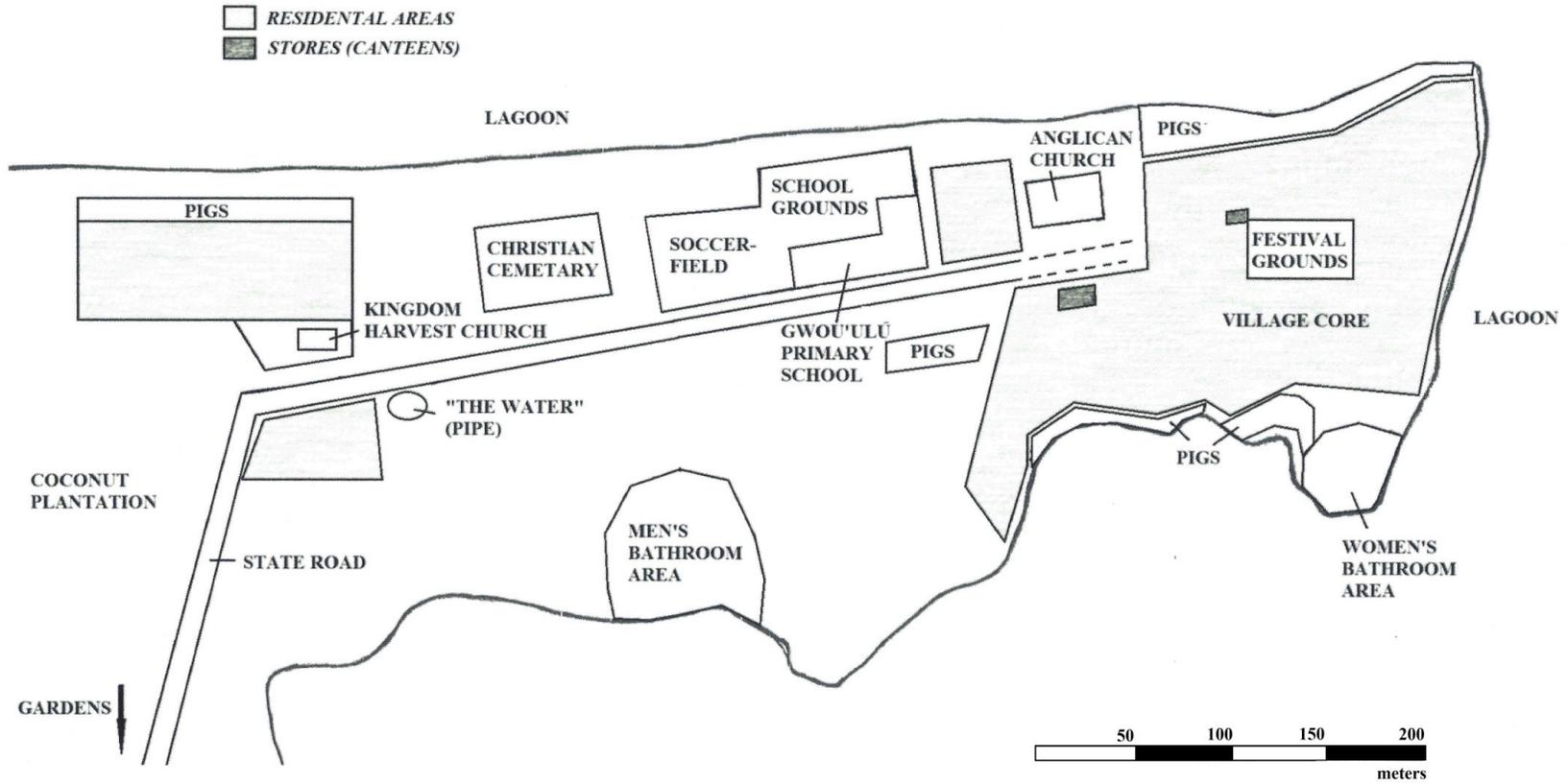
Map 4: Gwou'ulu in the Lau Lagoon



Map 5: Gwou'ulu and Suava Bay



Map 6: Gwou'ulu Village (Spatial Organization)



1 ♦ Introduction: Studying the State in Solomon Islands

Introduction

This thesis is based on a classically conceived ethnographic study among the Lau People of Malaita Province, Solomon Islands, in their ancestral home, the Lau Lagoon, and in the urban capital of Honiara. It explores and discusses how the Solomon Islands state—marked by a recent history of civil conflict known as “The Tensions” (1998-2003), foreign military intervention (2003-2013) and an ongoing presence of foreign advisors in government ministries (2013-2017)—has become visible in the everyday lives of rural and urban non-elite Lau; and how this visibility affects non-elite perceptions of the state as legitimate, dominant governing system.

State theorists such as Abrams (1988), Bourdieu (2014) or Mitchell (1991) contend that, at a most fundamental level, what defines the state is, alongside a monopoly over both “physical *and symbolic violence*” (Bourdieu 2014:4; emphasis in original), the ability of the state to become invisible or normalized in everyday routines. According to Bourdieu, the state is an “unthinkable object” (2014:4) because it is integrated into social norms and practices in such a way that its legitimacy and dominance as governing system are rarely questioned, and if they are, only during temporary disruptions or change, e.g., during school reforms. This legitimate domination is said to be rooted in the ability of the state to engender a sense of shared belonging among its citizens, for example (but not necessarily or exclusively) through the “artificial construction of an artificial culture” (158), the nation, and more broadly through “the unification of the corresponding spaces (economic market, cultural market)” (223).

In the Solomon Islands context, I suggest that the independent, centralized Solomon Islands state has, from the perspective of non-elites, failed to ever become integrated into daily routines as “unthinkable,” legitimate, dominant, stabilizing force. Instead, I propose that the independent Solomon Islands state has become predominantly and continuously visible as a disruptive force. Solomon Islanders have not (yet) had an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging to and entitlement within the state, among others, because the state has failed to

reliably provide even the most basic services and infrastructures, and because the state has been unable to consistently enable Solomon Islanders' access to and participation in the global "cash-for-food" economy.

In this introduction I lay the foundation for this examination of state visibility in the Solomon Islands and among non-elite Lau in particular. First, I briefly sketch the broader context that informed my ethnographic research and writing. Second, I move to a more elaborate introduction of the issues at the heart of this thesis including reflections on how and why to study the state anthropologically and in the Solomon Islands case. Lastly, I introduce core concepts and terminologies in Melanesian anthropology, provide further details on my methodological approach, and describe the structure of this thesis.

Research Context

A small islands developing state in the south western Pacific, Solomon Islands gained independence in 1978 under the guidance and initiative of the British colonial administration rather than as a self-driven process (Bennett 1987). A Westminster-style system of Government was enshrined in a constitution that was drafted in London with only limited input by few Solomon Islanders (Corrin 2007). At the time of independence, Solomon Islands were thought to be ill-equipped for modern statehood. Institutional capabilities were limited, internal legitimacy of state governance was marginal, and infrastructures for state control were largely absent (Bennett 1987; Dinnen 2008/2009). Ever since independence and before, state-building has clashed with linguistic and cultural plurality—fifty-six Austronesian and seven non-Austronesian languages⁴ (Tryon and Hackman 1983) are spoken by a population of approximately 605,000⁵—and diverging local conceptualizations of government and governance (Akin 2013; Keesing 1982; Moore 2004).

⁴ Due to the difficulty of distinguishing between languages and dialects there is no broadly agreed on number for the vernaculars spoken in Solomon Islands. Tryon and Hackman's (1983) numbers of 56 Austronesian and seven non-Austronesian languages are among the most commonly agreed on. Alternatively, the Ethnologue (2016) lists 75 individual languages for Solomon Islands, with 71 living and four extinct, and 69 being indigenous and two non-indigenous.

⁵ This calculation is based on the 2009 census according to which the total population was 515,870 with an annual population growth rate of 2.3 per cent (Solomon Islands Government 2011).

Between 1998 and 2003 this instability paired with a continued crisis surrounding landownership and a crumbling economy—the GDP had halved in real terms since independence (Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2003)—escalated in five years of civil conflict or “ethnic”⁶ tensions (The Tensions). The Tensions resulted in a nearly complete disintegration of state structures and institutions which “were subverted and utilized to serve the interests of a self-defined and privileged few” (Kabutaulaka 2005a:292). Major enterprises such as Gold Ridge mine and Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd collapsed and a large section of the population on Guadalcanal—the island province that is home to Solomon Islands capital, Honiara—was displaced (Moore 2004). Education, health, transportation and other social services failed, and violence and criminal activities more generally were rampant in urban areas and, against common perception, also in (some) rural villages (Kabutaulaka 2005a).

In response to the Tensions, and after a formal request from the Solomon Islands Government (SIG), an Australia-led regional military and civil assistance mission (RAMSI) was deployed to Solomon Islands in 2003 to set the stage for “effective” government and governance based on the model of a Western liberal state. The intervention force did not assume executive authority but RAMSI and SIG collaborate in their state-building efforts. Internationally, Solomon Islands were perceived as “failed state” or at least a “failing” one, and as such a threat to international security (Dinnen 2008/2009; Kabutaulaka 2005a). For example, in 2003, then Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, affirmed the need for RAMSI by arguing that,

If we do nothing now and the Solomon Islands becomes a failed state, the challenges in the future of potential exploitation of that situation by international drug dealers, money launderers, international terrorism—all of those things, will make the

⁶ Kabutaulaka (2001) argues that the classification of The Tensions as “ethnic” is a misconstruction of the events and the complexity of the actors involved. Specifically, he suggests, similar to Moore (2004) and Fraenkel (2004), that ethnicity only played a marginal role in the conflict. Instead, he contends that weaknesses in government and governance structures combined with a lack of leadership and limited socio-economic development should be viewed as root causes. White (2001) problematizes the transplantation of the concept of ethnicity to the Melanesian context in general. He argues, among others, that “the most common forms of self-identification in Melanesia rarely align the kinds of signifiers commonly associated with ethnicity in pluralistic, industrialized economies. Even the marker of group identity most favoured by academic observers—language—is only one of numerous forms of collective self-identification in this region today” (145-146). Ethnicity, White continues, has largely been featured as the source of conflict in Solomon Islands as a result of Western media coverage.

inevitable dealing with the problem in the future more costly, more difficult (ABC Radio 2003 cited in Kabutaulaka 2005a:295).

With few exceptions, most notably the disturbances and partial burning down of Honiara's Chinatown following the 2006 national elections (see Moore 2008), RAMSI appears to have succeeded with its primary goal. Peace, understood as nonviolent coexistence, between the conflicting parties has been maintained, especially between the two dominant militias, the Guadalcanal-based Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) and the Malaita-based Malaita Eagle Force (MEF). In addition, the Solomon Islands Government in cooperation with RAMSI implemented several projects and reforms to increase state control and knowledge of Solomon Islands' citizenry. These efforts included, among others, a national population and housing census in 2009, the preparation of audit reports, new payroll information and accounting systems, human resource and financial reforms in the police and prison services, and in 2014, biometric voter registration for the national and provincial elections that issued first ever identity (ID) cards to a majority of adult Solomon Islanders (see Hobbis and Hobbis 2016).⁷

Despite these successes, research on the RAMSI-era has also highlighted the distrust in existing state-based governance systems that persists among many Solomon Islanders (Dinnen 2008; Fraenkel et al. 2014). Suspicion towards foreign involvement in international and domestic affairs has been especially widespread. The state rationality envisioned and implemented by Australia, its regional partners, and to some degree by SIG, seems to have clashed with the interests and visions of at least some sections of Solomon Islands society. In 2006, RAMSI Public Affairs Manager, Mary-Louise O'Callaghan, outlined RAMSI's encounters with elite resistance to their proposed reforms:

There has been resentment, suspicion and active undermining of RAMSI's reforms and, in particular, the policy of putting key RAMSI personnel into ministries such as finance and in positions in other departments, such as that of the accountant-general... The daily, endless and time-consuming struggle to push on with these

⁷ See Fraenkel et al. (2014) *The RAMSI Decade: A Review of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, 2003-2013* for a comprehensive list and assessment of the state capacity reforms and projects implemented during RAMSI's military presence in Solomon Islands. The military arm was withdrawn in 2013 with civil advisers and members of the Participating Police Force (PPF) scheduled to remain in Solomon Islands until 2017.

reforms, with little or no support from all but a few of Solomon Islands' senior bureaucrats, was described by one RAMSI insider in 2005 as 'trench warfare' (cited in Fraenkel et al. 2014:21,23).

Assumptions and Changing Directions: From Participating in the State to a Quest for Autonomy

When I first conceived this study, I proposed to more closely explore these frictional encounters with a focus on non-elite rather than elite resistance. Specifically, my pre-fieldwork goal was to identify how non-elite Solomon Islanders—who are popularly represented as unfamiliar with, or are said to require better education about the usefulness, role and rationality of modern statehood—imagine and actualize the Solomon Islands state as *their* state in a context of foreign intervention, and how they do so in creative and unexpected ways.

I envisioned that my thesis would reinforce argumentations that highlight the capacity of more marginal groups within the (global) state system to creatively adapt and subvert it to respond to their own interests, needs and values rather than, in this case, to those of RAMSI and local elite partners. I imagined my project to lead into a direction that resembles Hetherington's (2011) findings in Paraguay. His research among *campesino*, "small farmers with or without land, living in the fertile eastern half of [Paraguay]" (2), focused on *campesino*'s creative participation in a state system that operated, to a notable degree, on the assumption that *campesino*, as largely illiterate and supposedly unfamiliar with state rationalities, could only be governed and not participate in governance themselves. Contrary to this state-based representation, Hetherington found that *campesino* had become "guerrilla auditors." They had learnt to read the law (documents) to identify inconsistencies, to "unleash undisciplined interpretations and hence novel possibilities into the situations that the documents purport to describe" (9) and therein to challenge and transform the state in unforeseen and innovative ways.

However, as is the case for most ethnographic studies, my research focus changed in response to these observations, my fieldwork, subsequent analysis and ethnographic writing. Most of all, my focus shifted from a primary interest in local encounters with externally-sponsored state-building in a postcolonial setting, to a focus on individual Lau experiences with

and attitudes towards the Solomon Islands state, with reference to what many of my local respondents considered to be an increasing dependence on the global (food-for-cash) economy.

In the course of my fieldwork, I came to see that I had been blinded by the flood of state-centric literature in response to the Tensions and the RAMSI intervention. I had assumed a degree of state centrality, or an interest in and concern with externally-sponsored state-building processes that many of my local respondents simply did not share. I encountered “guerilla auditor”-like Solomon Islanders and I had an opportunity to converse with members of a growing and young state-focused civil society movement—institutionalized in, but not limited to, Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII), an organization registered under the Charitable Act and an active public forum for political debate on Facebook with a Facebook membership of 17,185 as of 12 July 2016. FSII describes its aims as

- (a) To create pressure on responsible authorities by means of campaigns, protests, boycotts, making position statements and wide demonstration putting authorities accountable for their actions.
- (b) To consult and dialogue with relevant bodies on development challenges, representing people’s concerns brokering resolutions based on national interests of the people of SI.
- (c) To educate people on their civic rights, hence develop responsibility and sense of ownership and collectively rise putting responsible authorities to be accountable for their actions and deeds.
- (d) To create a credible and informative forum which based on well research, analytical and factual data’s substantiating FSII as a unique and reputable movement in SI.
- (e) To be a responsible movement, being the mouth piece and ‘watchmen on the wall’ for the mass civil society.
- (f) To be a proactive stakeholder in policy formulation within the government machineries representing the views of the silent majority (FSII, 12 July 2016)

However, the significance that FSII members and other often town-based civil society actors attributed to the state—reflected in FSII’s objectives—was not representative of my local respondents’ actions and the attitudes they expressed towards the state. While FSII members assume a state-centric position in their efforts to reform and essentially improve the state, a majority of my local respondents expressed a desire for the state to matter less to their lives. The Lau with whom I worked were not involved in FSII or similar often Facebook-centric groups.

This was pragmatically—but importantly—also the case because FSII (and others) operate primarily in English. Despite its status as Solomon Islands official language, English remains incomprehensible to many of my local respondents who rely instead on Solomon Islands Pijin,⁸ the lingua franca, and their respective local vernaculars, in the case of my fieldwork predominantly Lau.

In other words, while FSII members seem to assume a state-centric position in their efforts to reform and essentially improve the state, a majority of my local non-elites respondents expressed—in response to the disruptive visibility of the state in their lives—a hope for the state to become (more) peripheral to their lives and to any possible solutions for the struggles they face. They hoped for the state not to matter, or at least for it to matter less. For instance, many villagers wanted to avoid increasing their participation in the state-mediated cash economy, and instead to continue producing their own foods or exchanging them—as far as possible unmediated by the state—at local markets and with neighbouring language groups.

In other words, unlike members of the urban educated elites, of the nascent (urban) civil society and of foreign development and “state-building” organizations operating in Solomon Islands, many of the non-elite Solomon Islanders whose views I discuss in this thesis did not desire or attempt to “fix” the state as recognized legitimate, dominant governing system. Instead many of my local respondents hoped to free “local strategies of social survival” from some of “the limits of their viability” (Eckholm-Friedman and Friedman 2008b:171) that are embedded in rural Solomon Islanders (partial) political-structural integration into the centralized state and its hierarchies of decision-making.

In this my findings resemble, to some degree, those of Roger Keesing (1978, 1980a, 1982, 1992a) and David Akin (1999, 2013) among the mountain Kwaio of Central Malaita. Keesing and Akin document not only Kwaio desire for but also achieved relative autonomy from the centralized state and accompanying Christianization throughout colonization and beyond. Keesing (1992a) traces the Kwaio struggle for, and partial achievement of autonomy to Kwaio

⁸ Solomon Islands Pijin is, alongside Vanuatu’s Bislama and Papua New Guinea’s Tok Pisin, one of three Melanesian pidgin languages that developed during early trade relations with Europeans, specifically during the labour trade to Queensland in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is now spoken across Solomon Islands and especially in urban areas where it is the main language and a mother tongue to second and third generation urbanites (Jourdan 2002).

commitment to ancestral ways (rather than Christian conversion), attempts to codify some aspects of these ancestral ways into a form of “customary law,” and to Kwaio resistance to instruments of state-subjugation such as taxation, state infrastructures and social services. According to Akin (1999), the state does not provide any services such as schooling or biomedical care in the “autonomous” regions of Kwaio; and he suggests that while the Kwaio have at times communicated a desire for these services to the government, they have often done so only “in association with demands for more political autonomy” (1999:40).

In comparison, I found that while my local respondents also desired more political autonomy, they felt that they could not achieve an autonomy that resembles that of the Kwaio. As I show in chapter 2 in comparison to the Kwaio, the Lau embraced the centralized state and Christianity in early encounters with Europeans, and by the time that the Lau had grown resentful towards the centralized state they were unable to escape from its reach. This is, among others, the case because as coastal rather than inland population such as the Kwaio, the Lau were particularly vulnerable to attacks by British naval forces, or physical state violence. I suggest that this “inescapability” continues today in different ways. With a rapidly growing population, my local respondents feel their ability for social reproduction increasingly curtailed, not by physical state violence, but by a growing dependency on foreign produce, foods and goods to cover daily needs. Many Lau are aware that the state is internationally recognized as primary and (only) legitimate mediator of (global) economic relations and, therefore, also dependencies, for example, by controlling and stabilizing who is recognized as “official” landowner (see chapter 5). As such my local respondents are limited in their quest for autonomy from the state, even though in everyday encounters the state primarily becomes visible as disruptive force.

Within this context my local respondents acknowledge and fear a continuing shift in their positioning vis-à-vis the state and vis-à-vis other states, from a centre of regional flows of produce and labour—exemplified in pre-colonial (and today partially continuing) trade networks that are based on the interchangeability of land and sea produce—to, seemingly, the uttermost periphery of the contemporary global state and economic system. My local respondents are worried about, and feel increasingly trapped in a system of social reproduction that, in a dependency on the disruptive centralized state, curtails their ability to make choices, and participate, in their own terms, in “processes of production, distribution, and consumption, the

basic framework within which a population reproduces itself over time” (Friedman 2007:109). I move on to a more comprehensive analysis of these issues of state visibility, autonomy and dependency in the Solomon Islands case in subsequent chapters. First I more carefully position my research, and especially my conceptualization of the state, theoretically and in political practice.

On Studying the State (in Solomon Islands)

The difficulty of studying the state has been discussed widely.⁹ For decades, at least in anthropology, the state appeared to have been killed as primary focus of analysis in response to Radcliffe-Brown’s (1940) proposition that the state lends itself conceptually to a kind of mystification that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to grasp analytically; and that instead anthropological analysis should focus on political systems (see Trouillot 2001). At the same time, the recognition has grown that as long as the state matters in political practice, the difficulty of studying the state cannot and should not prohibit its investigation. This is especially the case because anthropology (and sociology) have so readily, for better or worse (see Friedman 2007), embraced the study of globalization, despite and in view of its close entanglements with the state (Aretxaga 2003; Jessop 2001, 2016).

I contend that the study of the state matters in particular (but not solely) in recognition of the position of states internally and externally within the contemporary global political-economic system. The state may be “just one institutional ensemble among others within a social formation” (Jessop 2001:167), e.g., alongside corporations or religious institutions; and the state may be “continuously doomed to generate ‘state failure’, since many problems lie well beyond its control and may even be aggravated by attempted intervention” (Jessop 2016:248). Nonetheless, the state also continues to be “asked by diverse social forces to resolve society’s problems” (248). It is perceived as “peculiarly charged with overall responsibility for maintaining the cohesion of the social formation of which it is a part” (Jessop 2001:167), e.g., through regulatory regimes that attempt to manage industrial production and consumption, in the

⁹ For a more comprehensive overview see Jessop (2001, 2016)

domestic market and beyond, for instance, through negotiations of international trade regulations.

The importance of the state as political unit in the contemporary global system is also evidenced in continuous efforts to build or strengthen the capacities of states that are, internationally and from the perspective of other states and related actors, deemed to be “failing.” Australia’s decision to intervene in Solomon Islands, and the fear expressed in John Howard’s statement cited above, are exemplary in this regard. The RAMSI intervention is indicative of the extent to which the state is, at least by some powerful actors and in political practice, recognized as necessary, dominant and legitimate governing unit in the contemporary global system. It is also indicative of the extent to which these powerful actors are committed to ensure a, from their perspective, more stable “incorporation of local populations within larger systems” (Ekholm-Friedman and Friedman 2008a:2), in this case Solomon Islands more comprehensive integration in the state-mediated global capitalist economy as Westminster-style democracy.

As suggested by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “it is widely accepted that sustainable development, peace and stability *require* effective and legitimate states able to fulfil key international responsibilities and to provide core public goods and services, including security” (2016b:para 1; my emphasis); and, in turn, it is necessary for other states and international organizations to help “fragile” or “failing states” with state-building to “enhance capacity, institutions, and legitimacy of the state driven by state-society relations” (para 5).

Notably, and implied in the significance the OCED attributes to state-society relations, incorporation of a territory as state within the global state system consists not only of ensuring the capacity of a state such as Solomon Islands to fulfil its role as state among other states within the global economy, e.g., by issuing a currency. Instead state-building also aims to increase the internal coherence and authority of the state. In this vein RAMSI-supported reforms such as the introduction of first identity cards have also focused on ensuring that Solomon Islands residents become comprehensible or “legible” to the Solomon Islands state by taking, from a RAMSI-favoured state-centric perspective, “local social practices such as land tenure customs or naming customs and [create] a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored” (Scott 1998:2),

In other words, there is, on a most fundamental level and simplistically speaking, an “external” state as internationally recognized governing institution that is, for example, represented in inter- and multinational organizations such as the United Nations; and there is, closely intertwined, the “internal” state that, according to state-building actors such as RAMSI or international organizations such as the OECD more broadly, should be the primary governing institution within the territory that encompasses, in the case of my research, Solomon Islands (see also Tucker 2010). It is this “internal” state that is most concretely visible to the imagined citizens of the state—“imagined” because at least in the Solomon Islands context non-elites do not necessarily identify themselves as “citizens” of the state but more adequately as residing within the territory that encompasses the Solomon Islands state. In the following I briefly sketch how to analyse this “internal” state and its situatedness and visibility in everyday encounters with the imagined citizens of the state, without, however, forgetting the situatedness of this internal state in the global political-economic system which I elaborate on further in chapters 2 and 3.

State-Society Relations and Studying Mundane Encounters

Efforts to bring the state back as analytical category with a focus on state-society relations have been led by Abrams and his *Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State* (1988). Abrams rejects Radcliffe-Brown’s (1940) proposition based on the argumentation that an analytical focus on political systems fails to account for how the state as particular governing system achieve its legitimation and domination. In this vein, Abrams contends that studying the state requires an examination into “the legitimating of the illegitimate” (76). Specifically, one is to inquire into the “immediately present institutions of the ‘state system’—and in particular their coercive functions” (76) and into the “state-idea” (79). Such inquiry, Abrams asserts, does not require the researcher to believe in the state, just as the sociologist of religion is not asked to believe in (or debate the existence of) god(s). They are merely to examine the institutional system (churches) and the ideological or religious idea (theology) associated with a particular religion. The state can then be studied as “structuration within political practice” (82) and as “historically constructed... for specific social purposes in a specific historical setting” (80), e.g., historically in the Solomon Islands case as political unity within the British Empire.

A posthumous publication of Pierre Bourdieu’s (2014) lectures on the state between 1989 and 1992 reflect Abrams’ (1988) concern with studying the state in reference to how “the

dominant dominate” (Bourdieu 2014:173). As already alluded to, Bourdieu describes the state as “unthinkable” (3) and he suggests that there is a consensus among those believing in the state that “acts of ‘state’”—“political acts intended to have effects in the social world” (10)—are both legitimate and the central, overarching source of authority, closely connected to a shared sense of belonging to the state (and closely intertwined with the nation). In other words, according to Bourdieu, the state assumes a “double face” (222) of both integration and domination that constitutes its foundation as primary legitimate governing system; it is this “double face” that has to be accounted for in studying the state through state-society relations.

Similarly, Mitchell argues that the state is characterized by a structural effect that allows for the “entity... to seem something much more than the sum of the everyday activities that constitute it, appearing as a structure containing and giving order and meaning to people's lives” (1991:94). The apparent boundary between the state and society is then but a result of this structural effect, and it should be treated as such rather than as a factual given but, in the reverse, also as more than mere illusion.

This conceptualization of the state and state-society relations has important methodological implications. To locate the structural effects of the state, and in my case the Solomon Islands state, Mitchell suggests that, above all, “we should address the state as an effect of *mundane* processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, supervision and surveillance, and representation that create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society or state and economy” (1991:85; my emphasis). Similarly, Painter argues that by focusing on the mundane or the everyday in a grounded examination of the state, it is possible to identify and acknowledge the “heterogeneous, constructed, porous, uneven, processual and relational character [of states]” (2006:754). He further contends that any examination of the state has to account for the everyday because it is in the everyday that the state is realized, thus its legitimacy and dominance as governing system established. For instance, Painter notes that there is importance in the passing of legislation; yet, laws only really come to matter once they are implemented and enforced on the ground “through the myriad mundane actions of officials, clerks, police officers, inspectors, teachers, social workers, doctors and so on” (761).

I contend that, at least in the Solomon Islands case, such mundane analysis of the state is most adequately done not through a Foucauldian lens that is, first and foremost, concerned with the logics of authoritative structures, “the disciplinary effects of different discursive formations and epistemes” (Painter 2006:763). Instead, I suggest that a mundane analysis of the state can be more comprehensively achieved through an theoretical framework that recognizes that Solomon Islands has not yet been completely, rather than “already” (De Certeau 1984:xiv), “caught in the nets of [state] ‘discipline’” (xiv-xv), while acknowledging that the state is nonetheless part of most Solomon Islanders’ lives, for example, through the schooling that it provides, the roads that it builds, the elections that it holds and the land registry that it maintains. Therefore, to understand the role and position of the Solomon Islands state, its legitimacy and dominance, I trace, in this thesis, when and how the state is part of Solomon Islanders’ lives and how or to what extent the state, through these encounters with its imagined citizens, has been able to become “unthinkable,” legitimate, dominant and unifying as governing system.

The Political Science and Anthropology of Solomon Islands

In the political anthropology of Solomon Islands broader theoretical considerations of how to study the state anthropologically have only received scant attention, especially in the postcolonial period. Most of all, Solomon Islands-based political anthropology highlights the significance and nuances of localized socio-political and religious orders and their transformations, but not eradications, alongside processes of so-called modernization rather than, more comprehensively, the state.

Following an analytical focus on the political adaptations of “custom-as-ideology” (Keesing 1982:358) during the colonial period (Akin 2013, 2015; Keesing 1978, 1980a, 1992a; Laracy 1983), the political anthropology of Solomon Islands has more recently shifted to a primary concern with how kinship and language groups and their rootedness in ancestral lands or place continue to shape encounters with “modernity” including state-based governance (Burt 1994b; Guo 2011; Hviding 1993; McDougall 2016; Scott 2007), its entanglement with nationbuilding (Jourdan 1997; LiPuma 1997; LiPuma and Meltzoff 1990; White 2001) and economic development (Gegeo 1998; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2002; Hviding 2003, 2012; Hviding and Baines 1994; McDougall 2005). In addition, and alongside a growing interest in the anthropology of Christianity in Melanesia, emphasis has, in particular, also been placed on the

significance of Christianization for both local and national politics (Burt 1983, 1994a; Hviding 2011; Maggio 2015; McDougall 2003, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012; Timmer 2008, 2015a, 2015b; White 1991, 2012). On the other hand, a more comprehensive study of the state or, more accurately, one that places state visibility at the heart of analysis has largely been left to the political, historical and interdisciplinary social sciences.

Perhaps as a result of its disciplinary orientations, existing research on contemporary (RAMSI-era) state-building in Solomon Islands has focused on questions of “why intervene?” “how to intervene?” and “what are the consequences of intervention?” (Allen 2006; Allen and Dinnen 2010; Barbara 2008; Braithwaite et al. 2010; Dinnen 2007, 2008, 2008/2009; Dinnen and Firth 2008; Fukuyama 2008; Hameiri 2007, 2009; Kabutaulaka 2005a; McDougall 2004; Richmond 2011). This has been complemented by a historically based interest in identifying the root causes of the Tensions, including a concern for the motivations of militants and for Solomon Islands political economy (Allen 2011, 2012, 2013; Bennett 2002; Brigg 2009; Fraenkel 2004; Kabutaulaka 2001, 2005b; Kwa’ioloa and Burt 2007; Moore 2004, 2007)

What much of this literature has in common is the research (and practice) that they speak to, which concerns the role of state-building in the international governance toolbox (especially the liberal peace debate) and the international state system that sponsors and implements interventions such as RAMSI. This research is largely based on policy-analysis and historical reconstructions of events in Solomon Islands, only supplemented by snippets of ethnographic and more commonly qualitative, interview-based work. On the other hand, extended ethnographic research on the state of the contemporary post-2003 state in Solomon Islands, especially beyond urban areas, is by and large absent or the side-product of the anthropological studies mentioned earlier.

One objective of my thesis is to start filling this gap by, as previously noted, moving beyond a state-centric Foucauldian framework that is predominantly concerned with an investigation of how the state, its institutions, representatives and more broadly state elites attempt or want to achieve domination. Instead I focus my analysis on if and how the state becomes visible in the everyday lives of my local respondents and how this visibility affects the legitimacy and dominance of the Solomon Islands state from the perspective of non-elites, the

majority of the imagined citizens of the Solomon Islands state. I do so specifically through a three-pronged analysis of state materialities, state representatives and alternatives to the state.

A Matter of State Materialities

In chapters 5 and 6, I examine mundane encounters with the state through the state materialities that Star describes as “boring things” (1999:377) and Graeber as “dead zones of the imagination” (2012:105), infrastructures and bureaucracies that, in their everyday and mundane presence, mediate and support state projects of legibilities by increasing residents’ visibility in the state. Anthropological research has increasingly recognized the significance of infrastructures as “the materiality of the civil link between citizens and the state” and as such “central to the reformulation of political subjectivities” (von Schnitzler 2008:901).¹⁰ As “lines of contact, circulation, and partitioning in social life” (Chu 2014:353) infrastructures—from roads (Harvey and Knox 2015) to power sockets (Taylor 2015) to bureaucracies and their documents (Graeber 2012; Hetherington 2011)—are deeply embedded in everyday routines and an understanding of how to use and access them is indicative of membership in a community of practice (Star 1999:381). Depending on availabilities, reliabilities, the means and temporalities of usage, and how and by whom they are provided, infrastructures thus become important signifiers and mediators of relationships between “suppliers or regulators” and “customers,” often the administrative state and its citizens (see Chu 2014; Harvey and Knox 2015; Larkin 2013; Taylor 2015; von Schnitzler 2008).

This is exemplified in von Schnitzler’s (2008) research on prepaid water meters in Soweto, South Africa, and the ways in which they have come to signify, as well as enact, a changing relationship between citizens and the state as primary provider of basic infrastructures in a response to neo-liberal reform. Von Schnitzler argues that the forceful installation of prepaid water meters and an accompanying campaign about how to calculate water consumption intended to reshape local understandings of citizenship. The Apartheid era recipients of welfare who would choose not to pay their water bills were to be transformed into post-Apartheid citizen-customers in the liberal state. Citizen-customers were expected to recognize their fiscal responsibilities towards the nation, while the technological narrative surrounding the meter

¹⁰ For a comprehensive review see Larking (2013)

installation was to shift how access to water was being discussed. Water was no longer supposed to be thought about as a social right and therefore a political issue, but as a commodity and therefore an administrative issue.

Importantly, von Schnitzler's (2008) and others' research on the role of infrastructures in shaping state-citizen relations does not imply simple top-down imposition and acceptance of state infrastructures as means for state control (see also Chu 2014; Schueth 2012; Trovalla and Trovalla 2015). Instead, they highlight infrastructures as sites of struggle between the state and its residents, or in other words as central to uncovering the mundane negotiation of state legitimacy and dominance, the ability of the state to become a stabilizing or a disruptive force in everyday routines.

A Matter of State Representatives and Gavman

Complementing this analysis of state materialities is, closely interconnected, an examination of mundane encounters with state representatives, from politicians to primary school teachers to electoral clerks—the human resources of the state. In the particular context of Oceania it is not uncommon to encounter the claim that the primary problem faced by the state as legitimate and dominant governing institution are its representatives (see Corbett 2013, 2015), and potentially their lack of commitment to the state (*vis-à-vis* other forms of belonging). For instance, in an analysis of nation-making, LiPuma introduces the case of a bureaucrat in Papua New Guinea who

...educated, intelligent, a high-ranking local administrator, had gone home that weekend to be a warrior in an 'intertribal' dispute. In his role as administrator, he wanted the state to solve the dispute, knowing that nations are defined and held together by common law; nonetheless, as clansman he is, in his own words, compelled to 'help' his fellow clan members. In this case, the disposition inculcated by clanship and community overpowered those inculcated by exposure to nationness (1997:49).

The importance of the human resources of the state is a concern that echoes throughout this thesis as my local respondents, whenever discussing the state, were doing so by using the Pijin word *gavman* rather than the English term "state" or a direct translation in Pijin or Lau. A Pijin word derived from the English "government," *gavman* extends, in everyday usages of the

term, beyond the executive in a Westminster-style state system, the government. Instead it refers to a state-like category in the Solomon Islands context (Jourdan 2002:57-58) that I found to be used in particular reference to governing capacities of all high ranking political actors in the state, the Prime Minister and his cabinet as much as MPs, Permanent Secretaries and other high level bureaucrats.

In personifying the most influential representative of the state, *gavman* is fluid and interconnected (see Dalsgaard 2013) with this fluidity often but not always coinciding with the electoral process. A new MP, or a new assignment for the MP—ministerial positions are frequently reshuffled—commonly also bring about change in appointments of higher level bureaucrats such as undersecretaries. For instance, an MP who is not re-elected might become the Permanent Secretary of a cabinet minister and often long-term colleague. My local respondents were well aware of this practice and, as a result, they found little reason to distinguish between elected members of the executive and legislative branches of the state, and higher level bureaucrats. They were all *gavman*.

At the same time, also with a focus on the human resources of the state, my fieldwork reveals distinctions between *gavman* and those working for *gavman* as clerks in the various ministries or in social services, specifically in non-managerial positions in public health centres or as teachers, especially those in primary schools. These positions may be reshuffled as well, or obtained because of kin connections with members of *gavman*. However, my local respondents agreed that those who were merely employed by *gavman* were more limited in their ability to influence *gavman* decision-making processes (knowing a close relative of a member of *gavman* could be considerably more effective). This was especially felt to be true for public health and education-based *gavman* employees as well as non-managerial members of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). On the other hand, because of the extent to which at least ministerial clerks were able to execute some influence, for example, by scheduling a meeting with a *gavman* representative, these *gavman* employees were also thought to be most likely to demand or expect bribes for their services, because of their lack of immediate power.

As I propose throughout this thesis and especially in chapter 7 where I consider in more detail non-elites perspectives on their “leaders” in the state, my local respondents commonly held members of *gavman* and to some degree *gavman* employees responsible for nearly everything

that has been going wrong with the independent Solomon Islands state. *Gavman*, as used in this thesis, then indicates a locus of power that is rooted in leadership positions within the state. It personifies a core component of the state and understanding when and how the state becomes visible through these representatives to my local respondents constitutes an important aspect of my proposed mundane analysis of the Solomon Islands state.

To sum up, in acknowledging such mundane relationality, in the personified state and its state materialities, my project recognizes that the state is always in the making as a potentially “unthinkable object” that is materialized in a particular array of institutions and organizational structures that sets it, perceptually, apart from society. State-building is an ongoing process that is multidirectional but also unequal and constructed, above all, in everyday interaction and encounters with the state. I contend that an ethnographic inquiry into these interactions through a dual focus on state materialities and the human resources of the state, such as presented in this thesis, is the most promising for gaining a better understanding of such processes.

At the same time, I recognize that the Solomon Islands state is yet to become a dominant idea and practice with foreign actors, especially Australia-led intervention force, Asian business interests and development organizations, being actively involved in attempting to build a state that is itself compatible with the contemporary global political-economic system. Therefore I suggest that it is also indispensable to account for potential alternatives to the state as governing institution and how these alternatives become visible in the lives of non-elites in comparison to the visibility of the state. I do so in chapter 6 and 7 in particular reference to how clan-based leaders and decision-making interact with and encounter the state; and I do so, most concretely, in chapter 8 in which I more carefully examine the role of mainstream Christian churches as alternatives to the state as well as how, to my local respondents, mainstream churches have increasingly become visible and potentially destructive in their entanglements with the Solomon Islands state.

Concepts and Terminologies

In the following, I introduce, for the context of this thesis, additional significant terminologies in Melanesian (political) anthropology and how I define and use them here.

Class Emergence and Non-Elites

First and foremost, it is necessary to offer a more detailed description of the system of social stratification that is implied by my use of the term “non-elites” as a primary analytical category. In my definition, I closely follow the often used Weberian-approach to identifying an emerging (urban) middle class in Melanesia (Gewertz and Errington 1999; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Jourdan 1995, 2008a:58) and the distinction between “elites,” the (urban) “middle class” (or “aspiring elites”), and “non-elites” that it provides. In particular, this approach proposes a class-based differentiation based on affluence (in a capitalist economic system), access to economic and political power, language preferences (English, Pijin or vernacular) and an individual’s relationship to and usage of *kastom* as identity marker and lifestyle but also as a claim to authority.

In her Honiara-focused study, Gooberman-Hill (1999) suggests a definition of the middle class that encompasses entrepreneurs, church and government employees, including teachers who use postcolonial, urban infrastructures and Christian rhetoric to maintain and advance their social standing. Members of the middle class are described as “generally affluent by virtue of their jobs and entrepreneurial activities” but not as elites who are “genuinely wealthy” and who enjoy access to the “machinery of real political or economic power” (21). Members of the middle class aspire to become elites—a westernized, privileged bourgeoisie commonly linked through their international travel¹¹ (Hau’ofa 1987)—but they are also said to be aware that educational attainment and their relative affluence limits their ability to fulfill this desire (Gooberman-Hill 1999). Members of the middle class “[work] towards distancing themselves from *kastom* and overcoming barriers of ethnicity” (Gooberman-Hill 1999:20), while elites are said to use both to augment their power (see also Jourdan 1996). In addition, members of the middle class often assume a nation-focused identity and an associated class-focused (rather than language- or kin-focused) sociality that creates a conceptual difference between the middle class and the non-elites they propose to serve (Gewertz and Errington 1999; Gooberman-Hill 1999).

¹¹ “There already exists in our part of the world a single regional economy upon which has emerged a South Pacific Society, the privileged groups of which share a single dominant culture with increasingly marginalised local sub-cultures shared by the poorer classes” (Hau’ofa 1987:1)

From my own observations, members of this middle class are most frequently also active members of the burgeoning civil society organizations such as FSII. They work in and for international and local non-profit and non-or inter-governmental organizations such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community or Transparency International. They often speak good English—“[the language] of social advancement” (Jourdan 2008a:64)—and they rely more strongly on Pijin rather than on local vernaculars which many young urbanites do not know or do not know well, with their Pijin existing on a “linguistic continuum such that it is difficult to know where Pijin stops and where English begins” (Jourdan 2008a:64).

For the purpose of this thesis, non-elites are then represented by the majority of rural Solomon Islanders (80 per cent of all Solomon Islanders) whose first and primary language is their vernacular, whose Pijin remains strongly influenced by these vernaculars (rather than English), who often have only completed some primary and/or secondary education and whose literacy skills are curtailed by the limits of their education. Based on the 2009 population and housing census of Malaita, “15 per cent of males and 9 per cent of females 12 years and older responded that they had attended secondary education (Form 3-7); 59 per cent and 51 per cent of males and females completed only primary level, and 19 per cent of males and 35 per cent of females had no schooling completed (no schooling, preschool, or only some primary). Three per cent of males and one per cent of females had tertiary education” (SIG 2009a:30). The Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE 2007:11) reports that 55.6 per cent of Malaitans are classified as non-literate, 37.4 per cent as semi-literate and 7.0 per cent as literate in comparison to Honiara where 23.6 per cent are classified as non-literate, 48.5 per cent as semi-literate and 27.8 per cent as literate. This deviates strongly from the 2009 population and housing census of Malaita which suggests, for example, a literacy rate of 82.3 per cent for males aged 15-24 and a literacy rate of 77.5 per cent for females aged 15-24. While my own survey of literacy skills is very limited in scale it corresponds more closely with that of ASPBAE, especially in recognition that the SIG census based its assessment of literacy on the question “Can you read and write a simple sentence in one or more of the following languages: English, Pidgin, Local language, or Other language?” (SIG 2009a:30).

The affluence of these non-elites is limited in rural areas, by a continued reliance on self-provisioning through fishing and gardening and occasional microeconomic activities (more in

chapter 4) and, in urban areas, by occasional temporary contracts as unskilled labourers and frequently a life as *Masta Liu*. Jourdan (1995) defines *Masta Liu* as often (but not always) young men and, to some degree, women, who arrive in Honiara directly from the villages to experience a novel life in town, its entertainment infrastructure (from night clubs to sporting events) and, more broadly, to access a wider range of goods, services and, simply, people. Often school-leavers or drop-outs, *Masta Liu* are unable to secure any stable employment (e.g. as shopkeepers or at the wharf) and instead float between relatives and jobs, often experiencing prolonged periods of hunger (Jourdan 1995).

This said, *Masta Liu*, rural fisherfolk and gardeners and those urbanites who lead more precarious lives than the middle class—commonly as low-level employees in Chinese-run businesses with a small income and little job security—do not necessarily resent this life or necessarily at all times envy elites and the middle class for theirs. Many of my local, rural and urban, respondents explained to me that they enjoyed and valued the freedom these lifestyles offered to them. They emphasized a perceived increase in food security as small-scale farmers and fisherfolk—“the idea of depending on money to eat scares me”—and the *Masta Liu* in town (and during visits to the village) noted how much they enjoyed the independence from the constraints of rural lifestyles, but also from regular employment.

This thesis focuses on these non-elites; although I also recognize that belonging to one class or another, especially in urban areas, is fluid with non-elites often staying with middle class relatives during visits or even for prolonged stays in town. In particular, during the last two months of my fieldwork, I conducted a series of interviews with members of the young, civil society-engaged middle class in Honiara in an attempt to develop a better understanding of their perceptions of Solomon Islands as state, nation and country vis-à-vis those I had observed and recorded in a village environment, and in essence among non-elites (with the exception of the village headmaster and priest who, especially when in town, expressed to a large extent the sentiments Goberman-Hill (1999) attributes to the middle class). However, at the heart of my ethnography lie the experiences of non-elites—in the state-focused literature the silent majority—the villagers with whom I lived over a period of eight months and, for the final two months, their urban relatives, the *Masta Liu*, low-level employees in Chinese shops, the betel nut

and tobacco vendors who purchased betel nut and the locally grown tobacco, *savusavu*, in bulk at the wharf and resold them at small stands alongside the road.

Notably, this focus on non-elites is not to imply a class-centric analysis. On the contrary, by not focusing on those members of society that most easily fit within a class system, I build on Hamelin and Wittersheim's (2002) suggestion that in the Oceanic context social transformations including those that occur in reference to state- and nation-building, cannot be adequately addressed through a class-centric framework. This is in particular the case because such analysis faces the risk of becoming trapped in a "tradition-modern" dichotomy that ignores the potential of fluidity in identity formation including governance systems and loci of leadership beyond and within the state (Wittersheim 2003). In addition, a class-centric framework runs the risk of implying a division between "custom-as-ideology" (Keesing 1982:358) and the "lived custom" of majority of Solomon Islanders who are attributed with no (or little) political agency in the state and nation. I briefly discuss this debate and its positioning in this thesis next.

Kastom (and Autochthonous)

Kastom—based on a Melanesian Pidgin word from the English "custom" or "tradition" (Jourdan 2002:94)—constitutes one of the most widely contested analytical concepts in Melanesian political anthropology, especially so as it has become deeply entangled with debates about authenticity and the "invention of tradition" (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In state-focused debates *kastom* has most commonly been defined as political symbol, or as already indicated, as "custom-as-ideology" (Keesing 1982:358). Especially in the context of the anti-colonial Malaita-based Maasina Rule movement (1944-1953),¹² *kastom* is commonly used to refer to an effort by Malaitan leaders to straighten out, in essence to alter and unify diverse local autochthonous or "customary" rules for codification. For example, the movement incorporated and promoted chiefs and hereditary hierarchical structures, even though "it is only in southern 'Are'are [a language group] and Small Malaita that hierarchies of hereditary chiefs approximated in pre-colonial reality the system presented to the [colonial] administration as indigenous" (Keesing

¹² The name of the movement originates in Are'are where *maasina* means "sibling," "cousin," "relative" or "close friend;" and *ruru* refers to "a gathering or work party. Either *ruru* or the English 'rule,' or both, could be the correct etymon—as Keesing noted, Malaitans have a penchant for cross-language puns" (Akin 2013:166). I describe Maasina Rule in more detail in chapter 2.

1982:360). By attempting to create a shared pan-Malaitan canon of locally grounded rules, these leaders tried to legitimize “customary” law vis-à-vis government law that had been imposed by the colonial administration and which predicated legitimation “on an assumption that a timeless, enduring and pre-European ‘native custom’ existed that could be isolated and authenticated for legal purposes” (Akin 1999:49).

In some anthropological discourses the efforts of Maasina Rule and other comparable, including contemporary, movements resulted in a treatment and discussion of *kastom* as “decidedly not an expression of alternate cultural orders” but as “culturally empty” (Akin 2004:185); in Lindstrom and White’s (1995) words, “literature on [*kastom*] for the most part has remained suspended at the level of rhetorical constructions deployed in national and international arenas” (206). In this thesis I follow David Akin’s (2004) proposition that this tendency has distorted the meaning of *kastom* by failing to acknowledge the local groundings of *kastom*, how it is deeply entangled with people’s everyday lives and ancestrally-based belief systems, and that “*kastom* and culture are highly interactive, each continuously shaping the other over time” (186).

Importantly, I did not encounter any significant efforts to straighten out autochthonous rules among my local respondents; instead, these efforts were more frequently visible in rumours about neighbouring language groups, in debates on Facebook or in traditional print media. In other words, because my local respondents attributed little significance to the explicit national political aspirations of *kastom* as interacting with other “meta-categories” of political legitimacy, such as the state or Christian churches, at least during my fieldwork, I do not engage the anthropological *kastom* debate any further in this thesis. Instead, when I use the term *kastom* I do so to discuss any aspect of life that my local respondents described to me as rooted in autochthonous cosmology and practice. Simultaneously, I recognize that these perceptions are inseparably tied to previous and ongoing *kastom* codification efforts across Malaita and Solomon Islands, especially in view of Lau involvements in Maasina Rule; and I also acknowledge that these perceptions are essentially relational, “comparing and contrasting sets of cultural practices: (1) a traditional past as opposed to the changing present, and/or (2) the indigenous traditions and practices as opposed to others” (Donner 1993:541).

In addition, complementary to my use of *kastom*, throughout this thesis I rely on the term “autochthonous,” from the Greek “αυτοχθον” (autokhthon), “self” and “earth,” rather than on

“indigenous,” “customary” or “traditional.” I do so, on the one hand, to avoid the politicized connotations of “indigenous,” as well as the in anthropological literature contested meaning of “customary” and “traditional” as potentially necessarily suggesting stasis. On the other hand, I rely on autochthonous to emphasize the importance of the link between personhood and place and landscape that autochthonous implies in its etymology. The significance of the historicity of places and landscapes as “cultural representation” (Guo 2003:192) in Solomon Islands and for Solomon Islanders is well documented (Guo 2001, 2003; De Coppet 1985; Keesing 1982; McDougall 2004, 2015a; Scott 2007). In place-specific ways Solomon Islanders understand and relate to places by knowledge of how these places and their landscapes have been shaped by their ancestors. Places and their landscapes are continuously made and remade in constant dialogue between the living and their dead, ancestral spirits as well as equally place-specific familiar (animal) spirits. As McDougall suggests “the connection between persons and land... is ontological: it is the ground of a person’s identity” (2015a:4), inseparably tied to clan-based lineages, and essentially different from “property... things on the land” (5).

Notes on Method

I completed my research based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork (February 2014 to February 2015). I specifically worked with the coastal Lau-speaking people of Malaita Province in recognition of the continued significance of language and kinship groups as primary loci of belonging (Jourdan 2007). I spent eight months in Gwou’ulu Village in the rural Lau Lagoon in North Malaita (more in chapter 4), and four months in Lau-dominated peri-urban settlements in and around Honiara. During the first two months I stayed in settlements along Honiara’s eastern borders, obtained research and residency permits, worked on my language skills and established connections with foreign statebuilders. During the final two months in Honiara, I stayed with a family in close vicinity to White River alongside Honiara’s western border and completed interviews with elite Solomon Islanders and foreign state-builders and development workers.

Despite its multisitedness, my research design and its implementation closely followed those of classic ethnographic studies, especially during my time in Gwou’ulu (aware of its shortcomings, I even brought a copy of *Notes and Queries* (RAI 1951)). I participated in

everyday life. I learnt how to prepare local meals and how to paddle across long-distances in dug-out canoes. I helped with community work, participated in barter-based market activities alongside rural women, and joined in exceptional celebrations and times of sorrow, after births, marriages or deaths of villagers. In other words, rather than focusing my research solely on the state and the impacts of externally-sponsored state-building, I collected data on everyday life. My goal was to discern when and how the state emerged as an actor, ally or foe in Lau decision-making processes, from engagements with foreign statebuilders, politicians, bureaucrats, nurses or teachers, to roads, electrical grids and state-issued documents.

Because my goal was to identify when and how the state mattered in everyday life, my data collection was focused on participant observation and infrastructure surveys to track indicators of state presence in my field sites. Interviews augmented this. I scheduled most interviews (unstructured) during the campaign for the 2014 National Election on November 19. During most of October, state politics took centre stage in everyday conversations in the village, and I was able to complete 22 unstructured interviews on the elections of about 60 minutes each without significantly interrupting the flow of everyday life. Interviews with villagers centred on their thoughts and reactions to individual candidates and their campaign promises, and the state of the Solomon Islands state more broadly.

This said especially women (but also some men in more precarious positions in the village) were often too shy to agree to formal interviews with a digital voice recorder and about matters of politics, or they were much more shy during such interviews than in more informal settings, e.g., while teaching me how to cook local foods. During my fieldwork I witnessed on several occasions how women's voices were silenced in political discussions. For example, when women stood up to ask questions or make a comment during campaign events for the November 2014 national election—just like their male relatives had done—relatives (male and female) often expressed embarrassment. Not only was it considered inappropriate for women to express political opinions publically, but women were said to be too unformed and uneducated to have valid political opinions. This sentiment was expressed by men and women alike, by the speaker's relatives and by other audience members. In some cases male relatives also insisted on being around for interviews with women and privacy was rarely guaranteed. In response to this silencing of women's voices in formal interview-based settings and in public deliberations, my

thesis only occasionally includes direct citations from interviews which I completed predominantly with men, and even more so with men who felt, to some degree, secure in their positions within the village and beyond.

The majority of interviews were taken in Solomon Islands Pijin, or a fluid mix of Lau, Solomon Islands Pijin and at times English. All interview abstracts, as cited in this thesis, are based on my translations.

“Ideally Suited to a Husband and Wife Team”

*A splendid research site for a study of social structure and economics, ideally suited to a husband and wife team.*¹³ Roger Keesing, Research Reconnaissance, Lau Lagoon, no date (likely around 1964)

I did not come across the above note until after my fieldwork and during a short visit to the Tuzin Archive for Melanesian Anthropology, University of California, San Diego, in February 2016. Nonetheless, it curiously fits, at least to some degree, my fieldwork and its execution in the Lau Lagoon. Most concretely, I completed my field research, in the village and in town, alongside my husband, Geoffrey, who collected data for his doctoral research on the impacts of digitalization. Geoffrey’s co-presence had a notable impact on my fieldwork, the data that I was able to collect and how it was collected. Most directly, I was immediately identified as a married woman in village relations (though without a child). Within a context of strictly regulated sexualities—for example, compensation still had to be paid for pre-marital sexual relations and unmarried women were rarely allowed to walk by themselves, even through the village—being married and living with my husband, increased my ability to interact with Lau women and men of all ages, as well as my mobility. Rapport was more easily established. I was able to join men during most activities (not fishing), including when no other woman was around, and I was encouraged to actively participate in “women’s work,” from cooking to doing laundry to joining

¹³ “Ideally situated for a husband and wife team” has been blacked out in the copy under Roger Keesing’s file (MSS427, Box 33, Folder 24), which I only found after coming across the same document in Harold Ross’ files (MSS733, Box 5, Folder 4) without the redaction. Importantly, also in the Keesing file a secondary note was maintained that notes, “a husband and wife team would double the labor force and be an obvious asset” (no page numbers)

other married women to trips to local markets, to purchase and sell vegetables and fish respectively, or to barter for them.

Because of Geoffrey's presence I was also able to participate more easily in, and observe, village life and politics from "the margins." Village leaders, including those men with political aspirations, were very welcoming to both of us and, individually and together, we engaged in interesting and stimulating conversations with them. However, especially during exceptional events such as campaigns, leaders often hoped to primarily sway Geoffrey—a (white) man in a highly gendered society—to support any one of their respective political agendas. While I was free to join any of these leader-focused conversations, Geoffrey's presence allowed me to withdraw from them as well. Instead, I was able to gauge the reactions of women and those men with less interest in a leadership position within or outside the village in the context of campaign, school or church events. I was able to observe reactions to *gavman* from the sidelines, but among the majority of villagers rather than among the local "elite."

At the same time, being a husband and wife team limited our abilities to live with a host family rather than having to live more independently in our own household. Logistically hosting two anthropologists was simply "too much" for some families that we might have stayed with had we done our research individually. Eventually, and during our stay in Gwou'ulu Village, we had to concede to being our own household, with our own leaf hut and, after a few months, our own kitchen. Nonetheless, we were able to participate in and observe rural, everyday household life as part of a larger multigenerational family with several dispersed nuclear family units but with a frequently shared hearth at the oldest generations' house in the village centre. In addition, I was taught how to cook local foods with the available tools in an all-women's multigenerational household, thus providing me with another opportunity to learn about everyday routines in a more intimate setting.

Geoffrey and I were, after all, also invited to stay with members of our primary "host family" in Gwou'ulu during our final period of urban fieldwork. The small house with two bedrooms that barely fit a double-sized mattress each and a small living/dining room with a wooden couch, was "formally" rented by one of the sisters—a single parent after her brothers had chased away her husband because he beat her one too many times—who worked for a butcher in Honiara's Chinatown. The house hosted a fluctuating number of adult siblings

circulating between village and town, and their children. It had a small outhouse/shower that was connected to Honiara's piped water infrastructure, and a "cash power" (prepaid meter) connection to the capital's electric grid. When money for gas was available, cooking was done on a mobile, one plate, gas stove; otherwise I cooked on an open fire in the backyard.

At the beginning of our fieldwork, as we were preparing to depart to the Lau Lagoon and were busy with obtaining necessary permits in Honiara, we rented a relatively new house on the East side of Honiara on Leo Ridge, close to both the Lau Fishing Village (Kukum) and Lau Valley. The house had no electricity, but it was connected to Honiara's water supply and included a shower and toilet inside the house (rather than an outhouse). Cooking was also done on a mobile, one plate, gas stove or in a small kitchen hut in the backyard. The sister-in-law of our landlord lived with us and taught me basic cooking skills, among others. Several of her relatives were our neighbours, with many of the younger adult family members (18 to 30) being second generation urbanites who had never or only for short periods lived at "home" in the Lau Lagoon and in other saltwater settlements around Malaita.

A Village-Town Continuum

As indicated in my introductory remarks and more concretely in my discussion of class differences in contemporary Solomon Islands, analytically I place my focus on non-elites in the village and to a lesser degree in town, rather than on a village-town comparison. Village-town relations are instead treated as a continuum, especially in the lives of non-elites who frequently circulate between both, for labour, access to schools or hospitals, entertainment or any other reason (including for holidays). At the same time, the village lies at the heart of my analysis in an attempt to better understand encounters with the state beyond its more commonly studied site, town and the professional lives of foreign and local elites and the middle class.

I recognize that the "classic" study of villages has been widely critiqued as the basis of a treatment of cultures and societies as "bounded, homogenous and static units" (Mitchell 2010:7) and as analytically inappropriate in view of globalizing, transnational and more broadly cosmopolitan life-worlds (see Sorge and Padwe 2015). However, in consideration of the significantly large rural population in Solomon Islands and of how little the village features in

contemporary literature on state-building, especially its mundane (infrastructural) encounters, I contend and follow Sorge and Padwe's (2015) suggestion that

Villages are in fact ideal sites for the investigation of these themes, and propose novel ways of re-embedding villages as sites that can generate ethnographic knowledge that is indispensable to current disciplinary foci and theoretical concerns.... Villages [are] not... bounded units, but rather... places enmeshed within amorphous realities significantly characterized by a circulation of people, goods, images and ideas not moored to a single place. Villages have not remained stagnant, nor have they been abandoned, and their particular modernities yield unique insights into the experience of the contemporary world and its various transformations over the past decades.... They remind us of the utility of garnering place-based understandings for what they can teach us about the politics of subaltern opposition to neoliberal capitalism, just as they can offer glimpses into rural life-worlds that are experiencing late modernity in a markedly different way than their urban counterparts (242, 244).

Importantly, this methodological orientation does not render the urban and its relations with the rural insignificant. On the contrary, my seventh chapter is dedicated to a notable degree to exploring how this fluid relationship impacts village-based attitudes and experiences with the state, in all the diversity of opinions that are expressed. In addition, my discussion of the state in the village is based on and set in dialogue with my fieldwork in town. The latter includes, most specifically, the already mentioned interviews with civil society-engaged members of the middle class as well as supplementary conversations and interviews with foreign statebuilders and development workers, members of RAMSI and the Participating Police Force (PPF), as much as foreign business women and men. Particularly significant, and alongside the village-town continuum, is also my observation of and participation in concretely state-centric events, from PPF-RSIPF (Royal Solomon Islands Police Force) organized outreach and awareness events, to the campaign (and other) events that accompanied and preceded the 2014 national and provincial elections.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into one introductory and two thematic sections, in addition to concluding reflections. The two thematic sections bring together the study of state visibility in its material

connections (chapters 5 and 6) with an anthropologically more classical examination of political leadership (chapter 7) and the relationship between religion (Christianity) and political governance (chapter 8). The introductory section offers a more comprehensive historical perspective on the Solomon Islands state and the Lau therein (chapter 2), a cursory overview of the challenges faced by the Solomon Islands state since independence (chapter 3) and a detailed description of my primary field site, Gwou'ulu Village (chapter 4). Throughout my analytical chapters (5 to 8), I use “thick description” as primary means for my ethnographic writing, while I use my concluding chapter (9) to tie the four analytical chapters together.

Chapter 2 outlines the historical and socio-cultural processes that have shaped the Solomon Islands state until independence in 1987, and it situates the Lau in this context of colonial and postcolonial state-building to better understand contemporary Lau distrust in the state and its abilities. At the same time, my second chapter positions the Lau as not inherently marginal in or excluded from the Solomon Islands state in a comparative historical framework. On the contrary, I highlight the Lau's relative connectedness and historically significant participation in state formation, in particular vis-à-vis Malaitan inland populations such as the mountain Kwaio whose struggle for political and cultural autonomy, as already alluded to, has been discussed in some length by Roger Keesing (1978, 1980a, 1992a) and David Akin (1999; 2013).

In chapter 3 I sketch the challenges faced by the independent Solomon Islands state within the global political-economic system with a particular focus on how, with independence, Solomon Islands has remained dependent, if not become more reliant, on external forces, foreign states and business interests. I base this description predominantly on a review of the existing literature and on discussion that are prominent on Solomon Islands news media, such as the daily newspapers the *Solomon Star* and *Island Sun*, as well as Solomon Islands-centric Facebook groups such as Forum Solomon Islands International that I shortly mentioned earlier in this introduction. I specifically outline how, since independence, economic inequalities have become accentuated, also alongside processes of urbanization; and how foreign dependencies have become entangled with fiscal mismanagement and corruption. Last but not least, I briefly introduce how state legitimacy is questioned because of its failure to adequately cooperate with church and *kastom*-based alternatives.

Chapter 4 introduces Gwou'ulu Village as the locus of my analysis and my field research. I describe the spatial organization of the village, the rules that governed residency requirements and access to gardens and fishing grounds, as well as gender relations and church routines as the most significant organizing principles of village life. In the second half of the chapter, I start "[thinking] infrastructurally" (Chu 2014:353) by outlining Gwou'ulu's access to the primary materialities of state control including roads, new and old media, power and water supplies, social services such as health clinics and schools, courts and other public administrative facilities, as well as Gwou'ulu's broader integration into cash-based economic activities. I demonstrate how Gwou'ulu enjoys, within the broader Solomon Islands context, good access to infrastructures, particularly in comparison to villages located further inland. Lastly, I account for preferences for the village lifestyle and for constraints to this lifestyle, specifically in response to rapid population growth and its impact on slash-and-burn agriculture and fishing.

Chapter 5 builds directly off of my infrastructure-focused introduction of Gwou'ulu by analyzing the temporality of Gwou'ulu's state materialities based on three case studies that focus on (1) water and electricity, (2) the North Road, and (3) public health and education. I ask not only how these infrastructures were obtained in the first place (through the state or its alternatives) but also how they are maintained and by whom, and when and how Gwou'ulu villagers make use of them. I demonstrate differing degrees of dependency and desire for these infrastructures and a preference for and common reliance on alternatives. State failures in providing access to and maintaining infrastructures are shown to nurture a growing disillusionment with the Solomon Islands state. This chapter then provides evidence for my argumentation that the Solomon Islands state is, to non-elites, primarily visible as destructive rather than invisible as stabilizing force.

Chapter 6 further extends my infrastructure-centric analysis of the state with an analytical focus on economic desires and dependencies in reference to state-sponsored "development." I examine villagers' (and their urban relatives') attitudes towards state bureaucracies, and more precisely, the documents ("black and whites") and contracts that are necessary to establish a trustworthy relationship with the foreign economic interests that are inseparably tied to development projects. In the case of Gwou'ulu this development project is the Suava Bay Development Project, a fisheries centre, a township, and an international seaport and airport. I

argue that villagers were well aware of the legitimating significance attributed to state-issued documents in the global economy, but the state had failed to convince villagers that they could trust in documents to bring about hoped for change. In addition, in their attempts to “fix” truths documents were seen as contradictory to localized ways of knowing complex histories, in particular of landownership. Nonetheless, Gwou’ulu villagers felt increasingly compelled to obtain state-issued documents for development because of their growing dependence on imported foods and other goods. However, the state as issuing authority of documents was resented for its inability or unwillingness to acknowledge village needs and knowledge in its role as globally recognized “legitimate” mediator between villagers and global capitalism.

Chapter 7 moves from infrastructural considerations to an analysis of attitudes towards, and experiences with, local and national political leadership in acknowledgement of the significance attributed to personal responsibility in the state, and specifically in *gavman*. I discuss why the question of “what is a good leader?” has become so central in contemporary Solomon Islands politics and I outline the broader leadership structure, and its representatives, in Gwou’ulu. These leaders are shown to draw their titular authority from their positions in clan-, church- but also state-based governance systems. Simultaneously, I suggest that titular authority is in villagers’ everyday decision-making processes not necessarily equated with legitimate authority.

More broadly, I argue that, from the perspective of the villagers, leadership was in crisis, in particular, because their economic dependency on foreign goods (and therefore the state) required leadership *in absentia*. The most important leaders of Gwou’ulu were increasingly required to be based in town to negotiate the necessary state-issued documents; however, Gwou’ulu’s villagers questioned the morality of life in town and they were uncertain to what extent their town-based leaders remained committed to representing the interests of the village. At the same time, those leaders who remained in the village were losing in significance alongside the village itself and because of its distance to the state and foreign (business) interests. I demonstrate this devaluation of the village and village leaders based on an analysis of village feasts which continued to signify and reaffirm trust in leaders as good leaders (assuming the feasts were successful). This uncertainty about village leadership in the state and the global

economy is then argued to signify a broader uncertainty in village life that is closely connected to state-building.

Chapter 8 shifts the focus of my analysis from the state to Christian churches as most commonly identified alternatives to Solomon Islands “weak state.” I retrace the historical entanglements between Christianity, as theology and institution, and the colonial and postcolonial state. I highlight how Christianity emerged as alternative to the ancestral religious order because it allowed Solomon Islanders to access new sources of spiritual and secular powers. In this Christianity became also closely intertwined with anticolonial movements. However, Christianity has throughout its history been appropriated by state actors, foreign or local, as a means to establish legitimacy and to establish a national sentiment among Solomon Islanders. I argue that this long history of nationalist appropriation has contributed to a growing resentment among Gwou’ulu villagers towards the mainstream churches which are viewed as replicating the mistakes of the state. Mainstream Christian churches are then not alternatives to the state but reinforce villagers’ feeling of insecurity and global dependence, and by so doing they have created further rifts in the village community.

In my concluding chapter 9, I summarize the argument presented throughout this thesis. I discuss, specifically, how the village remains a locus of authority in view of the unreliability of the state, its representatives, infrastructures and social services. Simultaneously, I highlight how despite a continuous disappointment and lack of confidence in the state, villagers have grown dependent on the state as mediator of their growing global dependencies on the “food-for-cash” economy. This relationship is shown to be further complicated by a dependency of the Solomon Islands state itself on the global system. Last but not least, I briefly discuss the implications of my findings—a perception of the state as destructive force in a context of multiple dependencies—for state theory and practice.

2 ♦ A Historical Perspective on Autonomy, Micronationalisms¹⁴ and Growing Global Dependencies

Introduction

This chapter briefly introduces the history of centralizing governance systems—towards a state—and accompanying forms of belonging—towards a nation—in Solomon Islands and traces the particular position of North Malaita and the Lau therein. I demonstrate the marginality of Solomon Islands in the global state system from the heydays of European colonialism until independence, and highlight early European disinterest in, if not a distaste for, the islands and its peoples. In doing so, I account for how Solomon Islanders' early encounters with Europeans have informed the challenges faced by the independent Solomon Islands state and contemporary Lau attitudes towards it. I then also show how the Lau as “saltwater” peoples, more than “bush,” “hill” or “inland” peoples, facilitated early relationships with Europeans, global capital and its political system. I argue that this localized historical centrality in globalizing, state-based encounters and the Lau's comparatively long entanglement with European forces, including Christianity, informs Lau and specifically Gwou'ulu¹⁵ distrust of the independent Solomon Islands state.

This chapter is organized into two parts. The first describes, in broad strokes, the geography of Solomon Islands, and briefly outlines some of the traits of the peoples and cultures that historically inhabit the Solomon Islands generally, and North Malaita in particular. I do so specifically in view of how linguistic and cultural diversity discouraged the emergence of a state-like political unit and a nation-like identity within the boundaries of today's state. Within this context, I recognize that some previous anthropological analyses addressing this diversity have contributed to negative portrayals of the islands by “[invoking] pseudo-evolutionary comparisons” (Kabutaulaka 2015:117) that identify the comparatively small-scale Melanesian

¹⁴ I borrow this term from Allen (2013) who uses it to describe the development of distinct island identities within the Solomon Islands that correspond to diverging experiences with European encounters.

¹⁵ Gwou'ulu was one of the first Lau Christian settlements on the Malaitan mainland established around the turn of the 19th century (more in chapter 4).

political systems as “underdeveloped” or “backward” (117). Kabutaulaka suggests that this is the case because Melanesian political units did not sufficiently resemble the centralized European state, and because extensive trade networks beyond political unification were frequently ignored. I reject any categorizations or value statements that establish hierarchies of political systems that explicitly place the centralized state at the top of the pyramid and, frequently, Melanesian polities at the bottom. My concern here lies instead with sketching the artificiality of colonial boundaries to better understand Lau perceptions of the state as external political idea and institution.

The second part focuses on early encounters with Europeans after the islands’ rediscovery (1768/69),¹⁶ during early trade relations (1800s–1860s) and during the international labour trade (1860s–1900s). In addition, I account for Solomon Islands and Lau experiences as British protectorate with a resident commissioner (1896) including the introduction of a head tax in the 1920s and the emergence of anticolonial movements in the 1930s/40s.

I focus on the early years of interaction with Europeans when the Lau prospered in comparison with their inland neighbours because of their willingness to engage with European traders and colonial administrators. This time of success is especially invoked in contemporary Lau narratives and in comparisons with “Lau failure and poverty” in the independent Solomon Islands state. This narrative is exemplified in the following article that describes Lau/Mbaelelea,¹⁷ the constituency Gwou’ulu belongs to, as the least developed.

¹⁶ From a European perspective, first discovered by the Spanish explorer Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira in 1568, the history of the Solomon Islands is a curious one because “though ship after ship set out to seek them, they were so completely lost to Europeans [after Mendaña’s first discovery] that, in the course of two centuries, geographers came to doubt their existence, and they were actually expunged from the chart, until they were re-discovered by Carteret and Bougainville in the latter half of the eighteenth century” (Hackney and Thomson 2010:i)

¹⁷ Linguistically, “b” “d” and “g” are pre-nasalized in Solomon Islands languages. “Mbaelelea” is usually spelled “Baelelea,” while, for example, “Mbaenggu” is spelled “Baegu” (Christine Jourdan, personal correspondence, 20 May 2016). This rule is most frequently used in anthropological and linguistic work on Solomon Islands and I follow it throughout this thesis. However, I make an exception for the term “Lau/Mbaelelea Constituency” to reflect common usage in publications by the Solomon Islands Government and news providers such as the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) (in comparison to, for example, “Baegu/Asifola Constituency”); when referring to the language group “Baelelea” I use the simplified spelling, a practice also common in Solomon Islands news reports.

CONSTITUENTS of Lau/Mbaelelea in North Malaita have described their constituency as the least developed in the country.

Speaking to the *Solomon Star*, a group of constituents said that for the past four to eight years, no major development has been implemented by past MP's of the Constituency.

'Most of our schools are still run down, clinics have never been upgraded, roads are in their worst state and even projects intended for constituents were never given to those who deserve it.

'Our MPs have over the years been most self serving [sic] and only support their supporters.

'Such mentality needs to change if we are to develop our constituency in the future,' spokesperson for the group Peter Silas said.

Mr Silas even added that for years, islanders living on artificial islands in the Lau lagoons have been the least supported with regards to projects and other issues of concern such as climate change.

Mr Silas was speaking in support of Niuleni artificial island elder, Abel Satu who called on the government to consider kick starting negotiations for islanders to relocate to the mainland with the effects of climate change now slowly swallowing up their islands.

'Future leaders of Lau/Mbaelelea must look seriously into these concerns and start developing our constituency.

We have been silent and suffered for far too long,' Mr Silas said (Infiri 2014:para 1-9)

The article was published in the *Solomon Star*, one of Solomon Islands national newspapers, during the 2014 election campaign on 15 October 2014, and was frequently referred to in Gwou'ulu village discussions. None of my local respondents, who were aware of this article by reading it themselves or through hearsay, doubted its accuracy and Lau/Mbaelelea weakness in comparison to other constituencies. For example, during an interview about the election one of Gwou'ulu chiefs noted that "We need a new Member [of Parliament]; we from Lau/Mbaelelea are too far down the list. I mean that other constituencies are on top... with development and so. This is why I talk strongly to my clan to elect a new member" (Interview, 19 November 2014). These expressions of disappointment and need for change foreshadow similar statements that I introduce throughout this thesis. In the following, I outline the events that historically inform the emergence of such state-critical sentiments.

Solomon Islands, North Malaita, its Peoples and Cultures

The borders of Solomon Islands as they were described at independence in 1978 (map 2), do not represent a pre-existing political unit but include a diverse, dispersed and to differing degrees, interconnected group of people and peoples. Today's population of about 605,000 is spread across an archipelago that stretches over 1,500 kilometers and covers 777,000 square kilometers of which 96 per cent are sea. Solomon Islands includes six main islands—Choiseul, Guadalcanal, Malaita, New Georgia, San Cristobal and Santa Isabel¹⁸—and over 900 smaller ones, in addition to tiny atolls and artificial islands made of coral rock built especially by the Lau and Langalanga of Malaita. Even the six large islands are only between 80 and 200 kilometers long and 15 and 50 kilometers wide with Malaita being 190 kilometers long and between 10 and 40 kilometers wide, covering 4,200 square kilometers with mountains rising up to 1,300 meters above sea level. Despite this comparatively small size, the particular topography of the main islands has encouraged linguistic and cultural diversity. Of volcanic origin, the large islands are dominated by central mountain ranges with little coastal plain, sharp mountain ridges and deep valleys.

As already mentioned, this comparatively small landmass but vast area of “land covered by sea” is home to over 60 language groups. 11 language groups are found on Malaita alone (see map 3), with further divisions into dialects. For example, when Geoffrey Hobbis and I first arrived in Gwou'ulu Village, located at the very northern tip of the Lau Lagoon in North Malaita (more in chapter 4), we intended to rely on Pierre Maranda's *Semiotic Encyclopedia of the Lau People* (1997) for our language training. However, after we had gone through only a few pages with Lau speakers in Gwou'ulu, we abandoned the comparative endeavour because it was confusing us as language learners. Our local respondents identified simply too many differences between their own dialect and that of the southern Lau Lagoon where Pierre Maranda carried out most of his research. This said North Malaitan dialects are mutually intelligible. For example, when visiting markets in To'abaita-speaking areas Lau-speaking women had no problem with understanding their trading partners, and they had no problem with being understood in return.

¹⁸ The main islands are the foundation for most provinces of independent Solomon Islands: Central Province, Choiseul Province, Guadalcanal Province, Isabel Province, Makira-Ulawa Province, Malaita Province, Rennell and Bellona Province, Temotu Province, Western Province and the capital territory of Honiara.

Figure 1: Tauba Island, Lau Lagoon, Malaita, December 2014



Alongside linguistic diversity, historical and early ethnographic research emphasizes that socio-political groupings in the Solomon Islands were historically relatively small, as were their settlements. For example, Ross (1978) notes that North Malaitan inland or bush villages were “sparse and dispersed, with small hamlets averaging twelve persons on ridges or knolls” (121). Coastal or saltwater populations such as the Lau were, in comparison, “dense and nucleated, with large villages of several hundred persons” (121).

Leadership was highly localized and concentrated mostly on the senior men in their respective hamlets and the most senior men (elders) in larger villages or in small regions consisting of about a dozen hamlets (Bennett 1987:14). At its largest scale, leadership focused on big men—simplistically defined as men who gained privilege and power through conspicuous demonstrations of wealth and its redistribution among supporters within but also beyond their kinship groups.¹⁹ Yet, according to Bennett (1987:14), even these men were unlikely to have a following that was greater than two hundred. A few chiefly societies existed—all of them saltwater peoples including the Lau—but in these societies, too, access to leadership was not guaranteed by inheritance alone (more on this in chapter 7). Achievement and successful

¹⁹ See Douglas (1979), Godelier (1986), Godelier and Strathern (1991), Sahlins (1962), among others, for further discussions about the concept of the Melanesian big man.

participation in reciprocal exchange networks were indispensable and within this context, the reach and scale of chiefly societies was limited as well. For example, in Lau the size of political units was usually confined to the size of the artificial islands. Historically (and today) Sulufou is the largest, with around 300 residents out of a total of five to six thousand Lau speakers in 1927 (Ivens 1930:50).

The scale of political organization is also evidenced in conflict resolution mechanisms and structures, as well as in warfare. In the North Malaitan context, Hogbin (1939) notes that most disputes were resolved between the conflicting parties without consulting leaders beyond the senior men in the households concerned. Big men were only called when disputes were likely to escalate while “outside the district [of about thirty to eighty members]... formal control is entirely lacking” (82). This said, among Lau this is not entirely true. Walter Ivens (1930), the first ethnographer to do research in Lau, notes that if a chief (or the son of a chief) was found to be extraordinarily knowledgeable beyond the particular histories of his clan, and if he was “known to be of quiet disposition, gentle, and not given to quarrelling, a tractable man, and not easily provoked” (Ivens 1930:90), Lau elders might have appointed him as *aofia*, “the embodiment in himself of peace” (90). *Aofia* were relied on as peacemakers between Lau clans and across the lagoon. However, *aofia* were only appointed if a man was found who had all the required qualities and upon whom elders were able to agree. Importantly, Ivens (1930) notes gaps in succession that correspond with the narratives that I recorded as well. My local respondents emphasized that there had been no *aofia* in recent history and that, so far, no man had emerged who could assume this position though some men tried laying claim to it.

Within this context, war, raids and revenge killings were frequently the result of disputes that transcended the immediate district, and they were usually only relied on for serious offences, which in the North Malaitan case, included, in particular, “the seduction of an unmarried girl, adultery, sorcery, and murder” (Hogbins 1939:99). For example, in the case of Sulufou, Ivens (1930) records narratives of four war-like conflicts, “(1) a raid on Mala[ita] by the people of Gao [Santa Isabel]; (2) improper conduct on the part of visitors towards the women of the place; (3) foul words used to women at a market; (4) an accusation of the practice of black magic at a feast” (185). Alliances with neighbours for warfare were common, but they were always in flux and changes often followed the rise and fall of big men.

Ivens also notes that peace was commonly desired and arranged through compensation, payment of pigs, chicken and most of all *malefo*-style red shell money, a type of currency (see Robbins and Akin 1996). *Malefo* or *tafuliae* refer to the most popular type of shell money and the only type that can be used as compensation for murder, and is commonly part of bridewealth. It has “a particular pattern composed of ten strings of shell beads, basically red (sometimes called ‘red money’), white and black. There is a fixed pattern of combining beads of different colors and the length of the strings is usually seven or eight feet, with a pattern of straight lines... in the middle. Some strings... are about ten feet long with a net shape... in the centre. *Tafuliae* has the characteristic decoration of a piece of red cloth on both ends of the string...—the red cloth symbolizes blood, and the presentation of *tafuliae* represents the payment of blood” (Guo 2006:21).

Figure 2: *Malefo*-style red shell money being presented as part of bridewealth, Gwou’ulu, August 2014



Warfare was also limited by the demands of slash-and-burn agriculture. Slash-and-burn was and remains the most commonly used agricultural technique and taro and yam were the main root crops. These root crops were supplemented by breadfruit, sugarcane, papaya, coconuts and various green vegetables. The seas (and especially lagoons) were and are a source of a multitude of fish, from bonito to mackerels, as well as, among others, dolphins, turtles, crayfish,

and crabs. Fish was the main source of protein, complemented by domesticated pigs, insects and wild game. I discuss the continuance and transformations of small-scale farming and fishing in Gwou'ulu in chapter 4.

In this context, the most significant networks of identity formation and belonging were descent groups organized along clan²⁰ lines with descent being traced differently across Solomon Islands, through the mother's or father's side or through both. In North Malaita all descent groups were patrilineal or cognatic with a patrilineal bias and strongly rooted in the clan's ancestral homes, specifically the location of the clan's burial ground—in Lau skull pits in the *maanabeu*, the men's seclusion area. In Lau this also held true for women who usually married outside their own clans and villages and who, with marriage, relocated to their husband's home (Köngäs Maranda 1974). Married women remained members of their birth clans and their skulls were expected to be deposited in their clan's skull pit because “as ‘an *alien* spirit,’ [a woman's] skull cannot be placed among the skulls of her husband's clan” (195; my emphasis).

Cosmologically, these clan- and place-specific ancestral spirits, as well as familiar animal spirits, were at the heart of localized religious and socio-political orders. Ancestral spirits were believed to be ever-present and in constant dialogue with the living, in particular through dreams and divination. Interpretations of ancestral prescriptions—*abu* (taboo), or *tabu* or *tapu* in other Oceanic languages (Keesing 1982:31)—guided decisions about the spatial organization of a village, gender relations, warfare and perceptions and rituals surrounding life-cycle events. Importantly, Elli Köngäs Maranda (1974:195), who conducted research together with her husband Pierre Maranda among the Lau and on the ancestral artificial island of Foueda in the 1960s and 1970s, notes that ancestral spirits were also the source of innovations. Decisions, for example, about changing a particular ritual practice, were made in reference to conversations with ancestral spirits and, as a result, there were recognizable differences between clan rituals even within specific language groups and between close neighbours.

²⁰ In Pijin a clan is commonly referred to as *traeb* (from the English “tribe”). Anthropologically speaking, Lau *traeb* are most accurately defined as clans, “unilineal descent groups that unite a series of lineages descended from a theoretical common ancestor, the genealogical links to whom are often either not remembered or who may be purely mythological... Clans are often exogamous, and localized clans can serve as territorial political units” (Rhum 1997:63).

This is not to say that the peoples and cultures of the islands were not mobile and interconnected. Trading was especially common between saltwater and bush peoples with regular markets being held on or near the shore to trade fish for vegetables (preferably taro) and vegetables for fish (preferably big fish) (Maranda 1969, 2002, 2008; Ross 1978). Similarly, Bennett (1987, 11-14) suggests that inter-group marriages were widespread and migration occurred regularly, especially in response to disputes, warfare, population pressures, or sickness. For instance, Ivens (1930:26) argues that migration among some Lau from North Malaita to Malaita's far south likely occurred shortly before first European contact. He explains this movement as primarily the result of population growth. Ross' description of the Lau's close bush neighbours, the Baegu, is telling about local awareness of and relationships across distance:

The Baegu are aware of other peoples and places, but their importance diminishes as distance increases. Nggela (the Florida Islands) and even Guadalcanal are on clear days visible from the mountains. In the old days, coastal groups raided Santa Isabel, and Isabel has always been the source of *'ai ni gao*, a hard, dark, ebony-like wood. Outrigger canoes occasionally drift in from Ontong Java or Sikaiana [atolls], and the latter figures in at least one epic tale. Despite this knowledge of outside peoples, northern Malaita remains the relevant social universe. The Baegu recognize their linguistic affinity with other northern Malaitan dialects (Lau, Toabaita, Baelelea, and Fataleka). Inter-marriage, trade, and other social interaction occur routinely among these northern Malaitan groups and even extend into the Kwara'ae region of central Malaita. The Langalanga people of Malaita's central west coast make and distribute traditional shell money around the island. Central and southern Malaita, although known, fade in importance (1973:108-109).

To sum up, historically Solomon Islands was divided in their political units and identity formation alongside geographic variation, nurturing linguistic and cultural diversity. Multiple regional trade networks flourished but not political unity and even these trade networks do not prescribe Solomon Islands borders as they were created by British colonial administrators and as they were fixed with independence.

A wider-reaching identity, first as "Kanaka" and beyond the borders of today's Solomon Islands, only began to emerge with increased encounters with Europeans, more specifically with Pacific Islanders' participation (voluntarily and not) in the labour trade and significant periods of time spent on plantations in Fiji and Queensland alongside other, historically more distant,

Islanders (Bennett 1987). Nonetheless, even in 1992 Solomon Mamaloni, Prime Minister of Solomon Islands in the years 1981-1984, 1989-1993 and 1994-1997, claimed “Solomon Islands or the Solomon Islands Community has never been a nation and will never be a nation and will never become one” (1992:10 cited in Kabutaulaka 2001:para 74); and Jourdan (1997) argued in a reflection on ongoing nationbuilding efforts that “people keep on defining themselves locally, with kinship remaining the most important pole of identification” (144; also Dinnen 2007; LiPuma 1997; White 2001). This, in turn, has been highlighted, at least by foreign and local state officials and elites, as one of the core obstacles to legitimate state formation in Solomon Islands (see Allen 2013; Jourdan 1997; LiPuma 1997; White 2001).

In the following section I outline some of the historical forces that shaped identify formation during colonial encounters including the creation of micronationalisms that correspond to the main islands but not Solomon Islands at large. I show how first encounters with Europeans were characterized by the islands independence and islanders control over their engagements with European traders in particular. At the same time, I highlight how this control eroded over time eventually becoming institutionalized in the establishment of a British Protectorate. With growing European activities in the archipelago, “the pace of technological, social and psychological change among the islanders was greatly increased” (Corris 1973:6). New conflicts, schisms and dependencies were created with the Lau of North Malaita having been, historically, deeply entangled with providing Europeans access to the islands and facilitating exchange networks but also with the loss of political autonomy from early on.

Nascent Micronationalisms and (Global) Dependencies: The (North) Malaitan Experience

“The Terrible Solomons”

Geographically belonging to Melanesia, named by Dumont D’Urville after the color of its inhabitants “the Black Islands”—in comparison, Polynesia and Micronesia were named after their geographical features—Solomon Islands did not fare well in early European descriptions. Notions of Melanesian inferiority, “savagery” and immorality were nurtured by tales of cannibalism. More broadly, European perceptions of the islands were closely entangled with then dominant racial theories concerning human difference and hierarchies of intelligence

(Tcherkézoff 2003). Jack London's *The Cruise of the Snark* (2004) and the chapter "The Terrible Solomons" in his *South Sea Tales* (2012) are, in many ways, representative of early European perception of the islands and its peoples. In London's words:

If I were king, the worst punishment I could inflict on my enemies would be to banish them to the Solomons. On second thought, king or no king, I don't think I'd have the heart to do it (2004:166).

Early European observers were confined in their visits to beaches and commonly observations from afar, specifically from the decks of their ships (Corris 1973:17); and their knowledge of the islands and their inhabitants was limited and severely distorted. European colonial powers and their trading companies found little worthwhile to warrant facing "the terrible Solomons" in any systematic way (Bennett 1987:1-20). For decades (1800-1860s) only European whalers sporadically visited select coastal villages—those identified as the most hospitable—to restock basic supplies; and most captains preferred for the islanders to come on board rather than sending his own men ashore (Shineberg 1967). Malaita and with it the Lau remained largely isolated from European traders during this time. In terms of resources, "they had nothing to interest whalers and traders, and strict sexual codes meant that women were not available" (Moore 2007:216). Importantly, even in those locations where trading was more widespread, contact remained limited and with it knowledge of the other.

The historical record indicates that both parties desired the other's goods—Solomon Islanders wanted hoop iron in particular—but these goods were dispensable and what "the other" desired was sufficiently available on both sides (Bennett 1987:33). As demonstrated in Shineberg's (1967) elaborate exploration into early Melanesian trade relations with Europeans in the context of the sandalwood trade to China, Islanders were by no means passive actors in these early encounters. Islanders made active choices on when and how to interact with Europeans, including occasional looting of trade vessels.

Under the usual conditions of trading, the balance of power was such that the islanders were in a position to bargain and exercise a limited choice of action. In their dealing with the white men they showed no want of confidence in their own capabilities during this period... [However] the introduction of semi-automatic firearms, the dependence of Melanesian labourers on their employers, and the

increasing intervention of European governments gradually assured the final preponderance of the white man (Shineberg 1967:216).

I turn to a discussion of this shift in power relationships in the following.

Labour Plantations

Towards the mid-nineteenth century trading networks expanded with sandalwood, copra²¹ and tortoise-shell being especially sought after by European ships. But Solomon Islander desire for European goods was also on the rise, in particular for steel tools and guns (muzzle loaders and then Snider rifles). In this context, the fastest growing commodity became labour. Bound by indenture contracts for two to five years, Solomon Islanders and above all, Malaitans, were recruited to work on plantations in Queensland and Fiji and, to a lesser degree, Samoa and New Caledonia.

While Malaitans had had little to offer to traders in terms of natural resources, they did have their labour and they were motivated by a growing interest in accessing European goods directly rather than through trade networks with neighbouring islands. Moore (2007:216) suggests that over a 70 year period, starting in the 1870s, Malaitans entered into 51,000 indenture contracts with many serving multiple times. There was no island in Melanesia with a comparable share of its (male) population involved in the labour trade. Between 1871 and 1904, Malaitans comprised 52.9 per cent of Solomon Islanders and 14.8 per cent of Pacific Islanders at the Queensland plantations, and 62.6 per cent of Solomon Islanders and 19 per cent of Pacific Islanders in Fiji (Moore 2007:217).

Especially in the early years of the labour trade, popularly known as “blackbirding,”²² “recruits” were abducted and deceived into coming on board the ships. However, forceful recruitment by European ships declined relatively quickly. On the one hand, the Queensland administration—under pressure from the British government—appointed government agents

²¹ Dried sections of the coconut meat or kernel that is used to extract coconut oil

²² Derived from the African slave trade, “blackbirding” refers, simply speaking, to the stealing of black labour.

to ships to prevent kidnappings;²³ and, on the other hand, perhaps more importantly, Islanders no longer had to be forced to work on the plantations (Corris 1973; Moore 1985), at least not by recruiters. Frazer suggests that local social pressures increased for young men who were reluctant to work on the plantations “particularly from senior male relatives, who stood to gain from the limited quantity of grade goods and cash which labour recruits earned” (1973:11).

After the initially kidnapped recruits had returned to their homes “satisfied with the treatment and rewards they had received in the colonies” (Corris 1973:29), many Malaitans enlisted willingly even though the journey was not without its perils and even though Melanesians were often treated unfairly on plantations. “Once indentured in Queensland, they were servile bonded labour, paid poorly (by comparison with European labourers), and often transported and held in circumstances that have been described as slave-like” (Moore 2015a:159). In addition, the Queensland Government misappropriated large amounts of deceased islanders’ wages and the death rate was staggering. According to Moore, “24 per cent of indenture contracts and closer to 30 per cent of individuals” (2015a:172) lost their lives on Queensland plantations.

Nevertheless, Moore (1985) argues that the labour trade did not necessarily disrupt the lives of young men or the communities they were part of. Recruitment fit into “existing exchange networks, political and social pressures present in Melanesian society, and to predictable stages in traditional life-cycles which coincided with the requirements of the labour trade” (47).²⁴ Because other areas of the Solomon Islands had established long-term relationships with European traders, and because they were able to obtain foreign goods at home, they showed little interest in working abroad. Malaitans, on the other hand, did not have this opportunity and European recruiters quickly focused their attentions on the island and especially its coastal areas (Bennett 1987:83).

²³ Scarr (1967) notes the limitations of this attempt by the government, largely because of the low wages paid to government employees, the short employment contracts and the dangers they faced on their voyage. Among others, “they ran considerable risk of catching malaria and dysentery, and worked under the constant danger of attack from the shore” (13).

²⁴ Temporary labour migration persists as an important rite of passage today, and is reflected in the lives of urban *Masta Liu* that I describe in my introduction, as well as in temporary migration of Gwou’ulu men that I outline in chapter 4 (see also Chapman 1976; Frazer 1981, 1985).

The Lau Lagoon in particular became a centre for European activities. In 1868 and after deserting from an American ship, a Scottish sailor, John Renton, was stranded together with four companions on Maana'oba Island (see map 4). He alone survived. According to Ivens (1930), "the four elder men were killed by the people of Maana'oba, but Renton was saved on account of his youth, the chief claiming him for himself" (71). For eight years Renton lived in the Lau Lagoon, and mostly on Sulufou in the southern Lagoon, where he learned the language and participated in everyday life including the "[hunting of] turtle, a thing specially under the care of the ghosts" (Ivens 1930:72).²⁵ Rumours of a European's presence in the Lau Lagoon reached far and eventually prompted the recruiting brigantine *Bobtail Nag* to search and "rescue" Renton from Sulufou (Corris 1973:32). At the same time the *Bobtail Nag* was able to recruit thirty-one residents from the artificial islands. This was the most successful voluntary recruitment in Malaita until then. "Renton, by providing the recruiters with an entrée to the Lau Lagoon, enabled them to tap what was probably the largest single source of labour in the group" (Corris 1973:32).

Kwaisulia of 'Adagege and the Saltwater Advantage

Recruiters visited the Lagoon frequently throughout the 1870s and 1880s, including Renton who returned twice on labour vessels with presents for Sulufou's residents and to recruit more labourers (Ivens 1930:73). Most significantly, Renton was joined on the *Bobtail Nag* by Kwaisulia from 'Adagege, an artificial island close to Sulufou (Ivens 1927:23-24; 1930:73).²⁶ While little is known of Kwaisulia's time on Queensland's plantation, Corris (1970:256) suggests that he probably stayed for six years, three years longer than mandated by his contract. Corris believes that this extended stay allowed Kwaisulia to develop a better understanding of the European lifestyle than many of his Malaitan colleagues. Kwaisulia like other so-called "time-expired boys" were said to have had the opportunity to become skilled in pidgin English—"an attribute for which Kwaisulia was later renowned" (257); and he

²⁵ I recorded several stories on John Renton's stay in the Lau Lagoon. Especially among residents of Sulufou his survival and integration into their community is remembered fondly and a source of pride. The troubles Renton and his companions faced on Maana'oba were contrasted to, and seen as indicator of "civilization" in Sulufou.

²⁶ It is unclear if Kwaisulia joined the *Bobtail Nag* on its first trip to Sulufou or on its second not many months later; Ivens contradicts himself in this regard, noting the second trip in his 1927 volume and the first trip in 1930.

gained prestige among new arrivals and “confidence which enabled them [time-expired boys] to associate with some Europeans and enjoy the fleshpots of town” (257).

Most significantly, upon his return from the plantations Kwaisulia was to become a so-called “passage master.” Passage masters facilitated the recruitment of Islanders as middlemen for European ships, and the historical record suggests that no European ship was able to enter and recruit in the Lau Lagoon without first being visited, and catering to, Kwaisulia (Corris 1970:258). As passage master Kwaisulia provided provisions, worked as interpreter and once the labour trade became focused on bush peoples, Kwaisulia and other passage masters also spread the word inland about the arrival of recruiters (Corris 1973; Moore 1985).

Passage masters also assured the safety of ships. During this time it was not uncommon for labour ships to be attacked with the primary goal being to loot them (Corris 1973; Scarr 1967). For example, the *Emprenza* was attacked, looted and burnt in June 1880, and all of its crew killed (Corris 1973:33). Scarr (1967) also notes that if Malaitans were killed by recruiting ships in defense, they may be attacked again later in revenge. Exemplary is the killing of Malaitan men at Serago in 1886 after which “the Serago people offered a reward of 100,000 porpoise-teeth to any village which should capture a ship, and a smaller sum for the body of a single European. The people of Manaoba [in the Lau Lagoon] won the latter prize in 1888 by killing the government agent of the *Ariel*” (Scarr 1967:14).

In this context Kwaisulia (and other passage masters) were to become more powerful than any leader on Malaita had been before (Akin 2013:17). Kwaisulia’s stronghold was filled with European goods, “rifles and ammunition, tobacco by the case, barbed-wire, knives, axes, mirrors and cloth... dogs and even more exotic things such as a ship’s boat, clocks, [and] music boxes” (Corris 1973:64). He used the goods he obtained to expand his sphere of influence from Maana’oba to ‘Ataa and throughout much of the lagoon. In one of four wars described by Ivens (1930:190), Kwaisulia is mentioned as being in charge of an assault on Funafou. The incident occurred after a man from Funafou was accused of having used malevolent magic against a chief from Sulufou during a dance. This account is also one of the few instances that Ivens mentions Gwou’ulu, in this case as the location where “Kwaisulia’s decorated canoe was smashed up” (190) and members of its crew were killed.

Ivens merely notes that this happened at some point after the assault on Funafou. In response, Kwaisulia attacked Maana'oba Village (rather than Gwou'ulu).²⁷

As Kwaisulia's power grew because of his close relationship with Europeans, access to weapons and means for fortification, so did the power of the Lau, as saltwater peoples, in comparison to their inland neighbours. Beyond guns, saltwater peoples, who had nearly monopolized the labour trade in its early years, were able to transform their trade wealth and surplus into localized wealth, ownership of pigs and shell money that far exceeded that of bush populations. In response, for example, bridewealth became inflated, "[encouraging] the inland groups to offer their young men for labor recruiting" (Bennett 1987:87).

Within this context saltwater peoples such as the Lau initially restricted inland access to labour vessels to limit bush access to guns in particular—after all, vessels could only be reached through the coastal areas. However, it did not take long for the Lau to realize the advantage of allowing inland participation in the labour trade, facilitated and mediated by the increasingly powerful Lau. In a nutshell, the Lau realized that they could profit more from facilitating the labour trade than from participating in it themselves (Corris 1973:34; Moore 1985). Corris (1973:37) argues that this change of heart among saltwater peoples—although they continued to a lesser degree to enlist and work on plantations—correlates with the Queensland and Fiji ban on recruits' transporting guns to their home islands in 1884. Guns were still smuggled home by the Islanders but their numbers decreased notably.

Coastal villages were aware of recruiters' and bush peoples' dependence on them. They regularly increased prices for fresh water and other goods desired or more accurately required by recruiters, and they "taxed" inland recruits after their return from the plantations for safe passage through the coast and back home, and they even collected an initial upfront beach payment (Corris 1973; Moore 1985; Scarr 1967). In other words, within Malaitan (and some neighbouring) trade networks the Lau were at the centre of the labour trade in collaboration with and in partial control of British (and other European) traders. Lau choices to actively engage with Europeans were advantageous, especially as the Lau were yet to

²⁷ I did not come across any narratives about the attack during my fieldwork.

become more comprehensively dependent on foreign forces and eventually governance systems.

This said Lau engagement and growing entanglement with Europeans and their goods, but also with other Solomon Islanders and Melanesians on plantations, brought about significant changes in the islands. Historical research indicates that the scale of political units increased, at least in coastal areas, and the loci of legitimate leadership were transformed (Akin 2013; Corris 1970, 1973; Keesing 1992b). Again the case of Kwaisulia is particularly illustrative. Kwaisulia was married to the daughter of a Sulufou chief but not of chiefly lineage himself. He was close to the source of chiefly power, but unlikely to ever be recognized formally as leader because he was, according to Corris, of not “very distinguished birth” (1970:255). Ivens (1930:65) suggests that if any evidence for his “non-chiefly” status in `Adagege was required it can be found in “ownership” of fishing grounds that was restricted to chiefs and which, for `Adagege, were “owned” by a man named Kwao at the time.

However, as Keesing argues, “modes of leadership and arenas for power were historically constituted, and changing” (1992b:187) and with this change Kwaisulia rose to power and became, by many, acknowledged as legitimate leader. Corris (1970:261) suggests that Kwaisulia became a quasi-chief, or rather a new type of leader who combined the tasks of chiefs, war leaders and priests. Kwaisulia was said to have done so “by involving himself in the provision of human sacrifices required for the settling of feuds, by arranging marriages between coastal and bush peoples, by directing the porpoise drives which were of enormous ritual significance for the Lau people, and by conducting impressive accompanied tours south to Sa’a and north to Auki and Isabel” (261).

Kwaisulia’s leadership was also recognized as legitimate because of his successes as passage master and as war leader using the guns and tools he had obtained from Europeans. His power was rooted in and derived from “his ability to manipulate the whites and be accepted by them on their ships as a powerful equal” (Keesing 1992b:180). Accordingly, even though Kwaisulia was never formally a chief, he was referred to as chief of Sulufou and `Adagege and beyond by Europeans—for example, Hopkins describes Kwaisulia as “a big

sea chief, the head of all the sea folk” (1930:para 28)—and today he is remembered as a chief by the Lau (Keesing 1992b:179).

This is not to say that Kwaisulia’s power was never contested, or sometimes even rejected by his contemporaries. Indeed, Ivens argues that, “it was *only* due to his reputation amongst white people, which he traded on, that he was not killed for his overbearing ways” (1930:199-200; my emphasis). Nonetheless, if anything, this decision not to kill Kwaisulia is further evidence for the significance that the Lau attributed to relationships with European traders and the power and influence that it brought to them, in particular vis-à-vis their inland neighbours. Kwaisulia’s leadership was then only “truly” challenged by people from Maana’oba after the Queensland and Fiji prohibited recruits from returning to their home islands with guns purchased or given to them as plantation labourers. The people from Maana’oba had gained increased access to armament because of contact with Samoan recruitment vessels that still allowed the purchasing of guns, thus expanding their sphere of influence vis-à-vis Kwaisulia alongside an, at the time, more advantageous European encounter (Corris 1973:113).

The Arrival of Christianity

Some transformations brought about by the labour trade, specifically the arrival of Christianity, were more difficult to control—also to the dismay of Kwaisulia (Corris 1970:263)—and would unhinge Malaitan societies for decades to come (and as we will see in chapter 8, until today). Not every returnee from the plantations maintained ancestral beliefs and therewith the foundation of the local sociopolitical and religious order. On plantations, labourers were exposed to Christian missionaries, in particular the Queensland Kanaka Mission (today’s South Seas Evangelical Church), the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Melanesian Mission and the Seventh Day Adventists, who had previously failed to establish strong footholds on the islands and on Malaita in particular (Hilliard 1978). In the particular context of the Anglican Melanesian Mission, Hilliard notes that by 1894 the Mission had

...claimed 8929 baptized converts out of an estimated population of 150,000 on islands where it was working... The largest Christian community was on Nggela [Florida Islands] where 3000 were baptized. Next largest in order was Santa Isabel with 1200, Mota Lava 1013, Mota 770, Santa Maria 644 and Maewo 500. On no

other islands did Christian converts number more than 350... not an impressive return for almost forty years' continuous operation over a wide area (1978:115).

Importantly, the *Southern Cross*, the ship of the Melanesian Mission, had visited North Malaita several times in the 1890s and was rejected by the Lau in their attempts to recruit boys for Norfolk Island to be trained as local missionaries (Hilliard 1978:177).

This changed with the intensification of the labour trade. Burt (1994a:108-109) suggests that with distance from their homes, Malaitan labourers were uncertain about the protection they could expect from their ancestral spirits, and especially those Malaitans who signed up for multiple terms likely viewed Christianity as more appropriate for life among Europeans. Hogbin suggests that the first converts at the few early local mission schools “were young men, themselves eager to visit Queensland, and it is only reasonable to suppose that they were fired primarily with a desire to know something about the place to which they were going” (1939:180). Among these plantation converts, some (but by no means all) remained committed to Christianity upon their return, even becoming teachers in mission schools or establishing such schools themselves.

This trend accelerated when colonial labour migration was brought to an end with forced repatriations from Queensland in the early 1900s. Several Lau converts who were hoping to avoid the turbulent politics of Kwaisulia—a fierce opponent of Christianization—joined Christians at Malu’u; while others settled in Fou’ia, a Christian mainland settlement opposite `Adagege with a mission school run by Jack Talofuila, Kwaisulia’s cousin (and therefore comparatively safe from Kwaisulia), who had converted during his sixteen years in Queensland (Corris 1973:136).²⁸

It was these Christian, coastal enclaves—including Gwou’ulu—that would further saltwater entanglements with Europeans, not only their capital and goods but more strongly their ideas about centralized socio-political (and religious) orders. Facing strong (violent) resistance from villagers who continued to follow ancestral prescriptions, these communities brought together Malaitans from different linguistic and cultural groups. They grew into

²⁸ See Hopkins’ (1930) *From Heathen Boy to Christian Priest* for a more detailed account of Talofulia’s life

comparatively large villages and as such they were increasingly viewed as undermining the dominant ancestral order (Akin 2013:32; Boutilier 1979:52).

This in particular was the case because these settlements forbid following ancestral taboos and engaging in bridewealth and other exchanges with non-Christians (Akin 2013:32), but also because “the presence of individual Christians in pagan hamlets threatened the cohesion of those communities, which was deemed so important for agricultural and military pursuits” (Boutilier 1979:52). For their survival these Christian villages then depended not only on missionary support but also on help from the newly established British colonial authorities (Burt 1994a:114), thus, further increasing their exposure to European ideas and administrative structures, and also their dependency.

These intensified encounters in Christian settings (but also beyond) did not only nurture a better understanding of European interests and values (including their racial hierarchies). They also increased existing frictions while creating new ones between and among saltwater and bush peoples, and between Christians and non-Christians. Leadership and networks were challenged by new ideas and new ways to obtain wealth and power; and the changes started to become increasingly embedded, if not potentially irreversibly so in local societies.

Slowly but steadily the tables had turned. Islanders were losing more and more control over the means of social and economic reproduction. Most concretely, they had also grown dependent on foreign goods such as guns but also tobacco. Bennett (1987:93-94) argues that because tobacco could not be re-traded but only used once Islanders, tobacco fueled foreign dependence above anything else (see also Marshall 2013:79-80). Solomon Islanders started to grow their own tobacco with seeds stolen from the plantations. However, Bennett (1987) contends that a preference for manufactured tobacco persisted.²⁹

²⁹ I observed this persistence myself, even though a shift appears to be taking place wherein locally grown tobacco is becoming more popular, especially within local “modernizing” discourses that describe locally grown tobacco (*savusavu*) as healthier because it is “organic”—my local respondents used the English term.

A British Protectorate and New Schisms

In the 1890s Islanders political autonomy, irrespective of the degree of centralization that it purports, was further undermined by a colonial administration that, though reluctant, made its presence felt with often violent force. What follows is a closer look at this imposition of British rule, (some) Lau collaboration with colonial state-building, as well as a continuing, growing but also changing Malaitan resistance to the Islanders' loss of political autonomy.

A British Protectorate was established in Solomon Islands in 1893, according to Bennett (1987:105), because Britain feared a loss of its dominance in the Pacific with increased German and French presence in the Pacific. The first resident commissioner, Charles Morris Woodford, arrived in 1896. Woodford faced significant limitations to his reach, and localized resistance in particular to his efforts to pacify the islands. "His administration was too small and too poor to do much by itself" (Hilliard 1978:134). For example, the grant-in-aid that Woodford had received from the Colonial Office "was barely enough to fund the skeleton staff of one British administrator, a few Fijian police, and a residency at Tulagi, let alone allow for any extension of government superstructure" (Bennett 1987:105).

This was not necessarily a problem. For instance, Hilliard (1978) suggests that the continuance of smaller political units prevented the emergence of unified resistance to the colonizers. However, budget shortages also necessitated a very pragmatic approach that required time and a delegation of tasks to non-government organizations and individuals. Resources had to be directed to where they were perceived to be the most necessary and potentially the most effective. These were the newly established plantations to generate tax revenue and Christian mission stations and villages which Woodford hoped would aid pacification, literacy and Solomon Islanders understanding of, and agreement to, a centralized political system (Hilliard 1978:134).

In this context inequalities between the islands and between individual island communities became increasingly pronounced, while Christianity was making new headway. Christian administrative structures emerged as complementary but potentially also alternative governance system in a rapidly changing world. However, the historical record indicates that especially Christian schools furthered distrust in Europeans. Missions schools often failed to

deliver what Solomon Islanders increasingly desired, literacy to more equally participate in European administrative and, most of all, in commercial endeavours.

Hogbin (1939:181) notes that the hope for education was one of the primary reasons why young men joined the missions. While they often ended up converting to Christianity, these young men quickly realized that the education they received at the missions was unable to fulfill their desires. As Akin suggests the “curricula [of mission schools] excluded whole realms of knowledge thought unsuitable or dangerous for Melanesians” (2013:151), and Solomon Islanders were increasingly becoming aware of this practice and the disrespect they suffered from Europeans. This in turn is said to have nurtured resentment, particularly towards European missionaries. Simultaneously, this awareness made Malaitan dependence more blatantly visible. Hogbin (1939) observed that despite their failures mission schools never struggled with recruiting new hopeful students. “The youngsters... with pathetic optimism, eagerly take the places of those who leave school” (181).

This said, within a context of limited colonial administrative capacities, Malaita was barely touched by the colonial administration during the early years of the protectorate. Bennett (1987:122) suggests that the colonial administration hesitated to engage with Malaita, among others, because of the perceived challenge that pacification on Malaita and especially among its inland population posed. This concern was confirmed by District Magistrate Thomas W. Edge-Partington, the first European to be posted on Malaita, who recalled:

One whole village of about 60 or 100 fighting men came over from Quai [Kwai, on Kwara’ae] and attached a bush village at Langalanga. They expected me to have a lot of police here and have absolutely no fear of the Government. They laughed at me the other day when I went down to Fiu [Kwara’ae] about a murder and took 17 with me all I could spare, leaving 6 to guard the station... This is going to be a very difficult island to tackle, and until the whitemen stop selling cartridges one cannot do much (Edge-Partington cited in Akin 2013:38).

In addition, Bennett (1987:122) alludes to a reluctance to pacify Malaita because the white population was said to fear that pacification would stop the continued flow of labour from Malaita, now to plantations across Solomon Islands rather than abroad. While this prolonged Malaitan political autonomy, British reluctance was deeply rooted in the socioeconomic

structures that would, over the long term, nurture Malaitan “underdevelopment” vis-à-vis other and especially western islands. Indeed, Cooper (1979) contends that pacification as colonial policy can be directly linked to colonial economic needs. Malaitan pacification was necessary to ensure adequate access to enough cheap labour for the growing plantations, but “it also established the conditions which kept wage rates low, through the preservation of local modes of production and their simultaneous subordination to the capitalist mode” (39).

When, in 1909, the first administrative offices were opened at Rarasu (Auki), today the provincial capital of Malaita, North Malaitan autonomy was the first to fall, around 1911 (Bennett 1987:121). Kwaisulia is known to have collaborated with the administration despite his disdain for Christian missions. For example, when the administration failed to apprehend two murderers, they asked Kwaisulia to do so on their behalf. He dispatched his oldest son who succeeded in capturing them (Keesing 1992b:180), prompting Woodford’s assistant to report:

It is quite plain that [Kwaisulia] is able to keep order in this district and I impressed upon him that he would in future be held responsible for the peace of this part of Mala[ita]. There is probably no other chief in the island who could send nine or ten miles [about fifteen kilometers] down the coast and effect without any disturbance, the arrest of two malefactors who do not belong to his tribe or sept (cited in Corris 1973:65).

Indeed, Kakalu’ae, Kwaisulia’s last surviving son, was to become a constable under William Bell, District Officer of Malaita from 1915 until 1927 and commonly credited with bringing *Pax Britannica* to the island (Keesing 1978:250-251).³⁰ Bell oversaw the implementation of “Native Administration” and a head tax in the 1920s. These efforts included the installation of district and village headmen³¹ and constables to increase lines of communication and control between villages and the colonial government, and the imposition of a tax on every able-bodied man, aged sixteen to sixty. The tax increased Solomon Islanders need to earn cash, and thereby their participation in non-self-provisioning and non-barter-based economic activities. For Malaitans, without cash crops or other means to earn money, this meant

³⁰ See Akin (2013:29-49) for a more elaborate discussion of Bell’s impact on Malaita and pacification.

³¹ Islanders appointed by the colonial administration to assist British district commissioners and district officers. Headmen assisted the colonial administration with everyday governance of sub-districts e.g. through tax collection.

engaging in circular migration as indentured labourers on European-owned plantations. At the same time, payment of the tax prompted no change in colonial attitudes towards the Islanders.

Although colonial administrators thought the tax would encourage a feeling of belonging (or at least submission) to the colonial centralized state, the Islanders witnessed no improvements in the services they received from the administration, or in their status, now as taxpayers (Bennett 1987:192-212). Even the contrary appears to have been the case. Albert Mason, an Anglican missionary, noted in 1925 that “the two government officials are so busy most of the year collecting this [tax] money that little time is left for attending to court business, and the medical assistance rendered to the natives is practically nil” (Mason cited in Akin 2013:44). According to Akin, starting at this time, “taxation without return or representation was to be a key issue in Malaitan political resistance for decades” (2013:44; see also Bennett 1987:265-278).

These efforts, and their violent enforcement—most concretely, the killing of Bell in 1927 by the inland Kwaio in resistance to the tax; and the government-led punitive expedition that resulted in the death of at least sixty Kwaio men, women and children, the gang-rape of Kwaio women, and the destruction of gardens, shrines and settlements³²—did not bring about the island’s unification under the colonial state; on the contrary, new schisms emerged that increasingly converged in a growing estrangement from, yet dependence upon Europeans and their capitalist economic production and governance system.

Growing Resentment and Maasina Rule

One key focus of resentment was colonial failures to acknowledge existing leadership structures, or at least to control the leaders that it had appointed. The case of Kakalu’ae, Kwaisulia’s son, is exemplary. Keesing (1992b:181-186) argues that, as late as 1952, the colonial administration emphasized Kakalu’ae’s achievements as constable and later as headman for Lau,³³ even though he was by no means whole-heartedly committed to the cause of centralized governance. Instead, Keesing suggests that Kakalu’ae used his power as headman to advance his own, highly

³² See Keesing and Corris’ (1980) *Lightning Meets the West Wind* for a detailed account of the events.

³³ Despite this colonial “praise” Kakalu’ae was replaced by Salaimanu for abusing his power in 1941 (Keesing 1992b:182).

factional, interests, for instance, when he covered up an assault on Funafou by men from Sulufou that was quite similar to one led by his father.

Malaitans came to view the exploitative behaviour of Kakalu'ae and some other headmen as indicative of the colonial government's failure and its disinterest in the Islanders. Headmen's failure furthered the rupture between the colonial government, its pragmatic supporters, and the broader Malaitan population. The colonial administration had given historically unprecedented power to men such as Kakalu'ae who, as headman, came to command clans and villages to which they had no claims to leadership in the prior system. At the same time, the power of headmen remained largely unchecked by their superiors and some of them, though by no means all, habitually exploited it.

A growing bitterness towards this "law and order" component of colonial administration coincided with significant economic turmoil and a British abandonment of Solomon Islands during World War II. By the 1930s, Solomon Islands economy had come to depend on copra production, and copra was badly affected by the Great Depression.³⁴ Malaitans who had to rely on their plantation wages to pay the head tax were hit by a 50 per cent wage cut; and the long-term exploitation of the Islanders became even more blatantly obvious. For example, labourers' wages on Solomon Islands plantation were considerably lower than the wage paid in Queensland, while the cost of desired goods was notably higher (Bennett 1987:160-164). Solomon Islanders and Malaitans in particular, had been used as cheap labour by the colonial government, any entrepreneurial efforts had been resisted and most capital generated from the plantations was moved abroad rather than invested in local infrastructures and services (Bennett 1987:192-217). When World War II arrived on the islands and the Japanese occupied Tulagi (among others), the British evacuated—from a local perspective in a cowardly manner—and Solomon Islanders experienced a more sympathetic and respectful relationship with American troops than they had ever had with the British (Akin 2013:132-144; Bennett 1987:285-291).

Resentment turned into resistance, and Malaitans came together in an attempt to develop an alternative, centralized *Malaitan* governance system. The anticolonial movement, Maasina

³⁴ See Akin (2013:94-101) and Bennett (1987:218-240) for detailed accounts

Rule, was born.³⁵ It started in 1944 in southern Malaita, had spread throughout the island by the end of 1945 and lasted until 1953. The motivations and developments behind Maasina Rule were recently described and discussed in extensive detail by David Akin (2013, 2015) and previously by Keesing (1978; 1980a) and Laracy (1983). Let it suffice to be said here that Maasina Rule laid the foundation for a locally envisioned political and economic unit that was to codify and “straighten” the multitude of local autochthonous systems into one that was to be representative for Malaita as a whole while refocusing Malaitan labour from colonial plantations to Malaita-based “communal economic endeavours” (Akin 2015:487). For example, “movement adherents—estimated at one point at 95 per cent of Malaitans—declined to work on the protectorate’s plantations and vowed to redirect workers to improving their home communities” (487). Most broadly, the movement was envisioned to allow for Malaitan self-governance based on autochthonous principles, although many “bad customs” were discarded. The goal was not necessarily full independence, but rather a diminished role for colonial government, and possibly American rather than British assistance.

At the same time, movement leaders were drawn from both followers of ancestral religions and from Christian denominations; and according to Akin (2013:164-213), the movement’s ability to bring different groups together was one of its main achievements. However, it was also one of its ongoing struggles in view of continuing tensions between different groupings; and one should not overstate the coherence of the movement. There were notable local variations, for example as described by Burt (1994a:171-202) for the Kwara’ae, and even there, the movement was quite different in western and eastern Kwara’ae, including diverging leadership and policies.

Importantly, Maasina Rule was the culmination of Malaitan resentment towards British control, but was also deeply rooted in the transformations that had already occurred in Malaitan societies during early encounters with Europeans. For example, Maasina Rule’s proposed organizational structures for self-governance closely followed the lines first developed by Bell

³⁵ Maasina Rule is not the only anticolonial movement that has occurred in Solomon Islands. One was the Fallows Movement which emerged just before the war, in 1939, on Isabel and subsequently gained influence throughout the southeastern Solomon Islands (Akin 2013:101-106; Bennett 1987:259-263). Another was the Moro Movement on Guadalcanal established in the 1950s and still extant today (Allen 2013:81-85; Davenport and Çoker 1967).

(Akin 2013:264; Keesing 1978a:252) and, in one of the early documents the movement produced, it “called for appointment of a single ‘chief’ to oversee the political organization of Malaita, with four other chiefs to serve under him—two each for northern and southern Malaita” (Akin 2013:261). Supporters of the movement now envisioned Malaita as a political unit; a new micronationalism had developed that focused on the shared Malaitan experience, as exploited labourers, unheard taxpayers, and politically disenfranchised vis-à-vis Europeans but also vis-à-vis other (western) Solomon Islanders who had historically been less dependent on selling their labour rather than produce.

Despite their historical entanglements with Europeans and colonial rule, many Lau readily and enthusiastically participated in the movement. Communication and trading networks the Lau had developed around the island were harnessed to connect Maasina Rule communities in northern Lau with those in the far south (Akin 2013:260). After initially joining the movement, Kakalu’ae became one of its fiercest opponents as it began to undermine his power; yet, during this period he by no means represented all of the people of the Lau Lagoon. The Lau had, in the course of colonization, become more and more subjects of European control rather than facilitators of European encounters with Malaitans.

While they still enjoyed some privileges as stevedores rather than plantation workers (Bennett 1987:267), the Lau had long ago lost the autonomy and localized superiority that they had enjoyed during the international labour trade. As saltwater peoples, their entanglements had shifted: they, like other coastal Malaitans, and particularly those in Christian communities, now “had little choice but to interact much more with Europeans and their surrogates and to allow their interventions in their affairs—not just missionaries but also colonial officers and police who frequented coastal areas, as well as the government headmen who lived there” (Akin 2013:278). This is exemplified in the administrative structure developed by Bell to govern Malaita. These structures were centred around coastal villages, specifically, the

... ‘passages’, the old ports of call of the recruiters [such as the one created through Kwaisulia]. Each Sub-District had a Headman, each passage had a Village Constable, usually with one or more deputies. Bell had a tax house, centre of administrative activities, built in each passage. He and his Clerks, working through Village Constables, divided each passage up into a scheme of ‘lines’, units which were supposed to be descent groups (Keesing 1978:251).

In other words, the coastal communities were the centre of “state” activity and control, and with resistance, they always risked violent punishment.

Maasina Rule did, in the end, not succeed in achieving all of its goals especially that of taking control over state-centric governance structures on Malaita. The movement had faced stringent opposition from the British colonial administration. In mid-1947 movement leaders were imprisoned and all movement activities were forbidden. Mass arrests and raids followed throughout Malaita including an arrest of 28 men at Malu’u on 1 July 1948 and colonial administrators even went so far as to consider arresting “all of the estimated 600 men in Malu’u Sub-district” (Akin 2013:277). Throughout Malaita and among men and women alike these arrests were met with frequently non-violent resistance. For instance, shortly after the arrest of the 28 men at Malu’u, the colonial police force arrested an additional 99 men who “waited for [the police], lined up for arrest with kits packed, and pleaded guilty” (277).

While colonial crackdown of Maasina Rule prevented some of its grander aspirations, especially its economic ones, Malaitan resistance was insofar successful as it prevented a return to the pre-Maasina Rule status quo. Concretely, according to Akin, “beginning in 1952, officers replaced harangues with negotiations, force with persuasion. They also abandoned the most resented intrusions into people’s lives, such as compulsory labor projects, domineering headmen, bullying soldiers, the shooting of pigs, and arrests for census refusal or tax default” (2013:332).³⁶

Notably, Maasina Rule coincided with a broader shift in British attitudes towards and treatments of its colonies including Solomon Islands, a shift that would eventually lead to Solomon Islands independence in 1978. I turn to these changes in British administration of the Islands in my next chapter which deals explicitly with Solomon Islands experience with independent statehood as described in the literature. For now it is important to re-emphasize that as Solomon Islands moved towards independence, the Malaitan experience with the centralized state was deeply informed by Maasina Rule. Maasina Rule is representative of Malaitan disillusionment with external administration, as well as with the broader transformations that had occurred in Malaitan societies in response to intensified encounters with European administration and centralized governance. Maasina Rule displayed the emergence of a pan-

³⁶ See Akin (2013:327-345) for a more comprehensive discussion of the movement’s failures but also successes.

Malaitan identity, or micronationalism, and an attempt to create a political unit that governed in some ways like the European state, though in its integration of autochthonous ideas and practices it was by no means a replica of that state. At the time that Maasina Rule emerged, Malaitan and Lau society had been fundamentally transformed by their European encounters, they had grown dependent on foreign goods and the capitalist economy. New schisms had developed alongside religious difference, political units had been redrawn and the scope and potential for leadership had been adapted to account for new sources of wealth, knowledge and power.

Summary

This chapter has, in broad strokes, introduced the history of the centralized state in Solomon Islands. This history highlights the significance of localized experiences with first European encounters, colonization and independence and how political autonomy was lost and political units transformed alongside colonization, foreshadowing the complex power relationship the Lau were to develop with the centralized, independent Solomon Islands state. Exemplary for how power relationships were reorganized during early encounters with Europeans is Kwaisulia's rise to power, most concretely, because he was able to successfully negotiate with Europeans as passage master elevating the Lau within regional power relationships with inland populations. At the same time, these shifting power relationships were highly contentious and increasingly rooted in a dependence on the European state. This is reflected in Lau disapproval for Kwaisulia's son, Kakalu'ae, who was no longer a more or less autonomous political-economic actor but a dependent "employee" of the colonial administration, first as constable then as headman.

In this chapter I furthermore sketched how the colonial administration was only too willing to exploit Malaitan labour and extract taxes without offering anything, such as infrastructural and economic development, in return; and how growing out of resentment towards the colonial administration Maasina Rule as primary anticolonial movement was born. Maasina Rule was not backward-looking in its focus on autochthonous or customary principles, but it was forward and outward oriented in its attempt to identify a governance system that was

Malaitan rather than imposed by foreign rules and through foreign leaders who had, so far, shown little interest in the Islanders themselves (Akin 2013).

This external outlook is significant for better understanding contemporary disillusionments with the Solomon Islands state, in particular how they pertain to the northern Lau experience. From first encounters with Europeans Lau influence and control has been on the decline. Their embrace of external actors, their ideas and practices, was only advantageous while political autonomy could be maintained. With colonization power shifted to Europeans. The Lau had lost control over when and how to interact with Europeans, their capital and goods and their governance system. They shared an experience of disenfranchisement with the inland population, and they came to resent the meddling of Europeans, their ideas and institutions, in their affairs. This was especially pertinent as, unlike their inland neighbours, their geographical location increased their vulnerability to the colonial government and the violence their Navy was able to inflict on local communities. It is this experience, a shift from the centre of localized political power in first global encounters to the periphery of the global state and capitalist system that informs the contemporary distrust of the Lau in the independent state that I describe in subsequent chapters. What follows in my third chapter is a brief introduction to these experiences with independence and especially to those aspects of statehood that have nurtured resentment among Solomon Islanders.

3 ♦ The Independent Solomon Islands State and its Challenges

Introduction

Building on the historical overview presented in chapter 2, this chapter outlines some of the challenges faced by the independent Solomon Islands state with reference to its complex global political-economic entanglements. My sketch is predominantly based on how these challenges and entanglements have been described in the literature, in the news media and how they are being discussed on Solomon Islands-centric Facebook groups. According to Finau et al (2014) and Wood (2015a:155-156) these groups are a significant and growing source of government accountability in Solomon Islands. Finau et al.'s (2014) research suggests that, while social media groups such as Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII) remain limited in their reach since they depend on reliable internet access and familiarity with the technology, these groups are an important component of the nascent (urban) civil society. Social media platforms are said to be significant for civil society development because they encourage discussion of political issues that are deemed important by Solomon Islanders and because discussions on Facebook groups have triggered responses by political actors (Finau et al. 2014; Wood 2015a:155-156).

I begin my description of the challenges faced by the independent Solomon Islands state with a brief outline of the events leading up to independence and the moment of independence itself. Then I shift to a brief discussion of the factors that have curtailed Solomon Islands more equal participation in the global state and economic system. In particular, I account for internal economic inequalities and how these inequalities relate to urbanization. In addition, I note how Solomon Islands remains economically dependent on foreign actors and unsustainable resource exploitation and how this dependence has transformed and fueled the development of a kind of patron-client relationship between *gavman* and the majority of non-elites. Lastly, I briefly introduce alternative governance structures such as Christian churches and *kastom* chiefs. By so doing this chapter foreshadows a more detailed discussion of these challenges in subsequent chapters or, more concisely, a more detailed discussion of how these challenges become visible to my local non-elite respondents in their encounters with the Solomon Islands state.

Towards Independence

In a comprehensive volume on the history of Solomon Islands between 1800 and 1978, Bennett (1987:311-347) titled her chapter on Solomon Islands independence *Coming, Ready or Not!*, while Premdas and Steeves describe “the final acts of Solomon Islands’ decolonization” as “not intense demonstrations of joy, but sober calculated conferences designed to solicit aid and technical advice so as to provide economic self-sufficiency in the long run” (1985:10). These word choices are indicative of the challenges that Solomon Islands, as political unit within the global state and economic system, faced in preparation for independence and have faced ever since. As I already noted in my introductory chapter, Solomon Islands independence was less a self-driven process than it was the result of global decolonization processes initiated by the British colonial government with “the British [seeing] the process as one of their gaining independence from the Pacific rather than the territories like the Solomons winning independence from them” (Bennett 1987:321).

In the 1930s, Solomon Islands had already become an international “British embarrassment... in that direct rule of a colony with no provision for social services or means of advancement had become anachronistic” (Akin 2013:26). In response to this international critique, when reestablishing control over the islands after the Second World War in the 1940s/1950s, the British colonial government shifted some of its priorities. A series of reforms were implemented. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act (1940) which applied to all British colonies at the time brought some financial aid to the islands rather than demanding self-sufficiency; though this financial aid was far below the amount colonial administrators in Solomon Islands considered to be the bare minimum for effective state-centric governance of the islands (Herlihy 1981:199). Solomon Islanders were encouraged to open their own stores, and the indenture-system collapsed nearly completely (Bennett 1987:301-309).

Moreover, also with roots in the 1930s, a national level Advisory Council with Solomon Islands members, Local Councils and Native Courts (later Local Courts) were established and strengthened over time. Local Councils were, among others, responsible for issuing business licenses and for collecting taxes; and they had been designed as “a form of local government that would, at once, be larger in scale than the typical small communities in which the people lived to

permit viability and yet to be intimate enough to impact trust to groups that had habitually distrusted and fought each other” (Premdas and Steeves 1985:38-39). Native Courts were envisioned to account for local practice in conflict resolution and decision making processes more broadly. Initially, Native Courts dealt with criminal, civil, and “customary” cases presided over by the respective headman. At least six elders had to be present and consulted for any judgment to be valid, and the courts could impose small fines as well (Hogbin 1944:261-262).³⁷

Good intentions aside, historical research suggests that these efforts were often regarded as insufficient and incomplete by the Islanders whom these councils and courts were supposed to serve, remaining under full control of the centralized British colonial administrations (Bennett 1987:301-309; Burt 1994a:211-213; Premdas and Steeves 1985). For example, Akin (1999) notes that Malaitans critiqued Native Courts because they only acknowledged the legitimacy of compensation claims for theft rather than—as practiced outside the legal framework imposed by the British colonial authorities—also for murder; and, more broadly, because they assumed that “a timeless, enduring, and pre-European ‘native custom’ existed that could be isolated and authenticated for legal purposes” (49). Moreover, councils and courts often only met irregularly and suffered from a lack of leadership because, among other issues, the positions were insufficiently rewarded with money and/or prestige (Premdas 1982:244). Premdas and Steeves (1985:43) further suggest that those recruited to serve in councils and courts were often (but not always) only equipped to fulfill one of the two needs of these governing institutions, being knowledgeable of British administrative processes and laws *or* of autochthonous conflict resolution mechanisms.

Beyond these attempted reforms to integrate Solomon Islanders in some decision-making processes and their mixed results, only in the 1960s and more concretely in the 1970s did Britain begin to actively consider Solomon Islands independence. Only then were constitutional and economic policies as foundation for independent statehood introduced, including a single-chamber Westminster-style of Government headed by a prime minister. Notably, these policies and structures were implemented with limited input by Solomon Islanders (Corrin 2007:145). Solomon Islands’ Independence Constitution came into force by British Order and was drafted in

³⁷ I discuss the contemporary transformation or rather disappearance of these means of local governance in chapter 7.

London. A delegation of Solomon Islanders was flown to London for consultations, but their input was only advisory and discussions lasted a mere ten days (145). According to Corrin (2007:145), this stands in contrast, for example, to the local enactment of Vanuatu's constitution.

First direct elections, in this case for the Legislative Council did not take place until 1964. This first election was limited to Honiara and won by an Australian businessman, Eric Lawson, as "local, Solomon Islander" representative (Alasia 1997:5). The Legislative Council had come into force by British Order in 1960 and was the name of the Solomon Islands legislature between 1960 and 1970. Not unlike the arms of local government shortly described earlier, the Legislative Council remained under the full control of the British High Commission and limited in its ability to foster Solomon Islander participation in governing the centralized state as imagined by its colonial administrators. First political parties also only emerged in the late 1960s, and they were unable to engender large-scale support among Islanders (Alasia 1997). Already the final general election during the colonial area in July 1976 witnessed the disintegration of the two main parties that had emerged over the previous decade (5-7). Most members stood as independents instead (7), and as I outline later in this chapter, independent candidates continue to dominate Solomon Islands political landscape until today.

Independence... and Continued Dependence

When independence finally arrived in Solomon Islands, it then did so in a context of unfamiliarity with the Westminster-system of government and in a context of continued dependence on foreign aid to cover state expenditures (Bennett 1987:301-309). At independence, the new state was only able to balance its recurrent or operational budget through a grant-in-aid contribution from the British Treasury (Premdas and Steeves 1985:22). In 1980, only 47 per cent of Solomon Islands budget was covered by local revenue of SBD 26,500,000 (23). This local revenue was topped-up with a UK grant-in-aid of SBD 500,000 to cover the needs of the recurrent budget, while the capital budget was fully dependent on bilateral (SBD 16,466,000) and multilateral (SBD 2,277,000) development loans (23). The Solomon Islands Government received an additional SBD 10,478,000 in development loans for a total budget of SBD 56,201,000 (23).

Independence also arrived within the context of micronationalisms and divergent experiences with colonization and capitalist economic production that I alluded to in chapter 2. Notably, the Western islands—now Western Province—attempted to secede from Solomon Islands shortly before independence (Bennett 1987:327-330; Frazer 1995:100-101; Premdas, Steeves, and Larmour 1984). Premdas, Steeves and Larmour (1984) suggest that supporters of the so-called “Western Breakaway Movement” worried especially about Malaitan domination over the new country and demanded further decentralization. To avoid secession, the centralized government increased funding for the Western Council. They placed Westerners in important positions in government and public administration, and paid compensation to the Western islands for the poem “Ode to the Westwind” which was released to the public shortly before independence. The poem described Westerners as “black and ugly, proud and lazy, Manpower they have none” (News Drum, 9 June 1978 cited in Premdas, Steeves, and Larmour 1984:39) and had, falsely, been attributed to an assistant of Peter Kenilorea, a Malaitan and Solomon Islands first Prime Minister (Bennett 1987:329). The Western islands remained with Solomon Islands, though upon independence the Western islands continued to fly the Union Jack, “boycotting the Solomon Islands’ independence, not declaring its own” (Premdas, Steeves, and Larmour 1984:34).

Some of the critiques voiced by the Western Breakaway Movement, especially in regard to decentralization, are indicative of how the independent state did not fundamentally break with several of the policies of colonial rule. On the contrary, the independent state had no official high-ranking position for *kastom* leaders as, for example, proposed during Maasina Rule and it remained centralized, in particular also as a result of continued financial dependence of provincial and local governments. For instance, Premdas (1982:245) notes that in the 1960s and 1970s local councils were only able to operate through significant subsidies from the central government, which increased from SBD 26,000 to SBD 463,000 between 1965 and 1973. Frazer (1995) suggests that any efforts towards decentralization with the formal establishment of seven provinces in 1982 have been curtailed by funding restraints and dependence on the central government. Between 1980 and 1987 the central government provided grants to provincial authorities at a value of 75 per cent to 83 per cent of provincial government revenue (103). This funding constraint persists until today (Suluia 2012). For example, after the December 2014 Provincial Election, Malaita Province was unable to cover the costs for a provincial assembly

meeting to elect the new provincial government until Auki businesses offered to cover the necessary expenditures (SIBC 2015a).

The independent Solomon Islands state also maintained an investment focus on few select areas that were deemed the most likely to be profitable economically. These focused on the colonial centres for agricultural production, largely centred on the plains of Guadalcanal and in the western provinces (therefore not on Malaita), and the postwar capital city of Honiara on Guadalcanal (Bennett 1987:311-347). First established as an American base and airfield³⁸ during World War II, the British administration chose Honiara as new headquarters (rather than the pre-war capital of Tulagi which was destroyed by Japanese bombs in 1942). Honiara's port had to be built up from scratch, as it only had a very narrow area of coastal flat land and flooding, including flash floods, are common (Moore 2015b:420); however, it had considerable infrastructure left from the war and was closer to some of Solomon Islands' largest coastal plains with great potential for future economic exploitation (Moore 2015b:419-420).³⁹

Many of the challenges faced by Solomon Islands upon independence remained at the time of my fieldwork, or may even be said to have become intensified in response to an inability to address in particular Solomon Islands dependence on external forces. From a global systems perspective, Solomon Islands, as political unit, has not only been shaped by foreign actors but it has also become thoroughly integrated into the global state and economic system on its very periphery, continuously dependent on external actors for survival rather than somewhat equal participation in the system (Tucker 2010; Wallerstein 1976).

This position on the global periphery is reflected in Solomon Islands ranking in the 2015 UN-issued Human Development Report, which measures and ranks a country's level of "human" or, more accurately, social and economic development with a triple focus on life expectancy and health, schooling and access to information, and standard of living based on GNI (gross national income) per capita. In 2015 Solomon Islands was among the countries characterized by "low human development;" it ranked 156th of 188 countries included in the report, the same as Mauritania, just above Papua New Guinea and below Zimbabwe (UNDP 2015:210). The same

³⁸ The airfield was first built by the Japanese and taken over by the Americans during the course of the war.

³⁹ For an extended discussion and history of Honiara see Moore (2015b).

report states Solomon Islands GNI per capita as PPP\$⁴⁰ 1,540, just above Gambia and below Mali (210). In addition, the 2016 Index of Economic Freedom, created by the Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal, ranks Solomon Islands as “repressed” and 161st of 178 countries included, just above Bolivia and below Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Miller et al. 2016:8). Solomon Islands economy is described as “heavily dependent on forestry and [it] suffers from a lack of dynamism. Poor infrastructure and an underdeveloped regulatory environment impede expansion and diversification of the productive base. The financial system remains rudimentary and lacks the capacity to provide sufficient credit for entrepreneurial activity” (389).

Within this context of peripheral “human development”—from a UN perspective—and the broader history of Solomon Islands emergence as political unit, Tucker went so far as to suggest that the Solomon Islands state only continues to exist by virtue of its dependent integration into the global system, thus becoming a “zombie-state... a nonexistent nation and a self-serving state organization sustained through external economic support, military intervention, and political coercion influencing the decisions of a small group of internal actors” (2010:73). Below I sketch some of these factors that prompted Tucker’s classification of the Solomon Islands state as “zombie-state” in more detail. I focus in particular on what the existing literature has said about when and how resentment toward the independent Solomon Islands state has emerged and developed over time. Importantly, this overview is necessarily only cursory and foreshadows a more concise discussion of these issues as they pertain to the experience of Gwou’ulu villagers, or more accurately as they become visible to my non-elite local respondents, in subsequent chapters.

⁴⁰ “Purchasing power parities (PPPs) are the rates of currency conversion that eliminate the differences in price levels between countries” (OECD 2016a).

“Who na spoelem Solomon Islands?”

Who na spoelem Solomon Islands? 1. Corrupt politicians? 2. Wakus? 3. both? who?
[Who is spoiling Solomon Islands? 1. Corrupt politicians? 2. Asians?⁴¹ 3. both?
who?] (Forum Solomon Islands, August 25, 2015)

These questions, asked by a Solomon Islander, on one of the country’s buzzing Facebook forums—similar but not the same as FSII introduced in my introduction—are in many ways representative of broader sentiments towards the current state of Solomon Islands as expressed in the literature, Solomon Islands and foreign news media and in “elite” discussions on Solomon Islands urban Facebook groups. Supporters of this sentiment broadly agree that something has been going wrong and continues to go wrong—Solomon Islands is being “spoiled”—and someone has to be responsible for it, with two likely culprits being “corrupt politicians” or the burgeoning Asian community or foreign interests more broadly. The person who submitted the initial post is also open to alternative answers. Within a week, over 90 comments were posted in response. Their suggestions range from “oketa [all] people and their attitude... No need to blame anyone” to “yea, maybe politicians on one part... what about the gov’t offices” to “money is the root of evil so that’s the root...” and many more that reflect these opinions, the opinion expressed in the original post or a combination of them.

No consensus emerges but three threads are particularly dominant in this discussion. They reflect concerns highlighted in the existing literature on the independent Solomon Islands state. Solomon Islands are thought to be spoiled by economic inequalities, dependence on foreign economic interests and aid, and the corruption that is felt to be closely intertwined with both but also with individual Solomon Islanders who vote for corrupt leaders. What is missing from the comments in this particular Facebook thread but discussed in the literature across Melanesia (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; McDougall 2008; White 1997, 2012) are calls for reforming the governance system to better and formally integrate chiefs and church leaders in the national decision making process. Exemplary for the latter in the Solomon Islands context is a

⁴¹ The Pijin term *waku* is derived from the Cantonese phrase *wah kiu* which roughly translates into “overseas Chinese” (Moore 2008:44). I encountered multiple uses of the term *waku*. Depending on the context and the person I talked to, it was in reference to Chinese immigrants only, to the broader resident Asian community or to any non-Pacific Islander living and working in Solomon Islands.

recent letter to the editor by Chief Kwaomoli, Central Highlands, Malaita Province, published in the *Solomon Star* on 25 May 2016. In this letter Chief Kwaomoli demands compensation from Kadere Party, which contested in the 2014 National Elections on a “3C” platform focused on custom, culture and church that remains, according to Chief Kwaomoli, unimplemented. Because of this failure, Chief Kwaomoli exclaims that

We, the chiefs of Malaita province who had been used to promote the Kadere party’s manifesto during the launching in various constituencies were very upset and will be seeking for means of customary settlement from them for a non-rewardable exhibition of our valuable customs and cultures without recognition as promised by the Kadere party (2016:para 7)

In the following I introduce each of these issues, which are believed to be spoiling Solomon Islands as country within a global system of states, in more detail. I conclude with a reflection on the role of the “3Cs.”

Economic Inequalities and Urbanization

Figure 3: Downtown Honiara, February 2015



Since World War II and more so independence, socioeconomic inequalities have become accentuated, including but also beyond the country's historical division into "producers" and "labourers" (Allen 2013:86-102). Broadly speaking, the western Solomon Islands have remained a source of "produce," timber in particular, while Malaitan men have remained as primary, temporary and highly mobile labour force that has increasingly become concentrated in urban areas and especially in Honiara. Already in 1973, 46 per cent of all employed Malaitans were working in the new capital (Frazer 1981:50).

These inequalities have been identified as one of the root causes of the Tensions and one that remains despite and after the RAMSI intervention (Haque 2013). In an extensive interview-based examination of Malaitan and Guale [the autochthonous residents of Guadalcanal] militants' motivations for joining the fights during the Tensions, Allen identifies micronationalist "development equity" (2013:104) narratives as among the most significant motivating factors. Guale militants point to the substantial contributions of Guadalcanal to Solomon Islands economy. The province, as "producer," harbours the country's only gold mine (Gold Ridge), vast oil palm plantation, and it is a primary source of commercial logging. Yet,

...the provinces which have large populations [specifically Malaita, which has the largest] will get more funding or more grants from the government. We feel that this is not fair because we produce a lot of income for the government but only receive a small proportion of the money in terms of infrastructure and development for our island (G, interview with G, J, and L, cited in Allen 2013:113).

At the same time, Malaitan militants are said to insist that this perspective is equally unfair because it ignores the contributions made by Malaitan labour to developing the "nation" at large (Allen 2013:137-156). This is exemplified in the following statement from Michael Kwa'ioloa, a Malaitan resident of Honiara, who experienced the violence of the Tensions without participating in the fights themselves.

They [Guale] should appreciate that Malaitans were the productive, active people who did everything in Guadalcanal, clearing and planting the thousands of hectares of oil palms for Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd. and developing the town of Honiara which administers the provinces of the country. It was Malaitans who worked the mining company at Gold Ridge, operating the machines and earning revenue for the

government and royalties for the Guadalcanal people from their land ... (Kwa'ioloa and Burt 2007:114-115).

Importantly, Allen (2013) emphasizes that both groups did not necessarily hold each other responsible for this unequal development. Instead, blame was placed primarily on “the government.” “The government” had unfairly distributed funds to weak provincial authorities that remain in a “clientalist relationship with national government” (Frazer 1995:103) despite the significance of island-based micronationalisms in identity formation and governance desires (Allen 2013; Moore 2004). In this atmosphere resentment had grown towards each other—Malaitans and Guale respectively—based on stereotypical perceptions of “the other” (Kabutaulaka 2001) and because of ongoing land disputes between Guale autochthonous landowners and Malaitan settlers who have been unable to access and/or afford the state-owned and increasingly overpriced land of Honiara (Moore 2004).

Figure 4: Banana Valley, a squatter settlement on Honiara's western border, December 2014



The infrastructural development and the rising living costs in Honiara with its approximately 78,300 residents,⁴² have also nurtured frustrations with the centralized state. Bennett (2002) notes that, in the colonial postwar period, Honiara, as expat enclave with a pre-existing wartime road and airport infrastructure, became *the* centre for government and commercial investments. Already in 1968, 44 per cent of all government expenditures were allocated to Honiara (Herlihy 1981:202); and, “the more Honiara had to offer, the less the administration decentralized” (Bennett 2002:6).

Among others, Honiara has access to grid-based infrastructures, power, water and sewage, as well as extended health services such as several (private) pharmacies and clinics, and two university campuses from the University of the South Pacific and Solomon Islands National University. Honiara also offers night clubs, casinos and a multitude of DVD stores and Internet Cafés. To elites, and to some extent the growing urban middle class, Honiara provides access to a lifestyle that is not available elsewhere in the country, from small malls that sell office furniture, high-end brand electronics and a wide selection of imported alcohol, to luxury hotels that serve Western cuisine such as pizza or Spaghetti Carbonara, have private pools and bars, air-conditioned, serviced apartments with wireless internet access and satellite TV subscriptions.

As more money is being invested into urban facilities by the public administration or private companies, class differences become more pronounced and more visible. Many of the town’s even most basic services, such as a grid-based power supply, are not regularly accessible to a large number of Honiara’s residents who work in temporary or low-paying jobs or who rely on their relatives to meet basic needs (see also Lacey 2011; UN Habitat 2012). A two-tier system has developed in town and between town and the village that I describe in more detail in chapter 5, what suffices to say here is that, because of unequal development, the lives of non-elite urban residents is often precarious. “Key issues are a lack of access to clean water; a lack of access to adequate shelter; food insecurity; personal insecurity, particularly for women facing gender-based violence; a lack of access to healthcare; poor nutrition standards; and unsustainable urban growth patterns” (Lacey 2011:371).

⁴² This calculation is based on the 2009 housing census for Honiara according to which the total population was 65,000 with an annual population growth rate of 2.7 per cent (SIG 2009b).

Figure 5: The Lime Lounge in downtown Honiara, an expat and *gavman* café serving e.g., cappuccinos, nachos and sushi in an air-conditioned environment, February 2015



This urban non-elite precariousness can also be observed in comparison to life in the villages, or at least in comparison to life in Gwou’ulu. For instance, Gwou’ulu has had no recorded case of malaria in the last ten years while Gwou’ulu’s urban residents have been battling with the disease, alongside diarrhoea and dengue fever. Honiara was also the centre for a large measles outbreak in 2014 that resulted in nine deaths. Fifty-five per cent of all measles cases were recorded in Honiara (InterHealth Worldwide 2014) and those who were affected in villages close to Gwou’ulu—there was no case in Gwou’ulu itself—had only recently returned from town.⁴³

In this context resentment has grown towards *gavman*. As suggested by Allen (2013), *gavman* representatives are often held responsible for unequal development including many of the “dangers” of town. At the same time, they are, according to my local respondents and discussions by Solomon Islanders on Facebook Groups such as Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII), the most likely to afford luxuries that remain inaccessible to villagers and

⁴³ The broader challenges of urbanization and population density, from mental health to adequate sanitation systems, have been highlighted by Jourdan (2008b), Lacey (2011) and UN Habitat (2012).

many of Honiara's residents. This bitterness has been especially nurtured by reports of *gavman* abuse of power and privileges. Exemplary is a 2015 scandal surrounding three government ministers (Agriculture and Livestock, Mines and Energy, and Tourism) with Augustine Auga, Minister for Agriculture and Livestock, being the elected MP for Lau/Mbaelelea Constituency to which Gwou'ulu belongs.

In July 2015, the Parliamentary Opposition released information to Solomon Islands press that accused the three ministers of having lived in Heritage Park Hotel from January to May 2015. Heritage Park is one of Honiara's most luxurious hotels housing, in Western-style self-contained apartments, high ranking expats, especially RAMSI and UN officials. During their stay, the ministers were said to have accumulated a bill for accommodation and food that totaled more than SBD 900,000 (USD 115,515) (SIBC 2015d). The ministers' request to SIG to settle their bills was first denied by state bureaucrats, noting that the amount far exceeded the ministers' monthly housing allowance of SBD 15,000 (SIBC 2015d). However, a Cabinet decision not much later, reported on July 24, rejected the administration's stance and, according to the *Solomon Star* (2015b), the bills have been paid by the Solomon Islands state.

A discussion of this incident on FSII indicates Solomon Islanders' disillusionment with such special treatment of MPs and the privileges they enjoy. The initial post quotes an *Island Sun* article from 17 July 2015. In this article the Special Secretary to the Prime Minister (SSPM) denies the existence of the bill saying it was "invented" while explaining that "Members of Parliament need decent accommodation to discharge their consistent ministerial responsibilities." This very sentence caught the attention of the majority of the 50 respondents to this particular FSII thread on the scandal. Respondents exclaim, among others,

Comment: Heritage Park is not 'reasonable' accommodation... It is the epitome of the hotels in Honiara. You better teach those ignorant MPs of yours what 'reasonable' means (17 July 2015).

Comment: What ministerial responsibilities require a decent accommodation in order to discharge your duties effectively? Most public servants work in harsh conditions where the environment is not conducive and yet they still discharge their duties effectively and efficiently. The SSPM statement is senseless and clearly show a man who wants to protect the skins of the 3MP (17 July 2015).

Comment: ...Like stay *lo* [in an] expensive hotel for what.... *Stap lo* [stay in] any lodge or motel if you *garem* [have] heart for *kandere* [country] or better yet stay in the house you lived in before you got elected (18 July 2015).

This perceived *gavman* inability or unwillingness to bring about equal economic and infrastructural development has cultivated some of the resentment felt by Solomon Islanders towards the centralized state. It is further complemented by ongoing fiscal mismanagement and foreign dependencies and a continuing exclusion of Solomon Islanders from more equal participation in and ownership of economic production.

Fiscal Uncertainties, Corruption and Foreign Influence

Solomon Islanders' exclusion from control over economic production is exemplified by the palm oil joint-venture Solomon Islands Plantations Limited (SIPL) on Guadalcanal that became defunct in 1999 as one of the companies targeted by militants during the Tensions, because of the continued local exploitation that it represented (Kabutaulaka 2001). First established in 1971, only two per cent of SIPL was owned by so-called customary landowners, while the national government owned 30 per cent and the British-based Commonwealth Development Corporation owned the remaining 68 per cent. The provincial government had no stake in SIPL (Kabutaulaka 2001; Moore 2004:73-75). At the same time SIPL appeared to be nearly indispensable for Solomon Islands national economy. In 1999 it was responsible for about 20 per cent of Solomon Islands' GDP (Moore 2004:74).

The case of SIPL is exemplary for the economic and fiscal uncertainties experienced by the independent Solomon Islands state. For employment, tax revenue and economic growth, Solomon Islands remains dependent on natural resource exploitation, in particular the palm oil, logging, mining and fishing industries. In 2013, logging made up nearly 50 per cent of the value of all export commodities (UN Data 2013), yet current outputs are unsustainable in the long and, increasingly, the shorter term (SIG 2015). For instance, the SIG 2015 Budget Paper notes that, while

... logging sector output in 2014 (around 2.14 million m³) turned out to be stronger than expected, reflecting high rates of re-entry logging and strong international demand [and while] the sector contributed ¾ percentage point to overall GDP growth ... this rate of logging is not sustainable and the level of output is projected to

stabilise and then decline over the next decade. As a result, the sector is not expected to contribute to economic growth in 2015 or across the medium term (although production could remain at high levels for the near term) (3).

In addition, Kabutaulaka (2006) notes that these commodities are particularly vulnerable to global market fluctuations and are closely intertwined with and dependent on foreign capital, especially from Southeast and East Asia. Extended and continuing research on the logging industry has also found it to be representative of the place of corruption in Solomon Islands politics, as well as of the weak enforcement capacities of existing (but often limited) rules and regulations (Allen 2011; Bennett 2000; Frazer 1997; Kabutaulaka 2005b, 2006).

Allen (2011:292) suggests that SIG tax exemption policies and knowledge of ineffective control and enforcement mechanisms have encouraged logging companies to actively pursue tax avoidance strategies to maximize their profits. For example, a special 2005 audit report by Solomon Islands Auditor-General shows that SIG lost SBD 39,908,862.00 worth in tax revenue in 2003-2004 because of special exemptions for logging companies. In addition, SBD 4,173,910.00 worth of royalties for landowners had been withheld and SBD 1,458,000.00 had, in one way or another, been misappropriated as unauthorized allowances (Auditor-General 2005a). Moreover, Frazer (1997) highlights how foreign companies have been skilled at manipulating legislation as well as the muddy waters of customary, communal landownership, which comprises around 87 per cent of Solomon Islands land. From a legal perspective, concrete guidelines for defining and identifying customary landownership have not (yet) been established and misuse of this uncertainty has flourished.

The stakes are high, especially so as current legislation requires direct negotiations between customary landowners/local communities and foreign business interests. Communities of predominantly self-provisioning farmers meet multinational corporations in a process that Hviding describes as “compressed globalization,” compressed because “the density, in space and time, of these local-global connections is striking” (2003:542). Rural Solomon Islanders have encountered and engaged with, among others, multinational logging, fishing and mining companies, conservationists, tourists; and “very much happened very quickly, activating wide-ranging global connections and systems; yet with surprisingly few participants on the ground” (542).

Within this context internal conflicts have been reported as being on the rise. Exemplary for local struggles with this compressed globalization are the logging conflicts in Birao Ward, Guadalcanal. Wairiu and Nanau (2011) highlight the violence experienced in the communities involved and between different interest groups, clans, youth and elders; and they emphasize gaps in knowledge about the legal processes that especially opponents to logging could rely on to at least attempt to prevent undesired exploitation of their land. At the same time, as Frazer (1997) suggests, it is only too common for foreign logging companies to continue resource extraction even in the unlikely case that permits would be withdrawn. For example, according to a June 2016 *Solomon Star* report, an Asian logging company had set up their equipment in West Guadalcanal on April 29, 2016, two days after Solomon Islands High Court issued an order banning the company from entering the area and from carrying out logging activities (Sanga 2016). A landowner cited in the same article notes that, so far, the police or the Ministry of Forestry have been unable to stop the company which is said to have not only set up camp but also started building a wharf and a one and a half kilometer long road inland (Sanga 2016).

These companies are further said to have contributed to the establishment of a “new business climate... the generous use of bribes and inducements by company representatives to gain the support of resource owners, local community leaders, and, most critical of all, politicians and other national leaders” (Frazer 1997:56). Kabutaulaka (2005b) suggests that political elites have readily exploited this climate to serve their own interests. Specifically, he indicates that political elites have started their own logging companies and granted themselves tax exemptions. Political elites are also said to have presented themselves as landowners to foreign companies often circumventing and excluding resident communities and clans from the decision-making process (Kabutaulaka 2005b). In this vein, in June 2015, Transparency International’s Solomon Islands chapter (TSI) called for the removal of Forestry Minister Bodo Dettke for granting an agro-forestry exemption permit to Solomon Resources Management Ltd. The permit allows for the clearing of land without having to obtain a logging license. Until 2014, Bodo Dettke served as director of the Solomon Resources Management Ltd. and it was only in January 2015 when he sold his shares of the company to his sister and after he had been appointed Forestry Minister (Radio New Zealand 2015).

On a most fundamental level, little appears to have changed with or despite the RAMSI intervention, at least in terms of Solomon Islanders' access to the means of economic production, more equitable country-wide development and foreign dependencies as described in the following. RAMSI's second priority area, after establishing law and order, was to improve fiscal management mechanisms and to crack down on corruption. However, in Haque's words and as suggested in my description above, "the overall structure of the economy has changed very little... the Solomon Islands economy remains centred on logging and the Honiara-based public sector" (2013:18), and on foreign investments and aid.

Aid Dependencies and their Hidden Costs

Figure 6: Sign indicating funds from AusAID and the Asian Development Bank were used for improvements to the road infrastructure of White River, Honiara, February 2015



A comprehensive analysis of the impact of aid on Solomon Islands and its hidden costs goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, it is crucial to briefly sketch aspects of Solomon Islands integration into the global-economic system through relationships with donor countries, and most specifically in recognition of the dependency that this system fosters. According to Haque, in Solomon Islands "aid continues to support basic service delivery, spur significant employment and economic activity, and finance a large current account deficit; [and] international technical assistance continues to play a vital role in providing many of the state

functions on which the private sector relies” (2013:18-19). Since 2003 Australia not only spent over USD 2.6 billion on RAMSI, carrying 95 per cent of its overall costs, but Australian aid expenditure to Solomon Islands also increased by 604 per cent between 2002 and 2012, from USD 58.27 to USD 410.31 per capita (Hayward-Jones 2014:7). In Solomon Islands aid are equivalent to 34 per cent of GDP (Haque, Knight and Jayasuriya 2012:14); and in terms of aid to gross national income (GNI), between 2009 and 2011, Solomon Islands was the second most aid dependent country in the world, up from a 35th place between 2000 and 2002 (Pryke 2013).

More concretely, during my fieldwork barely any construction site did not feature a sign similar to the one depicted in figure 6 that indicates contributions from donor agencies to any infrastructural improvements being made. Exemplary for the scale of donor involvement in infrastructural development are two major projects funded by the Japanese government. In 2010/2011 Japan funded the renovation and construction of the wharf in Auki—during my fieldwork the only transportation infrastructure connecting North Malaita with Honiara—covering all necessary costs of approximately USD 10.5 million (Embassy of Solomon Islands in Taiwan 2010); and in 2013 Japan agreed to sponsor construction of a 200-metre wharf in Honiara for a total of USD 26 million (Radio New Zealand 2013). More broadly, in the 2014 fiscal year the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) spent a total of JPY 1,125 million (USD 10,734,750.00) on projects in Solomon Islands including, among others, improvements to radio broadcasting networks, disaster emergency response, and a collaboration with Honiara City to improve waste disposal mechanisms (JICA 2015:29, 30, 119).

Aid dependencies have also influenced Solomon Islands integration and participation in regional and broader international organizations.⁴⁴ This integration is, according to Corbett and

⁴⁴ According to Corbett and Connell (2015:440) Solomon Islands is a member of the following International Organizations: the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States, the Asian Development Bank, the Alliance of Small Island States, the Commonwealth, the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (candidate country), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN; the Group of 77 at the UN, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the International Development Association, the International Finance Corporation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Labor Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the International Maritime Organisation, the International Olympic Committee, the International Organisation for Standardisation, the International Telecommunication Union, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the United Nations, the UN Conference on Trade and Development,

Connell (2015), cutting further into the already severely limited financial resources of small islands states such as Solomon Islands. Not even accounting for the costs of international travel to allow government officials to participate in core meetings, small islands state are said to frequently simply struggle to pay for annual membership fees or the costs of diplomatic missions in comparatively expensive locations such as London (UK). In addition, Corbett and Connell (2015) argue that because of the complexities of the contemporary global governance system, commonly the most skilled policy makers and bureaucrats assume the available permanent positions in international organizations rather than dedicating themselves to domestic affairs. Moreover, with limited financial means available only few permanent positions can be afforded requiring ministers and high level bureaucrats to frequently travel abroad to attend relevant meetings. As a result these domestic state representatives are often unable to fulfil their roles at home for prolonged periods of time.

While further research is needed to comprehensively address the questions of why Solomon Islands participation in international organizations and how this impacts the domestic commitments of the state, Corbett and Connell's (2015) findings suggest that Pacific Islands states perceive such participation as necessary for multiple reasons. Among others, representatives of Pacific Islands states are said to be well aware of the challenges climate change poses to them, and that their interests may not be heard if they do not actively pursue them themselves in international forums. At the same time, more significantly in the context of this thesis, Corbett and Connell (2015) link participation in these international organizations to aid dependencies. Small islands states are said to depend on funding from these organizations and are required to lobby for further financial support during respective meetings.

Moreover, countries such as Israel or Taiwan are said to have been pushing small states to join international organizations to support their sponsors' respective agendas. Indeed, both Israel and Taiwan are actively involved in development projects in Solomon Islands with Taiwan being particularly influential. Solomon Islands formally recognizes Taiwan as the legal representative of China and Solomon Islands has lobbied in the United Nations, among others in

the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation, the Universal Postal Union, the World Customs Organisation, the World Health Organisation, the World Meteorological Organisation and the World Trade Organisation. In 2015 Solomon Islands further submitted an application to join the International Criminal Police Organisation .

direct reference to Taiwan's commitment to development assistance. For example, in an address to the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare expressed his support for

... [reconsidering] the exclusion of the Republic of China from the United Nations... Taiwan has continued to share its development experiences with the wider international community when given the opportunity. Its continuing assistance during humanitarian crises also deserves full commendation. Solomon Islands appeal for Taiwan's representation and participation in the United Nations system is premised on the principles of justice, dignity and the right of the people of Taiwan to be heard and represented in the international arena and for them to be able to enjoy the same benefits that the rest of us enjoy (Sogavare 2001).

Within this context Bennett suggests that, "in order to hold Solomons' vote for its status as the Republic of China in the international arena, [Taiwan] seems bent on underwriting any scheme, no matter how questionable to preserve a semblance of government" (2002:10). Concretely, Taiwan has been the primary external funder and supporter of the controversial Constituency Development Funds (CDFs), which were first introduced in the 1990s. These funds allow Members of Parliament to fund small projects in their constituencies and, importantly, to do so at their discretion. "MP allocations from the development and recurrent budgets amount to some SBD426m, equivalent to just over 12 per cent of total budgeted expenditure for 2015, or SBD8.5m (USD1m) per MP" (Batley 2015:1), with SBD 70 million of the total funds being provided by Taiwan.

Baskin and Mezey (2014) observe that in theory (and at times in practice) CDFs allow for fiscal decentralization that is able to bring basic services to rural communities faster than centrally administered development projects. However, CDFs also harbour significant potential for mismanagement and corruption. To counteract misspending of funds, Baskin and Mezey (2014) argue that strong regulatory, especially transparency and accountability mechanisms are indispensable. These mechanisms are nearly absent in Solomon Islands and CDFs have been identified as a core contributor to the continued significance if not strengthening of what has commonly been identified as a type of patron-client relationships between MPs and their electorate (Batley 2015; Bennett 2002:9; Cox 2009; Hameiri 2007).

“Unbounded Politics”

Patron-client relationships have grown within and been nurtured by what Steeves’ (1996, 2011) termed “unbounded politics.” According to Steeves, Solomon Islands single-member constituency, first-past-the-post plurality system “has generated a form of politics featuring weak political parties and a large number of independent candidates contesting for power in a deeply divided, clan-based Melanesian society” (2011:344). In this vein, Wood (2014) suggests that voters rarely vote along party lines but they vote for the candidate they believe to be most likely to provide them with the desired resources or, as I propose in chapter 5 (and 7), *any* resource—if they are elected—because of a lack of trust in the state-based political process and leaders. According to Wood (2014), desire for “material help” trumps any other allegiances. If a candidate belongs to the same clan or the same church but is not believed to be the most likely candidate to offer material aid, Solomon Islanders are said to be unlikely to vote for them (Wood 2014).

Research on Solomon Islands electoral politics and Westminster system suggests that this system favours and is fed by political leaders who are “unbounded” or free from party platforms (Alasia 1997; Steeves 1996, 2011; Wood 2014). Historically, Solomon Islands has had a high turn around rate for politicians which indicates not only voters’ dependence on their MPs but also the extent to which MPs are dependent on voters. If elected MPs cannot deliver to their voters, they are frequently not re-elected—between 1980 and 2010, 47 per cent of sitting MPs were voted out of office (Wood 2015a:156). To increase their chances for re-election within this context Steeves argues that MPs focus predominantly on “securing cabinet appointments, senior posts in the state-owned enterprises and appointments to government boards and commissions” (2011:344; also 1996; Wood 2015a). “Grasshopping”—unregulated movement between parties, in as far as they exist, and between opposition and government positions—is frequent and a continued source of political instability.

Given that Independents usually form a significant presence in a newly elected parliament, party strength is very fragile. Of necessity, the ‘big men’ of politics must craft coalitions that cut across party lines and embrace Independents sufficient to gain the support of at least 26 MPs [in a parliament of only 50 MPs, and currently 26 ministries]. The challenge for a newly elected PM is to distribute cabinet portfolios shrewdly to balance island representation and to assure key supporters, usually other ‘big men,’ that they receive substantial portfolios. Only by rewarding ‘big men’ with prestigious, high

status portfolios will a new PM be able to hold his coalition together. The departure of a ‘big man’ early in a new administration can be fatal. Such a development can lead to rapid fracturing in the governing coalition and its displacement by a rival grouping (Steeves 2011:346).

This instability is exemplified in the near collapse of the Democratic Coalition for Change Government (DCC Government) which was formed after the 2014 National Election and faced a no confidence vote against the Prime Minister, Manasseh Sogavare in the fall of 2015. On October 21, seven Ministers including the Minister for Agriculture and Livestock, Augustine Auga, and MP for Lau/Mbaelelea resigned from their portfolios and crossed the floor with six backbenchers. They explained that they would be calling for a no confidence vote (Solomon Star 2015d). On October 23 the *Solomon Star* reported that three “hotel camps” had formed in an attempt to build a new majority to challenge the DCC Government. In addition, first ministers who had been reported to have resigned dismissed these reports as rumours (Solomon Star 2015e). On October 28, ten new ministers were sworn in and the DCC Government claimed to have the support of 31 members, including seven former opposition MPs (Solomon Star 2015f). On October 30, the motion of no confidence was withdrawn by the Opposition Leader (SIBC 2015f). The DCC Government remains in power but its membership has been recognizably reshuffled in this demonstration of Solomon Islands “unbounded politics.”

Notably, these events follow the first election held under the Political Parties Integrity Act 2014 which was meant to stabilize parliamentary politics by more strongly encouraging the formation of political parties; and they provide further evidence for Wood’s (2015a) and Fraenkel’s (2014) argumentation that the Act has largely failed. Solomon Islands politics remain “unbounded” and the Westminster-system remains challenged by a type of patron-client relationship wherein both patrons and clients are vulnerable and simultaneously jockeying for the desired goods and to remain in power. As suggested by Steeves (1996) and Hameiri (2007), patronage networks are not stable, alliances shift quickly, and patrons are easily abandoned if they fail to provide the promised perks.

Hameiri (2007) suggests that Solomon Islands history of internal state-based patron-client relationships is not necessarily—as for example portrayed by Australian government officials

and RAMSI—a negative one. Instead Hameiri argues that historically, since independence, patron-client relationships are the only “[alternative] for sustaining political power” (2007:423), and that this system includes incentives for political leaders to adequately serve their clients because of their own vulnerability within this system of “unbounded politics.” However, Hameiri (2007:433) also argues that because of growing wealth disparities, this system of patron vulnerability is increasingly collapsing and with it clients’ abilities to hold their patron-politicians accountable. This collapse is said to have, among others, been aided by RAMSI pro-market governance reforms, increasing foreign aid and the interests of the Asian business community. For example, the Constituency Development Fund system provides incumbent MPs with an advantage over other candidates (Wood 2015a:156-157). In response these other candidates, to be able to cater to voters’ demands, often turn to the logging or other industries to obtain the funds necessary to potentially win the campaign. A new cycle of largely foreign dependency and continued economic exploitation begins.

The Alternatives: Church and Kastom Leaders

Solomon Islanders’ resentment towards the independent Solomon Islands state has also been fueled by its apparent reluctance to integrate alternative—more legitimate—governance and leadership structures in the governance system, specifically by creating official high-ranking positions for chiefs and church leaders. In reflecting on the Tensions, Kwa’ioloa (Kwa’ioloa and Burt 2007) emphasizes the role played by elected government officials and other representatives of the state in facilitating and prolonging the conflict. He asks why and how the political elite is expected to bring peace if they are more interested in the benefits a victory may bring to them as individuals, and not to Malaitans, Guale or Solomon Islanders at large. Kwa’ioloa insists that autochthonous values, specifically a commitment to a redistributive system of wealth, rather than one that focuses on personal gains, need to be reintroduced into the governance system. “We have been drifting backwards as money destroys the conscience of the people and blinds them to the value of co-operation and exchange, and we believe that the country will not have any success until both the government and the chiefs contribute to government policies and strategies” (126).

The role of autochthonous principles and leadership, specifically of chiefs, in formal state-based governance systems has remained contentious since Maasina Rule and with

independence. Occasional attempts were made to strengthen autochthonous leaders in the state, for example in 1985 when the Local Courts Act granted chiefs the power to act as magistrates in land disputes; however, chiefs have remained marginal in formal, national level institutions. White (1997) suggests that this is not only because of state reluctance but also, if not primarily, because autochthonous leadership as “both personal and variable” (248) is difficult to fix in the objectifying language of the state. “Chiefship is better regarded as an adaptable model and set of practices than as an objective position with a fixed set of rights and duties” (247). In today’s Solomon Islands, chiefs are then argued to constitute leaders who represent autochthonous values, as also described by Kwa’ioloa, and whose primary responsibility is located in attempts to integrate into governance “practices regarded as old, local, and indigenous as opposed to the new, foreign, and introduced” (White 1997:251). In other words, with or without formalized roles for chiefs, what both White (1997) and Kwa’ioloa and Burt (2007) suggest is that Solomon Islanders resent the centralized state system for its relative power vis-à-vis communities. The state and its representatives are felt to govern without regard for the values that individual communities espouse, now especially including a “Christianized” *kastom*.

As I discuss in chapter 2 and in greater detail in chapter 8, throughout the twentieth century the role of Christian churches in communities has grown. Christian churches have become the focal point of village life, organization and leadership structures. While the state has often remained at a distance, Christian churches have presented themselves as potentially alternative structures to the state (though with considerably local variation). For example, Hviding (2011) notes that, in Western Solomon Islands, the Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) supplanted the Solomon Islands state during (and after) the Tensions to provide social services and stabilize economic production and development. The CFC has “[fused] old-style Methodist doctrines with ancestor worship, traditional chiefly hierarchy, modern corporate business ventures and agendas of rural development that aim for independence from both government and NGOs” (53); and, by so doing, the CFC is said to have been able to harness the benefits of logging for its local communities. The CFC not only succeeded at negotiating a favourable contract with the Malaysian company Golden Springs International, but they also managed the revenue in a way that encouraged further economic development on the ground and a diversification of the economy at large (Hviding 2005).

According to McDougall (2003), the United Church Women's Fellowship (UCWF) in Ranongga, Solomon Islands, has been similarly exemplary in its ability to unite women across Solomon Islands and beyond, and by doing so, to supplement, and at times challenge, what may elsewhere constitute the realm of the state. Most broadly McDougall suggests that "Christianity offered new kinds of opportunities both for local collective action and for making productive connections with the outside world" (66). In a similar vein, Douglas (2007) notes that churches assume comparable roles across Melanesia. They step in when state services fail or are inadequate, they have been actively engaged (and frequently effective) in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts during and after violent conflict such as the Tensions, they are at the root of women's empowerment (as also demonstrated by McDougall 2003) and, more broadly, they are argued to constitute the only source of reliable institutional structures, particularly in rural areas.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the complexities of Solomon Islands position within the global political-economic system, specifically Solomon Islands dependence on external actors, states and foreign business interests. In comparison to Solomon Islands experience with colonial administration introduced in chapter 2, independence changed or improved state-based governance but little; rather, independent statehood seems to have introduced new forms of corruption and global dependencies. Solomon Islands remain dependent on foreign aid and foreign investment. The means of economic production are firmly in foreign hands and inequalities have become further pronounced, especially alongside the development of a class-based system of social stratification as introduced in chapter 1, urbanization and corruption fueled by profitable but unsustainable natural resource extraction.

Within this context Solomon Islands is felt to have been spoiled. Only a select few Solomon Islanders, members of *gavman*, are perceived to be benefiting from the centralized state and from the externally-sponsored development projects that are linked to it. At the same time, *gavman* representatives are seen as unable or, worse, unwilling to implement necessary reforms and projects for more equal development, which also recognizes localized values and *kastom* within a context of historically situated micronationalisms or island identities. Christian churches

in their place-specific and denominationally-informed iterations and entanglements with autochthonous values, on the other hand, appear to be more firmly embedded in villages and are seen as possible alternatives to the state. In the following chapters I discuss each of these issues in more detail. First, however, I introduce my primary fieldsite, Gwou'ulu Village, in chapter 4.

4 ♦ Introducing Gwou'ulu: The Village and its (State) Infrastructures

Introduction

This chapter introduces Gwou'ulu, the village (map 6), its residents and its immediate environment (maps 4 and 5) as the primary site of my field research. As outlined in my introduction, I provide a general overview over the village and its residents, from basic survey data to land use regulations and gender relationships. “Thinking infrastructurally” (Chu 2014:353) I also describe the availabilities of some of the primary materialities or political technologies of (attempted) state control. These materialities include roads and other grids, social services and public administrative facilities as much as the presence (or absence) of state-issued currency and Gwou'ulu's broader integration in the global, state-mediated, capitalist economy. This chapter thus sets the scene for a subsequent analysis in chapters 5 and 6 of infrastructure-mediated state-citizen relations in the context of Gwou'ulu. I outline Gwou'ulu as residential space, and situate it within the particular environmental and political geographies of Solomon Islands' state materialities. This description is necessarily only cursory to provide the broader contextual framework within the particularities of my primary fieldsite for a more thorough analysis in subsequent chapters.

The Village: An Overview

Located on the far end of a small peninsula on the mainland of Malaita and at the north western tip of the Lau Lagoon in North Malaita, Gwou'ulu is one of the larger villages along the coastline with Takwa (map 4) and Suava (map 5) being the next villages with comparable numbers of residents. In 2014, Gwou'ulu had a total population, on average, of about 250 adults and 170 children, with between 40 and 45 regularly occupied houses. Gwou'ulu village community also included the residents of three hamlets within a three kilometer radius with 15 to 25 adults and children each.

Gwou'ulu experiences high fluctuations in the number of residents, which is akin to that of other rural settlements on Malaita (see Frazer 1981, 1985). About 60 per cent of men between the age of 18 and 45 who are raised (and married) in Gwou'ulu, spent most but not all of their time in Honiara and, to a lesser extent, in the provincial capital Auki, as workers for the tuna cannery in Noro, Western Province, or employed on fishing vessels. Prolonged absences are also not uncommon for many of Gwou'ulu's unmarried young women (aged 18 to 25), who are regularly based in town as house girls for salaried relatives or, less frequently, working as shopkeepers for one of the many stores operated by Chinese families in town.

Figure 7: An average house in Gwou'ulu; most houses were built from sago palm leaves and elevated on wooden (rarely concrete) piles; few had timber walling such as the house in the background, Gwou'ulu, November 2014



Depending on employment opportunities and the willingness of often second generation urbanite relatives to host them or, simply personal preference, these men and to a lesser degree women moved frequently between the village and town (see also Chapman 1976, 1992; Frazer 1981). Some had been away from the village for several years while others were circulating between the village and town on an annual basis spending about half a year in Honiara and half a year in Gwou'ulu. However, the men and women from Gwou'ulu with some higher education

often did not have houses in the village but were fully⁴⁵ resident in town. As previously noted, urban areas provided access to relevant employment opportunities, as well as the lifestyles that it afforded, from night clubs to advanced medical facilities, to everyday amenities such as a flushing toilet or private shower.

With many husbands and fathers in town, only a few remained in the village in their traditional roles as fishermen and to a lesser degree small-scale farmers—most gardens were tended by women—at least for prolonged periods of time. The majority of Gwou’ulu’s permanent residents were, therefore, elderly or wives, mothers and their children (on average between three and ten). Several households also included the children of relatives from other villages or even from urban areas to allow them to attend Gwou’ulu primary school. School fees were considerably higher in town and some villages (especially those further inland or on the islands) required long commutes for children by foot or dugout canoe if they were unable to stay with relatives closer to school grounds.

Because of the school, the village was also home to three teachers, including the headmaster, and their families, who were not from Gwou’ulu and who lived in dedicated teachers’ housing for the time of their appointment. The Anglican village priest and his family were from the southern Lau Lagoon and were only based in the village until the time the decision is made to transfer the priest to a different parish. All other villagers were raised in in Gwou’ulu or, in the case of most women, were married to a Gwou’ulu man. In addition, few men were living in Gwou’ulu because their wives had been raised in the village. Residency outside of a township or one’s home village or that of one’s spouse was not commonly allowed by village communities. Requests to settle in villages with distant clan affiliations often through a female

⁴⁵ Urbanites often considered their rural home villages as “home” and return was always a possibility (see Berg 2000). This is reflected in Michael Kwa’ioloa’s biographical account of life in town which resonates with the attitudes expressed by many of Gwou’ulu’s more or less permanent urbanites that I had the opportunity to meet. Kwai’oloa notes that life in town “doesn’t mean we lose our families at home. We have to go back to claim our original home, where we can return to permanently to live in the future. Even if we die in Honiara, there are our children. We have to maintain our connections with our ‘brothers’ at home so that even if my son arrives they will say, ‘Oh, it’s Lawrence Laugere, he’s the firstborn son of Kwa’ioloa and when Kwa’ioloa died he became senior of our land’” (Kwa’ioloa and Burt 2012:135-136).

line were associated with conflict, or some other perceived “need” to move (see also Burt 1994a:28).

Notably, founded as a Christian settlement, Gwou’ulu had no immediate “material” history of ancestor worship and all accompanying religious ritual practices (see Maranda 2010), including rules for village spatial organization (see Kōngās Maranda 1974:181-186). There had never been a *maanabeu* (men’s seclusion area) or a *maanabisi* (women’s seclusion area) that was restricted to the village’s women and men. During my fieldwork, only access to bathroom areas (which were in ancestral villages in their respective gender seclusion areas) were exclusively for men or women respectively. However, these restrictions cannot be compared to the *maanabeu* and *maanabisi* of ancestral villages. Bathrooms—mangrove swamps—were solely used for urination/defecation. They did not contain any of the ritually-significant structures that were found in pre-Christian seclusion areas, e.g., in the women’s case, birthing and menstrual huts, or in the men’s case, ancestral shrines.

Due to the absence of ancestral shrines also no pigs had been sacrificed by an ancestral priest within Gwou’ulu’s village boundaries since the village was first founded. This is significant insofar as the sacrificing of pigs was the ceremonial heart of the ancestral religion. For example, priests would burn offerings of a pig to ancestral spirits on behalf of sick villagers, or pigs were sacrificed to “purge a man who has killed a near relative” (Ivens 1930:152). According to Ivens (1930) and reaffirmed by my local respondents, the priestly sacrificing of pigs was indispensable to maintain positive relations with one’s ancestors. This absence of ancestral shrines and of a history of pig sacrifices in Gwou’ulu indicates the extent to which Gwou’ulu villagers’ relationship with their ancestors has been permanently disentangled in Christian conversion, a process which I discuss in more detail in chapter 8.

The village had, from its conception, been organized along Christian principles. The Anglican Church was the primary place for worship rather than ancestral alters in the *maanabeu*. The village had a Christian cemetery instead of the clan-specific “skull pits” in a *maanabeu*, and residential houses for each nuclear family. In ancestral villages, a man slept primarily in a men’s house and only occasionally joined his wife in the family’s residential unit in the village’s “neutral area” (*fera*) where both men and women were allowed to enter (Kōngās Maranda 1974:182-183).

“Owning” the Land, Working the Land

The right to settle in Gwou’ulu, or any village in the Lau Lagoon, was tied to a right to build a house—divided into a residential and a kitchen unit—and to a right of access to enough garden land to supply the family’s self-provisioning needs. As elsewhere on Malaita (Burt 1994a; Burt and Kwa’ioloa 1992; Guo 2011; Keesing 1982:10; Ross 1973), these usufructuary rights were not equivalent to ownership of land, which is more accurately understood as leadership of land, but they were also not mere favours by “land-leaders” that could be taken away (see also Hobbis 2016). Also as elsewhere on Malaita (Burt and Kwa’ioloa 1992; Guo 2011; Ross 1973), landownership was communal and tied to clan membership, which was determined by birth and inherited through the male line (for Lau, see also Kōngās Maranda 1974).

Figure 8: A Gwou’ulu garden plot with kumara as primary crop, November 2014



Land and sea ownership or usage rights were in Gwou’ulu (as elsewhere on Malaita), “the foundation of [villagers’] whole way of life” (Burt 1994a:23) as natural resource base but also inscribed with ancestral histories and relationships (for governance of sea rights see Akimichi 1991). Land and sea provided historically and in 2014 the material means for everyday survival through elaborate fishing practices and slash-and-burn horticulture. Because of Gwou’ulu’s proximity to the sea and a particularly sandy soil, for most villagers gardening was restricted to the starchy root crops kumara (*Ipomoea batatas*) and cassava (*Manihot esculenta*). Only a few plots allowed for growing lesser yam (*Dioscorea esculenta*), common taro

(*Colocasia esculenta*), swamp taro (*Cyrtosperma merkusii*), and vegetables such as eggplant (*Solanum melongena*), chili peppers (*Capiscum frutescens*), snake gourd (*Trichosanthes cucumerina* var. *anguina*) and slippery cabbage (*Abelmoschus manihot*). Yam (*Dioscorea alata*) and giant taro (*Alocasia macrorrhizos*) were not planted.

In this context, gardening was, historically and at the time of my fieldwork, only supplementary to fishing practices such as netfishing and night diving (with harpoons) within and beyond the boundaries of the lagoon itself.⁴⁶ Any catch that exceeded the immediate needs of an extended family was traded at local markets for cash or directly for vegetables, other starchy root crops and, when in season, the widely popular *ngali* nut (*Canarium indicum* L) (see also Akimichi 1991; Maranda 1969, 2002, 2008). Trading partners were commonly from neighbouring inland villages and hamlets of Baelelea and Baegu.

Figure 9: Men returning from net fishing inside the lagoon, Gwou’ulu, June 2014



Local flora and fauna were also significant for satisfying everyday housing needs—houses were commonly made out of sago-palm leaves (*Metroxylon sagu*)—and the production of the most basic tool for fishing, the dugout canoe. Both were in crisis in 2014, according to my local respondents, because a growing population, paired with some small-scale logging, had

⁴⁶ See Akimichi (1978) for a comprehensive overview over Lau fishing practices.

reduced the necessary tree stocks beyond sustainable levels. Only coconuts grew in abundance as part of a plantation that was largely defunct because of low world market prices for copra.

In Gwou'ulu land leadership, or within a state-centric framework "land ownership," was contested at the time of our fieldwork with each of the seven clans represented by male lines in the village laying some claim to owning Gwou'ulu land. A large development project in Suava Bay promised "riches" to landowners while possibly further restricting access to garden and residential land to residents with cognatic ties (more on this in chapter 6). This contestation was embedded not only in development desires but also in a long history of land disputes that is in various ways entangled with, among others, rapid population growth, disagreements about chronologies of land-leadership transfers in the past as well as a history of migration towards and the founding of coastal villages such as Gwou'ulu throughout the twentieth century (see also Frazer 1973; Hogbin 1939).

As briefly indicated in chapter 2, Christianization encouraged, and from a Lau/Malaitan perspective necessitated the establishment of new settlements. This was especially the case because Christian converts often chose not to follow ancestral rules that were at the heart of communal living in ancestral villages and to escape from violent reprisals from their ancestral relatives. These "refugees" commonly settled in close proximity to colonial protection, along the coastline and in vicinity to settlements that were open or at least not openly hostile towards their arrival. Located between the ancestral lands of three clans Gwou'ulu was one of these new Christian villages. Specifically, Gwou'ulu was founded by Lau Christian converts and mission teachers rather than by foreign missionaries as a refuge for other Lau Christian converts, e.g., from the island of Ferasubua in the southern Lau Lagoon.

Based on the multiple narratives that I collected, each situated within contemporary land disputes, I was, however, unable to reliably determine the exact year Gwou'ulu was founded—likely between 1900 and 1910. Disagreements about whose Christian ancestor founded the village and when were frequently used to establish particular landownership claims, while competing with the claims by the three clans with ancestral villages in the neighbourhood. The four clans without ancestral lands through male lines around Gwou'ulu explained that the land had been irreversibly "gifted" to them. The gift of land was traced to Christian clans' connections to local clans through female lines and also said to be rooted in decisions by

previous local clan leaders to have allowed Christians to settle “permanently” and with “full ownership rights” within the borders of today’s Gwou’ulu, the village centre and its garden and sea lands. In comparison the three clans with ancestral lands surrounding Gwou’ulu insisted that all or some of Gwou’ulu land was theirs based on their knowledge of ancestral lands, the histories inscribed in these lands, genealogies and burial places, and lengths of residence in or rather around Gwou’ulu. All three clans had their respective *maanabeu* in the immediate neighbourhood within an approximately three kilometer radius. The closest of them continued to be “taboo” (*abu*), including for the respective clan’s now predominantly Christian men. At the time of our fieldwork, efforts were underway to “cleanse” through special prayers by the Anglican priest and thus make accessible some of the remaining taboo areas. However, because of continued disagreements and, at times, conflict about these cleansing practices, none was performed in 2014.

As elsewhere on Malaita (Burt 1994b; Burt and Kwa’ioloa 1992; Frazer 1973; Ross 1973), claims to land leadership are rooted in oral histories, and most specifically in knowledge of the chronology and ancestors involved in settling and working on a given piece of land (and sea). Especially usufructory rights to land but also leadership of land could be transferred for various reasons, as compensation or reward for murder as well as, among others, through conquest, as a gift (e.g. to Christian refugees), or in exchange for a large amount of red shell money. For instance, I recorded a claim to land leadership that the respective clan traced to payment of 100 red shell money as part of a bridewealth exchange. Perhaps on the extreme end of this flexible transfer is a story recorded by Burt in Kwara’ae that traces transfer of land leadership to an old man asking a young boy to scratch his back “so that he could give him a piece of land in return” (1994b:323).

Within this context it is unlikely that land disputes would not occur on a regular basis. At the same time, based on the ethnographic record for Lau, it is difficult to assert to what extent such disputes have decreased, remained the same, or increased in response to the transformations that occurred during the Christianization and colonization of Lau. However, in the recollection of my local respondents disputes were said to have been on the rise and this increase was traced to two primary (but not sole) causes: (1) development desires that have been fuelled by a kind of moral decay that is said to have led to individuals, individual families, or individual clans

prioritizing their own immediate selfish interests over those of the village community at large; and (2) population pressures that notably decreased the amount of available garden land and therefore the foundation for village lifestyles. My local respondents' observations, in particular in regards to population pressures, reinforce Frazer's (1973) observations in the neighbouring To'abaita in the late 1960s/ early 1970s. Resonating with Gwou'ulu narratives Frazer suggests that "disputes have become more frequent and the opposing claimants more aggressive and bitter" (16). More concisely, he argues that up until around his fieldwork enough land was available to accommodate newcomers and a growing population, however, "this period is now almost over and there is much more concern with people's rights relative to other persons" (15).

I discuss development desires (or needs) in chapter 6 and elaborate further on these population pressures later in this chapter, first it is, however, necessary to develop a better understanding of two additional dominant organizing principles of life in Gwou'ulu, Christianity and gender relations,

Church Routines

Everyday life in the village was centred on small-scale gardening and fishing as well as Christian worship. In 2014, Gwou'ulu, along with the island of Sulufou, was one of the largest Anglican parishes in Lau Lagoon, which was otherwise dominated by Seventh Day Adventists in the south and Roman Catholics in the north, especially in Takwa and Tauba/Uru'uru. At the same time, Gwou'ulu was home to a Pentecostal Christian movement, Kingdom Harvest, which had built a church directly outside the immediate boundaries of the village. Six of Gwou'ulu families were members of the Kingdom Harvest Church during my fieldwork. Gwou'ulu was also home to two families who had converted to Jehovah's Witnesses. Jehovah's Witnesses had built a church between Gwou'ulu and the neighbouring Mana'abu, but it was located far outside both village boundaries (about 25 minutes by foot) and several Gwou'ulu residents expressed their discontent with the encroachment of Jehovah's Witnesses in the area. I discuss this denominational fragmentation in some more detail in chapter 8, for now I focus my description on the dominant denomination, the Anglican Church of Melanesia.

Figure 10: A baptism in Gwou’ulu following Anglican ritual, November 2014



Since the arrival of the “new” Anglican parish priest in 2010—he was, as previously noted, from a village in the southern Lau Lagoon—Gwou’ulu had daily evening church services (two to three hours at a time) and at least two weekly early morning services, one specifically for Gwou’ulu men and one for the women. Preparations for these services took up much of villagers’ free time (time not invested in gardening, fishing, microeconomic or childrearing activities). For example, the Anglican youth group—members were confirmed, unmarried Anglican youth—organized evening services for Thursday’s and the Sunday school program for unconfirmed children. The members of the Mother’s Union (nearly every adult, married, Anglican woman in Gwou’ulu) prepared the evening services and volunteered their garden labour for elderly community members throughout the day each Tuesday. Wednesday was often ecumenical services celebrated with members of the Kingdom Harvest Church, while Sunday was reserved for the Eucharist and generally kept as a day of rest (including from cooking), making Saturday’s particularly busy days.

Many villagers agreed and the village priest emphasized that church activities were at the centre of village life. They were not merely opportunities for Christian worship; they were also regularly used for what might be called public service announcements. Especially village elders

would give short speeches at the beginning or towards the end of a service to remind villagers of village “bylaws,” from women’s dress codes—women were required to wear skirts or had to pay a fine of SBD 10—to the ban on open consumption of alcohol that had been in effect since 2010. In addition, Church services were, according to the village priest, simply a way to keep villagers busy. They were held in evenings and early mornings when little “useful” work could be done—gardening was done during the day and fishing popularly late at night (for the fish to be sold fresh at a market the next morning). “Before 2010,” a common point of comparison in village narratives, evenings were said to have often been used for drinking and loud parties which frequently ended in conflict such as brawls or “sinful” pre- or extra-material sexual relations. My local respondents noted that the post-2010 increase of church services, the need for villagers to organize most of them themselves, and the simultaneous expansion of soccer-based activities for youth have contributed significantly to village harmony.

The Anglican Church was also at the heart of most exceptional events in Gwou’ulu, specifically the organization of feasts and dances, for Christmas or Saint’s Day, but also (at least indirectly) for the coordination of 2014 campaign events and the elections themselves. For instance, the village priest banned all “work” on Election Day (19 November 2014), from doing laundry to tending to one’s gardens, and the church organized the communal labour that went into the construction of the *luma baita*, the “big house,” in which polling took place. In addition, the church organized community work days every Wednesday (with some flexibility) to tend to the immediate infrastructural needs of the village, from maintaining the water supply to the rebuilding an elderly villager’s kitchen that had been destroyed during a storm.

Church leaders were essentially the village leaders. Barely any significant decision made in the village, such as the building of the *luma baita*, was left to non-Church leaders, from village and clan chiefs to the elected village chairman (more on these positions in chapter 7). Instead, secular and often clan-based leaders were integrated into church committees where they coordinated with but at times simply followed the village priests’ recommendations. The village priest assumed a central position in Gwou’ulu daily affairs. He was not only a spiritual leader but also a healer or, more adequately, a kind of exorcist. As previously noted, in ancestral villages ancestral priests had been consulted to sacrifice pigs to heal ill villagers. During my fieldwork, villagers consulted the Anglican priest instead. The priest would pray with the ill person and

complete a series of ritual acts that commonly involved Holy Water⁴⁷ and various prayers, and that were intended to chase away the spirits that were believed to be causing the illness.

In addition, the Anglican priest was consulted as “peacemaker” in cases of conflict within or between village clans. Even though clan-based chiefs were usually asked first to mediate tensions e.g., because of adultery, conflict resolution generally included a prayer, preferably led by the village priest. The goal was to achieve reconciliation between the conflicting parties, and in the eyes of God. This being said, the leadership of the village priest was limited to village-centric decisions. Any event that specifically concerned Gwou’ulu engagement with the state and global capital was beyond his immediate purview but, as I argue in chapter 7, also beyond that of other village-based leaders.

Gendered Labour and Politics

In addition to church activities, the rules that regulated the relationships between men and women were among the most significant organizing principles for village life. The division between men and women that had characterized pre-Christian Lau had been transformed and by no means disappeared in response to Christian conversion (see Hobbis 2016). Because these transformations are only marginally relevant for this thesis, I do not discuss them here in detail. However, what is significant to note is that at the time of my fieldwork village and state-level politics as well as participation in the formal and informal economy were highly gendered. Reflecting the findings of official Millennium Development Goals progress report by Strategic Asia (2010) commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme, women in and from Gwou’ulu were underrepresented in the labour market and in political leadership positions.

While men were primarily responsible for “waged” labour outside the village, the earning of cash in town, and as described in chapter 2, historically on plantations, women were responsible for the family’s everyday needs in the village and surrounding gardens. Gwou’ulu women ensured everyday survival, including the “cash” needed for occasional mundane purchases of processed goods such as rice or soap. In the village, women also reared their family’s pigs which continued to be an important source of wealth. In 2014 a pig could be used

⁴⁷ I was not allowed to attend any of these ritual exorcisms; the priest and villagers were reluctant to describe them to me in more detail so. Hence, I am only able to provide a vague description.

to pay compensation, as part of marriage rituals and exchange, or a grown pig could be sold for SBD 2000-3000. In addition, women were often involved in micro-economic activities such as the sale of baked goods or tobacco. Men’s wages, on the other hand, were envisioned to allow for upgrades to residential housing, from a new solar unit to a corrugated iron roof, the payment of secondary school fees (women often paid fees for primary school), and any other significant consumption of foreign, manufactured goods from second hand clothing to steel tools for garden work.

Figure 11: Unmarried women preparing *koa*⁴⁸ for a Sunday meal, Gwou’ulu, September 2014



It was not uncommon for women to complain that these wages were only too often diverted towards their husband’s urban lifestyles, specifically for beer or other women, rather than brought back to the village and their families. While even non-salaried men including *Masta Liu* had (some) choice to enjoy the luxuries of town and were often able to “relax” during times in the village; women worked in gardens nearly daily (except Sundays), for food or firewood, and they were responsible for selling any caught fish at markets, which were at least between two and four hours away from Gwou’ulu by dugout canoe (one way). Even many of the men

⁴⁸ Mangrove fruit (*Bruguiera gymnorrhiza*)

primarily based in the village were considerably less involved in fulfilling self-provisioning needs than their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. In several families, men went fishing only about once or twice a week and only occasionally tended to their family's gardens; though men were solely responsible for construction and maintenance of houses.

Men were, as I describe in more detail in chapter 7, nearly exclusively recognized as “leaders” in the village and solely responsible for conflict resolution and management of everyday village affairs. As I already shortly alluded to in my introduction, women's political voices were often silenced or ignored, e.g. during the campaign for the 2014 national and provincial elections. Husbands expected that their wives followed their electoral choices as well (although women noted that their husbands did not know which boxes they ticked on Election Day). This being said some of my interviews revealed that some men would be willing to accept and even vote for a woman in a leadership position in the state, as MP. However, this admission was, at the time of my fieldwork, merely hypothetical as no women had run for a seat in Lau/Mbaelelea Constituency. Indeed, according to Wood (2015b:533) only 72 women contested in a general election between 1980 and 2013. This number equals 4.1 per cent of all candidates. Only three women have national elections, including one in 2014, and none had been from Lau/Mbaelelea.

Thinking Infrastructurally: Connecting Gwou'ulu

As I noted in my introductory chapter, an analysis of infrastructures as state materialities constitutes one of the focus areas of this thesis. At the heart of such infrastructural analysis lies a discussion of state materialities in their usage patterns or temporalities, when and how they are used and how this temporality influences the visibility of the Solomon Islands state among my local respondents. To do so it is first necessary to develop a better understanding of Gwou'ulu particularities. In other words, a baseline description of existing or non-existing infrastructures is necessary to allow for a more concise analysis of infrastructural temporalities in chapter 5. To this end, I briefly outline in the following, in a snapshot fashion, the infrastructures that connected Gwou'ulu to the state as infrastructure provider but also in the grids that exist (or do not exist) between Gwou'ulu and Honiara, as urban center of the Solomon Islands state.

Specifically, I sketch the availabilities of transportation infrastructures, telecommunication and news media, power and water supply, social services, specifically health and education, public administration and courts and, last but not least, Gwou'ulu's (global) economic integration through a short description of the particularities of villagers' participation in the cash-economy.

Transportation Infrastructures

In the broader context of Solomon Islands and Malaitan villages, Gwou'ulu was well connected to basic road and sea-based transportation infrastructures and, therefore, to urban centres, the capital city of Honiara, as well as the provincial capital Auki. First built by the British colonial administration, the North Road—a mud road except for about a 5km radius around Auki—connected Gwou'ulu to other coastal villages and, more importantly, the northern township of Malu'u and finally to Auki. By flatbed truck Malu'u, could be reached in approximately one hour and Auki in about seven hours. From Auki, villagers were able to continue their journey on one of the regular ferries to Honiara. The inter-island journey took between three and eight hours depending on the ferry chosen and weather conditions. At the time of our fieldwork, no airstrips were functioning in North Malaita. An SDA-operated airstrip at Kwailabesi had been reclaimed by mud and the Malaitan jungle, while a new airstrip on Maana'oba Island was being built but undergoing delays because ownership of the land was disputed. The provincial airport at Auki was also closed indefinitely due to an ongoing land dispute.

Importantly, as of 2012, only about 58 per cent of Solomon Islands rural population had access to some road infrastructure, which were commonly built along the coast (Asian Development Bank 2012). In other words, they were mostly available to those villages and language groups, such as the Lau, who could also resort to sea-based transportation. This was true for Gwou'ulu as well. Gwou'ulu was accessible by sea through dug-out canoes and by fiberglass boats powered by outboard motor engines (OBMs). Around the Northern tip of Malaita an OBM trip to Auki took between three and four hours depending on the power of the available engine and always also weather conditions. Across Suava Bay the journey to Malu'u took about 30 minutes by OBM or two to three hours by dugout canoe. People living in so-called bush villages and hamlets, on the other hand, depended on their ability to walk a considerable distance across unwieldy terrain through deep mud and thick jungle before reaching a road or coastline. Once there, they were required to pay carriage or rental fees to saltwater people—if the

journey was to continue on, especially to townships, educational and health facilities. Gwou'ulu residents did not have to face these most basic challenges. The road, and of course the sea, were there. How and when they were used and the obstacles villagers faced to use them is, however, another story discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Figure 12: A fibreglass 'banana' boat with outboard motor engine at Hatodea Village, March 2014



Telecommunication and News Media

Gwou'ulu was also connected to state-sponsored infrastructural grids through its comparatively good mobile phone coverage. Since 2010, the village was being serviced by a Bmobile-Vodafone tower (Solomon Islands' second telecommunication provider) and, since November 2014, by an OurTelekom tower as well (Solomon Islands' first telecommunication provider). Reception was at times spotty but reliable enough to allow for basic and regular telephonic connections with relatives in town, elsewhere in Solomon Islands or even abroad. Mobile internet connectivity was more limited. The local 2G network was unable to reliably load many of the websites, such as Facebook, that were designed for the faster 3G and 4G networks or wired broadband services available in "more developed" areas including Honiara. At the time of my fieldwork, I was unable to locate any villager who even attempted to connect to the Internet

while in Gwou'ulu though many made use of social networking sites, and especially of Facebook during visits to Auki or Honiara respectively.

Still, mobile phones were prolific and network coverage was more reliable than in neighbouring bush areas, pragmatically, in part because fewer trees were blocking the signal. Villagers were even able to watch the 2014 FIFA World Cup games on mobile phones that had analogue antennas—assuming they were willing (and allowed)⁴⁹ to climb up the mangrove trees that surrounded the women's bathroom area, which was the only spot in the village where the analogue signal could be accessed somewhat reliably. While there were no permanent top-up locations/stores (to purchase credit for mobile phones) in the village, top-up could be arranged through willing relatives in town or through Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries who visited the village every Tuesday and who had obtained a top-up license through Bmobile-Vodafone.

Considerably less reliable in Gwou'ulu, was access to Solomon Islands' news media, in print or by radio. Only in some houses in Gwou'ulu and only irregularly was it possible to receive radio announcements and reports, especially those from SIBC (Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation), the national "public service" broadcaster. The predominant national print news media, the *Solomon Star* and the *Island Sun*, could, on a daily basis, only be accessed in Honiara. On two days of the week the *Solomon Star* was also sold in Auki but supply was so limited (and demand so high) that the copies were usually sold out within one to two hours after they arrived via one of the passenger ferries, the 360 Discovery, from Honiara. The *Malaita Star*, a monthly magazine that was intended for Malaitans and to be sold across Malaita, at least in smaller townships such as Malu'u, was launched in May 2014. However, as of May 2016 only one edition has been published and this first edition had only been available in Auki and Honiara as well. In this context villagers only reliably accessed national media sources when in town, or severely delayed when occasionally old newspaper copies were brought to the village by visiting or returning relatives.

⁴⁹ The willingness of many men to continuously climb these trees and the absence of any clear penalty for doing so, beyond ongoing complaints by Gwou'ulu women, is indicative of the extent to which ancestral taboos as reflected in the village's pre-Christian spatial organization and a male fear of female bodily fluids had disappeared, or at least decreased in significance in view of "new," and in this case entertainment, priorities.

This comparatively limited access to news sources is significant to note in the context of this thesis insofar as it prevents villagers' regular engagement with the Solomon Islands state through the, in urban areas, flourishing fifth estate. As I indicated in chapter 3, social media groups such as Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII) are growing in significance as platform for a nascent civil society movement and discussions about political developments that have even provoked some responses from *gavman* representatives. At the same time Facebook groups actively disseminate and discuss news reports from SIBC, the *Solomon Star* and the *Island Sun* creating a more integrated and interconnected discourse about the Solomon Islands state, its actors and the services it provides (or fails to provide).

However, all this is of little significance for Gwou'ulu villagers. Beyond being unable to effectively understand and communicate in English, the language preferred by FSII and the language of print media such as the *Solomon Star*, Gwou'ulu villagers simply did not have adequate access to the fifth estate. Accordingly fifth estate reports and debates rarely played into villagers' discussions about issues such as corruption among *gavman* representatives or the inadequacies of the educational system. Some news reports, such as the one cited in chapter 2 that suggests a comparative marginality of Lau/Mbaelelea Constituency among Solomon Islands constituencies, were known about by villagers but they were only rarely available to villagers in their original print form. Instead, visitors from town spread information about such articles, or knowledge of them was communicated from town to the village via mobile phones. During my fieldwork I only recorded three instances when copies of newspapers were brought back to the village by returnees or visitors from Honiara, and in all cases these newspapers were only circulated among kin networks rather than being shared with the village at large.

This said, Gwou'ulu did receive a more reliable mobile Internet networks in 2015 increasing villagers' access to and participation in Facebook activities. The extent to which and how this increased access may (or may not) transform villagers' understanding of and engagement with the centralized state constitutes an important venue for future research that builds on the findings presented in this thesis which is essentially situated in a "fifth estate vacuum."

Power

Based on a basic survey of neighbouring villages and conversations about those along the North Road, Gwou'ulu had comparatively good access to non-grid based power. While rural Solomon Islands was off the grid and many villages continued to depend on expensive petrol generators to fulfil basic power needs, Gwou'ulu had a growing and comparatively expansive solar power infrastructure. Around 85 per cent of houses owned solar power units. They ranged from simple 5W units that provided a few hours of light during night, to 120W units which allowed for mobile phones and tablets to be charged, multiple light bulbs to be used throughout the night, the use of small electric fans and the very popular loud speakers, and other smaller gadgets. As a point of comparison, Geoffrey and I had a 40W unit which was sufficient to charge our two laptops and two mobile phones (including one smart phone), to power four LED lights, and to occasionally help charge other villagers' electronic devices, such as a neighbor's portable DVD player. The village did not (yet) have enough power capacities for any cooling (and especially freezing) needs that would allow local fishermen to store their catch for longer periods of time, potentially enabling them to sell the catch at the more profitable markets in Auki and Honiara.

Figure 13: A 120W solar panel (left) and a 20W solar panel (right), Gwou'ulu, November 2014



While flashlights remained a necessity to walk around the village after dark, several sections of the village and especially the village centre were well enough lit to recognize other villagers from afar. Electric solar-powered light could nearly always be accessed if desired, for mortuary rites, a church service, or even a card game. Kerosene lamps, still widely used until 2012, were increasingly uncommon and only relied on as a very last resort. Indeed, I was merely shown some old ones but never witnessed one in use (they were disliked, among others, as additional heat source). If necessary, some households had small lamps that looked like kerosene lamps but that were powered by AA batteries which could be purchased at a small store (canteen) in the village. In addition, Gwou'ulu had one generator. It was owned by the church and used only occasionally to light evening and early morning church services, or to power the village entertainment system during church or school festivals. For church services the generator was usually needed after a week of continuous rain and cloud coverage, which limited but did not prevent the recharging of solar powered batteries.

Water Supply

Access to drinking water was more difficult, but it had become more convenient as well. Over years, several households or family “sections” of the village (4-6 houses), had been able to obtain water tanks and the necessary guttering to collect and store rain water. There were communal church tanks and a large concrete tank built for the Anglican synod in 2011 but, in 2014, it was not operational due to a lack of maintenance—I was assured that it could always be cleaned and fixed up if needed. On average, water tanks filled up with one or two days of continuing rainfall and the supply lasted usually about one week after the last significant rain. The water tanks were primarily used to wash clothing and dishes and for cooking. Since water tanks were said to be frequently infested with worms, drinking water that did not have to be boiled first was commonly obtained at “the water,” a pipe/tap located about 500 meters outside the village and connected to a spring further inland. “The water” was also used for showers (fully clothed; one tap only) and were accordingly busy, especially at times when the water in the tanks had been used up. It was not unusual to wait one’s turn for one hour or longer. If it had not rained for two to three weeks, the water flow slowed down as well.

Figure 14: “The Water”, Gwou’ulu, September 2014



Gwou’ulu shared “the water” with several neighbouring hamlets (between three and six houses) as well as the (Catholic) village of Tara’ana on an artificially enlarged island off the coast of Gwou’ulu. This strained the water supply further. As the pipe was laid above ground damage was also common. Running through the coconut plantation, water flow was often interrupted simply because coconuts fell on the PVC pipe and broke it. Gwou’ulu did, however, have about 100 meters worth of spare piping used to fix broken areas. Alternative water sources existed as well. There was another more reliable pipe—encased in a concrete foundation—in Mana’abu Village, which could be reached in about 45 minutes by foot through connecting garden lands. Also the “old” fresh water source (a spring) could be reached in about 50 minutes by foot. In addition, a river and some smaller wells with brackish water could be used for laundry to compensate for shortages in fresh water sources. Getting water was primarily the task of young, unmarried, engaged or recently married women, who collected water roughly between 9am and 5pm and for men of similar age group and marital status, who could collect water between 5pm and 9am. The rule was instituted by the village and enforced by adult men and women, those married with multiple children, who passed by “the water” on their way to or from their gardens several times during the day.

Villages that were further inland were generally said to have better access to reliable fresh drinking water, due to springs or wells that were located directly in or not far from the settlements. Compared to Gwou'ulu's shifting 40 to 45 houses using one water pipe (excluding the other settlements using the source), the few villages I visited in the neighboring Baelelea and To'abaita bush areas (inland but comparatively close to saltwater villages), often had one pipe for 4-6 houses. Despite this significant discrepancy, based on villagers' assessment, Gwou'ulu had adequate access to reliable fresh water sources. Some of the surrounding villages, such as on the larger neighboring island of Maana'oba, depended on small "unclean" wells with strong algae growth to supplement their water tanks. Drinking water had to be transported by dugout canoe (at least one hour one way). Boiling water before drinking it was common on Maana'oba as well. Hence, residents of Gwou'ulu considered themselves privileged in their access to water in the context of the Lau Lagoon, though many felt disenfranchised in comparison to other mainland settlements.

Social Services: Health and Education

In terms of basic state-sponsored social services (health and education), villagers from Gwou'ulu considered themselves comparatively well-connected. As previously mentioned, Gwou'ulu had a well-established elementary school that even sourced students from urban and rural relatives who had "worse" or more expensive access to primary education. During our fieldwork, several upgrades were completed and the school was in the process of transitioning to a community high school (as of June 2016 this transition has not been completed). All buildings were scheduled to receive a second floor with additional classrooms. New offices for teachers and a library that consisted of a reading and study room were built in 2014. In addition, the school complex included three houses with their own water tank for teachers from outside the village and the headmaster's house has access to a 120W solar system.

Gwou'ulu villagers were proud of their school and, most of all, proud of their headmaster, who had administered and implemented all upgrades since his arrival in 2010. In conversations, villagers emphasized that it was not uncommon for schools to receive funding for such upgrades but considered rare that they were completed successfully and without any significant loss of funds to "corruption."

Villagers were also satisfied with the quality of education their children received at Gwou’ulu Primary School, at least in comparison to other rural elementary schools of which they were aware. Many years, a few sixth graders from Gwou’ulu were accepted into some of the most prestigious secondary schools in the country—National Secondary Schools, as well as private ones, such as the Anglican Selwyn College. In addition, teachers were said to be reliable in their attendance, which was thought to be problematic in the case of other rural primary schools (and which had been a problem in Gwou’ulu before 2010). Schools fees were considered to be viable, again in comparison to, and in consideration of the quality of education received. For example, in 2014, sixth graders were charged SBD 100 per year while some primary schools in town were said to charge over SBD 1000 per student per year. To put this in context a 20kg bag of rice cost SBD 200 at the village-based store.

Villagers were enthusiastic about the possibility of having a secondary school in their village in the near future. In 2014, the closest was on the road and adjoined to Suava and could only be reached by foot in about 45 minutes. Few children from Gwou’ulu attended it, not because of the distance but because it was said to have a weak track record in educational achievement. Children who attended the school were said to be unlikely to pass the exams necessary to continue to the next grade. As the educational system did not allow for grades to be repeated, failing an end-of-year exam automatically meant an end to a child’s secondary education.

Figure 15: Malu’u Hospital, December 2014



There was also no biomedical health centre in Gwou’ulu, but a small clinic was located approximately a 75 minute walk away at Eden (Baelelea). The Area Health Centre/ Hospital in the township of Malu’u (To’abaita) could be reached in 30 minutes by OBM, or in two to three hours by dug-out canoe. The proximity of Malu’u hospital was significant, especially insofar as OBMs allowed patients to be brought there without having to walk themselves or without having to be carried. The health facilities in Malu’u included a family planning centre, a maternity ward and general practitioners, a pharmacy, and a malaria lab. At times a dentist was available as well. His schedule was usually announced by a local radio station that did not, however, have a strong enough signal to reach Gwou’ulu. In 2014, Malu’u was, furthermore, approved to receive a surgical ward but the project was put on hold after the Solomon Islands Electricity Agency (SIEA) announced plans to cease its operation in Malu’u, the only area in North Malaita connected to an electric grid. High operational costs and frequent “non-payment” of services were officially noted as explanations for the discontinuation of SIEA operations.⁵⁰

Public Administration and Courts

The closest police station, which had four police officers, was also in Malu’u, as were some very limited public administrative facilities, specifically the education authority of North Malaita. All other public administrative facilities and a larger contingent of police officers were located in Auki or Honiara respectively. Any significant state-issued document, if it needed, had to be obtained in Honiara. This included police certificates, which were frequently requested by employers and were also necessary for annual enrollment in the Honiara-based Solomon Islands National University (SINU). Passports, to the best of villagers’ knowledge, could only be applied for in Honiara, and the same was true for driver’s licenses. Additionally notable is that the payment system for state services was in transition during our fieldwork, toward a more computerized e-government system. At least in the transition phase this further centralized the public administrative process. For example, a fee that previously could be paid at an office responsible for education services now had to be paid directly at the Ministry of Finance in Honiara because it was the only facility with the necessary electronic equipment. Proof of payment then had to be brought to the respective administrative agency.

⁵⁰ As of January 2016 SIEA power still seems to be available in Malu’u (Matthew Bond, personal communication, 18 January 2016)

In addition, in 2014, the closest (state) court services to Gwou’ulu were located in Auki. A court house still existed in Malu’u but it had been defunct since the Tensions. Indeed, the only government officials in Gwou’ulu were the primary school teachers. There was no set-up in the village that was comparable to a municipal administration. All of Gwou’ulu’ “secular” leaders, such as the elected village chairman, assumed this role independent of the state and without any formal connection to it. Leadership structure in the village, which I discuss in more detail in chapter 7, merely reflected Gwou’ulu self-determined interests and needs, with some inspiration from colonial governance structures, but disconnected from contemporary state governance. In 2014, Lau/Mbaelelea constituency, which Gwou’ulu was part of, did not have a Constituency Development Officer (CDO) based *in* the constituency (as required in the Constituency Development Funds Act 2013) to coordinate funds for development projects. Instead, Gwou’ulu villagers also had to travel to Honiara to this end. The same was true for any court-based mitigation of land disputes which were ultimately decided by the High Court, and to settle divorce cases in which the wife hoped to maintain custody of sons who, following pre-Christian regulations, would stay with a husband if no court order was sought (and at times even with one).

In this context, most conflicts in the village, because of a theft, an extra-marital affair, or an act of illegitimate violence—violence against women was commonly accepted as legitimate especially for “infidelity and ‘disobedience’” (Rasanathan and Bhushan 2011:1)⁵¹—were mediated and resolved through a localized mixed *kastom*-church system (see Allen et al. 2011). Most commonly, both the culprit and victim would turn towards their respective clan leaders (chiefs) and/or to village church leaders, especially the village priest, and state their case. These leaders then negotiated compensation payments that were acceptable to both parties involved, based on their respective deeds. For example, after the theft of a solar unit, chiefs together with village elders decided that the thief had to return the solar power unit and pay SBD 200 in compensation; however, also the theft victims had to pay SBD 200 to the thief for verbally insulting the thief and his family. Conflicts were only resolved once compensation had been paid and if the amount paid was acceptable to all parties involved.

⁵¹ “73 per cent of men and 73 per cent of women believe violence against women is justifiable” (Rasanathan and Bhushan 2011:1) while, according to a 2009 *Solomon Islands Family Health Safety Study*, 64 per cent of women aged 15-49 who have been in a relationship report having experienced physical or sexual partner violence (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2009:3).

Economic Integration

In terms of broader economic integration, Gwou'ulu was, at least in comparison to the other villages that I visited in North Malaita, well-connected in the amount of cash (state currency) that circulated through the village and in the availability of out-of-village products that could be purchased. This is especially notable since no major development project or other direct engagement with global capital, for example through large logging ventures, was operational in Gwou'ulu in 2014. As already mentioned earlier even the village's coconut plantation was only used sporadically to produce copra. The only regular "businesses" in Gwou'ulu were two small stores (canteens) with business licenses from the Provincial Government.

Figure 16: An average selection of goods offered at larger village canteens in North Malaita, February 2016; photo taken by Matthew Bond⁵²



Owned by long-term residents, canteens provided access to basic processed foods and goods that required no refrigeration, such as rice (up to 20kg), canned tuna, sardines and meat, as

⁵² Photo used with permission

well as toiletries, from medical soap to hairbands, basic fishing gear and at times even Panadol, a broad-spectrum pain reliever. The larger of the two canteens sold petrol and kerosene (stored in oil drums) to power OBMs or the village generator. Both canteens allowed items to be purchased on credit. The list of creditors, including the amounts owed, was openly displayed. These canteens were exceptional in the immediate neighbourhood in the scope of products sold, and also, so I was told, in their longevity—the requirement to extend credit together with a tendency to “shop along clan lines, ignoring prices of goods” (Meltzoff and LiPuma 1986:56) has often lead to an early demise of village canteens. For instance, Uru’uru and Tauba, adjoined mainland and small island villages, with a large guesthouse that regularly catered to foreign guests, were (together) comparable in services and infrastructure connectivity, but in 2014, they did not have a store that sold bulk rice or even crackers (manufactured in Honiara and popular and affordable in rural areas).

A few households offered occasional, very limited canteen services consisting commonly of three products only: 1kg rice, canned tuna (flaked in water), and instant noodles (Mamei brand). Other products regularly sold/purchased for cash in the village were *dami* (betel nut, fruit leaf, and lime),⁵³ *savusavu* (locally grown tobacco), baked goods (buns and “ring cakes,” a type of fried donut), and popcorn. None of these products could be sourced from the village directly except for the lime which was made using local corals and some of the fruit leaf supply which grew in some of Gwou’ulu gardens. The flour for baked goods or the corn for popcorn had to be purchased at larger stores in Malu’u, Auki or Honiara and on occasion at “travelling canteens” that came to local road and bush markets. Betel nut and *savusavu* were sourced from other parts of Malaita through bush markets located in the Southern Lau Lagoon. They could not be grown in Gwou’ulu’s sandy, dry soil. The canteens regularly chartered flatbed trucks to restock their supplies in Auki from the Chinese stores operating there.

⁵³ More specifically, the Lau term *dami* stands for “the practice of chewing a mixture of *Areca* palm nut, the leaf, stem or catkin of the *Piper betle* plant, and slaked lime usually made from seashells or coral” (Marshall 1987:15). Comparable to other parts of Melanesia, “little formal ritual surrounds its use, it is an everyday substance typically enjoyed by nearly everyone in a community including young children... and it is an essential ingredient in intercourse between both individuals and groups. Sharing betel, like sharing food, signals amity, goodwill, a desire to cooperate” (16, 21).

It was also possible to use state currency to purchase fish and other seafood in the village, as well as chicken and pigs on occasion (depending on an individual owner's willingness to sell them). Usually fish and other seafood were caught to be sold or exchanged with bush people at daily markets (see Maranda 1969, 2002, 2008; Ross 1978). The closest market could be reached in a 90 minute walk or a two hour dug-out canoe ride (one way). Villagers could also pre-order fish and seafood especially sea turtle and clams with some fishermen and the occasional woman, especially shells and octopus that could be caught inside the lagoon.⁵⁴ If aware of a recent catch that was prepared to be sold at markets, someone could also ask to purchase it immediately. This being said, local produce was only occasionally sold in the village and usually only to its salaried residents or the canteen owners who had more reliable access to cash. Exceptions were "significant" events such a wedding. A non-related (non-attending) villager might be asked to provide fish for the event and be paid for it; related villagers and, more broadly, those participating in the event were expected to contribute some food, from gardens or the sea, as part of non-monetary exchange networks.

On the other hand, kumara and cassava, as well as vegetables, were rarely offered for sale in the village. They were usually reserved for personal consumption. Coconuts were so plentiful that they were generally "free" and could be collected as desired. On occasion boys sold green coconuts (they were the ones climbing up the trees to get them) for SBD 0.50. This practice was exceptional and not encouraged unless the money was intended for a particular community-based purpose, for example, to raise funds for the school or for a church activity. A few banana plants grew in the immediate vicinity of Gwou'ulu as well. They were owned by individual families and used for personal consumption only. Fruits were generally difficult to grow and rarely found in the village. The primary exceptions were watermelons due to the relatively close proximity (60 minutes by foot) of an agricultural watermelon farm. During watermelon season, many of Gwou'ulu's residents offered their labour—carrying the watermelons from the farm to ships to be sold at the Central Market in Honiara—in exchange for one watermelon per day. At times these watermelons were sold in the village, especially if several members of one family earned one through their labour. Regular waged labour was not available at the farm.

⁵⁴ This reflects a continuation of pre-Christian practice. While both men and women used to work in gardens (*hara*), only men were allowed to fish in the open ocean (*asi*). The lagoon as *asihara* or "sea garden" was, however, open to women for collecting shellfish (Köngäs Maranda 1974:181).

Beyond these microeconomic activities, access to cash was irregular. Teachers and the Anglican priest were the only salaried personnel in Gwou'ulu and they had to travel to Auki's banks to access their wages. Because of the travelling costs and to avoid "remittance" requests from villagers, they did so infrequently. Malu'u offered limited banking services through in-store banking that was attached to some larger canteens, but the few villagers with a bank account did not use these facilities. A SBD 1000 withdrawal limit for in-store banking barely justified the cost for the trip which was usually done by OBM for around SBD 200-300 in petrol—the same price covered a return trip on flatbed trucks to Auki.

As previously noted, to earn cash more reliably some families sent adult men to Honiara or other "industrial" centres for waged labor, or to sell *dami* in the former. For example, one such vendor told me that after only four to six months of work in Honiara he was able to pay for all of his brothers' secondary school fees and bring some small gifts back home, a mobile phone for his wife or a speaker system. However, on an everyday basis these remittance systems were barely noticed in the village itself. During prolonged absences only occasional perks were sent to the village, from mobile phone credit to a 20kg bag of rice. In one, according to women, exceptional case, a working husband sent back a fiberglass canoe which his wife rented to other villagers for a fee of SBD 20 per day. This was the only non-motorized fiberglass canoe in the village and in high demand as it ran more smoothly; with the non-motorized fiberglass canoe a three hour dug-out canoe trip, to a market, could be cut in half.

There were few additional, opportunistic or context dependent means to obtain cash. A former chief continued to offer his service as mediator, for deciding fair compensation in conflicts, for a fee between SBD 10 and SBD 200 depending on the perceived severity of the case. About once a year, due to family connections with the tourism information desk in Honiara, tourists found their way to Gwou'ulu as well, rather than to the guesthouse in Uru'uru/Tauba. Tourists were charged "ad hoc" (prices were decided on the spot) for accommodation, food and transport, and at times also beach use. Owners of OBMs and captains occasionally asked for cash payments for boat transportation service as well, though demanding rental fees from relatives (and in many cases residents of Gwou'ulu at large) was looked down upon. The neighbouring Mana'abu offered an OBM shuttle service to one of the markets (Tuesdays and Saturdays) for SBD 20 return, but nothing comparable existed in Gwou'ulu. The house we were living in had

been used as a guest house before our arrival, and after our departure. At times and depending on the guest, a rental fee was charged (we paid for an extensive renovation and expansion instead).

Figure 17: Bridewealth payment with red shell money, a crown made of Solomon Islands Dollar, giant swamp taro, turtle, Gwou'ulu, August 2014⁵⁵



Last but not least, Gwou'ulu was connected with the cash economy in adaptations of pre-Christian practice. Depending on individual family decisions, bridewealth could fully or partially consist of Solomon Islands Dollars rather than, or in addition to, the red shell money and dolphin teeth which had been used as “basic exchange media” or “money materials” before but also after the introduction of state-issued currency (Ross 1978:123). Additionally, red shell money and dolphin teeth could be and increasingly had to be purchased with cash. With few exceptions, shell money was no longer made in the Lau Lagoon; instead it had to be acquired from the Langalanga close to Auki who had nearly monopolized shell money production for regional

⁵⁵ The young girl “stood in” for the bride who was confined to bedrest after a difficult birth shortly before the ceremony was scheduled to take place. The girl was the bride’s niece, who her uncle had chosen as replacement because she was “cute.” No symbolism was attributed to her standing in for her aunt; the marriage was considered to be equally valid with or without the bride present. Most significant for the marriage to be considered valid was the groom’s family’s payment of the agreed upon red shell money, cash and cloth to the bride’s family, and in return the bride’s family’s payment of swamp taro, turtles, pigs and other foods to the groom’s family.

circulation (see Guo 2006). Gwou'ulu had also never been among the dolphin hunting Lau villages. As such it had been dependent on obtaining teeth through kin networks and exchange with villagers from the closely related Ferasubua and to a lesser degree Sulufou which had both practiced occasional dolphin hunts since the late 1950s (see Takekawa 2000:4). In 2014, dolphin teeth were said to have become increasingly difficult to find, and they usually cost SBD 2 per piece.

Compensation, as pre-colonial and pre-Christian means for conflict resolution and reconciliation, had equally become monetized, as indicated earlier. While red money (and pigs) remained significant as forms of payment, cash was increasingly requested, as primary or additional means for compensation. This was especially true of smaller disputes, such as a physical confrontation during which no blood was drawn, or of very large ones, especially if they are tied to foreign capital. Exemplary for the latter, though not in Lau, is a Kwaio claim for cash-based compensation from the British Government for the killing of Kwaio men, women and children in the punitive mission following the murder of District Commissioner Bell in 1927 that I briefly mentioned in chapter 2 (Akin 1999).

A Preference for Village Lifestyles

Despite its challenges and shortcomings, as alluded to in my short descriptions of infrastructure availabilities, it is important to note that many Gwou'ulu residents, and also some of the temporary migrants to town, preferred the village lifestyle including its disconnectedness from town and, as I discuss in more depth throughout this thesis, from the Solomon Islands state. Several of my local respondents, young and old, men and women alike, emphasized that they were living in the village rather than in town by choice. Older residents (over the age of 60) stressed that they preferred the village, among others, because they felt they had a voice there. In the village they felt more (though often still not sufficiently) respected for their experience, especially their skills in mat- and basket-weaving and their knowledge of seasonal changes and agricultural techniques. Reflecting Jourdan's (1995) description of generational divides in response to urbanization, many Gwou'ulu elderly felt (even more) unwelcomed in town, like a burden, unheard and disrespected.

Across generations villagers frequently expressed preference for the village lifestyle because of the independence that village life was said to afford. Villagers expressed moral concerns about life in town. Some were suspicious of the urban (sexually promiscuous) “cultural marketplace” (Jourdan 1995:144; 1996) that had emerged. They disliked the demise of their Lau vernacular among urbanites and their children who prioritized Pijin and English (see Jourdan 2007, 2008a), and they resented the felt erosion of kinship ties and networks in response to socioeconomic stratification in town (see Gobermann-Hill 1999).

This said in particular younger generations (twenty to forty-five-year-olds) did not reject the urban lifestyle because of its perceived immorality. They cherished the friends they had made in town, from across Solomon Islands, and many, including women, enjoyed going to night clubs or participating in dance competitions when in town. Marilyn who had spent some of her youth in town fondly recollected her interests in dance competitions during an interview while a male relative, Hubert, who insisted on his presence during the interview, provided a more critical assessment of dance competitions, or more accurately why he thought they were necessary to mediate the immorality of life in town.

Marilyn: When I was small everyone showed me dance movies with my cousins in town. I grew up with them and this is why I like them so much now. I watch *Taking to the Street, Bring it On, Step Up...* In Honiara everyone likes to battle with dance too, like in the movies. I just go for watch. I like it very much. Everywhere in town everyone likes to battle with dance.

Hubert: At the multipurpose hall the entrance fee was SBD 10. People enjoy dance battles very much.

Marilyn: Yes, very much.

Hubert: Everyone agrees to dance battles because it influences young children not to do rubbish things, to address issues that happen in the city... Dance battles are like soccer.

Marilyn: I like dance battles because everyone enjoys them so much, everyone goes crazy for them and tries to dance better than the other. When you show your dance, someone else responds with another new dance.

Hubert: Dance contest is nice to address issues like drinking alcohol like home beer, *kwaso*, and also marijuana. While you train you are busy. Even if you like drinking

beer or so, it is difficult to do. Your captain, who trains everyone, introduces discipline. Sport is nice for this (Interview, 30 October 2014).

This exchange indicates how life in town may be immoral, but it can also be enjoyable and what makes this life enjoyable may even mediate some of the immorality of the urban lifestyle. However, many of Gwou'ulu villagers did not think that what they disliked most about life in Honiara, or Auki—the need to earn cash—could be mediated, e.g., by sports.

Above all, many of Gwou'ulu villagers resented their dependency on money when in town. In the village there was space. Every nuclear household could have its own house and kitchen that would be built communally or at least with the help of relatives. Houses could be built “for free” or more accurately, as part of reciprocal exchange networks that continued to dominate village life. Work in gardens and fishing was tiresome and especially difficult for women during pregnancies or with small children, but they did not rely solely on money to eat. Many had gone hungry in town because they and/or the relatives with whom they were staying had not received their wages or not been able to find employment for the day, week or month. According to a joint SIG-UNDP analysis of Solomon Islands 2005/2006 Household Income and Expenditure Survey villagers' perceptions of higher costs in Honiara are accurate, even when all food is bought.

A low-expenditure Honiara [household] would need to spend almost three times (SBD 446.40) as much as a rural household (SBD 156.17) each week to acquire a basic minimum food intake for all members of the [household]. This takes account of the larger [household] size of Honiara [households] as well as the higher cost of food purchases in Honiara compared to the prices/values of food either produced for home consumption or purchased in rural/provincial markets (2008:23).

Villagers had also been hungry in the village, after cyclones or because frogs had eaten their crops—this happened to our small garden. Nonetheless, work in gardens or fishing activities were described to me, especially during conversations over garden work, as more reliable. Because crops and fish had to be sold first to be turned into cash they could not be “wasted” that easily. Cash for food could always be used to purchase beer or a new mobile phone instead. Because food could become cash when being sold at a local market, it also provided

some access to goods that were otherwise desired or needed, a new kettle to boil water for tea or a new machete to help with the gardens.

The most enthusiastic supporters of the rural lifestyle also emphasized that it was even easier to send their children to primary schools when in the village. School fees were considerably lower in the village than in town, and the necessary cash could usually be obtained through local market activities, through (men's) temporary employment in town, or through remittance payments from other, including relatives who lived more permanently in town.

Life in the village, the space and food that it provided, was also said to make it easier to raise pigs, which, as previously noted, continues to be significant in village relations and reciprocal exchange networks. In the village, pigs were commonly fed with food waste, from kumara peelings to coconut flakes. While dependency on food waste limited how many pigs a family could feed, it also ensured that they could feed some. Keeping pigs was considered to be impossible in town where feed had to be purchased. In Honiara, pig rearing was limited to those with reliable access to "more" cash to purchase not only food for themselves but also for their pigs. Villagers were, however, concerned about the sustainability of the village lifestyle, to a short description of these concerns I turn now.

Population Growth and the Rise of the Food-for-Cash Economy

"Children, there are too many children!" This (paraphrased) observation and often complaint was the primary reason voiced in informal conversations for why even those villagers who preferred village lifestyles desired "economic development" (more in chapter 6) and the change in lifestyle it would likely bring, e.g., a stronger dependence on earning cash for covering everyday needs. Population growth in Solomon Islands and Malaita has been rapid. Based on census data from 1970 to 2009 (SIG 2011), Malaita's population increased by 166 per cent during this period with an annual growth rate of 4.25 per cent. At the same time, Solomon Islands population grew by 220 per cent with an annual growth rate of 5.6 per cent. This growth slowed between the 1999 and the 2009 census but remains significant. Malaita's population grew by 12 per cent over these ten years and Solomon Islands population grew by 26 per cent. In 2009, 40 per cent of all Solomon Islanders were under the age of 15.

In addition, Malaita is Solomon Islands second most densely populated province (after Central Province). This holds especially true for the northern half of the main island which is home to approximately two-thirds of Malaita's population. According to the 2009 census Gwou'ulu belongs to Malaita's most populated ward with 10,070 residents. Overall, the Lau Lagoon was, as of 2009, home to approximately 12,821 Lau speakers (SIG 2011), and this number does not account for urban Lau who, at least theoretically, could chose to return *hom*. This most recent number stands in stark contrast to a census conducted by Pierre Maranda and Elli Köngäs Maranda (1970:832) in January 1967 which identified 5,265 Lau speakers in the Lau Lagoon;⁵⁶ or to William Bell's estimation of between five and six thousand Lau speakers around 1927 (Ivens 1930:50).

Population growth has been identified as one of Solomon Islands most substantial future challenges alongside and directly correlating with urbanization, infrastructural shortcomings, unsustainable economic growth, and dependence on natural resource exploitation (Andersen, Thilsted and Schwarz 2013; McGregor, Fink and Dawson 2016; Rosegrant et al. 2015; SIG 2011; Schwarz et al 2013). Specifically, population growth and the predicted impact of (unmediated) climate change is projected to increase the number of Solomon Islanders at risk of hunger by 45 per cent for the period between 2000 and 2050 (Rosegrant et al 2015:xxvi).

Because of the continued viability of self-provisioning farming and fishing, extreme hunger is not a major concern in Solomon Islands (SIG-UNDP 2008), but population growth has increased pressures on Solomon Islands most prevalent form of agriculture, slash-and-burn, specifically because of an "intensification of cropping, reduced fallow and soil degradation" (Andersen, Thilsted and Schwarz 2013:13). At the same time, sweet potato as the most important crop in terms of calorie provision is expected to be particularly vulnerable to climate change that is likely to bring higher rainfall to Solomon Islands (McGregor, Fink and Dawson 2016:466). Taro and yam production is also predicted to be negatively affected because the hotter, wetter conditions are anticipated to contribute to the spread of plant diseases (466); and McGregor, Fink and Dawson suggests that this shortfall in domestic food production can only be compensated if

⁵⁶ Maranda and Köngäs Maranda (1970) do not provide details on which villages they include in their survey and the numbers may not be directly comparable. However, based on personal correspondence with the late Pierre Maranda, our definitions of areas, villages and hamlets belonging to the Lau Lagoon are similar.

Solomon Islands (and other Melanesian countries) identify means to increase food imports of staples such as rice. However, rice in particular is also expected to experience a sharp increase in price “in the face of decreasing global supply (climate change) and increasing demand (population)” (462).

Simultaneously, population pressures have led to overfishing in Malaita’s coastal areas, including long-term habitat destruction as a result of mangrove clearance and coral reef damage (Schwarz et al 2013:11). Bell et al. (2009:70, table 7) suggest that demand for coastal fisheries resources already exceeded the available resources in 2010, with the gap projected to increase further by 2030. For Solomon Islands, Bell et al. estimated fish production to range between 11,150 and 13,800 tonnes per year. In 2010, the demand was estimated to be around 18,000 and projected in 2030 at around 29,900 tonnes per year.

Gwou’ulu villagers did not know these numbers; though they resonate with their fear and observations. I was told that fallow period for gardens used to be at least two years, with some plots remaining unused for decades. Yet, at the time of my fieldwork, some families had no fallow land at all. “Too many children” was the explanation I usually received as to why the amount of land that they had access too had decreased. Because of overutilization of their garden land, Gwou’ulu villagers were struggling with smaller crop yields.

Only few plots were available, or had become available after a villager’s death. These plots (alongside all others) were managed by individual clans and assigned as needed to newlyweds or returnees from town, e.g., retirees or even young couples who had decided to relocate to the village after perhaps not being able to secure employment in an urban area. These returnees had to belong to one of the clans represented in Gwou’ulu through a male lineage and they had to have previously lived in Gwou’ulu, or at least one of their parents had to have spent a prolonged time in the village. Notably, whenever a “good” plot became available—close to the village and with comparatively fertile soil with few rocks—they were immediately claimed by a family already residing in Gwou’ulu and belonging to the managing clan, at times in exchange for a plot further away from the village and with worse soil conditions.

As already noted in chapter 4, comparable to other coastal villages, Gwou’ulu had never had enough garden land to meet all their needs and villagers depended on trading fish for root

crops with inland populations. However, there was broad consensus that the situation had notably worsened over the last decades, also because of what were reported to be increasingly unpredictable weather patterns such as too much or too little rain and more devastating storms. The few available plots that could be given to urban returnees were far from the village, at least a one hour walk, and others were covered with rocks and comparatively unfertile soil.

The lagoon that immediately surrounded the village had been overfished to such an extent that, with few exceptions, such as the spawning of the grassfish *muu*, fishermen no longer attempted to catch fish in Gwou'ulu's close waters. Conflict surrounding use of available fishing grounds was not uncommon and reported to have been on the rise. The sea and with it fishing grounds were, in terms of usage rights and ownership, treated no differently from land (see Akimichi 1991). Disputes had always existed. However, as fish numbers decreased, these disputes were said to have intensified. Tensions between clans with competing claims were growing. Even though compensation already had to be paid, some Gwou'ulu fishermen used the advantage of the night to impinge on sea grounds surrounding Maana'oba Island, which is said to have still more fish.

In this context, Gwou'ulu villagers had grown more dependent on earning cash to buy food for everyday needs, especially rice, canned tuna and instant noodles. Based on food diaries from 30 households between 7 December 2014 and 28 December 2014, kumara was the primary food source to cover daily needs, and at times the only food eaten. Most families ate two meals a day, breakfast and dinner. Occasionally households had tea (which had to be purchased) and bread (which was usually purchased as well) for lunch, or green coconut as a snack. Sunday meals (including Christmas) were usually cassava pudding (*gara*) and fresh fish that had been prepared in a stone oven (*motu*) over night. This broadly corresponds to Jourdan's (2014) discussion of Solomon Islands foodways, most specifically a perception of raw foods as snacks and not meals, the dominance of roots and tubers for meals (which are cooked) complemented by smaller portions of "wet" and "fatty" foods, green vegetables and coconut milk, or fish respectively.

Most importantly, accounting for "special meals" on Christmas Day as well as the arrival of urban relatives who often brought processed foods, non-local foods were consumed by all households at least every second day, with five families eating processed foods, especially rice,

daily. Fresh fish was eaten, on average, two days a week, canned tuna on about two. The diaries reflect no notable difference between families with more regular income (teachers) and those who were only involved in some micro-economic activities. In other words, while Jourdan suggests that “in the early 1970s rice was already part of the diets of villagers, *when* they could afford to purchase it” (2010:268; my emphasis), by 2014 many families had no other option but to eat rice even when living in the village and therefore had to find the money necessary to buy it. Just like the Honiara residents that Jourdan describes, villagers “[ate] rice because they had no choice—price and accessibility drive their food choices” (2010:266). Rice was cheaper than buying kumara at local markets. It was even cheaper than exchanging fish for kumara if it was available.

Summary

To sum up, in 2014, the state, represented in infrastructural connections, remained at a distance from Gwou’ulu. Beyond the road, there were no grid-based infrastructures until Malu’u, and more reliably, Auki and then Honiara. The same to varying degrees was true of secondary schooling, medical facilities, the administrative branches of the state, and dependable access to print-, online- and to some extent radio-based news media and discussions. This being said, Gwou’ulu was, through the North Road and sea-based transportation, comparatively well-connected to Honiara and Auki and with it also to the state authorities, from courts to banking facilities that could (only) be found there. In addition, a moderately high circulation of cash in the village, based on a mixed microeconomic, remittance and exchange economy, provided the financial means to increase villagers’ access to transportation and subsequently town.

Gwou’ulu villagers did not necessarily resent this distance from town, or their village lifestyle. On the contrary, several villagers highlighted that they preferred the comparative independence from the cash economy that life in the village provided; and some were also wary about the perceived immorality of life in a town. However, a rapidly increasing population and growing pressures on their garden land and fishing grounds has increased dependence on imported, processed foods to meet everyday food needs. In the near future this dependence on imported food is expected to grow not only because of population pressures but also because of

climate change. Climate change has been predicted to negatively impact the yields of sweet potato, yam and taro in particular while increasing the prices of imported foods, specifically rice. In response, villagers' dependence on cash and the cash economy continues to rise and is likely to further accelerate.

What the above description of Gwou'ulu, the village, its infrastructural (state) connections and growing dependencies on the food-for-cash economy does not indicate, are villagers' attitudes towards and everyday decisions to engage or not engage with state materialities. The questions of why, when and how the state materialities were used is explored in the following chapters. Specifically, chapter 5 addresses usage patterns and attitudes towards grid infrastructures and social services and chapter 6 towards economic development.

5 ♦ Everyday Encounters: The Temporality of State Infrastructures

Prelude: Campaign Dreams and Disillusionment

During the campaign for the 2014 national election, nearly all candidates for the Malaitan constituency of Lau/Mbaelelea rallied their audiences around promises for improved infrastructures, social service deliveries and economic development in a corruption-free environment. Some promised to lead their constituents out of “36 years of slavery like Moses,” with slavery being defined as the hard work without reward that they claimed had defined post-independence Solomon Islands; and another candidate was described to me as “the same as John the Baptist, preparing the world for the moment, salvation is now” (Interview, 31 October 2014).

As in parts reflected in Dr. Lee’s campaign poster (figure 18), candidates contended—and villagers agreed—that this transformation or “salvation” was only possible if voters did not seek immediate returns, for example, a bag of rice for their vote. Instead villagers were asked to, and expressed a desire to seek lasting change and thereby independence from urban, salaried kin as well as from their Members of Parliament who were frequently asked to cover outstanding school fees or to provide shelter and food during constituents’ visits to Honiara.

Voters were encouraged to imagine a future for their children that was one of prosperity and self-reliance, and of participation in the global economy that was no longer mediated, controlled and manipulated by external forces, especially by Asian businessmen. Candidates promised that, with good leaders such as the candidates, this vision could become reality. They would use their power as MP to overcome rural isolation from the fruits of the urban—cash generating activities, consumer goods and improved access to utilities, health and especially post-secondary education—without taking away the land rights and moral autonomy of village communities.

Figure 18: A campaign poster hung outside of a canteen in Gwou’ulu for the 2014 elections; the candidate was not elected while the winner of the election was the only candidate without a poster in Gwou’ulu, November 2014

VOTE DR. LEE

DR. JUDSON LEE LEAFASIA  

GODLY LEADERSHIP = NO CORRUPTION

EXPERIENCE



DR. JUDSON LEE LEAFASIA



PROTECTION

SYMBOL – UMBRELLA

“YOUR VOTE – OUR FUTURE”

“RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTS A NATION BUT SIN IS A DISGRACE TO ANY PEOPLE.”
PROVERBS 14:34.

HOW TO VOTE HONESTLY AND WISELY!

“Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.”
Exodus 23:8. Deut. 16:19.

If you vote because you have been given assistance, promised money or goods and services, you are corrupted by Bribery and Treating (*National Parliament Electoral Provisions Act, Section 71 and 72*).
Bribery is Corruption and a sin against God and against the Law of Solomon Islands.
Corrupt people are under a curse and no development will succeed under their leadership!
“Cursed is the man who accepts a bribe.....” Deut. 27:25

God save us from corruption and bless Lau and Mbaelelea, Malaita and Solomon Islands because of your wisdom, integrity and honesty in wisely voting your next Member of Parliament, Dr. Lee!
Your wisdom in voting Dr. Lee will establish a new leadership trend in Lau Mbaelelea to stop corruption and establish development planning, monitoring and implementation of strategies to build a strong and brighter future for Lau and Mbaelelea and Solomon Islands.

YOUR VOTE FOR DR. LEE WILL CHANGE OUR FUTURE FOR THE BETTER!

Gwou'ulu was buzzing. In conversations and during campaign events, most agreed that, without substantial change, they would never be able to leave their metaphorical Egypt behind. As I outlined in chapter 3, villagers felt that, especially in response to a rapidly growing population, their global dependencies were likely to increase. Only with infrastructure development and improved social services villagers believed they would be able to become autonomous participants in the global economy, for their children.

However, as much as many villagers expressed this hope for development and corruption-free leadership, and saw it reflected in campaign promises, they were reluctant to believe that this vision for the future could become reality. Skepticism abounded. Could any of the candidates be trusted to bring about the change that villagers were hoping for? Did individual candidates truly espouse the corruption-free environment that they promised, during campaign events and on their posters? Villagers reminded each other that, often enough, elected MPs disappeared to Honiara once they took office, not to return to their constituency until the next campaign. Only those villagers who could afford to travel to Honiara would be able to demand promised services from their MP; even then, villagers considered it unlikely that promises would be fulfilled.

While future promises may not be kept, a bag of rice given today could not be returned. People circulated stories about infrastructure projects won and (potentially) lost. Some worried they would have to return the solar power units they received as known supporters from the incumbent MP through his Constituency Development Fund. Others told how, in a different constituency, a disgruntled former MP had sent his supporters to destroy the water pipes that had been installed during his tenure. Others pointed to Lau/Asifola, the neighbouring constituency, in which some were said to have already received fibreglass canoes for their support of one of the candidates. Surely, some villagers explained, Gwou'ulu had already lost out by not demanding more gifts from their candidates from the beginning. As the campaign was progressing and the time to make use of campaign perks was running short, many villagers grew increasingly reluctant to give up this seemingly unique opportunity of the campaign. After all, they had only a faint hope that a candidate might win who actually intends to and is eventually able to keep his promise of more equal development of infrastructures and social services for the constituency as a whole, rather than only for some of the MP's supporters.

The fear of losing even the few perks that supporting the “right” candidate, the one who would eventually be elected, could bring, encouraged many to seek immediate returns instead. Most villagers joined one or sometimes two camps or groups that formed around particular candidates. They opted to participate in the bartering for votes. Fulfillment of community-wide projects such as road maintenance and upgrades, or improvements to the village water source were, especially as the campaign was coming to an end, perhaps after all too much to hope for. Instead, several groups in Gwou’ulu followed the example of Lau/Asifola Constituency. They tried to convince their candidate to provide village supporters—not the village as a whole—with fibreglass canoes, preferably before Election Day. Many considered canoes to be core infrastructure developments. Most markets, as primary sources of cash income, could most easily and were most frequently accessed by sea. Fibreglass canoes even without outboard motors were more efficient than dugouts; with fibreglass, the duration of a canoe trip could be nearly cut in half.

Despite this agreement about what kind of leader villagers were looking and hoping for, there was plenty of disagreement about who, among the eleven candidates running in the constituency, was the most likely to fulfil any of his promises. None of the candidates was from Gwou’ulu, and all candidates had spent significant amount of time in Honiara and therefore away from “home.” Two candidates had close relatives in Gwou’ulu. One of them was believed to have “no chance” of winning and even his closest relatives decided to vote for someone else instead. The other was able to gain a following in Gwou’ulu among clan members, but only to some degree as an elder from the same clan was endorsing and campaigning for a different candidate. The village was divided, not along any discernible factors such as age, clan, level of education or gender but pragmatically based on how likely individual villagers thought the candidate was going to win and going to keep his promises, preferably to the community at large but at least to them, his supporters. Walter, a villager in his mid-30s, explained this fracturing based on previous failures to bring about change with a unified vote:

[At the last campaign event a village elder] said that we have to work together, everyone must vote for the same candidate, no separating, not everyone should go for another [candidate]. But that we have already done. When the community agreed to vote for one man, it was still the same, there was no change. This is why now everyone looks for themselves (Interview, 4 November 2014).

After the election, once the results had been announced, the vast majority of Gwou'ulu was in mourning. The candidate with the least amount of support in the village had won. He had campaigned in the village but had not even bothered distributing one of his campaign posters as had all other candidates. Also, the new MP had only very few and distant relatives in Gwou'ulu, and those relatives had actively campaigned for other candidates. The hope and excitement of the campaign and the possibilities that came with picking the "right" candidate had turned into resignation. Many villagers were convinced that the next four years would bring little positive change, some contended for the constituency at large under the new MP. For instance, Andrew was worried about the development plans of the newly elected MP.

[We need to] create jobs for all the university students from Lau/Mbaelelea. I do not think he [the newly elected MP] knows how to do it because he is not well-educated too. He says he will help with farming, but if we all farm, who will pay for it? He says nothing about building a better market (Interview, 24 November 2014).

Others were concerned about Gwou'ulu in particular. Because of the lack of support from Gwou'ulu for this candidate many of my local respondents believed that funds for new infrastructure and for maintenance projects would quite likely not be allocated to them. Gwou'ulu villagers worried about the possibility that they might not even receive smaller perks, such as help with school fees. Christopher explained that "the money that is available to the MP for sharing does not fit Lau/Mbaelelea. This is why corruption happens... with bad leadership it continues. The basket is emptied quickly [for supporters] and then there is no other basket for those behind [like Gwou'ulu]" (Interview, 24 November 2014).

Introduction

This ethnographic snapshot and the electoral behaviour that it describes reflect observations by Cox (2009) and Wood (2013, 2014, 2016) with regard to Solomon Islanders' electoral choices. Wood describes these choices as being trapped in a "vicious cycle of local voting (2013:1); "even though voters may want to live in a better governed state where public goods and services are well provided, unless they can rely on a significant share of their compatriots voting in search

of this shared objective, individual voters are better off voting instead for localized benefits” (2014:224).

Along the same lines, Cox (2009) highlights how this “local voting” nurtures a form of patron-client relationships especially because rural Solomon Islanders have had little experience with reliable state infrastructures such as health, education and transportation beyond what MPs offer to their “clients.” Therefore, Cox suggests, Solomon Islanders have not (yet) been able to develop any “ethos of citizenship” (965) that could demand more from the state than it has provided so far. Solomon Islanders have had no reason to develop a sense of entitlement or trust in the state, its institutions, structures, agents and the ideas it represents. State encounters have merely nurtured a faint hope for the possible, from improved health care to more equal access to the global economy and commodities, but they have not provided enough evidence for the possibility of its attainment.

The goal of this chapter is to develop a better understanding of this lack of basic entitlements—infrastructures, including social services—that I suggest also informed 2014 electoral choices in Gwou’ulu, that despite villagers’ hope for “a leader like Moses” who would break the electoral “corruption cycle,” they continued their reliance on patron-client relationships. To this end, I discuss three case studies which lie at the heart of Gwou’ulu villagers everyday encounters with the state as basic service provider: (1) how daily water and power needs are fulfilled; (2) state-sponsored transportation infrastructures as represented in the North Road; and, (3) villagers’ experiences with public education and public health services. I illuminate the respective presence of these infrastructures, or state materialities, in Gwou’ulu and the ways in which this presence (or absence) affects villagers’ choices on a daily basis, the obstacles they face, and the structures, institutions and agents they turn toward in search of solutions. First, however, I elaborate further on the theoretical framework outlined in my introduction, with a particular emphasis on the temporality of infrastructures as primary tool for state control (Scott 1998) or, according to Cox (2009), as basic requirement for an “ethos of citizenship.”

The Temporality of Infrastructures and Visibility in the State

As noted in my introduction, as “the materiality of the civil link between citizens and the state” (von Schnitzler 2008:901) infrastructures are of particular significance for locating the state in mundane, everyday encounters. As seemingly invisible, “boring things” (Star 1999:337), infrastructures have been identified as among the primary means for state control and state formation because infrastructures are able to disappear in the background of everyday life as part of the “unthinkability” of the state (Scott 1998; Taylor 2015). However, as Larkin (2013) contends, invisibility is only one component of infrastructures “at the extreme edge of a range of visibilities that move from unseen to grand spectacles and everything in between” (336). Infrastructures are not only spatial and material but also temporal and in their temporality or “when,” they become visible to differing degrees at different times (Harvey and Knox 2015; Larkin 2013; Star and Ruhleder 1996; Trovalla and Trovalla 2015).

More concisely, Trovalla and Trovalla (2015) argue that, in their temporalities, their “presence, absence, flows and non-flows” (44), infrastructures offer an entry for analysis because infrastructures serve as means by which citizens are able to infer and come to understand the state of their state and nation. In the particular context of infrastructure availabilities in the Nigerian city of Jos, Trovalla and Trovalla argue that infrastructures reveal “interrupted futures” (48). These “interrupted futures” are rooted in the deterioration of infrastructures that, fueled by the oil boom, were reliable in the 1970s but have suffered from a lack of maintenance and renewal since the oil crisis of the 1980s. In their discussions of everyday infrastructural needs and shortages, especially in comparison to the past, the residents of Jos are discussing the broader needs and shortages of the Nigerian state and nation, internally as well as in reference to the positioning of Nigeria in the global world. In this context Trovalla and Trovalla suggest that infrastructures, with “infra” translating as “underneath” or “hidden,” are better understood as suprastructures, with “supra” translating as “above and visible; transcending the realm of mere utility, signifying the unpredictable and elusive essence of Nigeria” (54).

This argumentation reflects Smith’s suggestion that infrastructures as “multi-user physical networks” (2016:2) are well situated to analyse power relationship and social change. This possibility for analysis is said to be, in particular, located in the temporality and contentious

nature of infrastructural maintenance, “ranging from routine actions... [such as] cleaning out canals to minor and major repairs, refurbishments, upgrades and replacement” (3). As example Smith introduces the controversies surrounding the governance of water systems in New Orleans. She notes how the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 has been blamed on inadequate infrastructures and their maintenance but also on social inequalities, and how both disrepair and social inequalities are intended, but remain contended, in post-Katarina reform plans. More broadly, Smith emphasizes that even in contexts where enough funds are available for infrastructural maintenance controversies surround such projects. These controversies range from disagreements about architectural designs to concerns with the long-term utility of particular infrastructures to discussions about social inequalities that lie, for example, at the heart of gentrification debates.

Notably, in the context of (rural) Solomon Islands and on a most fundamental level, I already implied the significance of infrastructural temporalities in my discussion of the Lau’s historically rooted and changing position in the state (see chapter 2). For example, as passage masters, the Lau were situated at infrastructural knots for the labour trade, well-connected and benefiting from interactions with European traders especially in comparison to their inland neighbours. However, in the transformation of “passages” into colonial administrative centres, the Lau became not only further entangled with the centralized state but the transformation also constituted a rupture, most of all a loss of Lau political autonomy. In other words, historic infrastructural links were transformed alongside Lau autonomy in entanglements with the European state. This being said, growing Lau resistance to the centralized state, as exemplified in their support for Maasina Rule, also indicates that even if state infrastructures become, to a more notable degree, part of everyday life they do not necessitate a more comprehensive embrace of the state idea and practice.

The latter claim, that the presence of state infrastructures does not necessitate an embrace of the state, is further evidenced in Street’s (2014) ethnographic exploration of biomedical practice and its governance in Madang Hospital, Papua New Guinea (PNG). Street argues that PNG’s hospitals have long been central to state-building efforts, as sites of visibility or legibility where the state and the public become intertwined and where the state sets out to create modern citizens by making individual bodies visible in the public service they receive. However, at

Madang Hospital, Street argues that individual patients remain invisible to the state and concretely managerial health staff because diagnostic uncertainties that are fueled by institutional limitations, unreliable technologies and shortages of staff and medication alike make it difficult if not impossible to adequately understand patients' needs. At the same time, health staff and patients are unwilling to bow to the demands of those in power and their neoliberal rationalities. Health staff and patients "*desire to be seen* by others (whether by politicians, medical experts, or foreign scientists" (Street 2014: 224), but they do so only on their own terms. To this end, nurses have unionized and successfully adopted some of the good governance and bureaucratic language spoken by the state. For example, Street describes how the nurses of Madang

...began to clandestinely collect letters, testimonials, and memos from different offices and filing cabinets in the hospital, which they collated into a carefully indexed two-hundred-page document... [that] argued that the CEO displayed 'undemocratic leadership,' 'poor governance,' and 'a lack of transparency' and used precisely these terms, imported from the same management schools in which the CEO had been trained, to argue the point (185).

Yet, Street contends that nurses have not internalized associated practices of (neoliberal) consumption. In this, Street argues the nurses have not embraced the PNG state or the public health infrastructures and services the state provides.

My observations in Gwou'ulu resemble Street's but also complicate and challenge her findings. I find her observations reflected in Gwou'ulu attitudes towards state infrastructures and (social) services, the frustrations, insecurities and hopes she describes, as well as the continued need for local self-reliance and creative solutions to everyday survival. However, spatially removed from central sites of contestations, such as public hospitals, Gwou'ulu villagers' experiences differ, from a state perspective, in their exaggerated marginalization and invisibility. Gwou'ulu and its residents have access to fewer means by which they can attract the gaze of the state—if and when they desire to attract it. Links between everyday life in the village and the managerial state are fragile at best. Gwou'ulu residents are far removed from the institutionalized connection offered to Madang's nurses in collective industrial action and unionization that reflect the extent to which they have themselves become participants, though not faithful followers, of a larger neoliberal framework.

At the same time, and more importantly, unlike Madang's nurses and patients Gwou'ulu villagers do not necessarily desire to be seen by the state, at least not at all times and only as they deem adequate. Despite or perhaps more accurately because villagers felt they had no choice but to embrace patron-client relationships in their electoral choices, Gwou'ulu villagers were unwilling to bow comprehensively to the state and its representatives. Accordingly, in their rural isolation, and in their decisions to stay in the village rather than to migrate to town, the residents of Gwou'ulu enact a form of independence and ownership of the infrastructures, services and resources that surround them. I discuss in more detail below, when and how this independence is enacted, and how it relates to (some) dependencies on the state. Specifically, I situate some of the infrastructural availabilities that I described in chapter 4 in everyday use patterns and their maintenance, to ask not only how they were obtained in the first place, but also how their continuance is afforded (or not) by and through whom. By so doing, I illustrate how different infrastructures and services are, in different ways, creatively adapted and, if possible, circumvented to avoid the state.

Case Study 1: Water, Power and Infrastructural Integration beyond the State

Gwou'ulu everyday encounters with water and electrical power as basic infrastructures are exemplary for villagers' integration in patron-client relationships, but also for villagers' distaste for those relationships within the context of the state. More concretely, my analysis of when and how villagers obtain and maintain access to water-based infrastructures and solar power units reveals a desire for alternatives to the state, in particular because state-provided infrastructures are recognized for being precarious and potentially conflict generating. This is particularly significant as power and water services are desired by all (in comparison to the road that I discuss in my second case study), and any improvements to these services are quickly integrated into everyday routines. "The water" and water tanks are valued as necessities for everyday survival in a context where access to fresh water is not sufficient. For example, because of insufficiencies, many families continue to wash their dishes in the ocean.⁵⁷ Electricity is primarily a means by which houses can be lit during night and without having to add further heat

⁵⁷ Villagers preferred washing their dishes in fresh water, especially if they had cash to buy soap that could be purchased at both of the village canteens.

sources through kerosene lamps or open fires. As power sources become more readily available, electricity is also desired and increasingly used for “non-essential” purposes, from charging mobile phones to the use of loud speakers for smaller (and at times bigger) parties.

State Unpredictability

During campaign events those villagers who had received solar power units through the incumbent MP, specifically through his Constituency Development Fund, were worried that the MP would demand them back should he not be re-elected, and especially if recipients of the units were known not to be supporting him anymore. Frank, a retiree who used to have a full-time job in Honiara, wanted to make sure this would not happen to him. He was worried because many of his family members had been vocal opponents of the incumbent MP and he had publically voiced some critique as well. He had a two-step plan. The night before the election he paddled with his solar power unit to his daughter’s husband’s home and asked them to hide the unit until the results had been announced and, should the incumbent lose, possibly for a while longer until the excitement of the election had blown over. On Election Day, as Frank stepped out of the booth, he looked flustered, announcing loudly enough for many villagers to hear that he had been so confused when filling in the ballot that he had failed to tick any box. His vote would be invalid. He had not supported anyone. Frank felt that being thought to have failed to vote was better than being thought to have voted for the “wrong” candidate. Perhaps the incumbent would be more lenient towards him as “confused voter” rather than as potential supporter of someone else. Perhaps, Frank suggested in a conversation we had about his fears, he could keep the solar power unit after all.

The incumbent lost in a sweeping defeat, and, indeed, it did not take long for some of the now former MP’s supporters to demand, and forcefully remove some of the solar power units that the former MP had distributed to Gwou’ulu villagers. However, in the end, this removal was only temporary. Frank was able to keep his solar power unit, and so were all other villagers who had received one through the former MP. I was told that the former MP himself ordered his supporters to return the solar power units they removed. His explanation: the panels and batteries had been given out through the CDF to aid development and as part of state programs. They were not “his” solar power units and no one was required to return them.

In this apparent contradiction, villagers' distrust in state authorities comes most forcefully across. I contend that the MP's intervention and his insistence on the permanence of these state infrastructures, combined with villagers' conviction that he might easily enough take the solar units back and perhaps he even should, demonstrates the inability of the state to become invisible in everyday routines. Gwou'ulu villagers did not trust the MP and the institutions he represented. Villagers could not recollect that the MP had visited his constituency after the 2010 election and before the 2014 campaign. The now former MP had merely provided basic infrastructures to and through his supporters but had come short of fulfilling his original promise for an improvement (extension) of "the water" to the village core. The former MP's refusal to take back the solar power units he had provided to some villagers during his tenure did not make up for this perceived negligence, especially as he was still felt to be responsible for the actions of his supporters who had initially collected the solar power units.

Beyond the solar units, the water tanks obtained through the MP's Constituency Development Funds were also felt to be precarious and they were least trusted for permanence and general accessibility. Unlike other water tanks, the water tanks sponsored by the MP had locks on them. They were also patrolled by villagers who voted for the MP and who demanded sole usage of the tanks. Although this may seem unfair, even those villagers who had had no access to these tanks generally agree with the measures. The capacity of individual tanks is only enough for around three families, if it is not to be emptied on the same day that extensive rainfall has refilled it. As long as an MP, without or through the CDF, does not provide a sufficient number of tanks for all families in the village, the tanks were justly thought to only be entitlements for those who had supported the MP during the last election and who were, therefore, the "lucky" beneficiaries of the patronage system of the state. However, even the beneficiaries of the water tanks remained cautious about how long they would have access to these tanks. Similar to solar power units, tanks could be demanded back at any time, or such is the common perception. Hence, "entitled" tanks were seen only as temporary luxuries, integrated into everyday life but never taken for granted.

Alternatives to the State

In this context, the integration of water and power infrastructures into daily routines and a longing for more is best understood as having occurred irrespective of and, at times, even despite

the state. Only three water tanks and some of the weaker (10W and 20W) solar power units had been obtained through state channels, specifically through patron-client relationships with their MP. On the other hand, “the water,” as primary water source, and the 120W solar power units, as strongest electricity generators in the village, had not been provided by the state, but by foreign development agencies, according to villagers, “the water” by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the late 2000s, and the 120W solar power units by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), through the Embassy of Japan in Honiara (2012-2013).

The Anglican Church also contributed water tanks that were accessible to the community at large and an extensive solar power unit for the church, as well as a generator. Other tanks and solar power units had been purchased and gifted by relatives with salaried work or successful betelnut sales at markets in town. With the exception of the canteen owners, the priest and, to a lesser degree, the teachers, no one who was predominantly living in the village was able to earn (and save) enough money to purchase tanks or solar power units without external help. Insofar as savings exist at all, they are usually reserved for school fees for, on average, the three to ten children per nuclear family unit, for major events such as marriage, and for compensation payments or contributions to community, clan or church events.

Notably, both solar and water supplies remain insecure in general and beyond their entanglements with state and patron-client relationships. Solar is insecure due to frequent battery failures and the need to obtain the necessary cash to purchase new ones. At the time of our fieldwork, some solar panels were over 5 years old but still functioning without problem, while batteries were said to sometimes fail after only 6 months or even less. Simultaneously, fresh water access was insecure because of environmental wear and tear, like the earlier mentioned coconuts that regularly fall onto the pipe, to infestations of parasitic worms in water tanks.

This said, even though these challenges persist, villagers usually found ways to overcome them without significant rupture to their everyday lives. As long as Gwou’ulu has plenty of spare piping, a team of two to three adult men can usually repair the water pipe within two to three days and, when it is deemed necessary, parasite infested water tanks are disassembled and cleaned as far as possible. New solar batteries are often obtained from kin in town or at times through extraordinary market activities, such as chicken sold of SBD 50 each, or traditional

sleeping mats sent to Honiara or Auki central markets where they sell for SBD 50-150 or for even more if tourists are around. While the success of these extraordinary market activities is never guaranteed, they do not interrupt everyday gardening, fishing and other market activities. Everyone has a skill, some livestock or other good that can be temporarily “sold” to cover some (but not necessarily all) unexpected costs. However, there is rarely enough demand to pursue these income generating activities full-time.

In addition, temporary solar power shortages could at times, at least partially, be overcome through the 120W units in the village. These units were exceptional in their stability because they were, on a monthly basis, maintained by a local technician from Suava Village. The technician had been trained and continued to be paid by JICA to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the solar panels, the batteries and the wiring. In other words, the most stable basic infrastructure persists because of the commitment of a foreign state, Japan, and not the Solomon Islands state.

Some villagers were suspect of the ultimate intentions of NGOs and development agencies. Still, these agencies were preferred. At least NGOs and development agencies offered a more direct link to the “global” and most of all they were more reliable in at least partial maintenance and the absence of threats that could bring about their removal. In this, my observation partially challenges Cox (2009), who argues that not only state but also non-state actors, especially non-government organizations and international aid agencies, have equally failed to engender a sense of entitlement. Cox (2009) suggests that these organizations are frequently viewed as functioning along the lines of a parallel patronage system with a particular set of rules that have to be followed. If these rules are resisted or an independent demand is made even a most basic service may not be provided. Gwou’ulu villagers were aware and critical of some of these rules. Nonetheless, these rules were conceived of as more stable and predictable in their possibly positive outcome. If foreign actors’ rules were followed, villagers believed that infrastructures could be obtained and might possibly even be maintained. These “foreign” infrastructures were broadly considered to be more stable than those provided through Solomon Islands state-patrons.

To sum up, the case of Gwou’ulu water and power needs indicates how the MP’s absence and his supporters’ preferential treatment has nurtured perceptions of the state as disinterested in

improving village life and needs and as present only in exceptional encounters, such as the campaign. Everyday encounters with the state are deeply intertwined with routines of uncertainty, distrust and disillusionment. Indeed, the infrastructures that are the least dependent on the Solomon Islands state and its agents, which had been obtained through private (kin) channels or NGOs and foreign development agencies, were embraced the most and integrated into daily routines.

Case Study 2: The North Road, Maintenance and Disrepair

The North Road is a further, if not more poignant example of how the temporality of accessibility or, more accurately in this case, its maintenance and state of disrepair, affects villagers' understandings of and attitudes towards the state and its ability to provide basic services that are also accessible and desired by non-elites. Life in Gwou'ulu has been impacted by the presence of the road, in particular by extending villagers' mobilities and their access to manufactured goods. Yet, this transformation is historically rooted in the construction of the road by the colonial administration in the 1960s and early 1970s. At the time of my fieldwork, the vast majority of villagers did not remember a time before the road and its initial construction. Instead, the road's everyday existence had become a sharp reminder of the potential for change, its stagnation or even deterioration that is also reflected in the ethnographic record. When the road between Malu'u and Auki was in its best condition during my fieldwork the trip took at least four hours; when Frazer (1973:2) used the same road the journey could be completed in 90 min to 2 hours. In other words, over the years, the road has become part of routines of uncertainty, rather than the routines of stability that basic state infrastructures are supposed to represent—however much those routines may, in the end, be mere illusions.

Villagers had also grown weary of the road's side-effects. The road was thought to increase vulnerability to theft, violence and sexually promiscuous behaviour. At the same time it was said to interrupt barter-based market activities by inflating prices of goods in the monetization of the trading that occurs. Thus, Gwou'ulu villagers' experiences with the North Road provide further evidence of “how roads can disconnect as effectively as they forge

connection,” and how roads can “entrench the violent exclusions of established political and material orders” (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012b:460).

Figure 19: The North Road, about 2 km north of Malu’u, August 2014



The Temporality and Sources of Repair and Disrepair

As already alluded to in chapter 4, the North Road is a dirt road except for a few kilometers around Auki. As such, it is particularly vulnerable to flooding and subsequent destruction during the annual rainy season. The road is thus only “permanent” in the acknowledgement of its existence and in a commitment to keep it alive, or to revive it whenever and insofar as possible.

When I first arrived in Gwou’ulu in May 2014, the entire North Road, especially its last ten kilometers (the feeder road to Gwou’ulu), had been washed out by strong rainfall. The flatbed trucks that transport copra from the various coconut plantations to Auki, that bring goods for small stores (canteens) back to the villages, and that transport passengers on top of the cargo, barely came to Gwou’ulu during this time. Also no other motorized road-based vehicles came to Gwou’ulu. No one in the village owned a flatbed truck or any other motorized vehicle and Auki-based kin with SUVs would not risk driving on the road as long as it was this damaged. Drivers would only risk potential damage to their vehicles for special circumstances, for example, if the two large canteens asked for transport of cargo or for special events like weddings or funerals.

The financial incentive for undertaking that risk was significant as the canteen or groups would rent the truck for around SBD 3000. By comparison, individual passengers to Auki would only pay between SBD 60 and SBD 100,⁵⁸ not enough to warrant a trip.

Figure 20: Flatbed truck waiting to be loaded with copra, empty oil drums and passengers for a trip to Auki, Gwou'ulu, June 2014



Accordingly, I only recorded three occasions when trucks were called for and actually made it to the village between May and September 2014. I was able to catch a ride with one of them, from Auki to Gwou'ulu, as it had been reserved by the Anglican men's group after a mission to Honiara (more in chapter 8). The overnight trip was exhausting, especially so the last ten kilometers, which took over two and a half hours to complete, including multiple stops for a flat tire and a broken spoke that was fixed provisionally with sticks and required readjustments every fifteen minutes. We moved slowly but, with the truck fully loaded with cargo for the village, proceeding solely by foot was only a last resort. The men helped as much as they could by removing obstacles from the road or walking alongside the truck to decrease its weight and the pressure on tires.

⁵⁸ Drivers adjusted costs for passengers based on their perceived available income, e.g. teachers would pay the full SBD 100, while a pregnant woman from the village who was heading to town for a hospital visit would more likely be charged only SBD 60.

Notably, in view of the unreliability of state-based road maintenance, villages along the road were the primary reason for why the North Road, in its state of frequent disrepair, did not become completely unusable. Beyond the purview of the state, individual villages took care of most aspects pertaining to the road and the mobility that it afforded. After all, safety along the road was not, at least in practice, regulated by the state and enforced by the police. During my fieldwork, only four police officers were stationed in Malu'u—based on a retired police officers' account in comparison to at least 15 police officers in the 1990s when he was stationed there. Responsible for all of North Malaita including the Lau Lagoon, Malu'u police officers barely had the funds to fill up the tank on their police truck, at least according to villagers' reports and based on the admissions of managerial RSIPF officers in Honiara. Instead of the police and the state more broadly, the villages along the road provided safe passage through their territories, for goods and people.

In the end, villagers were also the ones who found themselves charged with maintaining the road. In Gwou'ulu road maintenance from the village entry to “the water” (500m) was part of community work. Every Wednesday villagers (men and women alike) would complete one important task to improve or sustain the village, from renovations to kitchens and houses of elderly residents, to weeding, sweeping and in other ways fixing the road between the village centre and “the water.” I was told that community work was first initiated by the Anglican Church and during my fieldwork it was coordinated by the village priest together with the village chairman. The village chairman was elected by the village through a show of hands on a biannual basis, and he was primarily responsible for “public works” within the village, e.g., for fixing “the water” or for identifying projects that should be tackled as community work project.

With enough other tasks at hand—and not always enough volunteers who agreed to participate in any given community work project—road maintenance happened only once during my fieldwork. It involved over 30 (young) adults, took four hours and did not include any meals for the workers. A free meal was the most common and usually only remuneration for those who volunteered to contribute their labour to the community rather than to the everyday gardening and fishing needs of their families. In a conversation, a village elder (around 60 years old) explained that it is often those who work hardest in any circumstance who are also most strongly involved in community work. These men and women cannot be taken away from their daily

tasks, as fishermen or small-scale gardeners, too frequently. Without an immediate return, in cash or food, sufficient for several family members, the everyday wellbeing of “community labourers” and their kin would be threatened. Without the capacity to even provide a meal, the elder insisted any further maintenance or community work was simply not feasible.

While squeezed together on the back of a flatbed truck on the way to Auki, I had a chance to talk to Felix about road maintenance and the role of the village community vis-à-vis the state. Felix, a retiree, was among the most literate man in Gwou’ulu during my fieldwork, with a tertiary education and some administrative experiences in three provinces. He expressed great frustration. He explained that their share of the road—the distance from Gwou’ulu to the next village—was considerably larger than the 500 meters to “the water.” Felix guessed that for the village to maintain their total section of the road beyond the “water” more comprehensively—*gavman* was, after all, unlikely to help—repairs were necessary whenever it rained, and the road should be weeded at least once every second week. Around eight adult men would be needed to accomplish this, especially since everything would have to be done manually. No tools, except machetes, were available. There was not even a shovel in the village during my fieldwork. Felix had no solution where the money for such maintenance (for feeding workers and their families) was supposed to come from. He mused about applying for a maintenance contract from the provincial government but he was doubtful that it would be awarded. Also, despite his administrative experience, he admitted he was uncertain about the necessary bureaucratic steps to receive such a contract, assuming it was possible in the first place.

Felix (and others) noted that Gwou’ulu also had bad luck. As the terminus of a feeder road, they were unable to set up road blocks as commonly done by villages between Malu’u and Auki. Many villagers did not think it unreasonable for villages along the road to demand toll fees from vehicles to cover their labour costs, assuming of course, they used the fees to fix the road. How else, Felix asked rhetorically, could the road be maintained reliably without any financial help from the provincial or national governments?

Not long after this conversation, in October and just in time for the beginning of the 2014 election campaign the road was suddenly and temporarily fixed—holes were filled in with gravel

and the road surface was tamped. Villagers noted that such state-sponsored⁵⁹ road maintenance occurred from time to time, every other year or so, but that the rainy season always destroyed the road again. The road would only temporarily become more usable. Besides, it turned out that the road was of little use to villagers, at least during the election campaign, which some villagers suggested was the reason why the road had been repaired. In particular the Malu'u-Auki connection was disrupted regularly between October and November. Road blocks were set up as part of the national and, to a lesser degree, provincial campaigns. Gwou'ulu villagers were not surprised. They noted that road blocks were common and part of local-national political struggles. The North Road was blocked to prevent other candidates from accessing villages for their campaigns and, more broadly, to demonstrate the power of individual candidates. In their connection to state politics, the road had then become more unstable, a source of conflict. For many people, road blocks served as another reminder and indicator of the corruption and conflict national politics brought.

However, the road blocks themselves turned out not to be the primary reason for why Gwou'ulu villagers were unable to use road-based transportation after the North Road had been temporarily fixed. Nearly all flatbed trucks moving along the North Road had been reserved by candidates for their supporters, who accompanied candidates from one campaign event to another. Only rarely did a truck come to Gwou'ulu or even Malu'u to pick up individual passengers or to restock canteens. Truck drivers and owners could make more money working for the campaign and there were simply no alternatives, at least for trips to Auki, beyond very expensive OBM rides (SBD 3000 for petrol alone).

All this said, not all villagers were discontent with this state of disrepair and inability to use the road more frequently. This was at least the case for the section of the road between Gwou'ulu and Malu'u. By and large, everyone agreed that the road from Malu'u to Auki was important to access bulk goods and better medical care and educational services than those available in Malu'u. However, attitudes towards the road between Gwou'ulu and Malu'u were more ambivalent. Even without the road villagers were able to reach Malu'u, but at a higher cost

⁵⁹ As suggested in chapter 3 commonly in collaboration with, and funded through, foreign state's development agencies, frequently from Australia, Japan or South Korea, or through the Asian Development Bank

(by OBM) or with more effort (by dugout canoe). Why this inconvenience was preferred over at least a temporarily fixed road, I describe in the following.

The Ambivalent Road: Usage Patterns in a State of Disrepair

On an everyday basis, the road remained largely unused. People walked alongside it to get to some of their gardens, but they usually preferred bush paths as shortcuts and shadier alternatives. The road between Gwou'ulu and Malu'u did not significantly impact access to and use of health or educational facilities. Commonly, children attending schools outside of Gwou'ulu do not visit except between school years (Christmas) and flatbed trucks were not very popular options for those in need of medical care. The trucks are often overfilled and leave little room to cater for the special needs of a sick person. Also trucks often break down and are generally unreliable. For example, we once stopped for one hour just south of Basikana Island and north of Malu'u because, I was told, "the driver is too drunk to keep driving" (paraphrased). In addition, villagers only headed to health care facilities if a person's immediate life was in danger (including births) (see Hobbis 2016). Because of this particular use pattern, villagers chose the most reliable routes once the decision had been made to seek medical care. The most reliable option was an OBM or dugout canoe to Malu'u and from there, if possible, a truck to Auki and a ferry to Honiara. If no truck arrived in Malu'u or if the truck was too full to transport a patient, the patient could at least seek medical care at Malu'u's less well-equipped, but existing hospital. In other words, trucks were frequently viewed as last option, at least in cases of medical emergencies.

In addition, very few villagers used the road to access markets, irrespective of the road conditions, and markets were even felt to be negatively affected by the temporarily functioning road. Three of four commonly used markets were connected to the road, Matakwalao, Kwai and Takwa Market. Matakwalao Market is close to Malu'u and many of Gwou'ulu villagers were unhappy with the flood of urban residents who used the road to come to Matakwalao market only to purchase but not sell any produce. Many of Gwou'ulu villagers agreed that Matakwalao Market provides a good opportunity to earn cash. However, for many, cash income is not the sole or even primary purpose of market activities. Markets in and around Lau remain focused on exchange, on enacting a land-sea synergy that emphasizes and relies on the interchangability of coastal and bush produce (see Maranda 1969, 2002, 2008; Ross 1978). Gwou'ulu villagers come to sell fish in order to purchase bush goods—from betelnut to taro to greens—that are not

available or are more expensive in the village. However, at Matekwalao Market, along the road, items tend to sell out more quickly than at non-road based markets, and they usually sell at an inflated price that, in comparison to Malu'u's salaried personnel, Gwou'ulu fisherfolk cannot afford.

Kwai Market was further removed from Malu'u but also thought to be suffering shortcomings from being located along the road. Kwai market was small and people felt the market offerings were too often imbalanced with too many saltwater goods and not enough bush produce being offered. A good market was one that had an equitable share of both, and the particular imbalance of Kwai market simply reduced profitability for Gwou'ulu fisherfolk. I was told that when the road was in better shape a few years back, a used Japanese van provided a bus service between Kwai Market and Gwou'ulu for a SBD 8 return fare. However, when the bus connection offered better market access to coastal villagers, the imbalance and unprofitability of Kwai Market was said to have only become worse. Because those living inland had no road connection at all, they could not use the bus. In other words, the bus made it possible for more saltwater people to go to Kwai Market but access for inland populations did not change resulting in an imbalance between saltwater and inland produce, more fish and, in comparison, less vegetables and root crops were available. Prices for fish dropped and prices for bush produce, especially root crops and vegetables, became inflated.

Takwa Market was a particularly popular market for its size and its well-balanced land-sea synergy. While connected to the road, Takwa Market differed from Kwai and Matekwalao Market insofar as the road was of little significance. Neither coastal nor inland populations used the road to improve their access to the market as in the case of Kwai Market, and unlike Matekwalao Market Takwa was far enough removed from any more urban areas such as Malu'u. The road had no immediate impact on Takwa Market, at least from a Gwou'ulu perspective.

Perhaps most importantly, the lack of road was felt to positively impact the fourth commonly used market, Ruu Market. Ruu Market was located further inland—with a sea connection through a stream. With few exceptions, it was only attended by inland and saltwater villagers who intended to both sell and purchase produce, and it was the market that still relied most strongly on the barter system rather than on cash. Some villagers preferred it explicitly

because it was predominantly barter-based, a fact that Rachel, who had long lived in Honiara, attributed to the distance of Ruu Market to any road.

Accordingly, when the road between Malu'u and Gwou'ulu was fixed, by October, it was felt to have had little positive, if not a negative impact on villagers' access to and use of medical care, educational facilities or markets. The road did, however, increase the potential for mobility. Trucks began to arrive at least twice a week, sometimes even daily. Villagers confirmed that this frequency was normal when the road was in good condition. Drivers were contacted on their mobile phones—their numbers were in many villagers' contact lists—and one passenger was sufficient to get flatbed trucks to make the trip to Gwou'ulu. The canteens flourished as well. Products could be restocked more easily, and the trucks always brought some potential new customers. The price of petrol dropped SBD 10 per gallon. Life was also simply more exciting. Everyday routines surrounding domestic work, gardening and fishing were interrupted with news and gossip from town.

However, for various reasons, many villagers were unhappy with this increase in mobility. Most pragmatically, too often families felt that they lost important labour to it. Although women are mobile to a lesser degree than men—women require explicit permission from their husbands or other male family members to move outside village boundaries (Hobbis 2016)—villagers of all ages used the opportunity for cheaper and more convenient road-based transportation to “go on holiday.” Villagers would visit kin in Honiara and to a lesser degree in Auki, to rest from the everyday demands of village life, to more easily access mobile media (from music to Facebook), to enjoy occasional (private) bathroom facilities, a cold drink and a more varied diet, and to enjoy easier access to beer, tobacco, and also night clubs.

Shortly after the first trucks rolled into the village to repair the road, Edith and Richard were fighting. Edith wanted to use the fixed road to visit their daughters in town, just for a couple of weeks, to help with the children, she claimed. She would be back in no time. Their granddaughter would help Richard with taking care of household needs, from laundry to cooking while Edith was in town. She winked at Richard, and promised that she would bring him some presents (paid for by their daughters), perhaps some beer or Pall Mall cigarettes. Richard was furious. Edith had made the same speech many times. Turning to me he exclaimed that last time Edith had stayed in town for nearly a year. He had barely been able to keep up with all the

garden work and several garden plots had to be completely replanted after her return. Edith would not be going anywhere. Edith laughed. As a grandmother she was able to move more freely than married and unmarried women who could and were expected to bear children. She and Richard also had a good marriage. Her husband would, as always, forgive her. She would find a way to town and she was excited.

Not long after this conversation Richard came to our hut, not to continue my involuntary involvement in Edith's and his disagreement but because he had been thinking about the road, the town and the village, Richard had remembered that he had forgotten to warn us. After all, this was our first time in the village with a fixed road, and daily trucks. With the functioning road, Richard explained, Gwou'ulu was more like a town. Villagers could no longer leave their doors unlocked, even for shorter absences, perhaps to go to a canteen or during church services. With more people being able to get out, more could also get in. Especially during the campaign when candidates arrived with truckloads of supporters, too many strangers arrived in the village, including possibly thieves or even someone knowledgeable in black magic. In the end, it was difficult and at times impossible to hold strangers accountable for misdeeds, to even identify culprits. Besides, Richard added to his warning, now that it was more easily possible to blame a stranger, some of Gwou'ulu villagers may also "misbehave."

However, this is not to say that many in Gwou'ulu did not desire the road or, rather, a well-maintained road. As in other contexts of felt isolation and subsequent economic and political exclusion, a better, paved, permanent road promised development to Gwou'ulu villagers (see Dalsgaard 2011). Some of Gwou'ulu villagers mused that, with a paved permanent road, they would no longer need to go to town to access waged labour and processed goods would become easier to get. Rather than more mobility, there would be less of a need for it. Yet, as long as the road remained unreliable, the road was recognized as having little economic benefit. In its unreliability, the road, when functioning, was felt only to increase villagers' mobility for "unnecessary" and potentially "immoral" movements. Richard was by no means the only one concerned.

In a discussion of the relationship between place as the "basis of social identity" (Bolton 2003:71) and mobility along roads in Vanuatu, Bolton suggests that "it is not a good thing to be only on a road; one must be able to use a road in relation to a place" (71). I encountered the same

attitude among Gwou'ulu villagers who emphasized the importance of directionality and predictability in movement, a person travelling had to be identifiable as coming from a particular place and as intending to go to a particular other place. If a person moved along the road without being recognizable as belonging to a place (a village) and going to a particular other (another village or town) it was viewed as morally suspicious, e.g., some villagers were concerned about young men simply riding on the back of flatbed trucks to visit different villages to “pick up women.” In this vein, while on the road—or even just walking through the village—it was common to be asked where one was going or where one was coming from, rather than as common in English to be asked how one is doing (see also Jolly 1999:284). Indeed, in Solomon Islands Pijin the most common form of greeting is “stap kom lo wea?” (where are you coming from?) or “go wea?” (where are you going?). Within this context my local respondents further noted that going to Honiara merely for holiday was the same as being on the road without directionality or “reasonable” purpose; “tourists” in town did not intend to arrive but to be on the road for a prolonged period time, as a means of not being at home, of avoiding one’s responsibilities.

The practice of, in Lau, *liliu* or, in Pijin, *wokabaot*, to “take a walk, go nowhere special” (Frazer 1985:189), is not necessarily undesired or considered immoral, but an important aspect of Lau sociality. While wandering about in the village or in town social relationships are maintained, new ones created, news is exchanged and new information is obtained (see also Frazer 1985). However, from the perspective of Gwou'ulu villagers, “*liliu la* is only acceptable within certain limits. No one should wander around too much or too often, for every [Lau] belongs to a particular place with known people and should maintain a routine of productive activity built around domestic relationships” (200).⁶⁰ The temporarily fixed but still unreliable road was felt to encourage *liliu* beyond these acceptable limits because those who needed to go to a different place rather than unnecessarily walkabout could do so by dugout or OBM via Malu'u, and therefore without the road that was leading directly to Gwou'ulu.

Accordingly, the North Road is, like other roads (see Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012a), enmeshed in a “sense of promise and uncertainty associated with the idiom and materiality of (auto)mobility—and its association with issues of modernization, connectivity, growth,

⁶⁰ Frazer (1985) discusses the concept of *liliu* or *wokabaot* for To'abaita, Lau's close neighbours.

displacement, circulation, etc.” (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012b:460). However, the North Road is more than that. In its particular temporality, a state of unpredictability that oscillates between repair and disrepair, the North Road represents unfulfilled promises and an ongoing if not growing uncertainty. In Gwou’ulu the North Road is never invisible. When the state fixes it through short-term measures, it becomes visible as a site of potentially “immoral” movements and as potentially economically negative in terms of creating a trade imbalance at bush-saltwater markets. When the road deteriorates again, often with the next heavy rain, the road becomes visible in another way, as a site of disrepair. Villagers become responsible for maintaining the road. Also, irrespective of the state of the road, villagers were predominately responsible for providing security along the road, a security that during the campaign was directly undermined by state actors. In this context, the gaze of the state appears to be far removed from the interests of villagers and seemingly continuously unwilling to create a permanent (paved) structure, one that becomes invisible in everyday routines rather than being continuously visible as site of disruption and as a conduit for potentially immoral behaviour.

Case Study 3: Public Health, Education and State Dependencies

In comparison to the road, but keeping in mind Gwou’ulu embrace of water infrastructures and solar power units, villagers strongly desired educational and also biomedical services. Indeed, it was in their engagements with educational and biomedical infrastructures that villagers desired most to be seen by the Solomon Islands state. Following an early embrace of and enthusiasm for church schools during the colonial period (see chapter 2), Gwou’ulu villagers remained committed to school-based education during my fieldwork. Most broadly, they recognized and valued school-based education as means for participating in the global economy more equally, also because school-based education was thought to potentially allow for obtaining a salaried position *outside* Solomon Islands and thus outside existing state-based patron-client relationships.

Biomedicine, on the other hand, was embraced as a means for treating “new” illnesses, from measles to mental health to obesity, and to mitigate physiological pains, from broken bones to the labour of childbirth. Hogbin suggests that at the time of his field research in To’abaita in

the 1930s “every disease recognized has associated with it one or more magical systems, and it is believed that the symptoms begin to develop soon after the rites are carried out” (1939:82). Ivens (1930) similarly notes how illnesses and deaths were attributed to malevolent witchcraft; and also during my fieldwork it was not uncommon to seek spiritual explanations for both illness and deaths examples for which I introduce in chapters 7 and 8. Illnesses that were traced back to spiritual sources, especially to malevolent witchcraft, were considered unable to be successfully treated through biomedicine. Unlike *kastom* medicine, biomedicine was said to be incapable of “[mediating] between moral and physiological domains of experience” (Buchanan 1998:10). This said, as I allude to elsewhere (Hobbis 2016), Gwou’ulu villagers did not reject biomedicine or consider it merely secondary to *kastom* medicine. Instead the two types of medicines were viewed as complementary, among others because villagers expressed

...concerns about the effectiveness of *kastom* medicine after conversion to Christianity and the subsequent [disentangling] of ties to ancestral lines and spirits. Without the correct prayers and rituals, knowledge of which has been lost or weakened through Christian conversion, *kastom* medicine... is considered to be less powerful than it used to be (Hobbis 2016:143).

For example, Gwou’ulu women explained that there were only few midwives left in Lau with the necessary knowledge to aid pregnant women, especially during labour. Instead most Gwou’ulu women depended and preferred to seek pre- and post-natal care at public biomedical health facilities.

In this context villagers (and especially Gwou’ulu women) noted, and complained, that the state had failed to adequately provide both educational and biomedical infrastructures. However, unlike water and solar power units, Gwou’ulu villagers were struggling with identifying alternatives to the state. In its inability to provide adequate educational and biomedical infrastructures the state was continuously visible in its predictable failure. In their everyday struggles to ensure that especially their children received satisfactory educational and biomedical services, villagers were continuously reminded of the weakness, and seemingly also the Solomon Islands state’s disinterest in them.

Shortages and Dependencies on the State

With regard to both educational and biomedical infrastructures, Gwou'ulu villagers critiqued accessibility and the quality of education/medical treatment received. In conversations about state-sponsored educational infrastructures such as Gwou'ulu Primary School but especially also secondary schools, villagers questioned the commitment of the Solomon Islands state to provide secondary education for all who desired it, on Malaita and across Solomon Islands. My observations of education in Gwou'ulu then correspond with Oakeshott and Allen who note that “the provision of education is a key measure that Solomon Islanders use to assess state performance” (2015:10) and that especially Malaitans are highly dissatisfied with the educational services offered.

Being able to attend any secondary school was recognized as an urban privilege. Many Gwou'ulu children never make it to Form 1, the first year of secondary school, although some Gwou'ulu villagers were able to attend national secondary schools (see chapter 4). On average only one child out of three was able to obtain any secondary education. In comparison to Oakeshott and Allen's (2015) calculations, Gwou'ulu children fare better than the Malaitan average, but still lag behind urban areas. Oakeshott and Allen suggest that “the number of children attending secondary school were considerably higher in Honiara (55 per cent) than either the rest of Guadalcanal (36 per cent) or Malaita (25 per cent)” (2015:9).

Villagers noted that secondary schools did not have enough spaces available even for those children who wanted to attend, had the necessary grades, and had the funds to do so as well. In other words, even if all children were eligible for secondary school, there were only so many seats and many would get left out. For example, in 2016, only 23 per cent of all Solomon Islands Form 6 students received spots for Form 7, the final year of high school (Solomon Star 2016b). In addition, villagers knew of too many students from community high schools (rather than the elite national and provincial high schools) who had failed their standardized end-of-year exams and were required to drop out of school after only one or two years in a secondary school, or shortly before completion. Educational policies did not allow students to repeat grades and failed exams.

Figure 21: Gwou’ulu primary school students welcoming the arrival of their books provided by the Rotary Club of Honiara; previously the school library had less than 10 books; school buildings in the background, August 2014



Within this context villagers especially critiqued the quality of education offered at community (rather than provincial and national) primary and secondary schools. Community school constituted the bulk of all educational services and the schools most accessible to non-elites. Villagers complained about teacher absences, lack of teaching material, and linguistic confusions in community high schools. Many villagers wanted their children to be taught in English, the language that they knew was necessary for more equal participation in the global economy. Solomon Islands Pijin, as means for education and the most commonly spoken at least in Gwou’ulu Primary School, was despised as what villagers called “broken English.” At least in the context of education, Pijin served as another reminder of “broken Solomon Islands” in the global world.

In addition, villagers also explained that the costs for sending their children to secondary schools were often prohibitive, not only because of school fees but also because children commonly had to relocate to attend secondary schools. With the exception of the handful of secondary students who were attending the community high school close to Suava Village, all others were either living in dorms—accommodation that needed to be paid for—or with

relatives. Boarding with kin was often the most financially viable option but restricted the schools that students could apply to attend since they needed to have relatives in close proximity. Most of these schools were simply public community high schools that were most frequently in or around Honiara

In view of these shortcomings, Gwou'ulu villagers desired alternatives to the state, or, more accurately, because of the failures of state services they required them. However, they struggled to identify any viable alternatives, including church-based ones. Church-based educational alternatives were severely limited, too limited to be anything but an exception that proves the rule. Shortly before our final departure from Gwou'ulu, Sebastian knocked on our door. He had great news, his daughter had not only passed her Standard 6 exams and graduated from primary school, but she had done so well that she had been admitted to Selwyn College, a secondary school on Guadalcanal run by the Anglican Church. He asked if we were able to help with his fare to Honiara. Admission to Selwyn College meant that his daughter had the chance, if she remained committed to her studies, to beat all odds and possibly even attend a university. However, school fees for Selwyn College were high and he needed to find work in town to pay them.

From the perspective of many Gwou'ulu villagers, attending Selwyn College, which was known as a high-quality school, was a rare opportunity. National secondary schools, such as King George VI in Honiara, were felt too often to preferentially admit children of members of *gavman*, their close relatives, or at least those who were willing to pay for special treatment. The number of church schools was, on the other hand, too limited to offer a good alternative, especially since no Gwou'ulu villagers with whom I spoke were willing to consider inquiring about sending their children to schools run by denominations other than the Anglican Church. In search for alternatives to the state, this is problematic. Across Solomon Islands the Anglican Church has only a very limited involvement in education services. According to Bird (2007), 25 per cent of all formal education is church controlled, with church schools following the public school curriculum. However, only five per cent of all church-run primary schools and 8.7 per cent of secondary schools are affiliated with the Anglican Church of Melanesia.

Adequate biomedical infrastructures were equally difficult to access. As mentioned in chapter 4, the closest health centre was in Eden Village, about a one hour walk along the road

from Gwou'ulu that I discussed as my second case study. Because of a lack of motorized vehicles and a wide-spread perception that the health centre at Eden was unlikely to be able to help with anything, even a bandage, none of the Gwou'ulu villagers with whom I talked considered heading to Eden rather than paddling or paying for petrol to get to the Area Health Centre in Malu'u. However, Malu'u too, was frequently not considered a passable option.

Villagers generally made choices to visit health facilities based on how easily they could be accessed but, more importantly, on how difficult it was to guarantee a long-term stay or multiple visits to doctors if one was not admitted to hospital. Going back and forth, for example, between Malu'u and Gwou'ulu, was already too difficult. It was likely too exhausting for the sick and too expensive (considering OBM costs) to be done more than once or, in exceptional circumstances, twice. Even if patients were admitted they needed to be taken care of and relatives had to be present to help with everyday cooking needs, washing and other basic 'household' tasks. Health centres and also hospitals did not, or only unreliably, offer meal and other services (such as laundry) to patients. Patients instead had to rely on relatives who could accompany them (and therefore lose time and labour at home) and who would bring and cook food, among other daily chores (see also Hobbs 2016; Street 2014). As a result, Gwou'ulu villagers travelled most frequently to Honiara if they were in (urgent) need of medical care. Only a few villagers had relatives around Malu'u and connections to Auki were also more limited than to Honiara. Distance and cost, therefore, become the most prohibitive factors in villagers accessing public health services (see also Massey et al 2012).

Gwou'ulu villagers also critiqued the quality of biomedical treatment that they received at state-run clinics. Specifically, public health facilities beyond but also including the National Referral Hospital in Honiara were seen to be no different than community high schools. In conversations about Solomon Islands public health system, villagers highlight shortages and their growing disillusionment with the capacity and ability of the medical system, including Solomon Islands doctors (see also Hobbs 2016).

This disillusionment is exemplified in the death of a young, pregnant woman from the village, who had sought treatment at the National Referral Hospital. She died from hemorrhaging during a miscarriage because doctors were said to have refused to give her the needed blood transfusions. When another woman from the village sought medical care at Malu'u hospital after

a miscarriage, no staff with experience in maternal health was available, and she was merely prescribed a broad-spectrum antibiotic, one of only three types of medication available at the hospital pharmacy. The other two available medications were eye drops against bacterial infections and malaria treatment. Notably, because of the continued and frequent failure of the public health system, villagers often attributed public health successes to “spiritual treatments,” such as prayer, a strong faith in the Christian God, or exorcisms completed by the village priest.

Villagers’ assessment of Malaita’s and Solomon Islands biomedical infrastructure is by no means inadequate. In a 2015 health system review based on two surveys done in 2005 and 2012 the authors emphasize a “degradation of health facilities”, above all and with few exceptions because “most are not properly and regularly maintained due to funding constraints and poor budgeting” (Hodge, Slatyer and Skiller 2015:47). On Malaita there is one provincial hospital in Auki (Kilu’ufi), one faith-based hospital in Atoifi (Seventh Day Adventist (SDA)), four area health centres including one in Malu’u, 25 rural health centres and 43 nurse aide posts (48). Hodge, Slatyer and Skill note that Kilu’ufi hospital, the largest health infrastructure in the province, has only a short wave radio available as communication infrastructure (all other hospitals have landlines and internet). Further, Kilu’ufi hospital only occasionally has running water, frequently has interrupted electricity supply and oxygen sources, and has no working anaesthesia machine and no operating theater (50). In addition, Malaita has the worst health worker to population ratio among Solomon Islands provinces, with one health worker per 432 residents.⁶¹

In view of these shortcomings Gwou’ulu villagers also desired better alternatives to state-based biomedical health services; however, alternatives were severely limited. As already indicated there is only one faith-based SDA hospital in Atoifi in Central Malaita. Beyond denominational frictions with SDA communities in the Southern Lagoon, there were major logistical obstacles to reaching Atoifi from Gwou’ulu. It was easier, faster and cheaper to go to Honiara. There was also a smaller SDA clinic in Kwailabesi. Its distance to Gwou’ulu was comparable to the distance of Gwou’ulu from Malu’u. Despite its limitations Malu’u was

⁶¹ Honiara is worse with one health worker per 511 residents; however these calculations exclude the National Referral Hospital.

considered better equipped than the SDA clinic in Kwailabesi. Notably, across Solomon Islands and not in proximity to Gwou'ulu the Anglican Church only runs two clinics (Bird 2007:12).

A Two-Tier System

In addition to concerns with accessibility and quality of educational and biomedical services, villagers and their non-elite urban relatives were aware of and frequently described a biased and two-tiered educational and medical system. During my fieldwork private pharmacies were springing up across Honiara as were private health centres, with others having been established for years. Many private health centres, for example, offered medical services for those intending to travel abroad, to Australia in particular, requiring medical certificates to obtain entry visas. Simultaneously, national secondary schools such King George VI and the comprehensive, Honiara-based Woodford International School—an accredited Cambridge International School—were preparing their students to eventually be heading abroad, to obtain tertiary education, frequently in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Australia or New Zealand. As already suggested, many villagers were certain that these schools preferentially admitted the children of politicians, or anyone who was willing to bribe the relevant officials. Gwou'ulu villagers and their non-elite urban relatives were unlikely to ever be able to afford, or simply be granted admission to these health and educational infrastructures. They served the urban elite and foreign community, while non-elites depended on state-run health centres and primarily on community primary and secondary schools.

Sarah's experiences with the two-tier medical system, exemplify the struggles faced by local non-elites. At the time of our conversation, Sarah was living in Honiara. Her adult son was suffering from a long-term, undiagnosed mental illness. He could not live independently and he could not be left alone. After years of going to public health facilities and receiving the same treatment, Sarah recently chose to save her money to spend on a private doctor in town. She was shocked but not surprised, when he told her that the medication her son had been taking was outdated and rarely used to treat patients with the symptoms of Sarah's son. This doctor was a general practitioner thus unable to diagnose her son's illness more comprehensively, but he did prescribe a different medication that was imported from New Zealand and could be purchased at one of the "expat" pharmacies in town. At a cost of SBD 200 per week, Sarah could barely afford the medication. She was working at the betelnut market to cover prescription expenses

and relied on her extended family to help out with daily (food) needs. After only one week of taking the medication, Sarah's son's health had improved markedly.

There was no way for Sarag to earn this much money in the village, or to save up enough to buy bulk for an extended stay there. Due to distance and the cost involved, regular trips from Gwou'ulu to Honiara and back again were not an option. The medication was, to the best of her knowledge based on the information she had received from her doctor, not available anywhere on Malaita.⁶² Sarah was also doubtful that even the outdated medication could be obtained at public hospital pharmacies in either Malu'u or Auki. At the time of our conversation, Sarah was certain that she would eventually have to return to the village with her son. There was only so much she could do to be able to afford the new medication plus the cost of living in town. Sarah was getting older and she needed to find a way for her son to be taken care of in the long term. The village seemed the only reasonable option, away from private biomedicine but part of a community that could help with the care of her son as needed. However, Sarah was also certain that if she returned to the village, her son no longer had the chance to ever be cured.

Sarah's experience is not unique. It resembles Adrian's story which more concretely exemplifies Gwou'ulu villagers struggles with the education system and the patron-client relationships perceived to be embedded therein. One evening, Adrian proudly showed us his brother's Form 7 exam results. Adrian, now in his late twenties, had only completed elementary school. Ever since, after the death of his parents, he had worked hard to earn the necessary funds to send his younger brothers to secondary school. Adrian was proud of his brother, who was attending one of the better secondary schools in Honiara, and had received the highest marks in his class. Adrian hoped that his brother would be able to study computer science, funded through a Solomon Islands Government (SIG) scholarship. Adrian was worried. Without the scholarship, which funded the majority of Solomon Islands university students, Adrian's brother would not be able to go to university. Adrian had heard many rumours about the importance of good connections with one's MP for obtaining one of the scholarships; but Adrian had been a vocal supporter of a different candidate. Thus, all he could do was hope that his brother's marks were

⁶² When we first arrived on Malaita there was a private pharmacy in Auki, with ties to a larger pharmacy in Honiara. This pharmacy sold "specialty" medication not available through the public health system. However, the pharmacy permanently closed in September 2015, three months before my conversation with Sarah.

so excellent that he would, after all, be selected for merit rather than because of personal relationships.

Adrian's concern reflects those of many of Gwou'ulu villagers and their non-elite urban relatives, but also those of civil society actors who I talked with during my stays in Honiara. They are also visible in their posts on Solomon Islands Facebook groups and in news reports (e.g., Solomon Star 2016a, 2016c). My respondents especially questioned MPs' involvement in the selection process for SIG scholarships in view of high failure rates among SIG scholarship recipients. For example, in August 2015, SIG cancelled 59 scholarships for the University of the South Pacific after recipients had failed two or more of their courses in the previous semester (Solomon Star 2015c) and, in February 2014, 495 student scholarships were deemed invalid (Solomon Star 2014b). The following statement by Dr. Derek Sikua, MP and leader of the Independent Group, demonstrates more comprehensively how student failures are associated with patron-client relationships.

For instance, one senior Minister has submitted a list consisting of 20 students from his constituency. One of the shocking revelations also was that some students did not even meet the minimum required Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.5 to qualify for a government scholarship award, with some students attaining a GPA as low as 2.1... In addition, most students listed in the document obtained did not even mention students GPA's for reasons [known] only to applicants or MPs concerned... What has transpired here is that leaders must stop using the system and their power to deprive other Solomon Islanders the opportunity they rightly deserve... This is definitely an indication that something is not right, a case of not what you know but who you know! In other words, these leaders have defied a Cabinet Decision they themselves have made so what is the use of Cabinet making such a decision in the first place? This is a classic case of saying one thing and doing exactly the opposite! (D. Sikua, 23 February 2016, Solomon Star 2016c: para 4,5,9,13,15).

Despite such statements by *gavman* officials, Adrian, Sarah, and many other non-elites in Gwou'ulu and in town, were deeply suspicious of state leaders' commitment to ensuring best or at least better educational and health services for the non-elite Solomon Islander. The existence of good schools in Honiara and often private health services for elites and foreigners were seen to provide little incentive for members of *gavman* to change the status quo and to offer quality education and health services to villagers and non-elites. In this non-elite Solomon Islanders

echo the concerns of non-elite Nigerians in their critique of the “generator mafia” (Trovalla and Trovalla 2015). The existence of “better” national schools and health services with restricted access have “for many people become signs of the greed of the people in power... the big men all had their high-capacity generators [education and health services] and had no real interest in improving the situation” (50).

The everyday experiences of Gwou’ulu villagers with educational and biomedical state infrastructures resemble their encounters with other state infrastructures, at least insofar as they are recognized and discussed in reference to their failures. However, Gwou’ulu villagers’ experiences with public health and education also reveal a different temporality and visibility. Villagers desired education and biomedical services but, unlike their desire for water and power infrastructures, they could not mitigate this desire through alternatives; instead, they are reliant on the Solomon Islands state. In this dependency, the weaknesses of the Solomon Islands state become visible in permanence more so than in unpredictability. The Solomon Islands state and its representatives were recognized as predictably failing and predictably biased towards their own needs and interests, with little concern for the welfare of non-elites. In this, everyday encounters with state services were deeply embedded in routines of uncertainty, a mix of hope, frustration and disillusionment.

Summary

Gwou’ulu encounters with the infrastructures commonly viewed as closely intertwined with a state’s ability to see and control its citizens, were not uniform, at least insofar as villagers made different choices about the importance of individual infrastructures and, subsequently, their integration into everyday routines. Water and power infrastructures were broadly desired and increasingly depended upon in everyday routines. However, villagers were suspicious of the ability of the state to reliably maintain their growing water and power needs and wants. Many considered the few contributions to power and water supply of Gwou’ulu that were directly linked to the state the most precarious. Hence, these state infrastructures were the ones that have been least integrated into daily routines. Instead, villagers searched for and primarily relied on alternatives. While most villagers did not have the purchasing power to acquire their own water

tanks or solar power units, they had been able to receive and sustain them through salaried kin in town, church contributions, and foreign development initiatives.

On the other hand, the road was looked at with some suspicion but was not comprehensively desired. It was desired in a more durable form because, in permanence, it is hoped to reduce (rather than increase) villagers' need for mobility. However, as long as the road remained in a state of disrepair and dependent on village-based maintenance, the road, especially between Gwou'ulu and Malu'u, was primarily recognized and rejected for its side effects. The road interrupts saltwater-bush exchange mechanisms at markets and it was seen as harbinger of morally suspect behavior, from laziness to sexual promiscuity. In this acknowledgment, Gwou'ulu continued to resist dependence on the road, at least in its most immediate environment of the village itself and its trade networks with inland populations. The state, as it exists, was circumvented.

On the other hand, for social services, education and biomedicine, villagers had been unable to identify any viable alternatives. In continuing hope for more equal participation in the global economy, villagers considered school-based education indispensable and blamed the state for educational deficiencies. Similarly, they valued biomedicine but the current state services available to non-elites were primarily recognized for their shortages and failures. Villagers were concerned in particular about the two tier system that has developed and that they felt removes any incentive for Solomon Islands elites to improve the infrastructures available to non-elites.

These diverging integrations into everyday life, and different abilities to avoid state infrastructure and service deliveries, share a broader experience with the state. In its core idea and some of its traces, the state inspires hope—there is a road, some solar power units and water tanks have been provided, and an education and public health system exists—but in its enactment, it reveals disillusionment and discontent, a tension and eventual shift that is perhaps most visible in my introductory ethnographic snapshot. There I captured villagers' initial excitement about the potentials of a renewed political process, which turned into resignation and a decision to participate in the bartering for votes, to embrace immediate gains and give up on the idea of long-term change. For many Gwou'ulu villagers, the state is, in this particular realm, primarily visible in routines of uncertainty. Basic entitlements are not guaranteed and, at times (the disruption of road services during the elections) it is the state that most actively and directly

inhibits its own embrace as legitimate governing institution, especially vis-à-vis alternative infrastructure and social service providers in as far as they are available. This struggle for legitimacy, or rather villagers' rejection of state legitimacy vis-à-vis village needs, interests and values becomes more concretely visible in villagers' struggles with state bureaucracy and state-mediated development that I discuss in the following chapter.

6 ♦ Hope for Development: Economic Dependencies, Documents and the State

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to develop a better understanding of Gwou'ulu villagers' attitudes towards economic development within a context of growing dependencies on the global food-for-cash economy as outlined in chapter 4. At the time of my fieldwork, Gwou'ulu did not (yet) have any large-scale development project, but villagers aspired to obtain state approval for one, specifically, for a tuna cannery with a township and airport ("The Suava Bay Development Project"). Because of a preference for village lifestyles many villagers were unhappy about the proposed project, but they also considered it to be a necessity to improve especially their children's access to a cash-based income. Many villagers were certain their dependency on cash for covering basic needs, from food to shelter, would only increase over the next years. In this context, they preferred development to come to them rather than for them to remain dependent on temporary migration.

However, many of my local respondents emphasized that they resented the need for the development project, but even more so they resented their dependency on the state for the project. Reluctantly, villagers acknowledged that the state was a necessary intermediary for economic development. They knew that even if the state and its representatives would not be on site for the project, the state was responsible for issuing necessary documents and permits. More concisely, while many villagers were unable to read and understand most documents created for or by the state—they were written in Solomon Islands' official language, English, which, as previously noted, most did not understand sufficiently—villagers knew that at least from the perspective of potential foreign investors, these documents were necessary to form any "trustworthy" business relationship. Villagers had also come to an understanding that any (foreign) investor who was willing to promise development without such documents was not trustworthy themselves.

This created a conundrum for Gwou'ulu villagers that brought their uneasy relationship with the Solomon Islands state further afore. For development, villagers needed to engage with the state, and they needed to convince the state to represent their interests in the documents that it would issue rather than the interests of (foreign) investors. In their distrust of the state, many villagers feared that *gavman* representatives would be willing to accept bribes from investors to the detriment of villagers' needs and interest. Because villagers did not trust the state, the state bureaucracy and the documents that it issued were recognized, similar to the infrastructures described in chapter 5, as an undesirable dependency in their potential for further disrupting villagers' lives.

In the following, I further explore this perception of state-issued documents as necessary but potentially disruptive mediators of local-foreign relations with a focus on the assumed economic significance of documents and the positioning of the state as issuing authority “in between” villagers and global capitalism (and development). To this end, I first introduce core concepts and current research on the role of documents and bureaucracies in state-building as they pertain to the Solomon Islands case, and I describe and analyze the Suava Bay Development Project as my case study.

The State, Documents and Hope: An Overview

The Power of Standardization and its Plasticity

When the Australian Government considered intervention in Solomon Islands during the Tensions, state failure, above all, was located in the perceived inability of the Solomon Islands state to govern its population through effective administration and enforcement of laws. According to a 2003 report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, “the weaknesses of Solomon Islands’ institutions mean that there is little chance now that they can manage their own reform and fix their own problems, even with significant outside help” (39). One overarching goal of the foreign RAMSI intervention was, therefore, to (re)build and strengthen Solomon Islands administrative capacities, from its audit systems to citizen identification, e.g., through new biometric voter registration cards. RAMSI’s “machinery of government aspiration” was “a

public administration that is strategic, professional, transparent and accountable in the delivery of services and priority programs of the government of the day” (SIG-RAMSI 2009:6).

In prioritizing the administrative process, the RAMSI mission reflects Weber’s argumentation that, “based upon written documents (the ‘files’)” (1978:957), the bureaucratic process is intrinsically tied to, if not at the heart of, the modern state and the (capitalist) money economy that both sustains and administers it at the same time. Bureaucratization, Weber contends, is so significant because it “offers above all the optimum possibility for carrying through the principle of specializing administrative functions according to purely objective considerations” (975). In other words, bureaucracies through their documents serve to govern by standardization and, in reverse it is standardization that is said to allow for state governance (Scott 1998). The bureaucracy provides the state with “the capacity for large-scale social engineering” (5), as well as through punishment of “wrongful” behaviour, according to a set of rules that prescribe a particular reality as the only legitimate one (Foucault 1991).

This said, Scott (1998) further argues that there is always need for adaptive flexibilities and improvisation. Even though bureaucratic systems may attempt to account for all aspects of life, they never can. Eventually bureaucratic systems have to face the consequences of necessarily incomplete and inadequate planning. To illustrate this point, Scott introduces the history of scientific forestry management in Germany that was first developed for revenue generation between 1765 and 1800. Administrators had developed standardized rules for forestry management to improve prospects for commercial logging. These rules included the clearing of underbrush, removal of standing dead trees and the cutting down of old-growth forests to optimize short-term gains. While they succeeded with the latter, they failed in their inability to account for the long-term consequences of these changes, the loss of biodiversity and an increase in forest vulnerability to storms (Scott 1998).

Within this context of necessary imperfection, the bureaucracy and its documents, in a myriad of shapes and sizes, from identity (ID) cards to property deeds and maps, are then not, as Gupta (2012) explains, unlike the realities they attempt to control. They are unstable, malleable and open to a multitude of interpretations, challenges and appropriations. In the Solomon Islands case this is exemplified by the introduction of new biometric voter registration identification cards for the 2014 national elections. The cards were intended to reduce multiple registrations to

curb corruption in Solomon Islands electoral process. As Geoffrey Hobbis and I argue elsewhere (Hobbis and Hobbis 2016), while multiple registrations were prevented, candidates subverted the anti-corruption message of the cards. Candidate's campaign managers (CMs) were said to be waiting outside registration booths and offered newly registered voters cash in exchange for their cards. They promised that the cards would be returned on Election Day including additional "rewards." With each card being tied to a particular constituency and polling station it would not (and was not) difficult for CMs to locate the owners of cards on Election Day and to fulfil their promises.

When asked if they would vote for the candidates who had "purchased" their cards, several of my local respondents were hesitant. Many had come to prefer different candidates but they also felt obliged to reciprocate. Because of the money they had received for their cards villagers had been able, for instance, to buy a bag of rice and feed their families for a week or two. In return, they felt obliged to vote for the respective candidate. At least this candidate had shown some commitment towards them and would potentially help in the future as well. In other words, the ID card aided the existing system of unbounded politics that I alluded to in chapter 3.

The example of biometric voter registration cards also shows how documents are embedded in and reproduce structures of inequality and how they are significant sources of power and influence (Graeber 2012). In an analysis of production of authority in bureaucratic institutions in Islamabad, Pakistan, Hull (2003) demonstrates how officials exercise power in their ability to delay or prioritize the processing of documents, in some cases, by rerouting them to avoid "honest," non-corrupt bureaucrats. Even without corruption, the waiting involved in bureaucratic processes can be understood as "a technique for the regulation of social interactions... a manipulation of other's time" (Khosravi 2014:para 1). For example, Khosravi notes how by constantly having to wait for bureaucratic decisions migrants become trapped in a system of dependency on "others' decisions and help [which] leads to a patronizing relationship, with the migrant surrendering to the authority of others" (para 5).

The power of waiting, in a context of corruption, is evidenced in Gwou'ulu villagers' experiences with Solomon Islands bureaucratic state as well. Marge, one of Gwou'ulu's urban and better-off residents, complained to me about the challenges she had faced when attempting

to purchase a small plot of land on the outskirts of Honiara. For years, she had been going to the Ministry of Land to submit applications.

I go to the Ministry and I find a free piece of land. The official tells me, ‘no one has applied for this land. Fill in the forms and we process your request. Come back later.’ A few months later I return to the Ministry to check on my application. I am told to find a different piece of land. ‘The plot you selected has already been assigned,’ is the response I receive every time. I know people who work in the Ministry. I could pay them. My request would be processed. I am not corrupt. I will never get a plot of land (paraphrased).

Marge was certain that she was not being assigned a piece of land because she refused to bribe the clerk at the Ministry of Lands, and she was equally certain that her children would not receive a government scholarship to attend a university because she was not willing to offer a bribe to the Ministry of Education. At the same time, Marge was certain that the inefficiency or slowness of the state bureaucracy when processing any request was a significant conduit for corruption. She believed that request would eventually, after prolonged periods of waiting, be completed without having bribed an official. The long wait, however, encouraged some to pay bribes for their file to be prioritized, often to the detriment of those who were waiting in hope that eventually their requests would be approved, just like her.

Notably, despite this disillusionment and continued disappointment, Marge keeps on trying. She keeps on going through the maps at the Ministry to find new plots, and to fill in the application forms. Documents, the bureaucracies they are part of, the state and its development agendas, are also, if not above all, “hope-generating machines” (Nuijten 2003).

Hope in (and for) Documents

In my discussion of hope, I follow Miyazaki’s (2004) anthropological reading of Ernst Bloch’s philosophy of hope, which emphasizes the forward looking temporality of hope and its close entanglements with disappointment and indeterminacy. Bloch suggests that

Not only hope’s affect (with its pendant, fear) but, even more so, hope’s methodology (with its pendant, memory) dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy... referring

directly to disappointability: hope holds *eo ipso* the condition of defeat precariously within itself: it is not confidence (1998:341).

Because hope is rooted in disappointability, hope is then argued not to be destroyed but to be fueled by disappointment. Miyazaki (2004) illustrates and expands upon this argumentation in his examination of how the Suvavou people of Fiji have kept alive their hope for compensation from the Fijian government for their ancestral land, which today houses the capital city, Suva. Miyazaki highlights how the Suvavou people perceive past failures in achieving recognition of their claims as moments of temporal incongruity. The Suvavou people are said to locate their disappointment in “their failure to present themselves in an ‘effective’ manner” (49) to the Fijian state. This inadequacy, they believe, can be mediated through different presentations in the future. A moment of failure thus becomes a “moment of prospectivity” (109). Disappointment becomes hope for the future and hope allows for repetition, with some modification, of previously disappointing interactions with the state. Hope is then said to be rooted in recognition that there are limits to human agency (Miyazaki 2004). Rather than focusing on risks and attempts to predict all possible outcomes, “hope sees the future as nontransparent. A shift to the conditional tense is only therefore a reflection on what one’s work might make possible given a new set of circumstances” (Hetherington 2011:224).

Bureaucracies are also “hope-generating machines” because manipulation of the bureaucratic (and legal) system through its documents is not confined to state actors. On the contrary, in the context of Paraguay, Hetherington (2011) finds that marginal actors within the state can and have used bureaucratic fragmentation and uncertainties as tools for resistance. Undereducated farmers are shown to have been able to challenge the state and its status quo, at times in unexpected and creative readings and reinterpretations of the multitude of documents that prescribe but often also contradict each other in the realities they present. Documents add new layers to disputes and disagreements, for example, about land tenure. With every new document that is created the number of actors who are involved in the process expands and so does the scope of information that can be shared, debated, tested, and perhaps, even turned upside down (Hetherington 2011).

In other words, there is hope in documents because of their centrality in the state. Documents can be used as means by which the “invisible” in the state may become visible

themselves. For example, Jorgensen (2007) shows how in Nenataman, Papua New Guinea (PNG), local populations invented “clans” so they would become visible in the state. According to Jorgensen (2007), the PNG bureaucracy recognizes landownership only if it is linked to clans even if, in a particular area such as Nenataman, clans did historically not exist. Also in PNG, Street (2012) argues that by following bureaucratic practices such as the writing of annual reports, managerial staff in Madang hospital attempt to gauge the attention of the centralized state. Patients do the same in their use of clinic books and health cards when attempting to be seen by doctors as representatives of the state. In having access to the most basic necessary document, hope persists that, for example, a doctor will care enough and have access to the necessary resources to provide adequate medical care; the clinic book “appears to facilitate [the doctor’s] recognition of the patient as a treatable subject” (13).

I observed a similar hopeful use of health cards among Gwou’ulu’s villagers during a country-wide measles outbreak. When Gwou’ulu villagers learnt that nurses would come to vaccinate all children and young adults, everyone scrambled to locate their health cards or to procure enough cash to purchase one on site for children who did not have one. Many villagers were certain that their children would not receive the vaccinations if they were unable to show their health cards or at least buy one from the nurses. At government-run health clinics health cards were said to be required to receive any kind of treatment. Any diagnosis made and medication prescribed is recorded on the cards. They were meant to establish a permanent record for patients that was, however, the patients’ responsibility to keep, not the clinic’s. In this context, failure to locate their children’s health cards or the funds to purchase one was the primary reason why some families did not send their children to see the nurses.

Street argues that the health cards in Papua New Guinea can be understood as “inscription devices that simultaneously make the patient legible to the biomedical state and produce self-monitoring patient-citizens” (2012:12). In other words, health care cards are said to encourage their holders to think differently about their body and health, and by so doing to foster a desire to maintain this health. I did not observe such an attitude towards health cards among Gwou’ulu villagers. Instead, health cards were viewed, above all, as representative of the untrustworthiness and unreliability of the public health system described in chapter 5. Villagers did not trust the medical system the cards belonged to, yet they took care of their cards in a hope

that they might facilitate some treatment that was better than none. Rooted in a disappointment in the public health system, health cards were thus also hope-generating machines according to Bloch's (1998) and Miyazaki's (2004) definition of hope.

Drawing on the example of the Suava Bay Development Project, I now further explore this tension in villagers' attitudes towards state-issued documents and the hopes they represent. Notably, unlike the documents I have introduced so far—the biometric voter registration cards, the land registry and its maps as well as the health cards—the document that I discuss in the context of the development project, has not yet been written, stamped and issued. In other words, rather than discussing the material impacts of existing documents and the potential for manipulating them in creative use as Hetherington (2011), Street (2012) and also Miyazaki (2004) have done, my discussion focuses on *aspirations* to obtain a particular (set of) document, the state-issued document(s) necessary for Gwou'ulu villagers (or landowners) to negotiate with investors to realize the Suava Bay Development Project.

Importantly, Gwou'ulu villagers recognize that documents can be employed in multiple ways and that they are by no means permanent in their claims and, even more so, they know the documents do not necessarily guarantee what they promise. Exemplary is the following description of the impossibility of fixed and guaranteed “landownership” by a non-Malaitan on Malaita:

Interviewer: What do you think of a person from Guadalcanal or Isabel who comes to Malaita and pays land in Auki?

Andreas: I am not sure if it happens. That would be very difficult. If it happens then we make a fool out of him. When he has paid, registered, then he will be chased out, to go back. You pay, land is there, paid, registered, you stay and then you fight with someone, you will just be chased out (Interview, 17 November 2014)

This flexible, or non-binding, attitude towards state-issued documents, in this case land registration, is further alluded to in villagers' recognition that, even if a court issued a document that assigns custody rights to the mother, many children nonetheless live with their fathers, in villages and far away from state-based enforcement mechanisms.

Within this context, Gwou'ulu villagers and their non-elite urban relatives also did not recognize the legitimacy of state-issued documents. Sometimes this was the case because the claims of these documents were perceived to clash with *kastom*, in the above case concerning custody rights because bridewealth was described to me as not only “paying for” a wife but also for at least two children, meaning that the father was necessarily entitled to custody rights in cases of divorce. Beyond *kastom* the illegitimacy of documents or state laws was also rooted in a recognition of “corruption” in the legal and bureaucratic system, as described and experienced by Marche when attempting to purchase a piece of land in Honiara. A second example is Ken's (and others') conviction that the results of the 2010 national elections and for Lau/Mbaelelea had been manipulated by the proclaimed victor. Ken felt that the candidate who had come second should have challenged the results in court but he also felt that this would likely not have been fruitful because of the corruption that he felt was inherent in the system.

Ken: I think once you know that you have not been corrupt yourself and you know that you should win, even if it is expensive you should go forward [to court]. But because he [the candidate who came in second place] was not well-educated he did not go [to court]. If you go to a good school... you have many friends in the big positions of *gavman* because you were a classmate with everyone, so they will help you this way this way to achieve what you want... that's the system, a corruption system. That's why he [the candidate in second place] did not move forward [with the case]. He said if he goes forward [with the case] he would lose, and he is correct because of the corruption that is there. That is what I believe (Interview, 17 November 2014).

Within this context and in the case of the Suava Bay Development Project villagers do then not immediately, or yet, hope for development. Instead villagers, at this point, hope for obtaining any one document that allows them to negotiate with (foreign) businesses. However, this document is not necessarily binding to them; and it only allows beginning to hope for development if the negotiations are successful and if they correspond to their own needs and wants and not necessarily to the demands of *gavman*.

The Suava Bay Development Project

Another Note on Method

The Suava Bay Development Project was highly contested during my fieldwork, especially so because of the reconciliation event that took place and that was meant to “shut talk” about the conflicts of the past to move towards the future. Many of my local respondents were, therefore, reluctant to talk about the conflicts that surrounded the project, the actors involved, and the particular acts that were to be reconciled. Much of the information I received was given in confidence, in hushed voices and with the promise of using it to inform my study, but it was not to be written down. In acknowledgement of this request some details will be left out from this account, including identification of the involved clans by name, the alliances they were part of, the other clans with whom they were involved in disputes, and details of the conflicts themselves. I discuss instead those aspects of the project that were publicly discussed and recognized as informing the reconciliation event and its potential longevity.

While this imposes limitations on some of the analysis I present here, I contend that villagers’ concern about “more talk,” especially to a doctoral student who was expected to write this information down and by so doing, to create new documents of state-recognized legitimacy, is indicative of the extent to which villagers (felt that they) have grown dependent on the intensified engagement with the capitalist economy that the project promised. The reconciliation had to take place and, if it fell apart in the long-term, it should do so by its own accord and not because of another externally produced document. At the same time, I contend that villagers’ reluctance is also indicative of their understanding of the significance attributed to documents in the state system and global economy. As suggested by Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo in their discussion Kwara’ae experiences with the centralized governance:

For several years after independence people in rural villages asked, what is this new national government and how does it operate? Today the workings of the government are less of a mystery to rural villagers, whose questions are now about values, goals and identity. Thus, the primary question in Kwara’ae villages currently is not ‘how does the government operate?’ but, rather, ‘what does government, its bureaucracy, laws and programs, *mean* to our lives?’ (1996:299; emphasis in original)

The Project

According to the Townsville Peace Agreement, signed between the Malaita Eagle Force and the Isatabu Freedom Movement on 15 October 2000, the “Suava Bay Fisheries Centre” is one of five major development projects to be implemented in Malaita as part of the reconciliation and rebuilding efforts after the Tensions. It is to be based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SIG and the Malaitan Provincial Government (MPG) and funded through national grants. Gwou’ulu residents were well aware of this short paragraph in the 31-page-long document that most had never been able to read, because they lacked literacy skills in English or simply because they had not been able to procure a copy of the agreement. Since first proposed, the project assumed a central role in villagers’ perceptions of, and hope for the future, as well as in disagreements about what this future should look like. The project had also been clouded in an unwavering uncertainty as villagers were waiting for the fisheries centre to leave the realm of written documents and political promises and become realized in concrete infrastructural developments, not only a cannery but also a township, an international airport and an international seaport.

With 50 per cent of worldwide tuna caught in the South Pacific, tuna—yellowfin (*Thunnus albacares*), bigeye (*Thunnus obesus*), albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*), and skipjack (*Katsuwonus pelamis*)—is considered to be one of Solomon Islands most important economic resources (Harorimana 2012; World Bank 2010). However, similar to logging, the fishing industry has been controlled by foreign companies and regulatory and taxation mechanisms have been shown to be too weak to prevent corruption and large scale tax evasion (Barclay and Cartwright 2008:201-236; Harorimana 2012; Moore 2004:79-83; 2008:77-81). For example, according to a 2005 special audit report, revenues between 2001 and 2003 reflect a shortfall of approximately SBD 37.2 million (Auditor-General 2005b). In other words, only 37 per cent of fishing license revenues had been collected. At the same time, Barclay and Cartwright (2008:223) suggest that Japan has used its aid payments, some specifically to the Ministry of Fisheries, and Solomon Islands aid dependency to influence fisheries policies, including decision-making in regard to SolTuna, the successor to Solomon-Taiyo Ltd., a 1972 joint-

venture agreement between the then colonial government and a Japanese company.⁶³ SolTuna owns Solomon Islands' sole tuna loining and canning processor located in Noro, Western Province, and has been described by Barclay and Yoshikazu (2000) as one of SIG's most significant sources of revenue and employment generation even though it pays barely any income tax.

Its challenges notwithstanding, the fishing industry is, next to tourism and mining, recognized as one of Solomon Islands most promising economic assets (Harorimana 2012; World Bank 2010). Harorimana (2012) suggests that the fishing industry could be especially beneficial to Solomon Islands economy if more onshore processing facilities were built and fishing rights were not simply sold to foreign companies who often used their own boats and non-Solomon Islander employees to process their catch elsewhere. The Suava Bay Fisheries Centre or, as it is now commonly referred to, the Suava Bay Development Project, promises to do exactly this.

A Vision

The structures that the majority of my respondents envisioned for the Suava Bay Development Project closely resembled those of Noro (see Barclay and Cartwright 2008:201-236; Barclay 2010), informed by the knowledge of several Gwou'ulu men who had worked in Noro over the years. Similar to Noro, the intention was to source labour primarily from surrounding village communities and to build additional housing to accommodate temporary migrant labourers if and whenever they were required. "Upper class" housing and office facilities for management staff were expected to be built as well. Villagers assumed or at least hoped that managerial staff would be sourced from their relatives with tertiary education—who until now had to rely on work in Honiara and Auki—other Solomon Islanders, and representatives of foreign companies.

⁶³ Taiyo Gyogyo (now Maruha Corporation) pulled out of Solomon-Taiyo Ltd in response to the Tensions. The company, renamed Soltai, became 100 per cent SIG owned. Today's successor SolTuna is majority-owned (51.5 per cent) by Tri-Oceanic Overseas Holdings, with Solomon Islands National Provident Fund holding 31.4 per cent, Investment Corporation of Solomon Islands Ltd 9.3 per cent and Western Province's Provincial Government 7.8 per cent (International Finance Corporation World Bank Group 2013).

To cater to the needs of the facility, an expanded population and local communities with more regular access to cash, villagers also expected the introduction of grid-based infrastructures. These included power through Solomon Islands Electricity Authority (SIEA) and water through Solomon Islands Water Authority (SIWA), as well as OurTelekom and Bmobile-Vodafone stores, and possibly internet cafés and other entertainment facilities. Villagers further expected that shops would open up; thus, the price for staple foods was projected to drop to at least Auki levels. For example, during my fieldwork a 20kg pack of rice was sold in Gwou'ulu for SBD 210, in Auki for SBD 180 and in Honiara for SBD 160.

In conversations, clan chiefs who had been primarily involved in negotiations with SIG, emphasized that they were aware of the challenges of resource-centred development projects. However, they also expressed hope that these challenges could be mitigated sufficiently if, as representatives of their clans, they could maintain control over the land and sea areas that the development project was to comprise. In other words, rather than selling their land, as they said others had foolishly done around Honiara and Auki in particular, they would lease their land to any company that was willing to build the cannery, and to SIG and MPG who were said to be responsible for building the township. Everyone who wanted to use the land and who did not belong to their clans through a male line would be charged a rental fee, including current residents of Gwou'ulu who were deemed not to belong to one of the, for the development project, state-recognized landowning clans.

These chiefs and some of more enthusiastic supporters of the project in Gwou'ulu, were convinced that the project would not only surpass Noro in its size, but that it would eventually begin to rival Auki and even Honiara. Suava Bay was believed to be more ideally located for heavy freighters, as well as cruise ships, and the land made available for development of the township was said to be about twice the size of Auki's current boundaries. The Suava Bay Development Project was envisioned as a truly decentralizing force, if not a recentralizing one that would shift power to Malaita, more specifically, to North Malaita and Northern Lau. Development would finally arrive and temporary and even permanent migration would no longer be necessary to earn larger sums of cash, to obtain secondary and perhaps even tertiary education, and to enjoy the infrastructural potentials of urban life.

The envisioned administrative structure and especially the hope that, because of this structure, the project would not fall into the same development projects traps realized elsewhere, are indicative of the extent to which documents and bureaucracies are “hope-generating machines” in villager engagements with the Solomon Islands state and the capitalist economy. Even though villagers had not yet obtained the desired document they hoped that once it was issued it could be used to facilitate development as they rather than others envisioned it. In the context of international development, Nuijten (2005) suggests that, however often policies and programmes fail, those working in the development sector maintain that better models or better structures can compensate for the mistakes of the past. “High expectations are raised and huge promises are made with the introduction of every new model” (52). This observation holds true for the Suava Bay Development Project and its proposed “different” structures. One supporter was so enthusiastic about the project that he exclaimed, “The seaport will be bigger than Singapore!”

In the following section, I discuss how this hope is tied to previous disappointment and its entanglement with the Solomon Islands state, in addition to villagers’ growing dependency on the food-for-cash economy. I argue that villagers’ hope resembles the “hope on remand” at Bomana, PNG’s largest prison (Reed 2011). Reed argues that those inmates who are waiting for their trials remain hopeful because the court date and preparations for it allow inmates to focus their attention on a concrete event. Those inmates who have been convicted, however, “are defined by a marked lack of directionality” (541). They have become hopeless. I contend that, comparably, as long as Gwou’ulu villagers are able to continue negotiations with SIG for the documents needed for the development project, as long as there are events scheduled that potentially culminate in villagers’ “release”—participation in the global economy at their own terms—hope for development persists.

Locating Blame

When I asked why the Suava Bay Development Project had stalled, I always received the same two answers both of which many villagers considered to be equally valid. Local MPs were said to have used the project as leverage in their election campaigns. Rather than pushing for the project to be implemented, Lau/Mbaelelea MPs were said not to have moved the bureaucratic process forward because, so villagers believed, stalling the project would allow them to pressure

villagers into voting for them again during the next election. Many insisted that there was little direct benefit for their MP (rather than the constituency) if the project went ahead. During subsequent campaigns, incumbents would claim that they needed another term to complete all the necessary administrative steps to convince SIG to allocate enough funds for the project to get started and to issue necessary permits for landowners' negotiations with fishing companies. Incumbents were said to also argue that if they were not re-elected, the new MP would have to start the bureaucratic process from the beginning. In other words, any of the incumbent's achievements were said to be tied to him as a person and could not be built upon by a successor. While agreeing with the latter statement, the incumbents' opponents would suggest that four years was more than enough to start with initial construction and that they could and would push the project through if they were to be elected.

Resigned villagers noted that the same rhetoric had been used during every election campaign; and during the 2014 campaign it was ever present as well. My local respondents were not sure what the internal administrative process entailed or how many documents would have to be procured. However, they were certain that these documents required the approval and signature of their MP and likely other *gavman* officials, who they assumed were listening to the advice of their MP on the matter. The implication of these claims for villagers' understanding of the bureaucratic process is notable. Their most powerful leaders in the state reinforced their existing perception of the bureaucratic process, a belief that there was nothing permanent about it, that the system was inherently personal and tied to individuals, and that, therefore, political leaders were to blame.

On the other hand, villagers blamed themselves, their neighbours, and members of their own and of other clans. Too many who claimed to be "landowners" were said to have staked their claims to the land and sea covered by the proposed project. Until the reconciliation event, no group had been willing to bow to another or to compromise as "shared" landowners. In this sentiment villagers agreed with a common rebuttal by politicians to villagers' accusations towards their MPs. Exemplary of this rebuttal is the following commentary in a *Solomon Star* article. The article reports on two meetings between Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, Deputy Prime Minister Douglas Ete, and Malaita's Premier, Peter Ramohia who, the article notes, demanded that SIG prioritize Malaitan development projects, including the one in Suava Bay.

According to the article's unnamed author, Malaitans had to agree on cooperation with each other and with the state before any development project could commence.

The single major obstacle to these projects is landowners themselves... Landowners loved to talk about development. When the government expressed its intention to develop a particular site, landowning groups would all of a sudden stake their claims. Dispute would follow and in the end, no development takes place.... If Malaitans want to see their province develop, they have to first sort themselves out. Landowners also have to change their attitudes. They have to willingly and freely open their land for the government and investors to come in and develop them. Of course there have to be negotiations and agreements to be made before developments can take place. But the onus is on landowners to be flexible and think seriously about the future of their children and province ... Unless landowners change their attitude, Malaita will remain as it is—an under-developed province with vast resources (Solomon Star 2015a:para 12, 19, 20, 25-29, 33).

Reconciliation

On 3 September 2014, a peace and reconciliation event was held on the soccer field just outside Mana'abu Village. The goal of, and hope associated with this even was to convince SIG that landowners would no longer be “the single major obstacle” to development and that it was now SIG's turn to continue the administrative process and issue the necessary documents. The event was attended by a provincial MP, a representative from the Ministry for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, as well as two police officers. Clan chiefs and village leaders from Lau and To'abaita participated, including those not involved in the disputes and with no significant claim to the land earmarked for the project. Members of the reconciling clans travelled from afar, including from Noro, to join in and witness the event.

The programme included a series of speeches in Lau, Pijin and English, prayers spoken by the Gwou'ulu village priest, dances prepared by groups from multiple villages, and a feast. While no one knew for sure, some rumours suggested that 50 pigs had been killed to feed an estimate of over 2000 participants.⁶⁴ Most of all, however, the event centred on an exchange of red shell money to reconcile not only clans who claimed to own the earmarked land but also clans who specifically had been involved in the murder of a Gwou'ulu clan chief during the

⁶⁴ On average villagers assumed 15 to 25 pigs had been killed for the reconciliation event (see table 1).

Tensions. In this regard, the final report of Solomon Islands post-Tension Truth and Reconciliation Commission notes: “In Gwou’ulu in the Lau area, one landowner was killed and two were severely injured because they tried to stop the Suava International Port project, conflicting with the interest of some MEF leaders” (2012:155).

Figure 22: Clans assembling at Mana’abu’s soccer field for the reconciliation event, September 2014



I include this information here because it has already been written down and legitimized in this process. I also include it because no names are identified. I do not, however, elaborate further on these events based on the testimonies that I have collected about them. With red shell money having been exchanged, any further talk about the conflict would risk breaking the “promise” of compensation that the conflict is laid to rest, even though it is not forgotten by those who have participated in it. This is exemplified in ongoing debates about the report generated by Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) after the Tensions. The report remains contested in its ability to achieve reconciliation between parties in a context that, among others, is unable to guarantee anonymity of victims. For example, Vella who worked for the TRC notes that, “along the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal, a hot spot of the conflict, villages are densely populated with houses built close to one another. Efforts to ensure privacy involved finding a private verandah or similar location, and talking in hushed tones. Even so, community members could easily identify who had spoken to the TRC” (2014:99).

The goal of the reconciliation event for the Suava Bay Development Project was to satisfy the earlier mentioned *gavman* concerns about land conflicts by demonstrating unity among local clans. For the 2014 event to go ahead clan chiefs had prepared their own documents in the form of kinship charts to establish the legitimacy of their claims. They had met to straighten out conflicting claims and to discuss past grievances that were said to have been resolved inadequately, disputes such as the murder but also other grievances that predated the killing. For example, several generations ago, one of the clans had split after a dispute between brothers. This clan held an additional reconciliation event in Gwou'ulu on 31 August 2014 as prerequisite for the event to be held on 3 September.

In the week preceding the formal reconciliation, tensions were high; the long wait for this particular hope-generating event was coming to an end. The reconciliation was part of “a whole series of judgements and outcomes to anticipate before that [final] moment” (Reed 2011:532) when, in this case, the cannery, hopefully, opens. To not jeopardize this stepping-stone in the administrative process, clans that were involved in the event avoided talking to each other or even among themselves about the conflict and the proposed reconciliation or any other potentially contentious issue. I learnt that much had remained unresolved and many feared that another conflict would ensue before the event. The event had to be successful. The MP for Lau/Mbaelelea was said to have told clan chiefs that SIG would not continue to negotiate any further unless the clans demonstrated their commitment towards unity and cooperation in a formal ceremony. All hope was focused on this one event that could break or, at least temporarily, make the development project.

Questions that I had about underlying conflicts were brushed away as soon as any suspicion existed that we could be overheard by someone else, including close family members. For example, when I asked women about the conflict during a conversation about the food logistics of the reconciliation event, they dismissed my question by noting that “We cannot talk about it. It is time for peace” (paraphrased). Clan chiefs were scheduled to arrive from Honiara only shortly before the event itself. They had been solely responsible for negotiations and kinship mapping. Many villagers had never seen the maps they created or they had only heard rumours about them. Only clan chiefs were said to know for sure which clans had been identified as “true landowners” in negotiations with SIG, but also in negotiations among each other. They

alone knew which clans had aligned themselves with these “true landowners” to formally participate in the development project. For the event to move forward, these decisions could not be questioned, at least not now.

Figure 23: Red shell money being presented by one of the conflicting parties (several clans) at the soccer field outside Mana’abu Village, September 2014



Villagers’ responsibility was not to cause any unnecessary trouble. For example, well-known clan “Don Juans” were often instructed to especially abstain from any extramarital affairs ahead of the reconciliation event. Villagers were also tasked with preparing for the event sufficiently for it to be recognized by the state as successful, as genuine. Villagers were responsible for procuring and cooking necessary foods and for constructing temporary housing to accommodate those clan members who resided elsewhere but who would be attending the event. On the evening before the event, one kitchen alone prepared 60kg of rice to feed all their newly arrived clan members for the night. The women responsible for the cooking complained that they would need at least 100kg to truly fill everyone’s stomachs.

Making Landowners

In (potentially) public conversations, Gwou'ulu villagers expressed the same attitude or silence that McDougall (2011) encountered in Ranongga, Western Province, when she enquired about villagers' perspective on disputes surrounding the arrival of the logging industry. Many were opposed to it. They knew of the likely exploitation and false promises of logging-based development. However, villagers would not get involved any further. "It was not really their business, they demurred, saying that it was 'the side of the landowners, the side of the chiefs'" (130). I observed similar perspectives in Gwou'ulu. If the Suava Bay project was to move forward, clan members could not object to their chiefs and they especially could not do so now that the reconciliation event was to take place.

In coming to understand silence in Ranongga, McDougall (2011, 2016) argues that in the context of resource-based development projects, the Solomon Islands state has nurtured disunity by insisting on negotiating for state-issued documents only with clan-based landowners. The wider communities that are affected by resource extraction and the development it is supposed to bring are left out and not recognized as legitimate actors. For example, McDougall (2011) notes how a court case that opposed logging had been dropped simply because it had been brought forward by community representatives rather than by landowners or a group that at least claimed to be such. In particular women are said to have been disenfranchised in the process despite their increasing significance in community mobilization and organization (McDougall 2011).⁶⁵

This clan- rather than community-focus is reflected in Gwou'ulu's case. The Suava Bay Development Project had also crystalized around clans and the lineages that had been prepared for the state to fulfil a necessary requirement for the reconciliation event. To obtain the hoped for document to commence negotiations with business interests, clans and lineages had to be fixed, at least temporarily, in the production of kinship charts. Many villagers, with whom I spoke about this project, feared the long-term acceptance of the status quo that would be created in response to a straightening of lineages and their claims to landownership.

More concretely, many villagers rejected the new proposed status quo based on what they noted were "mistakes" in the lineages presented and in SIG's focus on landownership claims

⁶⁵ See McDougall (2003) for a more detailed discussion on the growing importance of women and women's organization, especially in response to state inadequacies.

based on bloodlines only. Despite Ivens' (1930) claim to the opposite, landownership and usage right narratives that I collected indicate an absence of strict patrilineal rules. Instead and as already alluded to in chapter 4, my local respondents emphasized that land use rights had been and continued to be cognatic and tied to both male and female lines. It was leadership of the land that was said to be patrilineal, but also not necessarily. More broadly my observations closely resemble, for example, Keesing's (1967, 1980b, 1982) for Kwaio, Burt's (1994b) for Kwara'ae and Frazer's (1973) for To'abaita who account for the difficulties of reconciling the flexibilities in autochthonous conceptions of usufructuary land rights with the fixed rules mandated by the state. For instance, Burt notes that

It seems less appropriate to define land claims in terms of 'owners' and 'users' or 'primary' and 'secondary' 'rights', than as a hierarchy of seniority within the broad group of all those who have a claim on the land, each person's claim being assessed in terms of the closeness of their relationship to the leading claimants of the land. Closeness depends not simply on genealogical seniority and rules of inheritance but also on the obligations to one another which people recognize in living out the fundamental values of traditional society (1994b:334).

In other words, according to autochthonous principles, land and in the Lau case also sea use and leadership is based on a complex system that allows for ongoing adaptation in land and sea use rights, grounded in oral histories and remaining flexible therein. Akimichi recorded the following exemplary story about a transfer of Lau sea "ownership:"

One man Funua of the One-la, asked Dauwao of the Aenabaolo if he can use Dauwao's canoe for fishing. This man Funua used the canoe and fished at Foungaekwa. Funua tied a stone to the end of the net. When the stone fell, it broke the canoe of Dauwao. When Funua returned, Dauwao asked compensation for the damage of his canoe. Then, Funua yielded his territory (*alata*) from Gounakou to the end of Baro, and from Baro to the end of Dedefo, instead of paying by shell money (1991:11).

Despite their awareness of these flexibilities, Gwou'ulu villagers were, however, resigned to the state-mandated system, at least for now, for the reconciliation event. They had agreed to accept, for now, the creation of what Jorgensen called "special purpose clans" (2007:67) that corresponded to the state's "expectations of legibility" (68) to move forward with the development project. In their silent acceptance of the reconciliation event villagers had agreed,

for development and for future generations, to no longer be “the single major obstacle to these [development] projects” (Solomon Star 2015a:para 12) as they had been accused of by *gavman* representatives, which they did recognize as valid critique and an obstacle to development.

Reconciliation for Whom?

The vast majority of Gwou’ulu (and neighbouring) villagers that I talked with about the reconciliation event wanted it to be successful beyond and irrespective of its significance for the Suava Bay Development Project. Villagers wanted it to succeed because the need for reconciliation had grown out of violence and ongoing disputes that had divided Gwou’ulu and neighbouring communities. Accordingly, the program for the event included all necessary rituals for the reconciliation to be recognized as legitimate by its village participants, not only by the state. As already mentioned, red shell money was exchanged between conflicting parties and all witnesses to the event joined in a shared meal that centred on the ceremonially significant consumption of pork. In addition, the event was framed by Christian worship and prayer that emphasized participants’ unity in their shared faith and as “children of God.” Christian and *kastom* components of the reconciliation event were announced and presented in Lau and some Pijin thus understandable to the majority of attendees, most of all the reconciling parties.

It was the leaders of conflicting parties who had met and agreed on adequate compensation for each of the parties involved while food was prepared by the conflicting parties and shared with each other after the formal exchange of the red shell money. Within this context of “legitimate” reconciliation, the presence of state representatives was secondary, “almost a technicality” (White 2012:191) as in the church and *kastom*-affirming installation of a state-recognized paramount chief for Santa Isabel that White describes. State representatives also gave speeches but they were held in English and urban Pijin, so many of the villagers understood little of what was said. The speeches were recognized as necessary to obtain state-issued documents, for reconciliation *for* the state. However, at least in theory, the state had no immediate bearing on whether the ceremony would be recognized as legitimate dispute resolution between the communities involved in the conflict, as I explain below.

Because the reconciliation event took place to satisfy state demands for the hoped for documents and, in a context of perceived dependency on the development project, some

villagers, including chiefs, expressed concern about the extent to which the exchange of red shell money, the feast, and even Christian ritual were merely performative, solely for the state, and therefore done for the wrong reason. Some happenings shortly before and during the event pointed to state-focused performative reconciliation. The day before the reconciliation event, a special service was planned in the Anglican Church in Gwou'ulu. This service was not part of the "official" state-centric reconciliation event. For example, no one expected that the two police officers who provided state-sourced security during the event on 3 September would be in attendance, at least not in any formal capacity. The goal of the service was to more strongly ground the reconciliation in Christian communion, to increase its legitimacy for the conflicting parties irrespective and beyond the state. However, the day before the planned service, it was cancelled. The village priest was attending an ordination in a neighbouring village instead. This cancellation did not affect the main state-centric event, but it left a bad taste in villagers' mouths as the cancellation was felt to indicate a lack of commitment to reconciliation beyond the formal requirements of the state. Conversations in the village centred on one question: Was the event truly about conflict resolution or was it really only for the state and its documents?

On the day itself everything seemed to be going smoothly, at least until the exchange of red shell money. Two groups consisting of multiple clans were expected to exchange red shell money to "shut talk" about the murder and the conflicts. This reconciliation was not only for the development project but was also intended to bring back together the communities that had partially broken apart because of the disputes. Suddenly, a third party stepped in and presented one additional red shell money (*malefo*) to one of the two groups. The audience was stunned. This had not been agreed upon. The move was highly contentious, particularly because the third party presented red shell money to the group with whom they were already aligned and gave no acknowledgement of the other party involved. Some villagers around me were worried conflict would resume. They discussed leaving the event outside of Mana'abu Village immediately to return to Gwou'ulu, to safety. Nothing further happened, conflict did not immediately resume; yet new ruptures rather than unity had been created.

When I later inquired into why the third party had chosen to "intervene," I was told that it had allowed them to become formally part of the reconciliation ceremony *for* the state. With their presentation of red shell money, they attempted to formally align themselves with one of

the state-recognized “true” landowners to potentially increase their share of the revenue from the development project. Many of my local respondents were furious that this had happened, but because they had struggled for so long to get as far as the reconciliation event to move forward with the development project, they were not willing to immediately confront the “third party” about their actions. For now, at least on the surface, they were accepting the new status quo in an attempt to see if they might, after all, succeed at obtaining the hoped for document to move ahead with the development project.

Accordingly, the event was completed as planned. It appeared to have succeeded at convincing state representatives of the parties’ intent to cooperate for the development project and with the state. The event was successful *for* the state, and the two main conflicting parties agreed that it had also been successful enough for them to move ahead with their collaboration. However, doubt remained about the latter because of the interruption of the events by the third party, the failure of the village priest to hold a unifying service ahead of the reconciliation but also more broadly because some villagers were not sure if the reconciliation was held for the “right” reason, because conflicting parties admitted to their respective mistakes and took responsibility for them rather than merely because the parties involved wanted to move ahead with the development project. Within this context, several of Gwou’ulu villagers felt that the performance of reconciliation for the state had corrupted the reconciliation processes that villagers acknowledged as legitimate and grounded in their autochthonous values and Christian faith.

Notably, Gwou’ulu villagers are not alone in their suspicion towards reconciliation events organized by the state *for* the state as performative events without, so critics claim, aiming to achieve genuine reconciliation. On a national scale this distrust in the integrity of state-based reconciliation came more recently afore in responses to a week of peace and reconciliation ceremonies surrounding the Independence Day celebrations on July 7, 2016. The ceremonies explicitly intended to address grievances from the Tensions to “unify” the nation and were celebrated as successful first step towards long-term peace (Radio New Zealand 2016). However, on social media the events were heavily criticized, and some of Solomon Islands politicians spoke out against them as well.

For example, the leader of the Parliamentary Independent Group Dr. Derek Sikua accused the Prime Minister's Office of using the event to further the government's agenda without any genuine commitment towards the reconciliation process. Specifically, Dr. Sikua suggested that not enough had been done to address grievances among individuals, families and groups, especially those identified in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to move ahead with a nation-wide reconciliation event (SIBC 2016). Comparable sentiments were expressed on FSII in discussions about the event. These discussions are exemplified in the following comments to a post from the Solomon Business Magazine that emphasises that

...emotions were high today as former militants, provinces and the country united in the national healing and apology programme. Regardless of the opposition to the programme by the certain political figures and provinces, today's ceremony saw the exchange of traditional gifts amounting to millions of dollars and was attended by most of the provinces...

Comment: Waste time n [sic] government money (July 6, 2016)

Reply: In what view does your statement hold weight on? (July 6, 2016)

Reply: Does the government pay the demand of the people from Guadalcanal? 2.5m ... stop covering up with reconciliation after another... how many reconciliation do the government need to make to bring peace? (July 6, 2016)

Comment: How many times reconciliation gogo kasem [arrives in] 2016 what a joke (July 7, 2016)

Reply: heheh tru tu yah [that is true]... reconciliation Olowe nomoa [all the time] heheh (July 7, 2016)

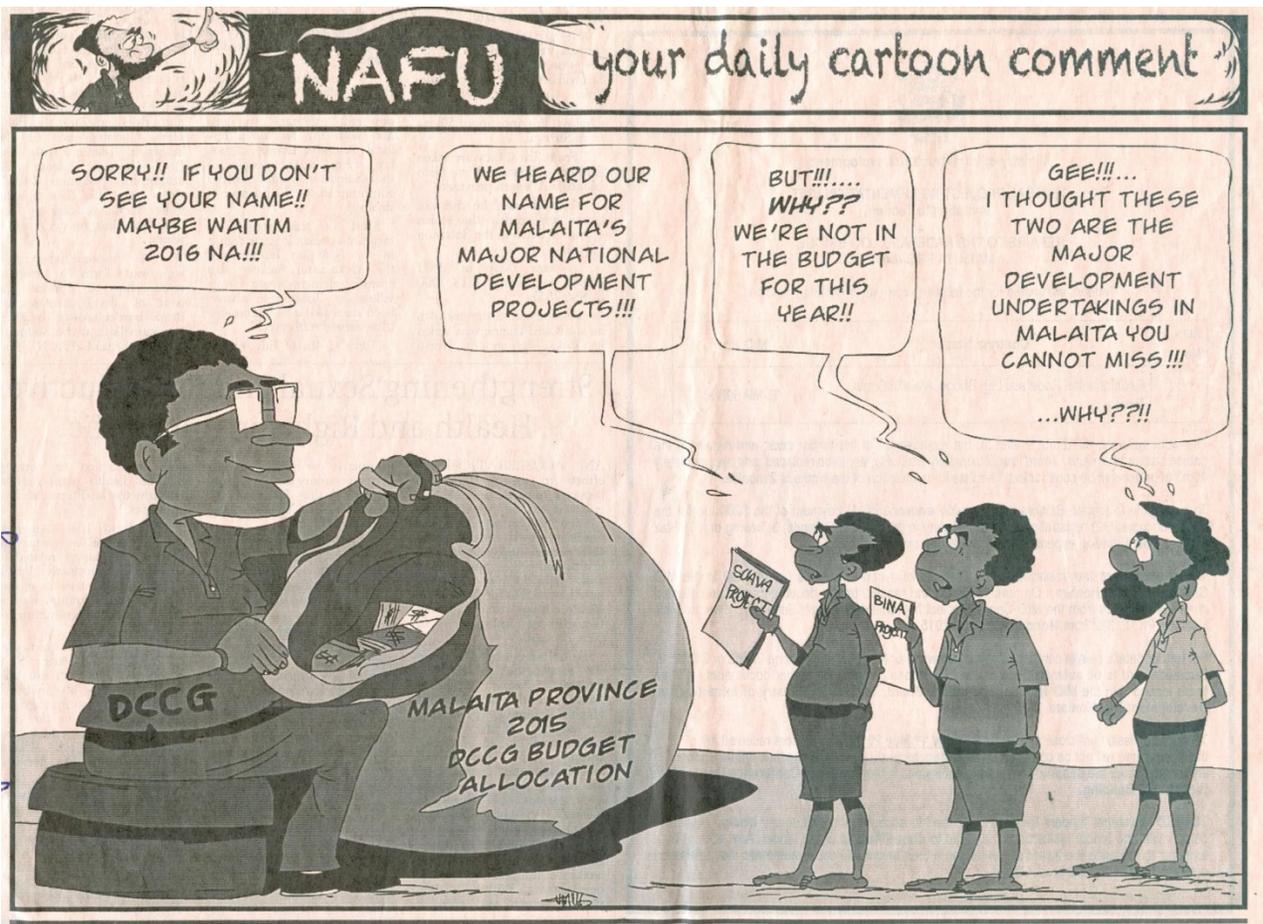
Comment: Last year SIG paid compensations to ex-combatants in the name of peace. This year SIG organized another week-long national apology programme. In whose interest will this peace and reconciliation programme serve? It is apparent that this programme is held to serve the interest of a few individuals who want to milk funds from public coffer. How long will it take us to reconciliation the past when the victims and the perpetrators have moved on with their lives? (July 8, 2017)

Comment: I have a feeling the PM is trying to impress us... what about those villagers who's [sic] homes were torched and family members killed during that coup? This militants are just mere puppets. Apologise to those affected rather than those who contribute please (July 11, 2016)

More Disappointment, More Hope

This broader suspicion towards the honesty of reconciliation events organized by the state and for the state turned out, at least for now, to be justified in the case of the Suava Bay Development Project as well. The “peace” of the reconciliation event has not lasted. Both *gavman* and “landowners” continue to be blamed, and blame each other for a lack of progress since the reconciliation event. Again, as exemplified in the caricature (figure 24) published in the *Island Sun* on April 22, 2015, the project has stalled, at least insofar as it remains within the realm of written promises.

Figure 24: Caricature identifying the Suava Bay and Bina Harbor Development Projects as not included in the 2015 development budget for Malaita (Island Sun, 22 April 2015)⁶⁶



With the national election, a new government, the Democratic Coalition for Change Government (DCC Government), came to power and Lau/Mbaelelea elected a new MP. The DCC

⁶⁶ I thank Christine Jourdan for providing me with a copy of this caricature.

Government announced that it would prioritize development projects on Malaita, including the one at Suava Bay. A meeting was held with “landowners” in Honiara shortly before I left Solomon Islands in February 2015. On 1 May 2015, SIBC (2015b) reports that a scoping mission had been sent to Suava Bay for site assessments and further consultations, with the goal being to start implementation of the project within the year. A subsequent SIBC (2015c) report, on 10 June 2015, notes that additional preparatory work was underway and, on 15 August 2015, SIBC (2015e) suggests that the DCCG had sent a land acquisition officer to Suava Bay. “[Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare] says the government will proceed in signing a Memorandum of Understanding... as soon as the land acquisition process is completed” (SIBC 2015e:para 3).

The enthusiasm in these reports has since dissipated. On 28 September 2015, the *Island Sun* reports that the lands acquisition officer had been “bashed” upon his arrival “after claims of disagreements by Land Owners [sic] on the land were not happy with the manner in which the process was done.... This newspaper was also reliably informed that the three projects in Suava will be on hold until further reconciliation and counselling process are done” (2015:para 4). On 9 October 2015, in a letter to the editor of the *Solomon Star*, the author, Em Fatainao, mentions a meeting “of supposedly land owners, chiefs and elders” (2015:para 2) at the Honiara Hotel and suggests that “[The Suava Seaport Project] hasn’t happened so it is wait and see but I am sceptical already on seeing some people in the pictures” (para 6).

Based on posts to the Facebook group “National Malaitans,” from 4 April 2016, Malaita’s Provincial Minister for Development Planning had announced that all development projects for the province had been cancelled by the DCC Government. However, already on 5 April 2016, the *Island Sun* (2016) reports that a DCC Government “Think Tank” has commenced further negotiations, though not without their difficulties, with landowners, the provincial government, and communities. Also on 5 April 2016, a Radio Australia (2016) report in Tok Pisin suggests that the Malaitan Provincial Government has given the DCC Government an ultimatum of 60 days to identify a way to realize the development project based on a “community government system.” This ultimatum was issued after the DCC Government had given MPG a 70 day ultimatum to do the very same.

The Think Tank’s report confirms to some degree Gwou’ulu villagers’ objections to the lineages that were created and fixed for the development project by noting that “Malaitans share

a profound spiritual connection to land according to culture, and therefore it *is the land that owns tribes and not tribes owning the land*” (Prime Ministers’ Press Secretariat Office 2016; my emphasis). However, it also disappoints Gwou’ulu villagers hope further. The report suggests reprioritisation of development projects on Malaita to focus on two projects only, the Bina Harbour Industrial Development Project and the Fiu Hydropower Project.

In other words, irrespective of the reconciliation event, the two sources of “blame,” *gavman* representatives and “landowners,” remain. Some news reports suggest hope and they sustain it, but so did news reports before the reconciliation event. For example, a *Solomon Star* article on 18 April 2008, is titled *Work on Suava Bay Development in North Malaita to Kick off Next Month*, and on 4 June 2010, the *Solomon Times* suggests that “the National Government will sign a Memorandum of Understanding... on the Suava Bay Project with the Malaita Provincial Government and Tribal Landowners of Suava Bay today” (2010: para 1). Within this context, hope remains in disappointment and indeterminacy; it remains because of villagers’ continuing and growing global dependencies; and, it is the state-issued documents that mediate and generate this hope in a context of continuing disappointment and waiting.

Summary

This chapter shows how villagers have recognized, and used, documents as a means by which they can make themselves visible in the state and, through the state, in the global economy. However, this visibility was not desired but only hoped for because of villagers’ growing dependence on the food-for-cash economy in response to rampant population growth. In this context, villagers recognized state-issued documents as necessary to attract the gaze of the state and foreign companies, but not as trustworthy in their content and promises. For example, state-issued health cards were said to be required to receive any medical treatment from the state without, however, generating confidence in the quality of the treatment itself.

The hope that state-issued documents generated among Gwou’ulu villagers is comparable to Reed’s (2011) description of “hope on remand.” Hope is directed towards particular events, those that precipitate direct engagements with the state as intermediary to procure necessary documents for villagers to negotiate with (foreign) companies. At the same time, villagers’ hope

is constrained by their growing dependencies, a perceived need for the documents and economic development. Gwou'ulu villagers have to hope for these state-focused events because they are already trapped in the cash economy, "in jail" and limited in their ways out, in how to (re)obtain at least some autonomy. Following Bloch (1998) and Miyazaki (2004), Gwou'ulu's reliance on hope is then indicative of their lack of confidence in the future, but also indicative of an uncertainty about alternatives to continuously re-engaging the state and its bureaucracy in hope for a different result.

Documents also reaffirmed villagers' distrust in the state and the type of development it prescribes. State-based development is perceived as not "[building] on knowledge resources villagers already have, and the strategies they know for expanding that knowledge" (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2002:403). For example, the kinship charters as documents that precipitated the reconciliation event for the Suava Bay Development Project were contrary to localized ways of knowing complex histories, and the flexibilities therein, of belonging to Gwou'ulu land and sea. In addition, the reconciliation event was critiqued for not sufficiently accounting for the communities involved; instead it was felt to be performative *for* the state and its representatives.

In this context, villagers perceive their situation as especially precarious because of the unreliability of the Solomon Islands state and, above all, its representatives. In assigning blame for why the development project had not yet been implemented, villagers emphasized the failures of individual leaders, their MPs but also the supposed landowners. These leaders were said to be representing their own interests rather than those of the community at large. The bureaucratic and broader state system was inherently personal, tied to individuals. In other words, the potential for hope to become confidence was confined to how "good" villagers thought their leaders were. Villagers' concern with good leadership lies at the heart of my next chapter in which I further discuss villagers' perceptions of their leaders, with a focus on how leadership is mediated by town-village relations and the distance in between.

7 ♦ Leadership in Absentia: Distance and the Devaluation of the Village in the State

Figure 25: A poster designed by Transparency International's Solomon Islands chapter to raise awareness for good leadership (against corruption) in advance of the 2014 national elections



Prelude: “What is a Good Leader?”

“What is a good leader?” I encountered this question repeatedly, in town and in the village, during interviews with foreign state-builders and local civil society members and during everyday conversations with villagers, men and women alike. When reflecting about the future of Solomon Islands, of Malaita or, more concretely of Gwou’ulu, this question was often considered to be paramount. Much of what was thought to be going wrong was attributed to bad

leadership rather than (only) the governance systems that these leaders were part of. In other words, while many of my local respondents were disappointed in, or even angry about, the lack of material affordances that they associated with the state and the global economy, failure—and, therein, hope for change—was predominantly located in the leaders who had been representing them in the system, be they politicians, bureaucrats, or businessmen (and women), or even church and *kastom* leaders.

The question of good leadership came up throughout my fieldwork, but it was particularly pertinent during the elections, or rather early in the campaign, which was also similar to the reconciliation event described in chapter 6, a hope-generating event. Villagers asked their candidates why and how they would be good leaders, and they discussed their electoral choices based on candidate's perceived leadership capacities. Policies were only secondary; a candidate who had good ideas may, after all, be unable to implement his promises or simply be lying about his intentions. The same trend, a focus on leadership capacities, was visible in reports and letters to the editor in the *Solomon Star* or the *Island Sun* as well as, or even in particular, on social media. “Wake up all *wantoks*⁶⁷ we need leaders not bosses” (FSII, 16 November 2014) and “we NEED leaders not politicians” (FSII, 25 September 2014) were but two of the calls posted and vividly discussed on Facebook.

Equally, the question was picked up, if not championed by inter/transnational actors and organizations, whether governmental or not. Exemplary is the awareness campaign organized by Transparency International's Solomon Islands chapter (TSI). Several of its flyers and posters, spread through new and old news media channels and at awareness events, featured information on good leadership (see figure 25). The message seemed to be comparatively consistent across

⁶⁷ The Pijin term *wantok* translates into “someone who speaks my language (vernacular)” thus “someone who belongs to the same cultural group” (Philibert 2000) or, more literally “one talk” (Jourdan 2002:257). It is commonly used to refer to a wider network of belonging than one's immediate kin group, nuclear family and clan. In the contexts I recorded, *wantok* was used to refer to anyone with whom someone had developed an emotional bond, a work colleague, a market acquaintance, a school friend, an anthropologist or, within a nationbuilding sentiment, any Solomon Islander or at times even any Pacific Islander. Despite its linguistic origins, *wantok* refers to more than an extended network of relationships beyond one's immediate descent group but within one's language (cultural) group. *Wantok* is rooted in the continuously changing web of social relationship that Jourdan (1996) and Gooberman-Hill (1999) identify as crucial to urbanization in Solomon Islands and that Philibert (2000) links to colonial experiences away from home, especially on plantations in Queensland and elsewhere.

the board, from international reports to attitudes expressed by villagers: do not vote for candidates who will be “corrupt” and only serve his (or her)⁶⁸ own personal gain and/or foreign business interests, his (or her) wantoks, his (or her) voters rather than the constituency at large, or even “only” the constituency or province but not the country.

However, conversations in the village and with non-elites in town quickly revealed disconnects in how the intricacies of this “problem of leadership” were understood by non-elite and elite (internal and external) actors. This was especially visible in what appeared to be elite misunderstandings of villager’s perceptions of a good leader/MP. Villagers desired the very leader described, for example, in TSI’s “Clean Election 2014” poster (figure 25). Ideally, many wanted to pick a leader who, among others, “has a history of helping the community,” “understands their community,” and “distributes fairly to everyone not just wantoks” (figure 25).

Some of my local respondents hoped to directly benefit from “their candidate” winning and some fondly recollected the perquisites they had received as a result of patron client relationships politics in the past, as suggested in chapter 5. Yet, many of the very same women and men also hoped that this system would change in the future, preferably immediately, with the 2014 elections. This was most concretely the case because they felt that the current system was unlikely to bring about the necessary change, more reliable infrastructures and social services as well as progress to the Suava Bay Development Project. Numerically, Lau/Mbaelelea is one of the largest constituencies in Solomon Islands and Gwou’ulu villagers were well aware of this. In this context, the likelihood of being among the individuals directly benefiting from their MP was considered low. This being said, while many of my local respondents hoped for a leader who would attempt to help the constituency as a whole, many were uncertain how and if such a good leader could be found.

In the case of Gwou’ulu none of the candidates in 2014 were from Gwou’ulu, and none had a notably history of helping the community before the campaign commenced. Gwou’ulu villagers were aware that several of the candidates had helped their own communities, but within the context of the patron-client relationships described in chapters 3 and 5, this history by no means indicated the candidate’s willingness to help the constituency at large and Gwou’ulu in

⁶⁸ I use brackets in reference to female candidates to reflect the strong gender disparity in Solomon Islands national politics that I already indicated in chapter 5.

particular. Many of my local respondents also wondered how they were supposed to know if the candidate was telling the truth, if he would be inclusive and if he saw Solomon Islands as a united country. There were no substantial differences in the claims and promises that candidates made during their campaign speeches. Everyone voiced their opposition to corruption, everyone promised better infrastructures, and everyone emphasized their commitment to Gwou'ulu, the constituency and the country. Besides, in conversations Gwou'ulu villagers emphasized that candidates had done the same during previous elections. If anything, corruption awareness posters such as the one from TSI merely reminded villagers of the false promises they had heard many times before, of their powerlessness when it came to their direct encounters with the state and, most of all, encounters with its representatives in *gavman*.

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to develop a better understanding of villagers' perception of this problem of leadership within the state and in a context of state-mediated global dependencies. Notably, I contend that this problem of leadership is not solely limited to national politics, *gavman* and specifically MPs. Instead, I suggest that from Gwou'ulu villagers' perspective the problem affects leadership at large, and at every level of governance. More concretely, villagers not only questioned the integrity of national leaders such as the MP but they also questioned the integrity of leaders in the village and especially of village leaders who directly engaged with the state, for example, in the context of the Suava Bay Development Project. I argue that this perception is linked to a felt shift in leaders' "directionality," from priority given to village interests to priority given to "selfish interests" in the (urban) centralized state.

To establish this argumentation I begin with a short description of the leaders who Gwou'ulu villagers recognized as such. I then move to a discussion of the significance of personal attributes and achievements for legitimate leadership in Gwou'ulu, Malaita, Solomon Islands at large and Melanesia more broadly. In the third part, I discuss how villagers struggle to identify leaders who have the attributes and achievements that villagers consider necessary to acknowledge legitimate leadership. I highlight how to lead the village in its engagements with the state, for example, to obtain the desired documents for the Suava Bay Development Project,

leaders have to be away from the village and its lifestyle, based in town, close to the state's administration. From Gwou'ulu villagers' perspective, this distance has resulted in a devaluation of the village in the state, therefore decreasing the perceived likelihood that villagers are served by the state according to their needs, wants and values. I discuss villagers' experiences with feasting as a means to demonstrate leadership achievements and capacities, to illustrate this problem with leadership *in absentia* in more detail.

Leaders of Gwou'ulu: An Overview

During my fieldwork, a plenitude of structures and institutions were in place that allowed individuals or to a lesser extent groups to be recognized as Gwou'ulu leaders, decision-makers and mediators of conflicts but also of relationships with socio-political and economic significance more broadly. The leaders of Gwou'ulu drew their titular authority—insofar as such authority exists—from their implicit or explicit links to clans, the Anglican Church, and/or the state. In addition, leadership in Gwou'ulu was strongly gendered, most leadership positions were reserved for men only, e.g., that of chiefs or catechists. The only female leaders in Gwou'ulu during my fieldwork were Anglican Sunday School teachers and the leadership of the all-female Mother's Union. In this, the leadership system of Gwou'ulu is not exceptional. In its complexity similar leadership structures have, for example, been identified by McDougall (2011) in Ranongga, Western Province.

During my fieldwork, every clan was headed by a clan chief, a hereditary position (with some limitations which I discuss later in this chapter). Clan chiefs frequently appointed clan village chiefs to lead the clan in the village if the clan chief himself was primarily resident in town. Because even the village chief might be absent at times and to ensure that any one clan always had a “formal” representative in the village, especially for conflict resolution, some clan chiefs also appointed so-called “lieutenant”⁶⁹ chiefs. The clan chief, village chief and, if appointed, lieutenant chiefs formed a clan “committee”⁷⁰ together with clan elders and anyone who was deemed an influential clan member, for example, because they had obtained a

⁶⁹ The English term was used.

⁷⁰ The Pijin term *komiti* was commonly used (see Jourdan 2002:107).

university degree. The clan committee was responsible for making decisions about land use, participation in development projects, and for mitigating intra- and inter-clan disputes that could not be resolved by one of the chiefs alone. While women were rarely included in these clan committees, some clans recognized postmenopausal women as clan elders and included them in decision-making processes. Depending on the importance of a decision made, especially in contexts of conflict resolution and development, all clan members could be consulted in meetings. Priority was, however, given to the voices of male clan members including, at times, the husbands of female clan members who resided in Gwou'ulu. In other words, at least men could make their voices heard within their clans, especially as they became older.

While clan leaders were primarily responsible for affairs that directly concerned clans and their relationship with other clans, e.g., in conflict resolution or land use for development, church leaders managed “community” affairs which continued, as in pre-Christian times, to centre on management of the now Anglican ritual cycle. Church leaders, in the Anglican Church, were above all, the Auki-based Bishop of Malaita who was married to a woman from Gwou'ulu, and the Gwou'ulu-based village priest who managed all church-related activities in the village including community work and relations with neighbouring village-church communities. The village priest also managed the ritual cycle and related events such as Saint's Day and Christmas including funerary rites for which he determined the length of mourning periods—during mourning periods no one was allowed to “work,” for example, the school would be closed, and villagers could only go to gardens to harvest food for the day but not to plant new fields.

In addition, the village priest appointed catechists who were responsible for officiating church rituals, in particular when the village priest was absent from Gwou'ulu. The village priest also appointed church group leaders who were responsible for organizing church events, including some weekly services, feasts and trips to other villages and towns. The three main church groups were the “Men's,” the Mother's Union, and “Sunday School.” Each group had one leader as well as leadership committees. These three groups were complemented by six residential groups with one, usually male, group leader and a usually male alternate leader each. Residential group leaders organized weekly “residential group” church services on Friday's and they coordinated residential groups' food contributions to feasts. Select church leaders, clan leaders, together with the head village chief and village chairman (more below), furthermore,

formed the “church committee.” The church committee was responsible for the coordination of large community works and it confirmed the village priest’s management of the ritual cycle.

Within the state villagers recognized, as their leaders, their MP and his Constituency Development Officer (CDO). The CDO was appointed by the MP to implement projects funded through Constituency Development Funds across the constituency. No CDO had been based in Gwou’ulu so far. Direct links in the village to the MP were the MP’s Campaign Managers (CMs), commonly men above the age of 40 who resided in the village. In the same vein villagers acknowledged the leadership of their provincial MP and his CMs. In addition to CMs, the state was most directly represented in the village by the headmaster of Gwou’ulu Primary School. The headmaster managed all school affairs including school funds and setting of administrative fees. He was recognized by villagers as determining the educational future of the village by successfully managing (or not) school facilities and activities including other teachers.

Gwou’ulu also had a system in place to elect a village “chairman”⁷¹ as “secular” leader of the village. Notably, this position was not formally required by or connected to the state. The village chairman was elected by show of hands every two years, had to be resident in Gwou’ulu and might be consulted for village-based conflict resolution. He was, however, primarily responsible for “public works” such as the maintenance of the water pipe.

Last but not least, the village also elects, but without a regular election cycle, a head village chief. I was told that the head village chief was often recognized as clan chief by one of the clans represented in Gwou’ulu but he did not have to be. Most importantly, the head village chief had to be residing in Gwou’ulu and he was primarily responsible for village-based conflict resolution. While not required by the state, the head village chief was acknowledged by the state as village leader during our fieldwork. For example, he was asked to serve as electoral officer for the provincial election and during campaign events, he was frequently acknowledged as primary village leader—to the frustration of the village priest and some clan chiefs.

This leadership system and associated titles were not exclusionary. On the contrary, it was common for individual leaders to hold more than one title, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes over a period of time. For example, the head village chief during my fieldwork used

⁷¹ The English term was used

to be a provincial Member of Parliament. He was also one of the three campaign managers in Gwou'ulu for the national MP who was voted out of office in November 2014; he was a clan elder, a clan village chief, and he was actively involved in church groups, especially the church village committee. Comparably, the school headmaster had no kinship ties to the village but he was a member of the church village committee and a catechist. In addition, and at least in part because of his position outside of village-based kin relations, he was occasionally consulted to determine compensation after comparatively insignificant but potentially escalating village-based inter-clan disputes.

To sum up, there is no doubt that, in a village with less than 200 adults, there was plenty of opportunity to claim some leadership position, or at least this was the case for men. Some villagers—men and women alike—even insisted that all married men were leaders of Gwou'ulu. In this context, wherein at least men could make some credible claim to leadership, what mattered most of all were a leader's ability to assert his leadership, to make his voice heard and recognized as legitimate in any given context. Rather than a matter of titles, where authority derived from one's position, legitimate and authoritative leadership was a matter of attributes and achievements including participation in exchange relations. In the following I discuss this claim further, including the rejection of leadership hierarchies in the centralized state that it implies.

A Matter of Attributes and Achievements, not (Solely) of Titles

In anthropological studies of Melanesia there are probably only few issues that have been as frequently discussed and that remain as hotly debated as leadership.⁷² Specifically, research has focused on the significance of attributes, personality and achievements—especially in exchange relations—for recognition as leader; and such attainment-centric leadership has commonly been juxtaposed to leadership claims that are rooted in chiefly inheritance.⁷³ A core aspect of this debate concerns the argumentation that autochthonous leadership—possibly with chiefly societies as exception—is never stable. Instead, claims to leadership have to be continuously

⁷² See, for example, Douglas (1979), Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo (1996), Godelier (1986), Godelier and Strathern (2008), Keesing (1985), Mosko (2012), Sahlins (1962), White and Lindstrom (1997)

⁷³ See Mosko (2012) for a detailed discussion of this (perhaps unjustified) juxtaposition

reaffirmed through participation in and contributions to exchange relations. For example, Hogbin (1939) notes for To'abaita that “the individuals who command the respect of their fellows have no permanent legal claims to obedience but rather obtain by the distribution of their wealth the co-operation necessary for the enterprises they initiate” (62); and Burt (1994a:43-44) highlights the significance of exchanging wealth, for example by providing pigs for feasts, for obtaining prestige among the Kwara'ae.

The Case of “Hereditary Succession”

In the context of the Lau, this debate is significant insofar as Ivens (1930)—the first anthropologist to have worked with the Lau—in his descriptions, did not leave a grain of doubt about the chiefly characteristics of Lau leadership systems. According to Ivens (1930) and reflecting the pan-Malaitan typology developed by Keesing (1985), pre-Christian Lau clans were led by a “troika”⁷⁴ consisting of “a priest, who maintained relations between a kin group and its ancestors... a war-leader/bounty-hunter [*ramo*]” (237) and, in the Lau case, a hereditary chief with a “fixed” claim to leadership. Concretely, Ivens (1930) notes that “Lau chiefs are chiefs by virtue of their birth, and *not* because of any prowess which they may manifest, or any wealth which they may amass, or any spiritual power which may manifest itself in them” (84; my emphasis). In other words, Ivens (1930) suggests that among the Lau precedence has, indeed, been set for leadership solely by title or position rather than by attainment, personality, and ongoing reaffirmation of a leaders' ability to maintain and repeat his achievements.

My own research contradicts this observation. In narratives about past leaders, my local respondents confirmed the validity of Keesing's (1985) troika model. However, they rejected Ivens' (1930) observations concerning unquestioned hereditary succession. In descriptions of both past and present leaders, my local respondents emphasized an all-encompassing significance of personality, achievement and the importance of the continuous reaffirmation of attainments through active participation in exchange relations, e.g., by contributing pigs for a feast, that is deemed adequate by recipients based on their assessment of the leaders' capacity. This is the case even though my local respondents noted that in deciding who would follow a

⁷⁴ Keesing (1985) borrows this term from “the brief period when the Soviet Union was supposed to be led by a triumvirate of leaders, who likened themselves to a Russian three-horse sled-pulling team (such a sled is a *troika*)” (251; n.1).

deceased chief preference was given to chiefly (and priestly) “aristocratic” lines (see Maranda 2010).

In a conversation focused on pre-Christian and pre-colonial leadership structures, Marcel, a clan chief, emphasized that ideally chiefs’ and priests’ successors had been their oldest sons (male primogeniture). Yet, clan elders were said to have made the final decision about successions. Oldest sons would only have been selected to assume their father’s positions if they were considered to be knowledgeable enough about their particular roles, from knowledge about ancestors and rites (priests) to the organization of village feasts (chiefs), and if they had demonstrated a commitment towards the clan community based on their available means, for example through contributions to bridewealth. Oldest sons also had to display the ideal characteristics for their proposed leadership position. Because a chief was often consulted to mediate conflicts that could not be solved by the conflicting parties and their immediate families an ideal chief had to be calm in disposition and able to put his own alliances aside in his mediation.

If oldest sons did not fulfill these criteria, or if they were too young to have been able to reliably demonstrate their ability, integrity and consistency, they would not be selected as successors. Instead, priority would likely be given to a more ideally suited brother, uncle or cousin of the oldest son. This flexibility in succession has, at least in parts, also been affirmed by Elli Kōngäs Maranda, who observed that “there are men who have refused to become priests after their fathers from fear of not being competent” (1974:201).

For today’s clan chiefs, Marcel insisted, this dual requirement of personality and achievement especially as demonstrated in generous participation exchange relations such as contributions to feasts was still in place. I encountered two cases during my fieldwork that confirmed this claim in their break with idealized rules for hereditary succession. Even years after the passing of the previous clan chief, one of the clans represented through a male line in Gwou’ulu was divided about who the clan chief should be. The former clan chief’s oldest son was one of the claimants and so was the former clan chief’s younger brother. Clan elders had been unable to come to an agreement about who was the more ideal and most trustworthy leader. Some clan members simply shrugged in response to this divide noting that they had accepted this

“twin leadership” as status quo for the time being, consulting whoever was believed to have the expertise they needed for a counsel or to resolve a conflict.

The second example involves the death, during my fieldwork, of a clan chief from Hatodea on Maana’oba Island. During a stay in Honiara, the clan chief had been punched to death by his oldest son after the clan chief had refused to give him more cash for beer. Because of the murder the oldest son was excluded from succession and so were the deceased clan chief’s younger sons. They were deemed to not (yet) be knowledgeable and responsible enough to reliably fulfil the role of a clan chief. The deceased clan chief’s oldest brother was also disregarded as successor because, as SDA priest, he was felt to not sufficiently respect autochthonous values. This was evidenced in the priest’s refusal to participate in exchange networks, specifically the payment of bridewealth, and even in mortuary rites after the death of his brother. As a result clan elders chose a younger brother of the deceased clan chief as the most adequate successor in view of his knowledge and his characteristics. I was told that the younger brother was known for a calm but ambitious demeanour and he had demonstrated willingness to share his wealth with other clan members, for example by contributing *malefo*-style shell money or a pig to compensation payments and for village feasts.

Accordingly, I contend that hereditary succession in Lau complements the extensive list of “exceptions to the rule” that Mosko (2012:158-163) compiled to support his argumentation that “satisfaction of the criteria of hereditary succession [in the Pacific] itself requires satisfactory performance of a long-sustained and wide-ranging series of interpersonal transactions and exchanges” (162-163). Based on my own observations and the narratives I collected, this holds true for Lau chiefs (and formerly ancestral priests) who could not attain their positions and titles without adequately demonstrating that they were, indeed, the perfect fit for the leadership role; and they could only do so based on their attributes and achievements, their demonstrated integrity and trustworthiness as leaders.

The leadership of Kwaisulia, the passage master from ‘Adagege, that I briefly described in chapter 2 provides further evidence for this significance of demonstrated leadership capacity from his skills as war leader to, more specifically, his demonstrated ability to accumulate previously unknown wealth and make this wealth felt far beyond the boundaries of his own clan. As already noted, married to a woman from a chiefly, aristocratic line he was in proximity of

chiefly power but in a solely hereditary system unlikely to ever be regarded as a chiefly leader; Yet the historical record leaves little doubt that his claim to leadership was further reaching than that of any leader before him (Akin 2013; Corris 1970, 1973; Ivens 1930; Keesing 1992b). Kwaisulia was acknowledged as legitimate leader by many. At times he was described as chiefly because of his reputation as war leader, his accumulation and distribution of wealth (Ivens 1930:199), and because he exhibited the attributes of a skilled leader. Kwaisulia “was generally considered to be subtle and wily, and his oratory impressed many” (Corris 1970:260).

This said, Kwaisulia’s experience also indicates that lineage does play an important role in determining chiefly (and formerly priestly) succession. Specifically, Corris (1970:262) suggests that despite Kwaisulia’s influence, attributes and participation in exchange relations, he was not chosen as “formally-recognized” chief after the death of his father-in-law. This is most of all significant because what Kwaisulia’s case then also demonstrates is that any titular chief could always be eclipsed in his powers by a more skilled leader. This leader, if powerful enough and recognized for his influence, could take over some, if not most, of chiefly responsibilities, e.g., by deciding about the waging of war, a chiefly prerogative that Kwaisulia assumed at multiple occasions (Corris 1970:261).

Such flexibility and instability of formal claims to leadership in a chiefly context is also reflected in Marcel’s explanations of contemporary chiefly leadership in Lau. For instance, Marcel noted that, while he was formally his clan’s chief, he was not able to make any important decisions by himself, e.g., about the Suava Bay Development Project. All important decisions were made by all clan leaders, and especially by clan elders; he and other clan chiefs were merely supposed to be representatives of their clans during negotiations with the state or during conflict resolution with other clans. His task was to be a good representative, and he had to continuously prove that he could be; otherwise, Marcel explained, it could always happen that his claim to the “title” was challenged by a brother or uncle, and this challenge could possibly even accepted as justified and legitimate challenge by his clan. Alternatively, it was also possible that his decisions and advice could and would simply be ignored.

The Case of Contemporary Village Leaders (and Beyond)

Importantly, my local respondents highlighted the significance of leaders' integrity and trustworthiness in conversations about *any* of the contemporary leadership positions that I outlined. The respective community, clan, church or village, needed to have sufficient experience with potential leaders' attributes and achievements, including adequate generous participation in exchange relations, to acknowledge their claim to leadership.

Anyone and especially any man as potential if not actual leader in the village was expected to strive towards such integrity. Those who did not were readily disregarded as village leaders irrespective of the titles they already held; at least until they changed their behaviour and began to contribute more adequately to the needs of the community. This said, not every leader was required to display the same characteristics. Instead, the characteristics depended fundamentally on the role these leaders were supposed to perform. Clan chiefs, for example, were expected to be ambitious and, if possible, well-educated to be able to push effectively for development projects, above all. Church leaders, on the other hand, were ideally not ambitious but even-tempered and perhaps even scholarly in their demeanour, always aspiring to develop a better understanding of Christian principles and prescriptions; while political leaders in particular (but also beyond) were expected to be generous in the spreading of their wealth to their clans and village communities.

Concretely within the realm of state politics, the following example indicates the importance of contributing to exchange relations for someone to be recognized as good and legitimate leader. In a nutshell, after a candidate paid lavishly for the funeral arrangements of a supporter who had died on the campaign trail, the candidate's popularity grew in Gwou'ulu, and according to an interview with Ken, a village from Gwou'ulu in his mid-30s, the candidate's popularity also grew among members of the clan the deceased belonged to.

Ken: We went to Ward 12 and this man died. [He was speaking at the campaign event] when he was finishing with his story, he says "... My brother's family and I decided to follow this candidate after he finished his campaign in our home; forty people from our village followed him, so we hope we will get more than 40 more after this event"... he was holding his microphone and then he said "I am ready to fall down now." After his speech a dance and music was supposed to follow. So people thought he was making a joke. He says "I am ready to fall down now" and he

fell down. The meaning of this is “I will die now”... He fell down and then he was breathing heavy into the microphone that he was holding in his hand. While he fell down people were laughing because they still thought he was being funny. When people ran to him to help he had already died.

From there an engine [OBM] came to take him back home... The candidate had to decide what he would do. The Solomon Islands Government says that you have to pay only SBD 100,000 if you kill a man, then you can straighten the problem with *kastom*. You go to prison for eight or nine or ten years but not for a lifetime if you pay. But the kind of death [at the campaign event], there was no need to pay anything because the candidate did not know either. It was the sickness of the men who died.

In *kastom* the candidate would give a very small thing not too big. But what the candidate did was that he gave SBD 100,000 to the family of the deceased and another SBD 100,000 for the clan of the deceased. Then he loaded two 3-ton trucks with rice, cargo everything, he provided [concrete] too, everything that is needed for after the death of the man. The [concrete] were for the grave. People in the village said ‘The man, had he stayed in the village and died, there would not have been much food after his death, but he died like a big man, a rich man that is how he died.’ Me too and everyone says that had the deceased been at home, he would have died not like a big man. So everyone from the man’s clan thinks that they now have to go and follow the candidate as well, me too...

Interviewer: Why did this man die?

Ken: It was *kastom* dying. The death was not straight. A devil [ancestor] is angry. It is a matter of devils. His own devil [ancestor] killed him. It was a problem inside the man who died. This is why he died. His father also died only two month ago.

Interviewer: So it is not a bad for the candidate?

Ken: No, not at all. The deceased man’s clan identified themselves that this is an internal problem, a problem with the clan not of the candidate. Also the candidate did something really big. He did something big for the death, for the burial. He paid his life and he paid another SBD 100,000 for the clan and two drums of petrol to run to markets and prepare everything for the death.

Interviewer: Is it true that the candidate also paid five red shell money?

Ken: Yes, that is true. That is part of *kastom*, it must be included. The red money went to the family. Red money represents respect. The candidate respects us. Red money is more than white man money; it is culture. We value red money very much.

Interviewer: Do you think five red shell money is a good number?

Ken: Yes, it fits because the candidate gave also SBD 100,000. Even if he had not given the red money the money that he gave was very big. The two priests from Gwou'ulu are going to solve the problem, to block *kastom* [the angry devil] and then they will bury the man. The candidate is there too, he will only leave after the burial is complete and then he campaigns more (Interview, 17 November 2014).

The growing popularity of this candidate demonstrates—among other issues touched upon in this interview extract that I do not discuss any further here—the significance and the positive impact of the candidate's generous contributions to the funerary arrangements on his recognition as a leader. Because of his actions he was recognized as leader who respects autochthonous values and who is willing to distribute his wealth readily and generously. For instance, another villager explained to me that “this is the first time in history that I saw a candidate do this; not even an Honourable who has been elected has done this kind of thing [being so generous]. No one! This is very important!” (Interview, 19 November 2014). In the end this candidate did not win the election because of not enough support in the inland areas of the constituency. However, he remained the most popular candidate in Gwou'ulu and based on the reports I was able to collect also in the village that the deceased supporter belonged to.

This concern with demonstrated and personality-fitting leadership was especially also visible in villagers' recognition of leaders who were predominantly outside of the any of the positions introduced (with the exception of being male). The case of David is exemplary. David lost his position as clan village chief and as contender for the position of head village chief after taking a second wife (and not divorcing his first). He and his second wife were expelled from the village, but were allowed to build a house not far from the village boundaries. David's expulsion and his removal from formal leadership positions were initiated by the village priest, confirmed by the church village committee based on moral grounds, and broadly approved by other villagers, including elders and other members of David's clan. However, no one else stepped up to assume David's previous role as peacemaker. Instead, and at first firmly opposed, especially by church leaders, David was called into the village every time a conflict ensued.

David remained a leader and for many he was even one of the most important village leaders because of his achievements in conflict resolution and, pragmatically, because there was no one else with comparable skills and influence. He was recognized as leader even though he

had been excluded from many of the “formal” leadership positions, especially those associated with the Anglican Church. I was told that in ancestral villages it was not uncommon for chiefs to have multiple wives. On the contrary, it was seen as indicative of the individual chief’s power. However, barely any of my local respondents considered this practice to be morally acceptable today. Several emphasized instead that David was able to keep an informal leadership position despite, but certainly not because of, polygamy.

In addition, David remained a leader in village affairs because he continued with contributing to important clan and village affairs despite being “banned” from residing within Gwou’ulu itself. For example he donated cash to one of the clans involved in the reconciliation event for the Suava Bay Development Project even though his own clan was not; and he contributed red shell money to bridewealth of more distant relatives within his clan. The latter is notable in view of what villagers described to me as a growing tendency to only contribute to bridewealth of members of one’s nuclear family.

With many leadership positions or “titles” to go around and with personality and achievement being recognized as most significant, villagers then only recognized those as leaders who were deemed to have fulfilled their roles adequately and who had demonstrated a primary concern for the needs and values of the clan, church or village community. Indeed, not only Marcel struggled with having to continuously prove his leadership abilities. Obtaining a formal position was not indicative of any individual’s recognition as leader, at any time, in any context and in reference to any of the “titles.” Based on their titles, even some of the most powerful leaders in and outside of the village, such as the village priest, could be challenged, overridden or simply ignored if they did not participate actively and positively in village life including contributions to exchange networks.

In other words, claims to authority were never absolute, irrespective of how they were obtained. Instead, they were strongly dependent on the support of formal and informal groupings, commonly constituted of village elders both along and across clan lines, and/or a notable number of married men who were predominantly resident in the village. For example, decisions to permit or ban fishing in particular areas of the adjacent lagoon were made by elders from the land/sea-leading clan and, if leadership of the area was contested, at least ideally, by a cross-section from

all clans involved in the dispute.⁷⁵ A decision made solely by the respective clan chief, and without consulting clan elders, would simply not be followed and chiefs could not enforce decisions without enough supporters. The same was true for a government injunction. For instance, during my fieldwork a national ban had been issued for catching *kabarai*, the ‘spawn of the spine feet’ (*muu*) (*Siganus spp.*).⁷⁶ The majority of villagers, in agreement with village leaders, disagreed with the ban (or rather simply ignored it) and caught *kabarai* to be sold or exchanged at inland markets.

Figure 26: Freshly caught *kabarai* waiting to be prepared in a *motu* (stone oven) to be sold at a bush market the next day, Gwou’ulu, September 2014



Village Knowledge and the State on the Periphery

Perhaps most significantly—based on my observations and on various conversations I had with villagers about their leaders and how leadership was recognized as adequate and legitimate and

⁷⁵ See Akimichi (1991) for a more detailed description of Lau sea tenure systems

⁷⁶ The English translation of the fish species and scientific name are based on Akimichi (1978:313, 323).

as indicated in the importance of demonstrated respect for village values in the contributions of the candidate to the death of one of his supporters described earlier—villagers did *not* acknowledge the centre-periphery hierarchies that are implied in the centralized state. The Solomon Islands state, or country, never trumped the village community in decision making processes. For example, the opinion of a member of *gavman*, even one who was related to residents of Gwou’ulu, did not necessarily trump the opinion of a village chief or any man from the village. Villagers weighed the validity of any proposition, e.g., about how to proceed with the Suava Bay Development Project, against the proponents attributes and achievements as demonstrated *to* and *in* the village community.

Within this context, from villagers’ perspective, the most important determinant of a person’s leadership abilities, particularly in engagements with the state, was his (or rarely her) knowledge of Gwou’ulu, its community, values, struggles, needs and wants. Only leaders who were believed to prioritize Gwou’ulu in their decision-making and whose understanding of Gwou’ulu and its residents was deemed “correct” were acknowledged as legitimate leaders; and any decision was, first and foremost, made based on knowledge located in the village and for the village. From this perspective, the village was the centre and the state (in Honiara) on the periphery.

Such preferential treatment of village knowledge is exemplified by another event that occurred in the context of the election. Shortly before Election Day, a police awareness event took place in Gwou’ulu. According to the RSIPF, the goal of the event was to encourage peaceful behaviour on Election Day and after results had been announced. The visiting police officers advised villagers to immediately head to their gardens after they had cast their votes, not to assemble and talk to others about the election. Police officers appealed to Gwou’ulu villagers to demonstrate the strength of the democratic system and national unity to ensure peace not only in Gwou’ulu but across Solomon Islands.

However, only a day after the awareness events, the village priest suggested that Election Day should be treated like a Sunday and no one should go to work. Instead the village should come together to demonstrate their own unity despite the differences of opinions that would be expressed on Election Day as individual votes. The opposing claims were discussed throughout the village; many agreed with the priest and did not go to the gardens or go fishing on Election

Day. In explaining this decision to me, some noted that in 2006 Gwou'ulu had been sacked by another village, with several houses burnt, because Gwou'ulu was believed not to have voted for the candidate from the attacking village. This might happen again, and to avoid more damage than necessary, Gwou'ulu villagers had to demonstrate their own unity and they had to be vigilant. Dispersing after casting one's vote was not ideal for the village community, so they would not.

When I inquired further about this decision concerning Election Day and, more broadly, about the priority given to knowledge about the village for determining legitimate leadership, my local respondents almost immediately started complaining about how difficult it had become to identify leaders who were, indeed, willing to prioritize and understand the village rather than merely to serve their own interests. Many villagers especially complained about the leaders who represented them in the state directly, such as the MP, or indirectly as negotiators of development contracts, such as their chiefs, continuously failed to prioritize the village. Villagers further noted that whoever they chose to represent them in the state would likely shift their priorities from the village to the state, and their own selfish interests. Many of my local respondents, especially women and those men who preferred the village lifestyle, complained that leaders, whether they were MPs, clan leaders or church leaders, would be “corrupted” and no longer willing to fulfil the “long-sustained and wide-ranging series of interpersonal transactions and exchanges” (Mosko 2012:163) that allowed leaders to be recognized as legitimate leaders.

Accordingly, during the election campaign, when candidates made promises to strengthen the positions of church and *kastom* leaders in the state—many of them did—villagers showed little enthusiasm for the propositions. I discuss the concern with church leaders in chapter 8, for now suffice to say that lack of interest in church leaders' inclusion resembled disinterest in reforms that focused on strengthening *kastom* leaders in the state. A small group, only those most closely aligned with the head village chief and the head village chief himself, expressed some support for the strengthening of the position of chiefs and especially for proposals to remunerate chiefs for their positions. However, the majority of village elders including clan-based chiefs considered the inclusion of institutions linked to *kastom* in the centralized state to be a non-issue. On the one hand, they thought that it was unlikely to be implemented and, on the other hand,

they did not think that such reform would be able to overcome village challenges within the state. *Kastom* leaders could be and had been corrupted in the state just the way MPs had. In the following I turn to a more detailed discussion of how villagers experience this disenfranchisement from their leaders across distance, when leaders stay in town to engage with the state.

Leaders in Absentia

Governing across Distance: An Overview

Throughout the previous chapters the question of distance between the state and the village has been lingering. In my description of villagers' attitudes towards state-sponsored education and health services in chapter 5, I noted that villagers' critique included a concern with access across distance, for instance, the need to send children to boarding schools or to live with relatives in town to be able to attend any of the "better" secondary schools. In chapter 4, I described how Gwou'ulu villagers were required to head to Honiara for nearly any public administrative service including courts; and in chapter 3, drawing on Bennett (2002), among others, I more broadly indicated how urbanization and growing economic inequalities have discouraged decentralization because state officials prefer to be close to the luxuries of town.

In identifying a "problem of distance," that is, the physical distance between the state and Solomon Islands village communities, my research is not unique. Instead it echoes ongoing debates about how failed decentralization after independence has contributed to state instability in Solomon Islands (Allen et al. 2011; Allen and Dinnen 2016; Bennett 2002; Frazer 1995; McDougall 2014). The argument has even been made that since the 1990s, Solomon Islands has become more centralized, specifically through efforts to reduce the size of the public service through structural adjustment programmes (Allen et al. 2011; Allen and Dinnen 2016; McDougall 2014).

In 1998, one of these measures was, in essence, the abolition of local government through the abolition of area councils and local courts that had first been established under the British administration and in partial response to Maasina Rule (Akin 2013) and that I shortly alluded to in chapter 3. Among others, local courts were able to hear land disputes; and area councils

included elected members who were able to raise and collect basic taxes and business licensing fees and to implement local policies, e.g., in regard to land use and tourism. With their abolition, “some 328 councilors [sic] and a large number of administrators and officials, including area constables, were dismissed and the raft of community bylaws administered at this level *disappeared overnight*” (Allen et al 2011:10; my emphasis). In conversations with Gwou’ulu villagers under the age of 35, state-linked community bylaws had disappeared to such an extent that most had never heard of these institutions; or they repeated stories they had heard from their parents and grandparents. In these stories local government was attributed solely to the colonial administration and its demise in the independent Solomon Islands state.

During the Tensions and in particular during peace negotiations, militants demanded a return to and strengthening of decentralization mechanisms. The Townsville Peace Agreement also contains a clause that concerns constitutional review to increase provincial power vis-à-vis central government power. However, these demands took a backseat during the RAMSI intervention (Allen and Dinnen 2016). In its mandate and its execution, RAMSI instead focused primarily on strengthening the centralized government and public administrative system (Allen and Dinnen 2016). During conversations with foreign statebuilders, several RAMSI and PPF officials complained that they were not even allowed to visit the provinces and particularly no to visit any areas beyond provincial capitals for “security concerns.” The dominance of the central state vis-à-vis subnational state-based governance thus remains unchallenged if not strengthened, and so is the distance between the urban state and village communities.

In this context, McDougall (2014) suggests that the centralized state (and some donor countries) have identified Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) as a means to decrease the distance between the state and the village. Yet, she argues that CDFs have failed at doing so because they have not benefited communities but individuals and because, at least in practice, they require villagers to travel to town to request funds from their MP. My local respondents confirmed this sentiment and experience with the CDF. Even more so, beyond McDougall’s (2014) argumentation, they highlighted how distance not only complicated their relationship with the Solomon Islands state but also how the prolonged experience with distance has continued to nurture further distrust in the state, most of all in any leaders who are entangled with it.

Urbanizing Leadership

Many of my local respondents were uncertain about how the distance between the village and town, out of which both the MP and also (illegally⁷⁷) the CDO tended to be based, could be bridged. From a village perspective, the only option beyond finding a good leader/MP—which seemed increasingly impossible—was to seek meetings with state (or funding) representatives in town. To this end, villagers had two basic choices: send someone from the village to town, for example, a village leader such as the head village chief or, rely on the efforts of someone from the village who was already resident in town, for example, a bureaucrat or, preferable to most, a clan chief.

Clan chiefs often lived primarily in Honiara (with around four visits to the village per year). They, like many other villagers, had followed the “urban pull.” Besides, following the development hopes of other clan members and villagers, clan chiefs seemed to be increasingly required to live in town to fulfil their role as clan leaders, clan chiefs and titular landowners. Only in town was it possible to complete negotiations with the *gavman* and other state and non-state (business) actors on a clan’s behalf. Thus, as the most important clan-based leaders, this task fell to clan chiefs. Other clan-centric responsibilities, especially those related to internal village-based conflict resolution, could be and were delegated to village and lieutenant chiefs.

In other words, the residency choices, at least of Gwou’ulu clan leaders were strongly influenced by the challenge of how, when and where the state, through its representatives (and leaders), could be engaged (at least potentially) successfully. Exemplary for this perceived need to be in town is the concept of “come back tomorrow.” The English phrase was mentioned to me at several occasions by those non-elites and elites (including civil servants), who frequently interacted with state institutions. The 2016 *Solomon Islands Public Sector Satisfaction Survey* identified the “‘come back tomorrow’ system” (Povey, Cook and Baffour 2016:1) as a core Solomon Islanders’ frustration in their interaction with public services (see also Kwa’ioloa and Burt 2012:178). The concepts describe the difficulty of getting anything done that required approval from state organizations. “We have not yet been able to process your request” (paraphrased) or “we only need the Minister’s signature, but he is currently out of the country”

⁷⁷ The Constituency Development Funds Act of 2013 requires CDOs to be based in the constituency they represent.

(paraphrased) were mentioned to me as common add-ons. In this context, persistence, showing up over and over again, was often considered to be the only option to maintain any hope for engaging with the state bureaucracy. This was especially the case as many such efforts had experienced what may be called deaths by tomorrows, when the process had to be started anew because cabinet was reshuffled and a different MP had to be convinced to sign the agreement, or simply because the endeavour was abandoned.

At least until the MP for Gwou'ulu was a good leader and engaged the village at his own volition and by prioritizing village needs and values, many of my local respondents were certain that it would take a considerable amount of time in town to realize any of their development hopes. For now, such hopes could simply not be fulfilled from afar. Even mobile phones had been unable to bridge the divide. Calls had been found to be ineffective to “push” state institutions and representatives in the same way that “being there” had. On site one could be sent away but refuse to leave without an answer, a phone call could (and frequently was said to be) simply hung up on.

Even when in town clan chiefs, at least in 2014, were still well-connected to the village; and some were respected especially for their autochthonous knowledge of lineages, ancestor spirits and their lands. All of them maintained houses in Gwou'ulu and some had left their wives and children in the village, indicating, at least to some, a desire to eventually return. Clan chiefs were often called (using mobile phones) when conflicts in the village could not be solved without them and their advice was frequently followed. In reverse, clan chiefs also called their village representatives, village and lieutenant chiefs regularly to check if any significant event had occurred that may require their attention. At least in two instances during my fieldwork, clan chiefs travelled back to the village to ensure that conflicts would not escalate, and they succeeded at doing so. Similarly men in important positions in the bureaucracy or in business were consulted by villagers in relation to funding for Gwou'ulu Primary School or because of troubles with teacher attendance. Gwou'ulu urbanites in Honiara (and to a far lesser extent Auki) remained influential from afar and were significant leaders *in absentia*.

Still, the “moral” distance between villagers and these urban village leaders, especially clan chiefs whose leadership was indispensably tied to their knowledge of clan land, appeared to be growing, along with the uncertainty of what kind of leader they were, good ones who

understood their community and who put them first, or more bad ones who did not and instead enjoyed the (urban) privileges tied to formal leadership titles; after all, the state would only negotiate with clan chiefs for development projects (see chapter 6). This perceived “moral” distance, facilitated by a supposed immorality of life in town, I discuss next.

The Immorality of Life in Town

In essence, being in town meant being absent from the village. Reflecting the “dualism” that Berg identifies as central to the image or trope of Honiara as “the opposite of ‘home’ (*hom*)” (2000:6-7), my local respondents described being in town for the state as morally challenging. They noted that in town leaders were tempted by the urban lifestyle and what it was (morally) infamous for—laziness, sexually promiscuous behaviour, and drug and alcohol abuse (see Donner 2002; Jourdan 1995, 1996, 2008b). Rather than “getting to town,” the problem became “being in town.” This added notably to the problem of leadership in the state, pushing the problem beyond the inadequacies of MPs and members of *gavman*. To engage with the state in town Gwou’ulu villagers had to find a good village leader who was able to serve as intermediary between the village and state leaders. This leader could not just go to town, or live in town to indulge in the luxuries of urban life, perhaps even at the expense of the MP/CDO who might try distracting the village representative from the issues at stake through special “perks.”

A good leader was then a leader who could be trusted not to succumb to the lures of the urban, or of simply being away from the village, and who would not, as Gegeo notes, lose their “true identity” (1998:293) when in town. A good leader would have to continue to prioritize the village at all times, and to be able to do so to also follow its rules from afar. For example, the church village committee of Gwou’ulu had banned the open consumption of alcohol in 2010 and pressured any villager heading to Honiara not to indulge in “sinful” drinking. However, most of my respondents, including village leaders, freely admitted that they enjoyed drinking in town and more broadly enjoyed the freedom from village bounds, from community pressures, when being in Honiara. Finding a leader who was willing to remain fully committed to the village lifestyle and its values was known to be difficult, if not impossible, much like finding a good MP.

This sense of “freedom” echoes Jourdan’s (1995) description of why young men and women prefer urban lifestyles, frequently as *Masta Liu*, unemployed men with no stable

residence in Honiara who depended on occasional jobs and their relatives in town to make ends meet (see chapter 1).

[For example,] some young girls marvel at the freedom they experience at being able to wander around with their peers, and at being able to talk to the boys without facing the reprimands of their *wantok*. They relish being spared the back-breaking work in the... fields that would have filled their days had they stayed in the village. All *liu*, boys and girls, will tell how easy life is in Honiara and how much they rest when they come to town... More [so]... what the *liu* are avoiding is the inescapability of *kastom* and the control that their kin and members of older generations have over the young ones: control over work... control over wealth through a system of reciprocal obligations, etc. (210-211; also Gooberman-Hill 1999)

My observations in Gwou'ulu complement those of Jourdan (1995). Urban freedom is what villagers who prefer the village lifestyle critiqued the most and why they questioned the integrity and trustworthiness of their leaders such as clan chiefs who were primarily in town, especially so if they were happily rather than begrudgingly in town.

Examples of urban enjoyments and village leaders' failure to follow village values are the problems of adultery and polygamy. Despite his continued role as peacemaker David, the only polygamist in Gwou'ulu, was continuously reminded of villagers' disagreement with his decision to take a second wife (in comparison also, for example, to "simply" having an affair). Any of his actions were scrutinized and carefully monitored and he remained punished in not being allowed to reside within the village boundaries. Gwou'ulu villagers were not able to "police" similar behaviour among their "urban" leaders, clan chiefs or bureaucrats.

As mentioned in chapter 4, Gwou'ulu highly valued its primary school. Much of the primary school's success was attributed to the headmaster, but also to their primary contact in the Ministry of Education, a higher-ranking bureaucrat married to not one but to two women from Gwou'ulu. Many of my local respondents were discontent and outraged about the polygamy, but in conversations many also pointed out that they depended on the bureaucrat for their children's future. Therefore nothing would be done to punish him, and others noted, not much could be done to punish him from afar, in particular because he owned property and a house in Honiara. This bureaucrat was, however, no longer viewed as legitimate leader of Gwou'ulu. If and when they could replace him as leader of Gwou'ulu, Gwou'ulu villagers would; and the same

sentiment was expressed towards a clan chief who had only one wife but who was known to have children with two other women in town.

Within this context of “urban freedom,” whenever someone wanted to go to town, irrespective of the reason, villagers also questioned that person’s likelihood and willingness to return. There were a few well-known *hom boes* and *hom gele*—men and women who unquestionably preferred the village lifestyle—but many villagers could simply disappear to Honiara, not to come back for years, if at all, or only for occasional visits during holidays. Indeed, as early as 1985 Frazer noted that “mobility [between rural and urban areas] has become more open-ended and unpredictable” (188) and this tendency seems to have been amplified further by a growing number of (middle-class) urban residents who consider Honiara their primary home (Jourdan 1995, 1996; Gooberman-Hill 1999; SIG-RAMSI 2013).

For Gwou’ulu villagers, this unpredictability of return had notable consequences for village perceptions of leaders and their long-term commitment to and knowledge of the village. Several clan chiefs who were resident in Honiara had children (sons) who had little experience of life in the village and of their ancestral lands, and thus only limited interest to return. The same was true for bureaucrats and at least some village chiefs aspired to eventually move to town for a longer, more permanent period of time. This raised important questions of succession and of rootedness. Who should assume the position of clan chief next? Should it be a son who was possibly well-versed in the bureaucratic knowledge necessary to expedite negotiations with state and business officials, but who had little understanding of everyday village life and weakened links to his clan and land, or a cousin or uncle from the village who would then also have to move to town, or at least very frequently travel back and forth?

In addition, many of these leaders *in absentia* were also felt to be only inadequately contributing their resources to village affairs, especially village feasts and other significant life events such as baptisms, marriage and death. Only rarely did leaders *in absentia* contribute to village events and affairs while being away from the village, and in particular if the event did not concern the leader’s immediate nuclear family. They would send a bag of rice to village-based family members similar to any urban (also female) residents but they rarely contributed generously to—as they were expected to by the village community—often feast-based events such as the main village feast on Saint’s Day. I turn next to a more concise discussion of village-

based feasting in the context of leadership across a distance, considering also the impact of leadership *in absentia* on villagers' perception of their value in the centralized state.

The Devaluation of the Village in the State

Distance, and with it the perceived need to have leaders from Gwou'ulu in town, also challenged villagers' perceptions of leaders *in* the village, among leaders and villagers themselves. While leadership in the village, especially for conflict resolution, was valued for its contributions to everyday peace, only few (and, I was told, increasingly fewer) wanted to lead in the village rather than from afar. This is reflected in how the head village chief of Gwou'ulu got his position. During one of our conversations he freely admitted that, because of the tasks and residency requirements it entailed, no one else or, rather, no one else preferred by other villagers, had wanted the position. All his older brothers had moved to town, leaving only considerably younger and less experienced village chiefs in the village.

In conversations villagers explained this disinterest in leading the village *in* the village as indicative of a devaluation of the village in the state. It was not possible to engage with the state in the village and even less to engage with foreign development organizations and businesses; to this end one had to be in town. Leaders in the village were then seen as important for everyday governance, but they had no influence on the future. Leaders in the village were considered unlikely to be part of the solution to the growing global dependencies that had convinced villagers to support projects such as the Suava Bay Development Project. Leaders in the village had, in essence, become "domestic" leaders, comparable to the role of women in family units rather than to men's waged (public) labour outside the village (and in the state).

This observation echoes that of McDougall (2015b) who identifies a similar process of devaluation of the village in Ranongga, Western Province. In Ranongga, leadership positions in the village have become so devalued that McDougall observed the recognition of female chiefs and the inclusion of women in clan committees because "it is a chieftainship that has been 'domesticated'... [The work of female chiefs is] like that of men in the same position... focused primarily on maintaining amicable relationships within kin groups *rather than engaging with powerful foreigners*... [which] is still mostly reserved for men" (205; my emphasis).

In other words, gendered domesticity as described in chapter 4 is replicated in the perception that the most powerful and important leadership positions are in town and therefore essentially reserved for men, while leadership in the village has been devalued alongside the labour of women. An analysis of Gwou'ulu experiences with feasting in 2014—in ancestral villages at the heart of the male-centric, ceremonial realm and the reaffirmation of claims to leadership (see Ivens 1930; Maranda 2010)—reveals the extent to which this domestication and transformation of village leadership has taken place, even though unlike Ranongga Gwou'ulu is yet to appoint any female chiefs.

*Village Feasts in 2014*⁷⁸

Research across Melanesia has identified the organization of feasts as particularly significant ritualized communicative and socially organizing acts (Kahn 1986; Lemonnier 1990; Maranda 2010; Wiessner 2001). Feasts lie at the heart of ritual cycles, warfare and the making (or unmaking) of peace. Feasts can express and consolidate solidarity and create social cohesion as much as they can be about conflict and exclusion. The food, in the Melanesian context especially pork, that is shared (or not) is central to notions of belonging. Feasts “provide an arena for the highly condensed symbolic representation of social relations. Like all rituals, they express idealized concepts, that is the way people believe relations exist or should exist rather than how they are necessarily manifested in daily activity” (Dietler 1996:89).

Within this context, feasts also signify leadership, especially in societies where leadership is (predominantly) determined by a man's achievements in gift exchange, since a core determinant of continued recognition of a leader is the leader's ability to successfully organize a feast (Lemonnier 1990). Such a feast should demonstrate the leader's wealth and his willingness to give back to the community without leaving anyone hungry. This was also the case for pre-Christian Lau (Maranda 2010) and, according to Ivens (1930), in the context of inherited

⁷⁸ Only those feasts that encouraged the participation of all villagers (e.g., not a baptism or marriage feast) are discussed here.

Table 1: Gwou'ulu Feasts in 2014

Organizer	Anglican Church (in the Village)			Clans (in the State)		The State (in the Village)
Event	Celebration of Saints' Day (St. Michael's)	Welcome feast for the Bishop of Malaita	Welcome feast for us	Intra-clan reconciliation	Inter-clan reconciliation	Electoral Campaign
Target Community	Anglican community (+ villagers belonging to other churches, e.g. Kingdom Harvest)	Anglican community (+ villagers belonging to other churches, e.g. Kingdom Harvest)	Village community	Members of clan A from three villages (ancestral lands in Gwou'ulu) + village community	Clans with ancestral lands involved in the Suava Bay Cannery Project + members of resident non-landowning tribes	Village community (also from neighbouring Tara'ana)
Organizing Committees	Church groups 1 to 6	Church groups 1 to 6	Church groups 1 to 6	Members of clan A	Members of landowning clans involved in the Suava Bay Cannery Project	Supporters of candidate
How many pigs (provided by whom?)	None	One (Bishop of Malaita)	One (us)	Three (state funding and fundraising among clan members and other villagers)	Between 15 and 25 (state funding and fundraising among clan members and other villagers)	One to three based on different village rumours (candidate)
How were tables organized?	One leaf table per group and one wooden table for leaders	One leaf table per group and one wooden table for leaders	One leaf table per group and one wooden table for leaders	Four leaf tables, three mixed and one for leaders (all attending men)	Ten leaf tables, nine mixed and one for leaders	Four leaf tables, one wooden table for leaders
Same food for each table?	No, different depending on group; more pig and chicken only at leader table	No, different depending on group; more pig and chicken only at leader table	No, different depending on group; more pig and chicken only at leader table	Yes	Yes	No; chicken only and more pig at leader table

succession. For example, Ivens (1930) notes that “the chiefs in Lau are still responsible for the carrying out of the big feasts, and these feasts are the most important things that occur in the social life of the communities as a whole” (1930:87).

In their close ties to pre-Christian religious practice, the particular feasts central to the mourning rituals that followed the death of a pagan priest, including a grand dance festival for ancestor worship (the *maoma*) and the women’s feast (Maranda 2010:134-150, 151-156) had disappeared with Christianization. However, as elsewhere on Malaita, for example, among the Kwara’ae (Burt 1994a), the practice of big feasts had been maintained in an appropriation into the Christian ritual cycle. Simultaneously, feasts had also assumed a role in negotiating and expressing village relationships with the state as external actor. All feasts that I observed in 2014 (see Table 1) were organized either by church, clan or state-based leaders. In each case they were the means to emphasize shared belonging, while the respective claims to leadership were hopefully cemented for another period of time.

Feasting Failures ... and some Successes

Importantly, from the perspectives of many villagers, big feasts in Gwou’ulu in 2014 did not succeed at bringing the village together or at (re)affirming individuals’ abilities as good leaders. All three church feasts were deemed failures by participants because of how little food was offered and shared equally between villagers and village leaders, and especially because of the unwillingness of any individual village leader or group of leaders to provide at least one if not more pigs.

The pigs that were purchased by the Bishop of Malaita and by us for our respective church-organized welcome feasts were described to us as appropriate gifts for visitors who are in leadership positions or for new, temporary special residents such as ourselves. However, as some villagers complained, the village should have at least matched our contributions. While no one individual was necessarily expected to provide an additional pig, there was some discontent because church leaders had not organized a fundraising event to collectively acquire one or two more pigs. This lack of leadership was deemed especially visible and disgraceful in the case of the St. Michael’s feast, which is particularly important in the village’s Christian ritual cycle. Several groups had prepared dances for the event but no one, including the village priest and

members of the church village committee or leaders *in absentia*, appeared to be willing to contribute to a pig.

The church feasts were also considered a failure because of the unequal distribution of the other foods provided, and because only leaders did not leave the feast hungry. Church feasts were organized along the church group lines created by the village priest. As instructed by the village priest and the church village committee, groups one to six organized their own foods and did not share the food they had organized with other groups. This caused a notable imbalance. The members of groups one to five were primarily families who depended on small-scale gardening and fishing for their contributions to the feast and they had “only” been able to obtain and prepare regular Sunday foods, such as cassava pudding. Church Group 6, on the other hand, consisted of the ten houses that included the residences of the teachers, the priest, and the biggest canteen. Group six had, in comparison to groups one to five, been able to afford larger quantities of rice, canned tuna and noodles, as well as more expensive market goods such as taro.

This said, not only Groups 1 to 5 but also Group 6 left the feast hungry, no villager or leader *in absentia* had decided to contribute enough food to feed all of Gwou’ulu families satisfactorily. An important exception was the seventh or leader table. The village priest was responsible for choosing who was allowed to join this seventh table—he, the head village chief, the headmaster and any outside-leader in attendance, such as visiting clan chiefs and (at times) ourselves. Other village-based leaders, formal or not (e.g. David), were excluded and expected to join their respective group tables. Notably, the leaders who had been invited by the village priest to join the leader table had a plenitude of food, including a larger share of any available pork and alternative meats such as chicken, which were not included on any of the group tables.

In conversations, villagers expressed discontent about the inequalities and leader inadequacies in food distribution. Villagers had expected leaders to contribute more food and to share it equally with all villagers irrespective of the “groups” and “tables” that they had been assigned. In this vein, some villagers negatively compared Gwou’ulu church feasts with those of the past, or those that were supposed to be happening in other parts of Malaita. Some were embarrassed, others angry, about the shortages of food and of good leaders who were willing to demonstrate and strengthen the value of community for the village itself, rather than for anyone else including for the state.

Figure 27: Leaf tables are being set up for an intra-clan reconciliation feast, Gwou’ulu, August 2014



For similar reasons—a shortage of food and unequal distribution of food—a feast organized by one of the candidates during the campaign was also deemed a failure. Those who had not been invited to the leader table, in this case jointly chosen by the village priest and the head village chief, left this feast hungry as well. Especially those who had not been supporting this candidate labelled the feast as a sign of “corruption” and thus decided not to join any of the tables (they watched from afar but did not eat). These villagers who were critical of the campaign feast noted that, at least theoretically, the event could be considered a welcome feast, similar to that organized for the short visit of the Bishop of Malaita. However, they also noted a succinct difference between the two events, and the two men. The Bishop of Malaita had proven his ability to lead Anglican communities across the province, while the candidate had yet to earn his recognition as a leader in and of Gwou’ulu. The feast he organized was intended to “buy” leadership with no previous evidence for it. The Bishop’s, on the other hand, affirmed his leadership.

In other words, for a feast to be considered successful all participants were expected to share the prepared food equally, with leaders contributing larger amounts of foods to not leave

anyone hungry and without expecting an immediate return (such as a vote in the National Elections). Neither the church nor the campaign feasts were able to do so, and therefore, failed to reaffirm or affirm any leadership claims. In comparison, in view of these criteria, the two feasts organized by clans and headed by their respective clan chiefs were considered more successful.

The broader events, including dances that accompanied the two clan feasts, were talked about favourably for days afterwards. The events had been inclusive insofar everyone, even the urban state representatives in attendance, shared the same food and roughly the same amount of food and no one was left (too) hungry. A distinction was made between leaders and “others” in the tables that were set up with one table being designated as “leader table.” However, there had been no pre-selection of who would be allowed to join the leader table and who would not. Instead, as the two feasts were about to commence, all village leaders—anyone who recognized themselves as such—were invited to join the leaders’ table. In the case of the intra-clan reconciliation feast, nearly all men followed this call (but no women). For the inter-clan reconciliation event, mostly clan and village chiefs and some elders joined, in addition to the visiting state officials, politicians and bureaucrats, men and also some women.

Despite this success, there was debate about who had and who should have provided the funds necessary to obtain pigs and other foods, especially root crops such as taro, for the two clan-organized feasts. Most villagers agreed that it was the responsibility of the individual clans involved in the reconciliation to organize their share of the feast. This would have allowed them to demonstrate their genuine interest in reconciliation with the other clans, as well as reaffirming their chiefs’ abilities to lead. At the same time, villagers insisted that the state was expected to contribute its share to the feasts since they were also, if not primarily, taking place to fulfil the bureaucratic requirements of the state for the Suava Bay Development Project.

Within this context, state funding was deemed insufficient in comparison with the amount that individual clans had to contribute and in comparison with their respective abilities, especially because, as already noted, the feasts were to a significant extent organized *for* the state. The state was said to have offered SBD 50,000 which merely covered the cost of 15-25 pigs (depending on their size), while clans were left to supply all other foods and, most importantly, the transport costs such as petrol for OBMs for male clan members resident elsewhere to be able to attend. Such costs are exemplified by two of the three clan groups

involved in the intra-clan reconciliation, one of these groups had settled as far away as Atoifi in Central East Malaita and their round trip required at least SBD 6000 worth in petrol.⁷⁹

As a result, the clan-organized feasts were only to some degree successful. They were successful because all participants shared all foods with each other and because no one left these feasts (too) hungry; though the state failed to demonstrate its leadership in the organization of the feast by not contributing generously enough to the organization of the feasts in comparison to the involved clans. Next, I turn to an analysis of what villagers made of the unsuccessful feasts and the church feasts in particular that had had been primarily organized *for* the village, in comparison to the clan-based feasts that had been primarily organized *for* the state (and not the village); and what this meant for villagers' perceptions of their leaders in the village and *in absentia*.

Domesticated Feasts and Devalued Village Leaders

The four feasts that were deemed failures had been organized primarily for villagers in the village. The more successful feasts, on the other hand, had a dual audience, the clans involved, including their respective village communities, as well as the state as “development partner.” Both the failed and the relatively successful feasts were meant to affirm leadership and to reinforce the village community; however, in the case of the feasts held predominantly for the village community (and to allow the electoral candidate to become a part of it), the leaders involved in their organization appeared to be unwilling to share food or to give enough food (or cash for food) to make these feasts a success.

The failed feasts *for* the village left too many people hungry and merely appeared to demonstrate another instance, whereby some, especially those in power, were comfortable if not sated in comparison to those in weaker positions. The latter included women and children but also most men and leaders *in* the village because of the restrictions placed on who was and who was not allowed to join the leaders' table. By so doing, these feasts were reinforcing existing dividing lines within the village. To several villagers these feasts brought afore the marginalization of the village in comparison to those leaders who were leading from afar.

⁷⁹ They had brought large quantities of betel nut, which is considerably more expensive in North Malaita, to sell at the event to cover some of their costs.

This is especially the case because even the village-based leaders, who were invited to join the leaders' table of the failed feasts, were commonly recognized for their ability, at least at times, to reach beyond the village in their leadership. The headmaster, who was not from Gwou'ulu, was well-educated and paid by the state to be in the village to bring education, which for many villagers, remains the primary anchor for their development dreams. At the same time, the head village chief was most likely to be recognized by the state for his leadership *in* the village despite continued village-based challenges to his authority, for example, when David would be called to the village to solve disputes. The position of the village priest was more ambiguous; yet, he also had an important external outlook, because he personified that the village belonged to a broader provincial, national and global community of Christians.

In other words, feasts *for* the village with no bearing on outside issues were, therefore, viewed as essentially devalued in comparison to feasts that were, at least in part, *for* the state and the state representatives in attendance. For village leaders feasts *for* the village appeared not to be relevant enough to warrant sufficient attention from leaders to ensure they did not leave anyone hungry even though, importantly, many of Gwou'ulu villagers considered these village feasts indispensable as community- and leadership-affirming events.

This is not to say that the clan-based feasts were not also for the village—they intended to serve the village by opening another door toward fulfilling villagers' development desires and mitigating their urban dependencies—or that participating clans did not support reconciliation. Villagers described the successes of these feasts, especially their inclusivity, as important and essential steps beyond continued intra- and inter-clan conflicts. However, the conflicts themselves and the reason for their dissolution—development—were tied inseparably to the village's external relationship with the state and the global economy.

Also the means by which the clan-organized feasts were successful appeared to further demonstrate the devaluation of the village within the state. These feasts succeeded because villagers and their leaders in and outside the village were able to raise enough personal (non-state) funds to impress the state. The contributions of the state, on the other hand, were limited or not enough to confirm, for the villagers, any state-based authority or leadership of and in the village. In other words, no big feast held in 2014 was able to reveal good (village) leadership. There was no willingness on the part of existing leaders, including village-based leaders, to give

back or share with the village community, any more than what seemed to be the bare minimum, that is, the organization of any feast with little food.

Summary

Comparable to broader concerns in Solomon Islands and the Pacific (see Corbett 2013, 2015) Gwou'ulu villagers felt that good or rather better leaders had to be found to successfully address the most significant challenges facing Gwou'ulu and also Solomon Islands. However, this problem with leadership had less to do with villagers' understanding of good leadership, as for example implied in TSI's awareness campaign (figure 25), than with a perceived elusiveness of leadership inside and outside the village. In response to their growing dependencies on foreign goods and the cash economy, Gwou'ulu villagers had accepted the need to engage with the state and its representatives by sending village leaders to town as intermediaries to "lobby" *gavman* on their behalf. To this end several leaders from Gwou'ulu (and not only of Gwou'ulu as, for example, in the case of the MP) moved to Honiara to be able to be closer to the state, *gavman* representatives and also the state administration more broadly. They had no choice but to lead the village *in absentia*.

This distance challenged villagers' confidence in their leaders. Villagers were uncertain how they could hold Honiara-based leaders accountable, in view of what seemed to some an increasingly strong urban pull, a desire to enjoy the "immorality" of life (from adultery to alcohol) in town. Many were doubtful about how to determine the priorities and values of their town-based leaders and worried that leaders *in absentia* were losing the ability to truly understand and care for village needs and values.

The latter was of particular significance in order to be recognized as a legitimate and trustworthy leader by the residents of Gwou'ulu. I demonstrated how despite a chiefly system of hereditary succession, claims to leadership depend strongly on leaders' attributes and their achievements, for instance in their adequate contributions to exchange relations in the organization of feasts. Only leaders who have and continue to demonstrate their integrity and trustworthiness, in words and their actions, are recognized as such. Exemplary is the case of the candidate for the 2014 national election who generously compensated for the death of one of his

supporters, going far beyond what villagers expected from him or thought to be possible. Leadership *in absentia* is felt to undermine villagers' ability to assess this integrity and trustworthiness.

Simultaneously, leadership *in* the village appears to have become devalued alongside a devaluation of the village in the state. This is the case even though Gwou'ulu villagers continue to value knowledge of Gwou'ulu, its needs, wants and values, as most significant indicator of good leadership. As Gwou'ulu men were drawn to and allowed to stay in town for prolonged periods of time and as the significance of town-based leadership was repeatedly reaffirmed, leadership positions in the village have become less desirable. The roles of leaders in the village have become devalued and this devaluation was especially visible in experiences with feasting in Gwou'ulu during my fieldwork.

Big feasts continued to be recognized as significant for reaffirming leadership, the wealth of a leader and his willingness to give back to the village community. However, the four feasts organized predominantly for the village left villagers and most village-based leaders hungry. No leader, in or outside the village, appeared to be willing to value the village community for itself by sharing or giving back enough food to demonstrate good (reciprocal) leadership during village feasts. Only those feasts performed for the state were, at least in part, considered successful. Yet, this was also only insofar as those successful feasts reaffirmed villagers' desire to be seen by the state to fulfill their development hopes. The state itself merely contributed what people thought to be a fraction of its abilities, reminding villagers of their own insignificance, domestication and devaluation of their rural life.

As a result, my local respondents found themselves in a complex bind. They valued leaders who were familiar with the village and who prioritized village needs, above all. Yet, they also needed leaders *in absentia* to keep their development hopes alive and they were unable to govern leadership from afar, to ascertain that their leaders *in absentia* remained trustworthy and committed to the village. In requiring this distance the state becomes visible again as disinterested in its imagined citizens and as destructive in its devaluation of the rural lifeworld.

Importantly, the state's ability as "distracting" or even "destructive" force becomes even more visible in its entanglements with Christianity and Christian leaders. As Corbett (2013)

suggests, “the theological frame” (495) which, like that of my local respondents, identifies ideal leadership based on demonstrated “integrity and trustworthiness” (496) is of particular importance in Oceania because, “due to its extensive influence, it tends to be the avenue through which local calls for better leadership are directed” (495). In the following chapter I turn to this discussion of the position of Christianity and Christian leaders in the state.

8 ♦ Mainstream Christian Churches as Alternative? Church-State Entanglements, Conflict and “Breakaway”

Introduction

In their introduction to a comprehensive volume on the relationship between Christianity and politics in Oceania, Tomlinson and McDougall suggest that across contemporary Oceanic societies “Christianity is the ground and starting point for political action” (2012:2). They highlight how residents across Oceania’s weak states such as Solomon Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, have sought to locate and find solutions for state failure in spiritual rather than secular explanations; and they note that the same reasoning can be found among state actors as well.

Exemplary for an embrace of Christian principles by state actors is “the Jesus Strategy” employed by the Fijian police (Trnka 2011). The goal of “the Jesus Strategy” is twofold. The first goal is to change the behaviour of police officers by reframing their role as “taking part in Christian crusades” (81). The second goal is to morally reform the public through Christian police action. For instance, Bibles are issued to police officers who are tasked with preaching to prisoners and young unemployed men to convince them “to change their lives because with Jesus they can” (Fiji Police Force 2009 cited in Trnka 2011:82).

The other side of the coin is Christian entanglements with civil society. For example, Eriksen (2009) argues that conversion to Pentecostal churches in Vanuatu can be understood as a form of social critique against the status quo, state inadequacies, as well as insufficiencies among mainstream Christian churches that have remained unable to address state failure. Pentecostal churches are said to be strongly involved in efforts to “[take] back the nation’ in ways that seem to owe much to the Christian politics of North America” (Tomlinson and McDougall 2012:9). Within this context Eriksen (2009) describes a Pentecostal women’s organization that attempts to influence state-level decision making, from trade deals to the appointment of new ministers, by drawing on their Christian spirituality. “We are targeting the important issues that our leaders have proved unable to deal with. We are channels for the Holy Spirits, and through the power of

the Holy Spirit we are changing our society” (a member of this women’s organization cited in Eriksen 2009:191).

In my outline of core debates surrounding the independent Solomon Islands state in chapter 3, I noted the importance of Christian Churches as potentially alternative governance structures to the state. I also indicated and to some degree discussed the role of Christianity, specifically of the Anglican Church, in village-state relations in the context of Gwou’ulu in previous chapters. I explored some of its organizational capacities, for example for infrastructure management (chapter 5), and introduced it as central to everyday routines in village life (chapter 4). At the same time, I noted some of the Church’s limitations, from churches as potentially “exclusive” alternative social service providers (chapter 5), to the failure of church leaders to acknowledge the village’s value in the organization of community feasts (chapter 7). The goal of the present chapter is to bring these observations together and to extend them in a more detailed discussion of the historical entanglements between Christianity and the state, as experienced and described by Gwou’ulu villagers during my fieldwork.

To this end, the chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I provide a historically situated overview of church-state entanglements in Solomon Islands. In recognition of the significance of the Anglican Church in Gwou’ulu I focus my description on the Church of Melanesia with only occasional references to other historical mainstream churches. In the second part, I turn to a discussion of Christianity in Gwou’ulu during my fieldwork. I suggest that Christian leaders are frequently suspected of being corrupt, especially when they engage with the Solomon Islands state. These Christian leaders are said to prioritize their own power and institutional survival over that of the community and they are more broadly accused of misrepresentation, of preaching one thing but doing another. In this context, villagers’ discussion of Christianity’s failure was often infused with nostalgia for the pre-Christian ancestral order. This order, villagers insisted, could not be “cheated” through disconnects between a person’s words and actions. The failures of the Solomon Islands state discussed in previous chapters have become associated with mainstream churches. Mainstream Christianity is perceived as yet another source of uncertainty, further evidence for why contemporary governance systems, state-based or religious, can and should be distrusted.

A Christian Social Order and the Colonial and Postcolonial State

In this section I sketch how historically Christianity came to be viewed not only as compatible with but also as an alternative to the pre-Christian, ancestral social and political order. I also demonstrate that acceptance of Christianity does not indicate an acceptance of colonial rule. Instead, in its integration into local social orders, Christianity became also integrated into anticolonial sentiments and movements such as Maasina Rule described in chapter 2. At the same time, I note how historic mainstream Christian Churches in Solomon Islands—Anglican, Roman Catholic, United Church (Methodist), the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC) and Seventh Day Adventists (SDA)—have become integrated into the state, and especially into nation- and peace building or pacification efforts similar to the “Jesus Strategy” employed by the Fijian police.

According to the 2009 census (SIG 2011), 32 per cent of Solomon Islanders belong to the Anglican Church of Melanesia, 19 per cent to the Roman Catholic Church, 17 per cent to SSEC, 12 per cent to SDA, and 10 per cent to the United Church. The churches are unequally distributed across Solomon Islands’ provinces. United Church membership is largely limited to Choiseul and Western Province with 85 per cent of all United Church members living in those two provinces. Forty-eight per cent of SSEC members live on Malaita, and 89 per cent of Isabel’s residents belong to the Anglican Church. On Malaita there are, also according to the 2009 census, five dominant churches. 26 per cent of Malaitans belong to the Church of Melanesia, 24 per cent to the Roman Catholic Church, 31 per cent to SSEC, 6 per cent to SDA and 5 per cent to Jehovah’s Witness (71 per cent of all of Solomon Islands Jehovah’s Witness are on Malaita).

Christianity as Alternative to the Ancestral Order

Unlike the inland Kwaio who Keesing (1992a) argues, maintained their ancestral beliefs vis-à-vis Christianity to prevent any further loss of their political autonomy, the majority of Solomon Islanders and especially saltwater populations such as the Lau converted to Christianity in the first half of the twentieth century (see chapter 2). In the following, I outline the impacts and roots of this conversion based on the historical and earlier ethnographic record with a focus on the

Anglican Church and Malaita and in consideration of its relationship with the colonial administration.

I have indicated an uneasy relationship between early Christian missions and the colonial state in chapter 2. I noted that the relationship between Christian missionaries, mission stations and the colonial administration was an especially uncomfortable one, characterized by a pragmatic need for the other, rather than a relationship based on respect, desire for collaboration or even necessarily complementary goals (Hilliard 1978; Tomlinson and McDougall 2012:5). Solomon Islands' first resident commissioner, Woodford, initially merely cooperated with Christian missions because of their reach (Hilliard 1978). With a small colonial budget and few administrative staff the missions allowed for a European presence in villages that could not otherwise or only barely be accessed on a regular basis. Mission schools were hoped to introduce villagers to what the colonial government considered the most basic components of European civilization and governance systems, pacification—and with it a state monopoly on violence—and literacy (Hilliard 1978). This church presence in villages combined with state absence has, historically and today, been recognized as the most significant difference between the two institutions as governing institutions (Bird 2007; Hviding 2011; McDougall 2008; White 1991, 1997, 2012).

Rather than the centralized secular governance system, Christian churches are argued to have been, historically, at the heart of transformations to village-based social and moral orders (Burt 1994a; White 1991). Within a few decades, in particular during the early twentieth century, Christian churches became central features of everyday life across many Solomon Islands villages. Broadly speaking, ritual life became centred on Christian liturgy, the role of diviners was assumed by catechists, ancestral priests were replaced by Christian priests and, chiefs became Christian chiefs, especially in Santa Isabel where the Anglican mission targeted chiefs because “conversion of a chief necessarily entailed conversion of his relations and followers” (White 1991:92).

The parallels implied in these Christian transformations indicate the syncretic orientation of the Anglican mission—a focus on identifying and building onto commonalities between Anglican Christianity and ancestral orders—that has been emphasized in the literature (Hilliard

1978; White 1991).⁸⁰ In a comprehensive history of the Anglican Melanesian Mission, Hilliard suggests that the Church of Melanesia and its missionaries had, from the beginning, approached Melanesian villagers with the intention of “[creating] a self-governing church—‘a native one and not a mere exotic’—that would conserve and not destroy the indigenous social order” (1978:294). Several missionaries rejected, at least to some degree, the racially charged portrayals of “the Terrible Solomons” that I outlined in chapter 2 (Hilliard 1978:190-213). Instead early Anglican missionaries, and missionaries turned anthropologists such as Robert H. Codrington and Charles E. Fox, appeared to be committed to the principle of “[trying] to understand the people among whom he [the missionary] works, and to this end he hopes that he may have contributed something that may help” (Codrington 1891:vii). Anglican missionaries underlined the potential for syncretism, “to keep what is good and to build up the new faith on that foundation” (Rivers 1910:para 6); and, contrary to the aspirations of the colonial administration, “the Melanesian Mission is there to give Christianity to the natives, and not to give them a twentieth century civilization, or what is worse, a veneer of it” (Southern Cross Log 1914:348, cited in Hilliard 1978:194).

In this context the church building has replaced shrines as sacred centres, and Anglican ritual practice more broadly has been recognized for its commonalities—though not necessarily sameness—with the ancestral order. For example, White points out that “the Holy Spirit is present in the Communion service much as ancestors were present at the shrines that encased their skulls” (1991:107). Also some, but by no means all, gendered hierarchies remain in Anglican Christian worship. On the one hand, while only men were able to go to ancestral shrines, women have equal access to church services and are often actively involved in the organization of them. On the other hand, male priests remain at the centre of ritual practice. For instance, in response to a suggestion that women should be allowed to become Anglican priests in the Church of Melanesia (as they are, for example in the Anglican Church of Canada), the crowd first broke out in laughter—thinking it was a joke—then into a stunned silence and after some reflection into complete rejection of female priests as a form of “desecration.”

Possibly most significant for understanding Anglican-ancestral syncretism is an acknowledgement that ancestral spirits are real and that they belong to the same cosmological

⁸⁰ This is also true for the Catholic Mission. For a detailed discussion see Laracy (1976).

world as the Christian God, though, foreign missionaries at times attempted to reframe ancestral spirits as “devils” and as inferior to the Christian God (White 1991). In an analysis of Anglican missionization on Santa Isabel, White (1991) highlights the friction involved in this reframing, and its partial failure. He notes that Isabel’s most important Anglican missionary, Henry Welchman, aspired to a comprehensive demolition of ancestral shrines. Welchman hoped to achieve this by requiring those who desired to be baptized to destroy shrines as evidence of their newfound trust in the Christian God and his powers vis-à-vis ancestral spirits. On the other hand, White suggests that newly trained catechists and eventually priests from Santa Isabel often rejected this destruction. Instead, they ritually transformed ancestral shrines with “acts of ‘blessing,’ ‘anointing’ and ‘baptizing’” (108). The friction implied in these different approaches to ancestral shrines aside, what matters for my argumentation here is that in destruction *and* in ritual transformation the reality of ancestral spirit was reaffirmed, and so was the spiritual dominance of the Christian God vis-à-vis ancestral spirits.

Reflecting this acknowledgement of a co-existence between ancestral spirits and the Christian God is the continued involvement of Anglican priests and catechists, at least in Gwou’ulu, in treating illnesses through prayer, exorcisms, hymn-singing or blessings (see also chapter 4); or in investigations into the spiritually-rooted causes of a death, as for example, in the case of the death on the campaign trail that I shortly introduced in chapter 7. In his recollection of the events Ken described the process of investigation and the underlying belief system that brings together ancestral and Christian faith and practice, and that simultaneously emphasizes the dominance of Christianity and a perception of ancestors as “devil-like” in contemporary Lau.

Ken: The two priests from Gwou’ulu are going to solve the problem [with the ancestral spirits that killed the man], to block *kastom* [the angry devil] and then they will bury the man... I do not know what exactly the priests block, the clan must have broken an important rule of *kastom*. For example, if your ancestors killed my ancestors it would be hard for me to eat from your hand; also I could not marry your daughter. If I did my ancestors would follow me and I would fall down and die. When you die, blood comes out your nose. It shows that ancestors killed you. It shows that a *ramo* [war leader] of us killed you because the ancestor says ‘How come you do this? Do you not know that this person’s ancestor killed one of us?’ In our Christianity we believe that only our priests can go and block this, so it does not happen anymore, so that you are free to marry someone from this family, so you are free from *kastom*, free from ancestors. For example, if I married someone from your

clan and then we had a child and the child died, and we had another child and it died, every child the woman bares has to die unless I solve the problem. I have to find out why my children die. I have to get to the bottom of the story and then priests can block it.

Interviewer: How does the priest block it? Is there a special prayer?

Ken: No, you just have to talk to God. There is no special prayer. You just have to agree to do it, you and the priest have to talk about it and agree on it; then the priest blocks it. We pray together and hold hands together and then go to church (Interview, 17 November 2014).

In other words, following the ancestral order Solomon Islanders who became Christian priests and catechists confirm in their words and actions that an illness and death could (and should) be attributed to malevolent spirits and/ or sorcery, and that such illness can (and should) be healed through religious practice (Burt 1994a; Hogbin 1939; White 1991).

In this context, the ethnographic record suggests that Malaitan Christians were, to some degree, able to view Christianity as an extension of the ancestral religion, and perhaps even an improvement upon it, as it, for example, also allowed to (partially) “free” themselves from many of the rigid rules (taboos) that lay at the heart of the ancestral religion. Maranda (2001) suggests for Lau that the Christian social order was in some respects simply more convenient. Christian priests offered their ritual services for free,⁸¹ rather than in exchange for shell money or a pig. From the perspective of men, according to Maranda, Christianity was also advantageous in the ontological transformation and devaluation of women into “Eve, Satan’s accomplice in deceiving Man” (109). Simultaneously, from the perspective of women, Keesing argues that women chose to convert to Christianity to escape “menstrual isolation and restrictive rules, to avoid bringing death or illness on their families, and the burden of guilt” (1982:239). More broadly, Burt (1994a), who examines processes of Christian missionization led by the South Seas Evangelical

⁸¹ This is inaccurate, at least insofar as contributions to collections during services were expected; however, in Gwou’ulu social pressure to “donate” was only put on teachers and canteen owners who were, in terms of their access to cash, the most affluent. Especially elderly villagers were not expected to contribute to collections. Instead, all collections from the service organized by the Mother’s Union on Tuesdays were donated to elderly villagers who were struggling maintaining their own gardens or with fishing due to their age and health.

Church (SSEC)⁸² in Kwara'ae, highlights how once Christian villages proved that they were viable—that they could survive even though they had violated many of the core ancestral prescriptions, especially in regard to gender separation—Christianity became more tempting (for Langalanga, see Guo 2009).

This said, Maranda (2001) also suggests that this Christian transformation or liberation was incomplete or inadequate insofar as his local respondents complained about the emptiness that Christian conversion brought. In addition, Keesing (1982) suggests that not everyone who converted to Christianity remained committed to the new Christian faith and ritual practice. Instead, in direct reference to women converting to escape from taboos surrounding female bodily fluids, Keesing notes that his “data would suggest that of those who have done so, more than half have returned to traditional life in the mountains, to their ancestors, sustaining as well as punitive... [because] Kwaio religion... gives everyday life—the experiences of dream of sickness and health, prosperity and paucity—a meaning and structure” (1982:239). As I outlined in chapter 2, the Lau were, however, unable to retreat to the mountains. Their location encouraged both the presence of colonial state actors and of Christian missionaries, foreigners and local converts who irreversibly destroyed and/or ritually transformed ancestral sites.

Christianity also challenged the ancestral order because Islanders started to question the ability of ancestral spirits to protect and guide them, in view of their loss of political autonomy (Burt 1994a); or because they could no longer adequately follow ancestral prescriptions since too many ancestral rules had been broken and ancestral sites had been physically or ritually destroyed. Especially because Christians received support from colonial authorities, their power increased. In this context, the historical record indicates that the ancestral order became viewed by some as a source of insecurity and powerlessness (Burt 1994a; Guo 2009). Such perception is exemplified in the mass conversions in Langalanga that Guo (2009:86) outlines. Guo argues that epidemics and especially the American bombing of Laulasi during the Second World War were

⁸² SSEC has its origin in the “Queensland Kanaka Mission,” which focused their missionization efforts on Melanesian plantation labourers who were hoped to, and who did, bring Christianity back to their home islands, especially to Malaita. Evangelical in its orientation the South Seas Evangelical Mission, renamed in 1904, was more “intrusive” than the Anglican Mission, at least insofar as they banned the consumption of betel nut, smoking and alcohol, as well as the payment of compensation and bridewealth. In 1975 the SSEC was established under its current name and became independent of the mission (Burt 1994a).

interpreted as displays of the Christian God's power and the comparative weakness of their ancestors. Within this context Guo suggests that the Langalanga viewed a turn towards Christianity as the better option for protection from further death and destruction.

Burt describes this shift towards Christianity as “a crisis of confidence in the old” (1994a:132). As Islanders continued to believe that events, behaviour, prosperity or misfortune could be traced to spiritual explanations, the historical and ethnographic record indicates that Malaitans and Solomon Islanders more broadly came to recognize Christianity as a potentially more powerful religious, social and political order within the changing contexts of global dependencies and centralized colonial governance. In other words, Christianity allowed for accessing new sources of spiritual and, through its connections with the colonial state, secular powers.

Christianity as Alternative to the Colonial and Postcolonial State

As alternative to the ancestral order, Christianity did not, however, necessitate collaboration with the colonial state. On the contrary, as Christianity became more strongly integrated into local orders, Christianity became associated with resistance to colonial and foreign domination (Akin 2013; Burt 1994a; White 1991). This is nowhere more visible than in Maasina Rule, Malaita's most significant anticolonial movement (see chapter 2). According to Akin,

Maasina Rule was not a religious movement in the usual sense, but that is not to say it was nonreligious, any more than almost anything important on Malaita was or is. Catholic priests said mass for chiefs, people who followed ancestors sacrificed and prayed to secure their support, SSEM members virtually melded their church with the movement, and Anglican laymen (though few clergy) prayed and sang hymns for its success. Even Adventists formed their own towns. In other words, everyone marshaled their various spiritual forces to the service of Maasina Rule, and a miraculous aspect of the movement is how they all worked together (2013:180).

Akin (2013) argues that Malaitan Christians were such enthusiastic supporters of Maasina Rule because of their disillusionment with foreign missionaries and, despite some disagreements, their entanglements with foreign colonial administrators. Many Malaitan Christians had given up the ancestral order in hope for a more equal participation in centralized governance and the now global “European” world. When this hope remained unfulfilled and

even contradicted, for instance, by taxation without any improvements to their lives, Malaitans felt betrayed. This portrayal also included foreign missionaries who had, in particular, failed at providing the promised education in mission schools (Akin 2013; Hogbin 1939). Exemplary for perceptions of this relationship between Christianity, education and taxation is the following complaint by John Palmer Pidoke, a chief of Nggela: “We have only been taught the gospel, but nothing yet about trade and commerce. We have been Christianized for 78 years now, the Church people are anxious for collections and the Government for taxes, but where is the money?” (Pidoke 1939 cited in Bennett 1987:241).

Maasina Rule can then be understood as not having only been about political autonomy, but about religious-political autonomy. Maasina Rule was not about a return to the old but about a step into the future that acknowledged autochthonous principles for leadership and governance, including the newfound Christian social order that remained rooted in place-specific ancestral foundations (Burt 1994a). Maasina Rule rejected foreign governance, political and religious, while in many cases treating ancestral and Christian principles as being in fundamental accord (Akin 2013).

The embrace of Christian principles is especially evidenced in an acceptance of the Christian message of unity and equality as God’s children (Akin 2013:181).⁸³ One of the most significant Christian transformations across Melanesia was a shift from descent-based communities and settlements to denomination-based communities and settlements (Barker 1996; Burt 1994a; McDougall 2016; White 1991). Villages such as Gwou’ulu were founded and grew as a multi-clan and, in this case, Anglican village. While it was and is not uncommon for clans to organize alongside one denomination, this descent-focused organization is by no means required (Burt 1994a:229), and it was even discouraged by early missionaries (White 1991:114). Unity beyond descent was a core message spread by missionaries and at the heart of church-focused rather than British administration-enforced pacification. However, foreign missionaries alongside the colonial administration regularly contradicted their preaching about unity in Christ in the racially charged treatment of Malaitans. While Hilliard (1978) emphasized that early Anglican

⁸³ This emphasis on unity is not restricted to Malaitans, as for example, reflected in McDougall’s (2016) discussion of Christian transformations as a type of cosmopolitanism in Ranongga, Western Province.

missionaries had rejected racial hierarchies, Akin notes that their successors did not remain “the compassionate freethinkers some of their predecessors had been” (2013:183).

This concern with contradictions between missionaries’ words and their actions, especially in regard to beliefs in Christian unity, reaffirms Michael Scott’s (2005) rejection of the argument that Solomon Islanders’ acceptance of Christianity was only pragmatic “to achieve private and public goals, including national ones” (Douglas 2007:162), without any concern for coherence. In Maasina Rule and in other ethno-theological projects—“the indigenous theological speculations and constructions of both layperson and clergy” (Scott 2005:102)—Malaitans, and other Solomon Islanders, sought to integrate Christianity into existing cosmological frameworks in a systematic way, and this integration frequently centred on how the promise of Christian unity fit into and could be realized despite ancestral “disunity” or descent-based difference.

Exemplary for such “ethno-theologies of place” (Scott 2007:325) on Malaita are the Kwara’ae centric Remnant Church (Burt 1983) and the All People’s Prayer Assembly of To’abaita (Timmer 2008, 2015a, 2015b). Both movements are concerned with explaining their relationship with the Christian God as God of Israel and the Gentiles before the arrival of Christian missionaries. Both movements answer this question by establishing genealogical ties that identify Malaitans as a lost tribe of Israel and that recognize ancestral prescriptions and the rules laid out in the Old Testament as close cognates. Notably, the validity of this genealogical link to Israel is also rarely questioned even by the most devout Anglicans in Gwou’ulu.

In other words, the historical and ethnographic record suggests that Christianity has been attempted to be systematically integrated into both village life and pan-Malaitan political identities while remaining, in many instances, distant to the colonial state. Combined with an ongoing disinterest in or failure of the colonial and postcolonial state to set roots in villages, it is no surprise that Christian churches and their institutional networks have assumed tasks that are elsewhere at the purview of the state, historically especially the running of primary and secondary schools and of health centres and hospitals (Bird 2007; Hogbin 1939). This role includes governance of everyday village affairs such as conflict resolution and village maintenance as described in chapters 4 and 5, at times even negotiations with foreign companies as briefly noted in chapter 3, as well as participation in nation-affirming peacebuilding across Solomon Islands as I briefly describe in the following.

In more recent Solomon Islands history, the significance of Christian churches has become especially visible in their roles as mediators of conflict during the Tensions. Many of the most successful peacebuilding efforts were orchestrated by Christian organizations and as collaborations between different denominations (Brown 2003; Carter 2006; McDougall 2003; Moore 2004; Pollard 2000; Weir 2000). For instance, Weir (2000) emphasizes that Christian denominational affiliations encourage a sense of belonging that allows for transcending the micronationalist island identities that, to some degree, fueled the violence. During the Tensions this potential was specifically harnessed by the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), a collaboration of four of the main churches—Anglican, Catholic, SSEC and SDA.

An example of their peacebuilding efforts is SICA support for the Anglican Melanesian Brotherhood, an Anglican order with predominantly young, unmarried male members who actively mediated between enemy sides, irrespective of the dangers this entailed (Brown 2003; Weir 2000); for example, seven brothers were killed on Guadalcanal during negotiations in 2003 (Carter 2006). In addition, a Malaita-focused collaboration between the four churches set up “ecumenical parish peace committees, which worked with returning militants, their families, and victims of violence and theft, to build relationships and trust with the police” (Moore 2004: 153). Also women’s organizations, which have been recognized for their accomplishments as negotiators and peacebuilders during the Tensions, were organized in accordance with Christian principles and in collaboration with Christian churches (McDougall 2003; Pollard 2000).

To sum up, historical and ethnographic research indicates that once Christian churches became integrated into local social orders, they also became aligned with Solomon Islanders’ religiously-informed political aspirations, most concretely with a desire for self-governance according to autochthonous principles, interests and needs. The centrality of Christianity continues in post-independence Solomon Islands and is reflected in the ability of Christian churches to fulfil tasks that the state has been unable to address effectively. At the same time, as I outline below, mainstream Christianity has become entangled with state politics or has been appropriated by state actors as a means for nation-building and to legitimize politicians’ claim to leadership.

Christian Collaboration with the Postcolonial State

Kabutaulaka (2002:26) argues that the independent Solomon Islands state and its leaders have frequently refused to comprehensively engage with leaders of civil society organizations and, as a result, with the Christian churches at the heart of, or closely connected to, most grassroots efforts. The reason for this reluctance brings to mind the differences between Christian missionaries and the colonial administration I indicated earlier. State officials recognize disconnects between their agendas and those of the churches and they worry about critique and rejection of their legitimacy more broadly. On the other hand, also comparable to the mission-colonial relationship is what state bureaucrats including police officers, members of Honiara's civil society and RAMSI and police officials told me to be an increasing recognition. These state actors believe that more collaboration with Christian churches is necessary to reach the rural areas to build a nation and, therefore, to establish the foundations for lasting peace and a strong state. This sentiment reflects McDougall's suggestion that, rather than viewing Christian Churches as "ersatz states ... a better goal might be to help foster productive relationships between church organizations and state institutions" (2008:15).

Efforts towards such collaboration are evident in the community outreach program of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) in collaboration with the Australia-led Participating Police Force (PPF), which also includes several Fijian police officers, who, based on my interviews and informal conversations with Fijian officers, supported the "Jesus Strategy" used to reform the police force in Fiji. The RSIPF community outreach program relies notably on church-state cooperation for its proposed successes. The most important goal of the outreach program is to reestablish trust in the RSIPF after many of its officers had collaborated with or had become militants during the Tensions. A second goal is crime prevention through presentations on how and why to avoid anti-social behaviour, specifically with a focus on alcohol, *kwaso* (locally brewed alcohol), marijuana abuse, and on family violence. As of 30 June 2014, the outreach program had reached approximately 113,000 Solomon Islanders through visits to 176 schools, 244 villages, 49 churches and including 85 community consultations and 24 community events (RAMSI 2016).

I had the opportunity to participate in one such outreach event at Burns Creek in Honiara and, throughout my fieldwork, I was able to talk to and interview RSIPF and PPF police officers

about the program, its intention and collaboration with Christian churches. This church-RSIPF collaboration extended beyond events that RAMSI (2016) classified as focused on “churches,” and also included so-called “village” and “community” events. I was told that events only take place when the respective communities agree not only to the visit but also to co-organization. Importantly, I was informed that the RSIPF commonly identifies communities and villages as being represented by their dominant denominational affiliation. In other words, if an RSIPF outreach event was to take place in Gwou’ulu (none had been or was planned during my fieldwork), it would be co-organized with the Anglican village priest and the church committee. When I asked why they focused on churches rather than chiefs, for example, I was told that, most pragmatically, the largest possible non-school-aged audience could be reached through church venues, especially if the outreach event took place on Sunday or, in case of SDA communities, on Saturday (though I was told that SDA communities had been most reluctant to participate in RSIPF-PPF outreach events). My RSIPF and PPF respondents emphasized that churches were recognized as the most unifying forces in Solomon Islands, also on a community level, especially in view of ongoing clan-based disputes surrounding land.

Outreach events were usually preceded by a church service in which police officers participated, to demonstrate the shared Christian faith. The church service was followed by a presentation on the role of the police in law enforcement and conflict resolution. Throughout the presentation, RSIPF and accompanying PPF members would emphasize how Solomon Islands was a Christian nation—after all 96 per cent of all Solomon Islanders belong to a Christian church—and how Christian morality and unity transcended clan, village, language, and provincial boundaries. Therefore, RSIPF/PPF members noted that villagers should always contact the RSIPF to deal with crime and mediate in conflicts. Conflicts should be resolved by an organization that cared and was responsible for the (Christian) nation at large, that is, the (Christian) national police force, though in collaboration with clan and village leaders, similar to the collaboration between national, provincial and village-based Christian churches. In other words, as Christian citizens of a Christian nation and as law enforcement representatives of the Solomon Islands nation-state, RSIPF members attempted to present themselves as committed to the Christian principles of peace and unity, and therefore as legitimate actors in conflict resolution.

This appeal to a shared Christianity is further exemplified in an RSIPF’s ethics and integrity training slide presentation that I was able to view and discuss with an RSIPF officer, which shares some commonalities with the Fijian “Jesus Strategy” described in the introduction to this chapter. The manual emphasizes the need for public trust in a morally “good” police force that comprehensively serves the nation, and reminds police officers of the oath they took on the Bible when taking up their positions. “Consider this: you took an oath before GOD to: Uphold the law without fear or favour. It is your duty both *lawfully* and *morally* to do your job to respect this oath... [you] took an oath BEFORE GOD to do the right thing” (RSIPF 2014: slide 7).

Historically and today, national and provincial politicians have also called for a Christianity-based national unity. In his discussion of the tenth anniversary of Solomon Islands independence, Feinberg notes that “unity as a Christian nation was repeatedly expressed through blessings and invocations, hymns and prayers at official functions. On Independence Day, the archbishop of Melanesia led a hymn and blessed the flag just before the prime minister began his address to the nation” (1990:29). Exemplary is a song printed on the last page of the Tenth Independent Anniversary Celebrations Programme. The following verse, cited in Feinberg (1990:34), is representative of the song as a whole, and indicative of the significance attributed to Christian national unity.

Solomon Islands One Happy Country
God’s Country, God’s Country
Solomon Islands One Happy Country
God’s Happy Isles
Provinces are brothers; and
Provinces are sisters
Our Father in Heaven who loves you too

This Christian framing of state events was also evidenced in several state functions I was able to attend, such as the launch of the Democratic Coalition for Change Government policy platform which included blessings by Christian church representatives. This framing is further reflected in critical remarks by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare during a visit to the Anglican Christian Care Centre which helps victims of domestic abuse: “We claim Solomon Islands as a Christian nation but it hurts me as leader of a Christian country when we have establishment like

this centre it contradict [sic] that we are living in a Christian country” (Solomon Star 2015g:para 9).

Even more so, these politicians have campaigned and justified their claims to leadership as rooted in their Christian faith, often including their leadership positions in a church, for example, as deacons or lay preachers (Corbett 2015; Douglas 2007). In examining how politicians across Oceania have entered politics, Corbett (2015) highlights the significance of politicians’ Christian roots and rhetoric. Pragmatically and reflecting in parts the RSIPF’s rationale for their collaboration with churches, Corbett (2015:49) suggests politicians recognize that Christian churches offer better and more comprehensive access to voters than any other public platforms. However, again beyond pragmatism, Corbett also argues that many politicians see their “political appointment as the realization of their preordained destiny” (2015:126). This perception is exemplified in remarks by the first Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Sir Peter Kenilorea about how he entered politics:

I’m a Christian and I prayed much... to ask if the Lord wanted me to serve the country or the state. I really put a please, I said well, if politics is your will for me to serve my country at this time, I’d like you to show it to me in a real tangible practical way... I... asked if anyone else was interested in standing for my constituency, and a friend of mine said ‘There were six interested, but they heard you were also interested, they’ve all declined, all pulled out.’ So I took that as a definite lead and that’s how I entered politics (Interview with Johnstone 1995).

I came across similar statements and explanations throughout 2014 national election campaign events. For example, one of the more popular candidates for Lau/Mbaelelea constituency explicitly emphasized that he had never had any interest in politics, and that he only loses by becoming a politician. He described himself as successful businessmen, a lay SSEC leader, and a faithful husband—even though his wife had not given birth to any children. He would be more successful and richer if he remained committed to his work for a Chinese company. This candidate then claimed that he was only running for office because God had spoken to him in a dream and tasked him with taking responsibility for the nation. One of Gwou’ulu villagers summarized how this candidate came to follow God’s calling to become a politician as follows:

The candidate did not want to run for office. He prayed to God three times to allow him not to run for office. The first time he had a vision and God told him, ‘You go and free my people from slavery.’ The candidate responded to God as Jesus had, ‘God take this cup of suffering away from me.’ Shortly after this prayer the candidate’s wife went for a walk, fell down and nearly died. They were in Australia at this time so they quickly rushed her to the hospital. The second time the candidate prayed to God, the same happened. This time the candidate fell down and nearly died. The third time, the same happened. His child fell down and nearly died. The candidate prayed to God again. He did not want to suffer from having to host voters in his house all the time, but he agreed to make this sacrifice. He did not want to run for office, but God told him he had to. So he did (Interview, 31 October 2014).

Notably, those of Gwou’ulu villagers who supported this candidate were less impressed by the candidate’s claim that God had demanded him to run for office than by what villagers considered to be indicators for the candidate’s willingness to live what he preaches. The first indicator for a Christian lifestyle was that the candidate had stayed with his wife even though she had not born him any children, and that no rumours were going around about him ever having had an extramarital affair; the second indicator for a Christian lifestyle was the candidate’s readiness to sacrifice his own well-being for that of the constituency. During conversations none of my local respondents questioned that this candidate would be better off, financially and in terms of his lifestyle, if he remained a businessmen. Also those villagers who did not support this candidate acknowledged these two indicators for a Christian lifestyle as positive attributes; though some questioned to what extent this candidate was justified to claim that he had been chosen by God as leader of Lau/Mbaelelea Constituency.

Similar claims by other politicians were equally critiqued, not only in Gwou’ulu but also on Solomon Islands Facebook groups. Take the following exchange on Forum Solomon Islands. The original message was posted on October 2, 2014, received 164 likes and was commented on 91 times over a period of one month (the last post is from November 5, 2014). The majority of commentators disapprove of using God’s name as campaign tactic, while some cautiously note that this does not mean that Solomon Islanders should not aspire towards electing a leader guided by God.

Original Post: Was shocked today to see one guy wearing a T shirt- saying something about—God is on their side, who will [be] against [God]—it was a campaign T-shirt

for one of the candidates contesting for the National Elections. Please let's leave God out from politics, we can pray to God only for guidance but not to use his name in vain for the sake of politics, I find this as very un sacred [sic] and a mockery to our Christian faith and principles. Please remember not use our God to gain for your personal agenda—God has plans for all of us and if he sees fit for you to become a leader—it will prevail—if you been through a marathon of failures in the race of politics it simply means it's not your path, this is plain common sense given by God to mankind. Stop using Gods name in politics—I warned you in good faith. Please pass on (October 2, 2014).

Comment: A confused candidate applying theological principles to the wrong scenario. I warned voters not to be fooled by such hypocrisy (October 2, 2014).

Comment: ... Voters, be on your guard, we've voted in a lot of God fearing people..., the choice is yours, but make it not because a candidate is using God as his/her campaign manager. Staka [a lot of] con-man (October 3, 2014).

Comment: There is no problems to seek the guidance of GOD to win the Election but just be mindful not to use his name when in parliament for Election [sic]. Some of these MPs forgot that they once seek the guidance of God each time we go to the poll... (October 3, 2014)

The skepticism that I encountered in Gwou'ulu and that is further reflected in the cited Facebook discussion supports Douglas' argumentation that “nationalist appropriation” (2007:163) of Christianity across Melanesia has, by and large, failed. Because of the earlier described integration of Christianity in local social orders and because of its global dimensions—humanity unified in God—Douglas describes Christianity (and *kastom*) as “an uneasy ideological basis for national unity” that “[transcends] the often dubious legitimacy of colonial and national states” (158,163). I suggest expanding this argument further to more comprehensively account for the increasingly long and difficult entanglement between churches and the state, and most of all for a desire for coherence in religious practice and belief, rather than just a pragmatic approach to religion and spirituality. With Christian leaders becoming politicians and the collaboration of mainstream Christian churches with the state, which remains void of trustworthiness and legitimacy, the trustworthiness and legitimacy of mainstream Christian leaders and churches has also suffered, similar to how the image of foreign missionaries suffered during colonization. For example, disillusionment with mainstream Christian churches and their leaders is evidenced in the following statement posted on Facebook:

Our country claims to be a Christian nation, however, what is going in terms of corruption & bribery shows that our nation is noway [sic] adapting the Christ like principles of honesty & preaching the truth. I like what Mahatma Gandhi said, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” (Forum Solomon Islands International 6 August 2015)

In the following, I discuss further the presence of this very sentiment in Gwou’ulu. I first describe when and how Christian leaders, specifically in their links to the Anglican Church in Gwou’ulu, became associated with the distrust and disillusionment felt towards the state. Then I move to a discussion of this experience, how it has created nostalgia for the ancestral order and the adjoined vision for a different, but not necessarily institutionalized future Christian order.

A Crisis of Confidence in a “Christian Old”

As already noted, the Anglican villagers of Gwou’ulu have, to some degree, embraced core aspects of the “ethno-theologies of place” (Scott 2007:325) that have emerged in other parts of Malaita and that root Malaitan lineages in an ancestral connection with Israel. At the same time many Gwou’ulu villagers agree that a shared global humanity, a sister- and brotherhood in Christ, lies at the heart of their Christian faith and, if there is a Solomon Islands nation, it is a Christian nation. As such, Christianity is for many of Gwou’ulu villagers a defining feature of their sense of identity, their belonging to their ancestral home, their country, and global humanity.

However, over the course of my fieldwork, several villagers confided in me suspicion or uneasiness toward the role of institutionalized religion in this mediation of belonging and any form of governance. This concern is reflected in how several of the conflicts that occurred during my fieldwork were directly related to, or even concentrated on the Anglican Church and its leaders in the village. In private conversations but especially also during campaign events—when calls were made for further integration of Christian Churches in state governance—villagers highlighted how institutionalized Christianity and its leaders were replicating, and thus are implicated in what is “wrong” with the Solomon Islands state. In other words, Gwou’ulu villagers had come to doubt not only the trustworthiness of the Solomon Islands state and its

representatives as outlined in previous chapters but also that of mainstream Christian churches as potential alternatives to the state.

Institutional Survival vs Communal Unity

Shortly after we arrived in Gwou'ulu, the Anglican village community started preparing for what many considered one of its most important annual events, a “rescue mission” to Honiara. Members of the Anglican men’s group, commonly referred to in English simply as “mens,” would be travelling to Honiara for a one week visit to Gwou'ulu’s urban residents. The primary goal of this trip was to “missionize” urban kin, to remind them about the importance of village values despite their temporary or even permanent relocation to town, to highlight the particular moral dangers of urban lifestyles away from the safety and moral guidance of the village community and, at its centre, the Anglican Church.

Figure 28: Welcome celebrations for the Anglican men’s group after the “rescue mission” to Honiara, Gwou’ulu, June 2014



All of the married male members of the Anglican Church in Gwou'ulu belonged to the group, and all of them were expected to participate in the trip. The Anglican village community financed the mission through church offerings, additional donations, and a fundraiser.

Preparations also included the acquisition and printing of two rescue mission uniforms which were a requirement for participants. The travel uniform consisted of a pair of blue jeans shorts and a dark green t-shirt printed in English with “Gwou’ulu Mens Rescue Mission” or “Gwou’ulu Mens Rescue Mission for Christ.” The event uniform consisted of a pair of black shorts and a white dress shirt with the same text printed on the travel uniforms but supplemented with an additional print of an orange coloured cross.

I was told that the uniforms, and their uniformity, at least in colour and basic design, were significant for the success of the rescue mission. The village priest and the leaders of the men’s group were certain that it could only be successful if all participants focused solely on their primary goal as “one community, with one mission, in one uniform.” For the purpose of this uniformity participants were also informed they would be required to return with the group to the village. The trip was not allowed to be misappropriated as a “free” (church- and community-sponsored) ride to town.

About one week before the intended departure a conflict between two of Gwou’ulu clans escalated. Since compensation has now been paid and it has become “taboo” to talk about the conflict any further, let it suffice to be said here that the conflict, above all, brought about doubt in the abilities and spiritual honesty of the village priest and his church committee. The Anglican leadership had initially been consulted to mediate between the conflicting parties. However, they had been unable to transcend their own involvement in the conflict. Once again, David, introduced in chapter 7, who had been “banished” by the Anglican Church after taking a second wife, had to be called to the village to negotiate for peace. He did so successfully even though he belonged to one of the clans involved in the dispute, and compensation was paid shortly before the planned departure for the rescue mission.

As a result of this conflict, or more accurately in response to the Anglican leadership’s inability to negotiate the peace, some of Gwou’ulu men excused themselves from the rescue mission. These men explained that their participation would be disingenuous, that they were not members of a unified community as the mission claimed they were, and as represented in their uniforms. The village priest and men’s leaders agreed to their absence. They considered unity of the participating members rather than at unity of the village community as the most important indicator for the mission’s success.

Upon the ‘mens’ return, organizers spoke of the overwhelming success of the mission. They noted they had found open ears among their urban relatives, and had learned that many of their concerns about life in town were also worrisome to their urban kin. The joint church services and commensal events they had organized had been well attended. However, they had also “lost” a few participants, most significantly one of the village chiefs who also belonged to the church committee. Several villagers identified this chief’s willingness to remain in town as indicative of church leaders’ unwillingness to follow their own preaching about the importance of unity. It was argued that they said one thing but did another.

In a discussion of “breakaways” from mainstream Christianity in Honiara, for example, by converting to smaller Pentecostal churches, Maggio (2015), reflecting Eriksen’s (2009) observations in Vanuatu, argues that this “breakaway” is rooted in two sources of disillusionment. The first source of disillusionment lies with the state-based status quo—failed development and dependency on foreign states and companies—which, according to Maggio, Solomon Islanders recognize as “embodied by corrupt politicians, criminals and false prophets” (2015:318). The second source of disillusionment, on the other hand, is rooted in mainstream Christianity, specifically its institutionalized practices. “‘Religion,’ in their [breakaways’] eyes, misleads the believer to the extent that religious institutions, for them, aim at their own perpetuation rather than the establishment of the Kingdom of God” (320).

The actions of the village priest—his decision to “lie” about Anglican unity to urban residents—echo such accusation, and some of Gwou’ulu villagers repeated this very concern about inadequate church priorities to me. They did so not only in reference to the conflict and disunity surrounding the rescue mission, but also in reference to the role played by Anglican Church leaders in land disputes.

As I mentioned in chapter 4, landownership was not only a source of conflict between village clans with ancestral grounds, skull pits and *maanabeu* (men’s seclusion area) in the immediate village environment, but also between these clans and members of clans who had arrived in Gwou’ulu as Christian refugees from the southern Lau Lagoon. Members of these “Christian clans” contended that not only had usufructuary rights been granted to them when they first settled in Gwou’ulu but that land had been irreversibly gifted to them by local clans in validation of the significance and power of the Christian God. Members of these “Christian

clans” were particularly well-represented in the church committee, and often used their status as Christian leaders in the village to challenge, for example, decisions about the construction of new houses or development projects by clans who traced their landownership claims to the location of their ancestral grounds. The disunity that was created as a result of these land disputes was especially resented because villagers belonging to either side of the conflict were disappointed in the village priest’s inability to foster a more comprehensive sense of community among all villagers.

Corruption and Rumours

Also a concern for corruption among Christian leaders and Christian politicians was paramount. I briefly highlight this concern based on three examples. There was only one candidate for the 2014 national elections who several Gwou’ulu villagers described as “ideal” in his campaign style and promises. This candidate was a retired Anglican priest, and he only travelled with two supporters. By so doing, he was said to demonstrate modesty. Candidates travelling with many supporters were commonly suspected of having “borrowed” money from foreign businessmen to fund their campaigns, to cover the costs of housing and feeding the supporters who accompanied them. These candidates were thought to be likely to prioritize the needs of foreign businessmen rather than their constituents should they be elected.

Reflecting his modest campaign style, the “ideal” candidate also focused his campaign speech on the dangers of corruption; specifically, on how corruption was at the source of *gavman* failure and how he would fight to eradicate corrupt practices should he be elected. This candidate even suggested that villagers vote for other candidates because he considered himself unlikely to win. He asked villagers to focus their electoral choices on the most likely, non-corrupt candidate who would prioritize constituents’ needs and who would be able to make wise (non-corrupt) choices when investing Constituency Development Funds into local projects. This “ideal” candidate also emphasized the importance of choosing a good, moral Christian leader, not another politician who would use his influence to “seduce” young women. He stressed, and many villagers agreed, that too many Solomon Islands politicians were adulterers.

Villagers saw their own concerns reflected in the words of this “ideal” candidate, and they agreed with his actions during the campaign. However, villagers also had close connections

to the village where this candidate used to be the priest. The candidate, during his time as priest, was said to have been known for embezzling church funds, for using collections for renovating his house and for paying his children's school fees. I do not know to what extent this accusation is accurate, but the rumour was widespread and the "truth" that it contained was rarely questioned. This candidate was seen as yet another Christian leader who did not live what he preached.

A second and frequently noted example of "false prophets" who were accused of being corrupt "politicians," was the behaviour of two of the most prominent village leaders during and after the 2010 electoral campaign. These leaders had served as campaign managers (CMs) for the candidate who won the seat for Lau/Mbaelelea in 2010. This candidate had promised the village outboard engines for fiberglass banana boats if he got elected; and he did provide them through his Constituency Development Funds. Villagers insisted that these boats and engines were meant to be merely managed by the MP's two CMs, and used by villagers based on their needs, for example, to go to a hospital. The core idea was that villagers would only have to pay for petrol. However, one of the CMs sold the motor and kept the profit to himself; and second CM was charging a rental fee to anyone who wanted to use "his" fiberglass banana boat and engine. These CMs had, at different times, been members of the Anglican Church Committee. They regularly attended and actively participated in daily church services. They would give testimony during these services scrutinizing other villagers for immoral often flirtatious behaviour and a lack of commitment to Christian worship and the community work that the church committee coordinated.

During one of my election interviews, Garfield, a man who predominantly lived in Gwou'ulu, brought up the corruption surrounding these OBMs as example for why Gwou'ulu had stopped following village leaders' advice when deciding who to vote for, reaffirming the argument that I presented in chapter 7 concerning a broader problem with leadership that transcends the perceived inadequacies of state leaders. Indeed, Garfield's remarks indicate a more positive attitude towards the MP than to village leaders. After outlining the events surrounding the distribution of the OBMs Garfield explained:

Garfield: People do not want for the system to stay the same. People want to make their own decisions about good candidates, not to follow all the big men. Before

everyone followed... if leaders say, 'oh we vote for this person' then everyone voted for this person.

I: So the whole village voted for the same candidate?

Garfield: Yeah. Before was nice, but all leaders spoiled this by ignoring all the voters who followed [their advice]. This Member [of Parliament] did well for everyone with the outboard motor engines. Our [village] leaders did not do well for us. They spoiled it for us. Too many men do this... This time we do not follow leaders. Everyone chooses by themselves who they vote for. We no longer follow our leaders. Everyone votes for someone else (Interview, 27 October 2014).

This said, as I note in more detail in my conclusion, the village did vote for the same candidate for the Provincial Election. Yet, they did so because everyone agreed that this candidate was the best candidate for the village because he was from the village, not because they followed the advice of their leaders.

Gwou'ulu villagers had come to value those leaders who did not insist that, e.g., their clan members followed their advice in the election. For instance, the village priest refused to disclose which candidate he intended to vote for which some of my local respondents recognized as a moment of demonstrated good leadership. A good leader, I was told during a conversation with Gwou'ulu women on the way to a market, would not abuse his leadership position in the Church for political gains, his own selfish interests as the CMs had done when not sharing their engines with villagers. At the same time, as indicated in Garfield's remarks, villagers regretted that they were no longer able to trust their leaders sufficiently to follow their advice. Leadership failure was felt to have caused further disunity in the village, encouraging everyone to follow their own selfish interests rather than those of the village community at large—I discuss this nostalgia for a unified past and contemporary disunity or "breakaway" in the final sections of this chapter.

Rumours about corrupt practices were also circulating about Gwou'ulu members of the church committee more broadly. Most concretely, church leaders were suspected of having embezzled money that had been intended for an extension of the church building. The priest had asked every family to donate SBD 100 as their contribution to the extension, and he had organized a fundraiser to this end. Every family that did not have SBD 100 could sell goods such

as fresh fish to other villagers at the fundraiser and donate the proceedings. In conversations about this event villagers noted that the same fundraiser had taken place a year ago, and the year before that, and they wondered why the extension had not yet been built. Some suggested that the money from previous years had been used to power the generator for church services on rainy days when the solar power unit did not work. However, rumours were also circulating that claimed that at least one of the church committee members had used the money for themselves instead, specifically to pay for their children's school fees.

The existence of these instances of “Christian corruption” and especially rumours—rather than certainty—about the prevalence of corrupt practices among Christian leaders is significant. As noted by Rosnow “rumours are public communications that reflect private hypotheses about how the world works ... they are attempts to make sense of uncertain situations... [and they are] a barometer of tensions” (1988:12); and as such, as demonstrated by Besnier (2009) in the context of Nukulaelae, Tuvalu, rumours are particularly powerful in everyday politics. Rumours (or gossip) allow for the co-existence of deniability and plausibility and the more they resonate with an experienced uncertainty, frequently in dialogue with nostalgia for a different and more ideal past, the more powerful they become (Besnier 2009). Potentially they are even being picked up and repeated by those with authority and credibility (Besnier 2009).

Rumours are then emotional discourses that reflect power relationships and are rooted in personal and collective memories (Emde 2005). In an analysis of the role of rumours in the politicization of ethnicity during the May 2000 coup in Fiji, Emde (2005) emphasizes a dialectic relationship between rumours and fear. “Rumour [creates] fear, fear [creates] rumour” (398). More specifically, rumours that claimed that Indo-Fijians tried to “colonize” Fiji were used to create support among Fijians for the coup, most concretely, because these rumours reminded Fijians of their colonial history of dispossession and dependence. By so doing, rumours nurtured a climate of fear, which in turn created new rumours, in particular also among Indo-Fijians. Indo-Fijians came to distrust their Fijian neighbours who believed the rumours that claimed Indo-Fijians attempted to re-colonize Fiji. In their dialectic relationship, rumour and fear thus became a significant source of conflict in the uncertainty and mistrust that they represented.

A similar dynamic is visible in the corruption narratives I encountered in Gwou'ulu that centred on rumours about those leaders who linked their claims to leadership to their role in the

Anglican Village Church. Notably, and as evidenced in the case of the campaign managers and the “ideal” candidate during the 2014 election, these rumours and the uncertainty they represent were closely connected to the state and leadership failures therein.

Immorality and Spiritual Punishment

Beyond the uncertainty implied in rumours, some villagers emphasized that there was more concrete evidence for the immorality of their Christian leaders as well. At the core of the ancestral, but now also the Christian religious order, was villagers’ belief that if someone behaved in a way that contradicted the will of ancestral spirits or the Christian God, ancestral spirits or the Christian God would punish the person for this immoral behaviour, now or in the Christian context in the afterlife. At a minimum ancestral spirits or the Christian God were thought to withdraw their support leaving the person without protection against malevolent sorcery (see Ivens 1930, for the ancestral religious order).

One of the most contested issues in Gwou’ulu during my fieldwork was the efforts of the Anglican village priest to establish a “prayer mountain.”⁸⁴ The concept closely resembles that of “spirit discos” among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea that Robbins (1998:310-312) describes, but on a mountain top rather than inside the church building. Events on prayer mountains are “group possession dances” (311) that include men and women. Participants aim to be possessed by the Holy Spirit as a way to communicate more directly and individually with the Christian God.

I was told that prayer mountains are common among charismatic churches on Malaita but not (yet) widespread among Anglican and Roman Catholic communities. Some villagers, therefore, rejected the priest’s proposition as “not-Anglican” in its ritual practice while others endorsed the idea because of a hope for direct personal communication with the Holy Spirit. There were also moral concerns about prayer mountains because they encouraged dancing in ecstasies between men and women and were, therefore, suspected of encouraging and allowing for immoral sexual behaviour by those who did not view prayer mountains as “correct” interpretation of the Christian God’s will.

⁸⁴ Villagers used the English term.

Another controversy centred on the location, the mountain, the village priest had chosen. The site used to belong to a clan's *manaabeu* (men's seclusion area), though it was no longer a "taboo place." It had been cleansed by another Christian priest who had performed a type of exorcism against the ancestral spirits of the *manaabeu*. Even women were able to visit the site without having to fear ancestral retributions. However, clan members as well as other villagers agreed that ancestral spirits were still there and would not take lightly to the desecration that the worshipping of the Christian God on their sacred grounds would entail.

The village and the clan most directly affected were divided. Proponents of the plan maintained that only with the prayer mountain could they finally become "true" Christians, communicate with the Christian God, and obtain his favours, for the village community at large. At least to some this required a more complete chasing away of their ancestral spirits, which they were certain the prayer mountain would allow for doing. Others were doubtful if their Christian priest would be powerful enough to fend off their ancestral spirits and if this was desirable in the first place. More specifically, in view of the rumours and conflicts described earlier, some villagers were uncertain if their priest (and the village Anglican community) had understood and followed the Christian God's prescriptions sufficiently to ensure the Christian God's protection against their ancestral spirits who were particularly powerful at their ancestral homes.

Importantly, at the same time as the village priest tried establishing the prayer mountain, the village priest's 18 year old daughter was admitted to the National Referral Hospital in Honiara with complications after contracting measles. One week later, the priest's wife's father passed away and then the village priest's young grandchild died shortly afterward. These events further negatively influenced some villagers' trust in their priest's spiritual powers and his trustworthiness and integrity as leader. These villagers interpreted the illness and deaths as indicative of spiritual—Christian or ancestral—discontent towards their village priest and his actions.

In a conversation about these events, Charles, a backslider—men and women who were formally members of a church but who sparingly attended and who were known as sympathizers of the ancestral religion—suggested that in "the time before" a diviner would have been consulted to identify the causes of the illness and deaths, to locate who had angered the spirits for them to withdraw their protection from the priest's daughter, his father-in-law, and his

grandchild. Charles suspected that the diviner would have pointed towards the priest and his prayer mountain. He lamented that “today” nothing could be done to know for sure. Charles had once been a committed Anglican, and he did not question the reality of the Christian God. However, in his ethno-theological attempts to “integrate [his] indigenous religious [tradition] and Christianity into systematic schemes” (Scott 2005:117), Charles had come to question the trustworthiness of Anglican Christian leaders in view of their inability to bring about the change they had been promising, their perceived corruption, and their role in fostering rather than mediating tensions in the village.

Nostalgia and “Breakaway”

Charles is not exceptional in his comparison between the ancestral and the Christian ways, and the emphasis that he places on the “secure” knowledge that the ancestral order provided. Many of Gwou’ulu villagers, in their disillusionment with Christian leaders in the village and in the state, expressed nostalgia for the ancestral order. Specifically this nostalgia focused on claims that the ancestral order could not be cheated in disconnects between a person’s (and a leader’s) words and actions and that this order was a conduit for peace rather than conflict, at least within settlements because of communally and consensus-based decision-making.

As already mentioned, the core of the ancestral order was a belief that any inaccurate understandings of ancestors would have negative consequences on the living. From the ethnographic record a fire that ravaged the island of Sufulou in 1912 is indicative of communication between the living and the ancestral spirits having gone wrong. According to Ivens (1930), villagers were preparing a feast for their ancestors when the fire started. After an investigation the fire was attributed to an angered ancestral spirit who disagreed with the feast being held. Nearly the whole village was destroyed and over 40 pigs intended for sacrifice were burnt.

To avoid such miscommunication ancestral villages were said to have, communally, examined and discussed any vision, dream or possession (see Köngäs Maranda 1974:195-196). The ancestral priest was most significant for reliably communicating with ancestral spirits and especially with a clan’s most powerful spirits. Nonetheless, any villager could communicate with ancestral spirits, and ancestral spirits could communicate with any villager, including women

who were and who remain excluded from most of the “communal” male decision-making processes. In the ethnographic record this is reflected in the following event described by Elli Köngäs Maranda:

On December 12, 1966, the festivities of the severing of the skull of a dead priest, Bata, were underway in Fou’eda. Bata’s daughter Kokoto, a widowed woman in her fifties, had come for the occasion from her husband’s island. Bata’s spirit possessed Kokoto, spoke through her mouth, and criticized the excessive spending. He said he was sorry for his people, for his children, and that they should not spend so many goods and so much food for his feast. I asked people what would be done. I was told the feast could still be held, in fact it had to be, but in a more modest manner (1974:1999).

Notably, during my fieldwork, Gwou’ulu villagers were not concerned that they had misinterpreted the prescriptions of their ancestors. They were well aware they had chosen to ignore ancestral prescriptions in Christian conversion, for example in allowing births inside the village and in removing most rules for gender separation. They were also aware that they had lost the knowledge necessary to resume more comprehensive communication with ancestral spirits. When the last ancestral priests died without initiated successors, “the members of the community whose minds are stocked with ... a vast store of knowledge of religious ceremonial and incantations and prayers... and the folktales” (Ivens 1930:151) had died as well. Gwou’ulu villagers insisted that, with the death of the last ancestral priest, the ancestral order had become permanently disentangled. There was no way back.

My local respondents noted that individuals could still follow ancestral rules to some degree; however as communities this ability had been lost. This was said to be the case not only because of the deaths of the last ancestral priests but also because individuals who had committed themselves to Christianity were unable to return to the ancestral religion. Many of Gwou’ulu villagers emphasized that this was not their choice, but the choice of their ancestors; and their ancestors would not allow them to return. For instance, Jack who regularly attended church services, who had a history of helping with church events but who also expressed an affinity and respect for the ancestral religion in conversations, explained that

...it is hard for us to turn back, if you are Christian you can never go back and hold a *kastom* something, it will kill you, or something will happen to your children, because

I know well about the master [Christian God] and I have done the work of the master, and I am already a member of the church. If I am neutral, if I do not do anything [for the Christian God] I am free, but for me, I am not free, because I always promised. If you are neutral and you like to go back [to the ancestors], it is ok, for me it is not. This is OK, I am OK to live the life of the big man [Jesus] (Interview, 29 October 2014).

In this recognition villagers acknowledged that they were to some extent “yearning for what is now not attainable, simply because of the irreversibility of time” (Pickering and Keightley 2006:920). However, they did not yearn for every aspect of this past, for instance, a return to ancestral warfare. Besides, many women did not want to return to the various taboos that surrounded the management of their bodily fluids in ancestral villages. In other words, Gwou’ulu villagers’ nostalgia does not indicate a desire to return to the ancestral order, but is a recognition that some “aspects of the past [can and should be] the basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future” (Pickering and Keightley 2006:921).

As villagers continued to believe that rewards but also punishments could be traced to spiritual explanations, they were less concerned with having misunderstood ancestral prescriptions than those of the Christian God. What villagers yearned for was a better and more reliable way to communicate with the Christian God than contemporary Christian leaders had been able to provide, and in this they also expressed hope for improving governance of and in the state. Elli Kōngäs Maranda described the Lau ancestral order as a “theocracy without gods” (1974:196); and it was this “theocracy” that villagers desired to return to, at least insofar as they desired a “return to” a comprehensive system of governance that is rooted in a more comprehensive understanding of the Christian God’s will and a commitment among village and state leaders to follow this will rather than to say one thing and to do another.

Justin’s description of the attributes he considers most important for identifying a good MP is exemplary for this desire to establish a system of governance that is based on honest leadership and on a close following of the Christian God’s will:

You do not tell lies. You tell what you see and what you hear. You do not campaign based on lies, to trap people to vote for you. No, you talk in facts... You do not follow your own mind. You just talk about God’s truth. You tell everyone, ‘my Campaign Master is God.’ You just talk about what God tells you, then you finish.

You do not lie to people. If you follow your own mind then you lie (Interview, 25 October 2014).

In response to such desire, and a felt need for change, some villagers supported a charismatic turn proposed by the village priest such as the establishment of the prayer mountain described earlier. By aspiring to possession by the Holy Spirit, the prayer mountain was seen as ritually significant to establish a more individual relationship with the Christian God, to potentially mediate miscommunication while equally opening up a space for a more communal decision-making process. If communication with the Holy Spirit were done individually, the veracity of this communication would have to be communally discussed similar to the communal investigative processes at the heart of the ancestral order. Spirit possession dances were seen as worthy alternative to the top-down decision-making by Anglican clergy and lay leaders whom villagers had found to be, similar to foreign missionaries, unable or even unwilling to follow the Christian principles of unity that they preached.

However, as suggested by Battaglia nostalgia as a “vehicle of knowledge rather than only yearning for something lost... may be practiced *in diverse ways*, where the issues for users become, on the one hand, the attachment of appropriate feelings toward their own histories, products, and capabilities, and on the other hand, their detachment from—and active resistance to—disempowering conditions of postcolonial life” (1995:77; my emphasis). As already indicated not every Gwou’ulu villager agreed with the prayer mountain and a turn towards charismatic Christianity. Some, commonly “backsliders,” withdrew from institutionalized religious life more broadly and instead oriented their decision-making processes towards their own ethno-theological readings of Christian prescriptions. Others became “neutrals,”⁸⁵ men and women who did not belong to any Christian Church and who attempted to follow ancestral prescriptions in as much as possible while living in a Christian village. Neutrals, in particular, emphasized that they used the English term “neutral” to describe their religious affiliation to indicate a disinterest in and disagreement with religious and especially Christian inter- and intra-denominational conflicts. As mentioned in chapter 4, Gwou’ulu had also formally ceased to be

⁸⁵ The English term was used. I encountered it in various contexts throughout the Lau Lagoon and in Honiara as well.

an Anglican-only village. It is home to a Pentecostal Kingdom Harvest Church (six families) and to Jehovah Witnesses (two families).

In this “breaking away” from mainstream Anglicanism, Gwou’ulu was then also “breaking apart.” The perceived failures of the Anglican Church and its leadership, its implications in “nationalist appropriations” and, more broadly, comparisons drawn between Church leaders and state leaders have fostered further disunity among Gwou’ulu villagers. The rumours that surround mainstream Christian leaders represent this uncertainty, and so does nostalgia for the past.

Rooted in multiple and at times contradictory visions for the future, Gwou’ulu villagers are breaking away from the Anglican Church similar to “secondary converts” or members of “breakaway movements” across Melanesia (see Barker 2012; Burt 1983; Eriksen 2009; Maggio 2015; McDougall 2009, 2012; Newland and Brown 2015; Timmer 2008, 2015a, 2015b). For example, McDougall’s (2009) description of secondary converts to Islam indicates the same underlying disenchantment with, if not a felt exploitation by, mainstream Christianity. She highlights especially how former Malaita Eagle Force militants have been drawn to Islam as an “antiestablishment identity” (486). Having been rejected as “sinner” by his Christian church, one of these secondary converts described his disappointment to McDougall in no uncertain terms. This description closely resembles the sentiments expressed by many Gwou’ulu villagers who had grown disillusioned with the Anglican Church and its leaders:

They want angels in church, they don’t like them scratched. But those who think they are angels are disillusioned, all of us are just human beings... [Christianity is foreign and brought] rubbish, immortality, alcohol—lots of things came in that didn’t exist in the Solomons.... We say that Christianity brought light, but really it just brought darkness.” (Conversation with McDougall, 28 January, 2007, cited in McDougall 2009:486)

Summary

When Christianity became an alternative to the ancestral order, it did so because it came to be perceived as a potentially more powerful religious, social and political system in view of the challenges and changes brought about by a European global world and growing dependencies

therein. When this Christian order failed to realize its promises, blame was placed on foreign missionaries who were thought to withhold knowledge and to replicate the racial hierarchies at the heart of the colonial state. However, 36 years after independence, Christianity remains closely entangled with “failed” state politics in Solomon Islands, especially in “nationalist appropriations” and despite an increased religious and political independence from foreign missionaries and colonial administrators. Solomon Islands remains divided. In this context, Gwou’ulu villagers have again come to resent the “old” with the old now being associated with the Christian social order that has, in the case of Gwou’ulu, been mediated by the Anglican Church for over a century. Gwou’ulu villagers have come to desire a future that is grounded in the nostalgic certainty of the “older,” the ancestral order.

In other words and more closely focused on implications for understanding the role of the mainstream churches in the state, the Anglican Church of Gwou’ulu has become associated with Solomon Islands’ failure to develop and become independent from foreign assistance and exploitation. Perhaps unaware of its similarities to missionization, colonization and pacification, the postcolonial state, its representatives, and foreign statebuilders have attempted to tap into Solomon Islanders’ ethno-theological embrace of the Christian principle of unity and peace. However, this church-state collaboration appears also to have repeated the same mistake. Villagers’ desire for religious coherence, for consistency between one’s words and actions is, or at least is rumoured to be, too frequently ignored by church leaders. Rather than a concrete alternative to the state, institutionalized mainstream Christianity should thus also be considered as potentially yet another reminder of contemporary uncertainties and Solomon Islands dependencies and failures in the global Christian and state-centric world.

At the same time, there is little doubt about the significance that my local respondents attribute to religiously-rooted governance, a form of theocracy, as legitimate means for governance, in the village and beyond. Gwou’ulu villagers have not been turning their backs to Christianity (or religiosity more broadly), from clan-based leadership or even necessarily from a system of governance that encompasses more than the village. Instead they have begun, fully or in parts, to break away from those leaders and the institutions that they represent that have become too closely entangled with the centralized state, the governance system that was first imposed on them by the British colonial administration, that remains, as suggested in chapter 3,

under foreign influence and control, most recently the RAMSI intervention, and that has yet to demonstrate to them an interest in and prioritization of village needs, wants and values.

9 ♦ Conclusion

Introduction

Throughout my thesis I have highlighted and discussed how Gwou'ulu villagers and, to a lesser degree their urban non-elite relatives, have become disillusioned with and distrust the Solomon Islands state. I have indicated that Gwou'ulu villagers' everyday and exceptional encounters with the Solomon Islands state have failed to nurture recognition of the legitimacy of the state and its actors as dominant governing institution, in particular vis-à-vis the village and its community. In this conclusion I summarize these findings in a more focused discussion of how this perception of the Solomon Islands state as primarily disruptive has encouraged further fracturing within the state rather than its unification as political unit, re-revealing the local communities that state-building, historically and today, has attempted to dilute. At the same time, I note how village quests for autonomy from the state are curtailed by a growing dependency on foreign foods and goods and therein by a dependency on the state as primary globally-recognized mediator of political-economic relations.

I do so, first, with a final ethnographic snapshot. Then I move on to discuss how the village remains a locus of authority in the state and I explore how this village-centrism is linked to the history of distrust of, and being disappointed in the state that I elaborated on throughout this thesis. Fourth, I outline how my local respondents' desire for autonomy from the state is curtailed by a growing dependency on the state within the global economy, while also identifying how the Solomon Islands state itself is limited in its abilities within a dependency on the global system. Finally, I review the core findings presented in this thesis and briefly explore the implications of my research for the broader question of how to study the state as “an unthinkable object” (Bourdieu 2014:3).

Ethnographic Intermezzo: Two Election Days

On 19 November 2014, the day of the National Election, Geoffrey Hobbs and I caused a small controversy in Gwou'ulu. We did not vote. It was inconceivable to several villagers how we could live in Gwou'ulu but not care enough about the community to make our voices heard. As I already alluded to in chapters 5 and 7 in particular, despite interests in individual gains, villagers also recognized the National Election as a “unique” opportunity to directly affect the position of Gwou'ulu in the Solomon Islands state by voting for a hopefully good (national) leader. While many villagers did not expect much to change with the election, it was a hope-generating event, similar to the reconciliation for development that I described in chapter 6. As such, villagers did not consider non-participation in the election an option if one really cared, not about oneself but about the village community.

In our defense someone pointed out that we had not yet lived in the village during voter registration which had taken place in late March 2014. We could not be on the list and hence we could not vote. This made sense to some, but only to some degree. There was always some flexibility, we were told. We should at least try. The electoral clerks would likely allow us to vote even though we had not registered. Our explanation that we could not vote because we were not citizens of Solomon Islands only caused confusion. We were here. We had been welcomed into the village, had been living in the village and therefore we belonged to the village, at least temporarily. We should have, and some contended we probably did have the right to vote. Voting had nothing to do with the passports that the state issued—an example I brought into the conversation to contextualize the concept of citizenship. Instead, voting was conceived of as a means for renegotiating the position of Gwou'ulu in the state, according to Gwou'ulu villagers' wants, needs and values. Everyone who was, could, and wanted to continue living in Gwou'ulu was considered necessarily invested in this future and thus eligible to vote.

I was too much trapped in my own state-centric framework, convinced of the legitimate dominance of the state in such a way that the state became “unthinkable,” that I did not dare to test this claim, to see if villagers were correct to assert that I could vote, or even more so to consider if I, after all, *should* vote. However, I did witness a more concrete application of this village- rather than state-centric understanding of voting and voting eligibility when Gwou'ulu

villagers went to vote in the Provincial Election on 11 December 2014—one day after the rest of Malaita because the ballot boxes did not arrive on time. During the Provincial Election not only Gwou’ulu adults voted, but also their children who were not prevented to cast their ballots, also not by electoral clerks. Children were sent to the ballot to replace those adults who had returned to Honiara after the National Election and could not afford to head back to the village to cast their provincial votes.⁸⁶

In conversations about the events during the Provincial Election, Gwou’ulu villagers insisted that they would not allow someone to vote in their constituency who they did not know, or who they knew was not resident in or around Gwou’ulu or closely connected through kinship ties. However, villagers maintained that they needed to make the votes of those count who *did* belong to the village community. In this case this was most easily achieved by sending children to replace missing, registered adults.⁸⁷ While there were some dissenting voices, most agreed with the choice to send children to vote. Unlike for the National Election, villagers had agreed to “block vote” for the only, candidate from Gwou’ulu for the Provincial Election. Everyone, adult or child, would cast their vote for this candidate to increase the chances of *their* candidate winning. In this context votes from children (in lieu of absent adults) were, above all, viewed an asset to Gwou’ulu; while in the context of the National Election, when there was no agreed on “best” candidate sending children to the polls would have likely been considerably more contentious.

Yet, despite Gwou’ulu strength in numbers in comparison to other settlements within the electoral district, the candidate from Gwou’ulu lost. According to village rumours, this loss could only be explained because another village “stole” the ballot boxes on their way to Malu’u. This neighbouring village was being accused of having replaced Gwou’ulu votes with ballots that they filled in “for Gwou’ulu” to correspond to the electoral interests of the other village.

⁸⁶ Out of constituency voting was not allowed. According to Chief Electoral Officer Poycarp, “under the current laws, all votes for a constituency must be counted together. That means that votes would have to be moved between Provinces. We believe that represents an unacceptable risk of interference with ballot boxes” (cited in Solomon Star 2014a: para 11).

⁸⁷ The same electoral roll was used for both the National and Provincial Election.

The Village as Locus of Authority

I started this concluding chapter with an ethnographic snapshot about the two election days because these particular experiences were among those that struck me the most during my fieldwork. They deeply informed the writing of this thesis and more concretely my answer to the overarching question of how the state becomes visible in the lives of rural and, to a lesser degree, urban non-elite Solomon Islanders; and how this visibility affects non-elites' perceptions of the Solomon Islands state. Gwou'ulu villagers' and my own confusions and the debates about who had the right to vote, and who had the authority to determine voter eligibility, illustrate persuasively how the Solomon Islands state has failed to legitimate its own domination (while reminding me of how much I had accepted state domination as status quo).

Rather than unifying belonging within the realm of statehood and perhaps even nationhood, the Solomon Islands state appears to have fostered a strengthening of locally-centered visions that emphasize local autonomy vis-à-vis the central state. The independent state has failed to be recognized as reliable mediator of local-global relations and dependencies. I contend that it is this failure that continues to re-revealed local communities as loci of authority despite their long-term entanglements with the state and transformations in response to Christian conversion. In other words, from the perspective of my local respondents, the Solomon Islands state has been unable, in Bourdieu's terms, to achieve "unification" and therefore "domination" through "monopolization" (2014:222) or, the establishment of a "central norm" (223), in this case through legitimation of a state monopoly on law-making and its enforcement.

Gwou'ulu villagers' decision-making on the two election days demonstrates how the Solomon Islands state has been unable to define who is and who is not a full member of the imagined nation-state; and villagers' success at defying electoral laws shows how the centralized state continues to struggle to establish its legitimacy even among its representatives, in this case electoral clerks. In other words, if, as defined by Bourdieu, the state is best understood as "political acts... recognized as legitimate, if only because no one questions the possibility of acting otherwise, because it is unquestioned" (2014:10-11)—just like I had done myself when challenged to cast my vote in the village—then the Solomon Islands state has failed or continues

to fail to establish its claim as legitimate dominant governing system, at least within the parameters of my field site and research.

My local respondents did not recognize the rules (or laws) established by the state as necessarily legitimate and therefore to be necessarily followed rather than only when the rules suited their purposes. In the context of the two election days, villagers assessed state laws surrounding the right to vote based on the perceived fit of these laws vis-à-vis village needs and interests. Electoral laws were rejected because they were deemed inadequate representations of village priorities. At least during the Provincial Election electoral clerks concurred, one of them being from Gwou'ulu. Shortly before the election, this clerk had participated in a special training seminar in Malu'u on the importance of electoral integrity; he had previously also worked for the provincial government.

The electoral clerk's and, more broadly, villagers' refusal to acknowledge the hierarchies that are foundational to the power and legitimacy of the centralized state echoes my argumentation in chapter 7. There I suggested that knowledge of and respect for village needs, wants and values were the primary criteria for villagers' assessment of good, trustworthy leaders, in the state as much as in the village, the clan and the church. Leaders who do not prioritize village needs, and whose knowledge of the village are deemed inadequate, are not recognized as legitimate leaders, and thus not trusted in decision-making processes. Because villagers frequently felt that their proclaimed leaders—from their national MP to church representatives—did not prioritize the village, Gwou'ulu villagers rarely hesitated to ignore a national law in favour of village-based decision-making and it was not uncommon for the law not to be considered or discussed at all. Exemplary for such attitude is villagers' decision to catch the spawn of the spine feet (grass fish) despite a national ban (see chapter 7).

This said, as already indicated in my ethnographic intermezzo, there were some dissenting voices during the Provincial Election. Not everyone was certain if it was the right decision for the village (rather than for Solomon Islands at large) to send children to vote. While most villagers hoped that the candidate from Gwou'ulu would win, some of my local respondents were wary of the decision made by the village to block vote and send children to the polls. These villagers wondered if this was not the kind of “corrupt” behaviour that would prevent the change that they had been hoping for. They wondered if such behaviour undermined

the emergence of a good leader, perhaps a leader like Moses, who could increase the socio-political and economic autonomy of Gwou'ulu within global dependencies, in the rise of the food-for-cash economy that, as suggested in chapter 4, has become central to villagers' decision-making processes.

Nevertheless, and as indicated in my ethnographic intermezzo, these contemplations among Gwou'ulu villagers did not prevent villagers from sending their children to the electoral booth, just as similar considerations had not prevented villagers from seeking immediate returns during the national election campaign that I described in my introductory reflections to chapters 5 and 7. Villagers had no confidence that a leader like Moses would be elected; they did not expect that other villages and their residents would chose to elect a leader who would not favour his supporters first and foremost. Even more so, they questioned whether such a good leader could be found, or even existed in the first place. In this context, villagers were confident that they had to focus, above all, on their own immediate needs in their engagements with the Solomon Islands state.

This confidence in and prioritization of the village vis-à-vis the state is also reflected in the attempts of Gwou'ulu villagers and their non-elite relatives to circumvent the state in as far as possible to maintain if not strengthen their autonomy from centralized control. For example, in my discussion of state and non-state infrastructures in chapter 5, I noted that Gwou'ulu villagers preferred infrastructures obtained through non-state channels, including from foreign ones like the Japanese International Development Agency (JICA).

Moreover, in chapter 4, I outlined how many Gwou'ulu villagers preferred the village lifestyle to the (possible) luxuries of urban areas because they resent their dependency on money when in town. Many of my local respondents are wary of the hard labour that small-scale farming and fishing entails. However, this hard labour is often favoured in comparison to the cash-based lifestyle that villagers consider to be more insecure, also because it is mediated and promulgated by the state. In the following I outline how this confidence in the village and distrust in the state are rooted in how the Solomon Islands state has become visible in Gwou'ulu lifeworlds, specifically as unreliable if not disruptive that increases perceptions of the state, its institutions and its leaders as untrustworthy and therein illegitimate encouraging villagers' to seek alternatives and further autonomy from state domination.

A History of Disappointment by the State

The limited hope for political change that villagers expressed during the two elections was rooted in a history of disappointment, which began in a loss of political autonomy as a result of colonization (see chapter 2) and which has been continuously reinforced since, including during my fieldwork. For example, after the Provincial Election Gwou'ulu villagers found their distrust in the possibility of change by means of elections confirmed and nurtured in the rumour that the only reason why the candidate from Gwou'ulu had not won was because Gwou'ulu votes had never made it to the counting office in Malu'u. In subsequent discussions Gwou'ulu villagers wondered why they should sacrifice *their* interests when interacting with the state, e.g., by not sending children to vote or by not asking candidates for perks such as a bag of rice (see chapter 5). They noted that other villages were clearly unwilling to sacrifice their own (selfish) interests themselves. Examples for such perceived selfish behaviour include the villagers in Baegu/Asifola Constituency, who were said to have received fiberglass canoes during the national election campaign (see chapter 5), the more immediate neighbours of Gwou'ulu who were accused of having stolen Gwou'ulu ballots, as well as the neighbouring village that had attacked and burnt down houses in Gwou'ulu after the 2006 elections (see chapter 7).

Beyond questioning the allegiance of other villages and their residents, Gwou'ulu villagers had also, if not above all, little reason to trust state representatives and state institutions to keep any of their promises, from infrastructure construction and maintenance (chapter 5) to economic development (chapter 6) to leadership with integrity (chapters 7 and 8). In essence, what I showed in previous chapters is that Gwou'ulu villagers questioned the trustworthiness of anything and anyone connected to the contemporary Solomon Islands state because the state has continuously failed to become integrated into any of Gwou'ulu villagers' everyday routines as stabilizing rather than disruptive force.

In chapter 5, I examined how the temporality of state infrastructures—when and how infrastructures become visible, especially in disruption—has affected Gwou'ulu villagers' and their urban non-elite relatives' perception of the Solomon Islands state. I highlighted how in this context the state is primarily and continuously visible in its inability to ever become invisible, to reliably provide access to infrastructures and social services. Gwou'ulu is not only off-the-grid,

reliant on solar power units and water tanks and one pipe/tap to meet basic electricity and drinking water needs; but I noted how those solar power units and water infrastructures provided by the state were also considered the most precarious in comparison to those obtained through alternative channels such as urban salaried kin or even foreign development agencies. For example, villagers worried that power and water infrastructures provided through Constituency Development Funds would have to be returned if the MP who provided them was not re-elected.

In addition, I showed in chapter 5 how road-based infrastructures were disliked, avoided, and seen as a source of immoral behaviour because of unreliable maintenance and an ongoing state of disrepair. While villagers desired a well-maintained road as a potential means of more equal development, they were yet to experience what it meant to have access to a well-maintained road. Instead villagers associated the state with the continuous state of disrepair that characterized the existing road and that was recognized as an obstacle rather than a contribution to economic activity. The existing, not-well-maintained road was considered to be interrupting trade at local markets that are based on a land-sea synergy and reliant on the interchangeability of coastal and inland produce. I showed how the road in disrepair creates imbalances in the distribution of produce by increasing accessibility of markets *only* to coastal populations. At the same time, I noted that the presence of urban customers (non-producers) leads to an increase in prices and unaffordability for villagers. Besides, the road is felt to bring insecurity by granting access to strangers and by so doing “seducing” Gwou’ulu villagers to misbehave, e.g., to steal and blame any theft on a stranger who had come through the village on the back of a flatbed truck via the road.

In the third case study that I introduced in chapter 5, I stressed how Gwou’ulu villagers were continuously disappointed by the state and distrusted it because the state had been unable to fulfill its promises regarding public health and education. Gwou’ulu villagers and their urban non-elite relatives complained about a two-tier system that, above all, benefited the urban elite such as state representatives who were able to access better (private) medical care and who were said to be more likely be able to access national secondary schools and be chosen for government scholarships for tertiary education. Since this status quo benefits urban elites directly, my local respondents felt that urban elites have little interest in improving public health and education systems for the predominantly rural non-elite population. The status quo allows elites to enjoy

the many luxuries of life in town that I described in chapter 3 and that remain unattainable to my rural and also my urban non-elite respondents. These luxuries include air-conditioned apartments as much as a cappuccino at one of Honiara's expat cafes—on average a cappuccino cost SBD 26, enough to pay for the base ingredients for a meal (rice, noodles and fish) for a family of five in Gwou'ulu, with all ingredients of the meal purchased in a Gwou'ulu canteen.

In other words, in its infrastructures the state has not only disappointed Gwou'ulu villagers but it has demonstrated disinterest in them. The Solomon Islands state has been unable to guarantee basic entitlements and it has failed to create an “ethos of citizenship” (Cox 2009:965) that could encourage Gwou'ulu villagers to demand more from the state than it has provided so far, that recognizes the state as even only potentially reliable provider of infrastructures. On the contrary, as the state becomes and remains continuously visible in an inability to reliably provide access to adequate services, Gwou'ulu villagers and their urban non-elite relatives are repeatedly reminded of what they consider as false promises of statehood. This is in particular the case because the Lau People of North Malaita have historically embraced engagements and collaboration with the European state and European economic forces (see chapter 2).

Within this history of state entanglements, Gwou'ulu villagers critique the state and its representatives as saying or promising one thing but doing another. The state promises development through education but is unable to provide quality education for all rather than only for the children of elites, and to generate enough jobs for those who were able to successfully obtain a secondary and post-secondary education. The state provides off-the-grid infrastructures such as water tanks and solar power units for some—the supporters of *gavman* representatives—but even then, as further suggested in chapter 5, state actors may demand such infrastructures to be returned. The state builds roads (or rather the colonial state built roads) but the independent Solomon Islands state does not maintain them, thus making roads too unreliable to be used for development but reliable enough to encourage immoral behaviour among those travelling alongside it.

This perceived state disinterest in non-elites and its unreliability are further evidenced in villagers' encounters with public administration and its documents, as well as economic development. In chapter 6, I discussed villagers' engagements with state bureaucracy for

development as hope-generating events following Miyazaki's (2004) and Bloch's (1998) definition of hope as rooted in lack of confidence in the future and therefore in disappointment, indeterminacy and disappointability. I stressed how Gwou'ulu villagers' hope for economic development is tied to a hope for state-issued documents that Gwou'ulu villagers believe will allow them to engage in negotiations with foreign and local businesses to open a tuna cannery on Gwou'ulu and neighbouring land.

More concretely, in my discussion of the proposed Suava Bay Development Project in chapter 6, I suggested that my local respondents' hope resembles the "hope on remand" that Reed (2011) describes. This hope focuses on fulfilling state demands to obtain documents from the Solomon Islands state that are deemed indispensable while being bereft of alternatives. To address the needs of a rapidly growing population, shortage of gardening land and overfishing, Gwou'ulu villagers explained, begrudgingly, that they needed the state. They depended on the state for issuing the documents that would allow for Gwou'ulu village to become trustworthy to foreign (and to a lesser degree local) business interests, for the Suava Bay Development Project to go ahead. However, Gwou'ulu villagers did not trust in state willingness and ability to issue these documents and to do so according to Gwou'ulu interests.

Gwou'ulu villagers acknowledged that, because of land disputes, they were to some degree to blame for the project not going ahead. In recognition of this responsibility, villagers decided to no longer be "the single major obstacle" (Solomon Star 2015a:para 12) to development by agreeing to participate in a reconciliation event to demonstrate unity among landowners to the state. Gwou'ulu residents did so even though many disagreed with the lineages or clans that were fixed and to some extent created for this event as state requirement.

While the event was successful, at least from a state perspective, villagers' hope continues to be disappointed, and this disappointment is directly linked to an apparent *gavman* unwillingness to push ahead with the project. Villagers blame *gavman* for not moving ahead with the project, among others, because not doing so was said to give leverage to MPs during election campaigns. Incumbent MPs would claim that they need to be re-elected to realize the project because one term was claimed not to be enough time—a strategy I observed during the 2014 national election campaign and that seems to continue on. Despite the reconciliation event and despite meetings between *gavman* and "landowners" since the reconciliation, the Suava Bay

Development Project is yet to move forward. For example, the May 2016 Think Tank report commissioned by Solomon Islands' Prime Ministers' Office does not identify the Suava Bay Development Project as one of two priority areas for the Democratic Coalition for Change Government and its plans to bring development to Malaita (Prime Ministers' Press Secretariat Office 2016).

In other words, in villagers' hope for economic development, mediated through the Solomon Islands state, the state is predominantly and continuously visible as unreliable, selfish and disinterested in the needs and wants of Gwou'ulu villagers. Though needed to maintain villagers' hope for development by issuing internationally recognized and legitimate documents, the state is also perceived as a primary obstacle to it. The state and its representatives are a source of disappointment and uncertainty and therefore, from a village perspective, inadequate and illegitimate as dominant governing institution.

Beyond the Suava Bay Development Project, Gwou'ulu villagers have also had little reason to develop trust in the state and its documents more broadly. For instance, villagers were aware that the state was, especially outside of town, unable to enforce court orders (and accompanying documents). For example, when state courts gave custody rights to mothers, some fathers "kidnapped" the children to raise them in the fathers' home village instead, and there was little if anything that the state did or was able to do about this (see chapter 6). Besides, Solomon Islands health cards, as the primary state-issued document that Gwou'ulu villagers had long-term experience with, were linked to the disillusionment that villagers felt towards inadequate public health services (chapters 5 and 6). In addition, only in 2014 first identity cards were issued to the majority of Solomon Islanders, in this case for voter registration. In chapter 6, I described how the "anti-corruption" intentions of these cards have been subverted by politicians and their campaign managers who use them to strengthen patron-client relationships between candidates and voters. Candidates attempted to and succeeded with "purchasing" votes by "buying" the cards from constituents immediately after they registered and by returning the cards on Election Day to their supposed supporters with additional perks.

I discussed this perceived selfishness of leaders, in particular when they engage with the Solomon Islands state, more specifically in chapter 7. I showed how villagers not only resent state leaders but also those village leaders who negotiate with the state on their behalf. Because

leaders have to be based in town to engage with the state, for instance, to negotiate for the Suava Bay Development Project, villagers are unable, from their perspective, to reliably confirm these leaders' achievements and their commitment to Gwou'ulu priorities, needs and wants. This is significant because Gwou'ulu villagers consider achievement and prioritization of the village to be primary indicators for trustworthy and legitimate leadership and for the trustworthiness of the institutions to which these leaders belonged. In other words, institutions or systems themselves were not recognized as legitimate outside the legitimacy of their representatives.

Within this context, based on an analysis of feasts in Gwou'ulu in 2014, I demonstrated how Gwou'ulu villagers are wary of a devaluation of their village in and vis-à-vis the state. Building on ancestral practice, Gwou'ulu villagers continue to treat the organization of feasts as primary indicator for leadership capacities and leaders' priorities. In 2014 villagers deemed only those feasts successful—by providing enough food to all villagers, not just for few select leaders—that had been organized *for* the state in the context of the reconciliation event to obtain the documents for the Suava Bay Development Project. Feasts that were primarily organized *for* the village, such as the welcome feast for the Bishop of Malaita, were considered to have failed to demonstrate the capacity and legitimacy of the leaders organizing them.

During failed feasts only a handful of village leaders surrounding the village priest enjoyed plentiful foods, including pork and chicken, while the majority of villagers were left hungry. In this difference between feasts for the state and feasts for the village, villagers felt devalued and village leaders were identified as disinterested in the village and, therein, as another source of disappointment. More concretely, the state and its representatives were viewed as distracting and diverting leadership resources away from the village and its residents and, by so doing, decreasing the value of the village vis-à-vis the state.

Last but not least, in chapter 8, I showed how villagers' perceptions of contact with the state as “corrupting,” were undermining the legitimacy of mainstream Christian churches, which in Gwou'ulu is the Anglican Church of Melanesia. From the perspective of Gwou'ulu villagers and according to the literature (see also chapter 3), mainstream Christian churches are the most promising and important alternative to the state. To demonstrate how churches became viewed as alternatives to the state I sketched the history of Christian conversion in Lau and Malaita more broadly. I showed how Christianity has historically not only emerged as an alternative to the

ancestral religious and socio-political order, but how it was integrated into resistance against the colonial centralized state, in particular during the Malaita-based anticolonial movement Maasina Rule. In addition, I described how mainstream Christian churches have historically compensated for state inadequacies. For example, they served as active mediators of conflict and peacebuilders during the Tensions.

However, my research shows that this position of mainstream Christian churches as a legitimate alternative appears to be in jeopardy. In recognition of the legitimacy of Christian institutions, local and foreign state actors, including RAMSI personnel, are encouraging stronger collaboration among the Solomon Islands state and mainstream churches by emphasizing a shared Christianity as foundation for nationhood and for police legitimacy. However, among my local respondents this very collaboration, or “nationalist appropriation” (Douglas 2007:163), has fueled distrust in Christian churches and their leaders. Drawing on several examples, I demonstrated how Gwou’ulu leaders who attempt to legitimize their claim to leadership based on their roles in the Anglican Church have become, similar to state leaders, associated with rumours about corruption. In addition, I suggested that Christian leaders were felt to have become disinterested in the village community, especially in comparison to immediate institutional (Anglican-focused) concerns. Like state leaders, church leaders were conceived of as saying one thing and doing another.

In this context, Gwou’ulu villagers expressed nostalgia for the ancestral order, one that was based on a comprehensive system of governance—a “theocracy” in Elli Köngäs Maranda’s (1974:186) words—and, according to villagers’ nostalgic portrayals, on consistency between leaders’ words and actions rooted in a trustworthy understanding of, in this case, the Christian God’s (rather than previously ancestral) will. My local respondents agree that the status quo—continuous disappointment in and even betrayal by governing institutions and their representatives, the state and the Anglican Church—should and cannot persist. However, Gwou’ulu villagers and their urban non-elite relatives are uncertain about how to establish a better theocratic governing system. As a result, my local respondents have been, formally or more commonly informally, “breaking away” from the Anglican Church or they have attempted to reform it on the village level, in different and at times contradictory ways. In response, the village has experienced fragmentation and further disunity that is closely connected to the

perceived failure of Christian leaders within and in dialogue with the independent Solomon Islands state.

The Village as Locus of Authority... in Dependency

Echoing throughout my thesis is an important recognition that, despite this continuous disappointment and lack of confidence in the state and associated actors, to some degree even the Anglican Church, my local respondents do not consider *not* engaging with the state an option. Because of what appears to villagers as an unescapable dependency on the state *within* the global economic system, “local strategies of social survival” are viewed as limited in “their viability” (Ekholm-Friedman and Friedman 2008b:171), and villagers worry that they are increasingly so.

An unwillingness not to engage with the state is visible in villagers’ insistence that Geoffrey Hobbis and I should, or rather that everyone interested in Gwou’ulu well-being, needed to vote in the National Election; and it is visible in Gwou’ulu villagers’ decision to send their children to replace absent adults in the Provincial Election. Gwou’ulu villagers do not think of voting as choice but as necessity to keep alive hope for the future of Gwou’ulu and their children. For the Provincial Election, this was especially the case because the village had reached a consensus about a potentially good provincial MP. Even though the candidate was resident in town and some doubted his continued commitment to the village across this urban-rural difference and distance that I outlined in chapter 7, the candidate was at least from Gwou’ulu. Villagers hoped that if he won he would prioritize them and in particular, infrastructural projects that would improve Gwou’ulu water supply. This hope did by no means constitute confidence in the possibility of a satisfactory outcome from a Gwou’ulu perspective. Instead it constitutes a hope that closely resembles Bloch’s (1998) and Miyazaki’s (2004) definition which suggests that hope is closely connected to disappointability. Gwou’ulu villagers’ hope is rooted in a history of disappointment, in this case in the state, nurtured by the remote possibility of a different outcome despite repetition, with minor modifications, of previously unsatisfactory results.

In addition, and perhaps even more so, such hope in disappointment and Gwou’ulu villagers’ perceived dependency on the Solomon Islands state is visible in their decision-making processes in regards to the Suava Bay Development Project. Villagers feel compelled to acquire

these documents and by extension the development project because of the population pressures and the rise of the food-for-cash economy that I described in chapter 4. Gwou'ulu villagers have been able to maintain a degree of autonomy from the cash economy and, therefore, from global capitalist production. They continue to rely on small-scale farming and non-industrial fishing to meet the immediate needs of their families and they construct houses based on locally available materials, especially Pandanus leaves. In addition, local trade networks with inland neighbours remain viable and do not depend on the state as intermediary—while local markets are now cash-based, barter remains recognized and used as valid alternative.

Many of Gwou'ulu villagers desire for this relative autonomy to persist. However, Gwou'ulu villagers are wary of the long-term feasibility of this economic autonomy. As I described in chapter 4, Gwou'ulu villagers frequently complained about a seemingly ever increasing number of children while being aware of Gwou'ulu seas being overfished. At the same time, garden land is overused with increasingly short fallow periods, if any fallow at all. During my fieldwork I found that families were already depending on processed and imported foods to meet basic needs, in particular rice. Rice has come to replace locally grown starchy foods such as kumara and cassava specifically in response to the growing population, overfishing of Gwou'ulu waters and not enough garden land to cover villagers' immediate needs. Within this context Gwou'ulu villagers did not believe that there was an alternative to economic development, further integration into the global cash-for-food economy, to ensure their future survival.

Therefore, as previously noted, villagers had agreed to accept the creation of “special purpose clans” (Jorgensen 2007:67) to obtain state permission for the project even though many felt that these clans did not adequately represent autochthonous governance (rather than ownership) of land and land-covered-by-sea. My local respondents have grown aware that, from an international perspective, *only* the Solomon Islands state is tasked with issuing internationally recognizable, “legitimate” documents; and villagers acknowledge that these documents are necessary to allow them to negotiate with foreign and local businesses about opening and operating a cannery in Suava Bay. In other words, Gwou'ulu villagers recognize the Solomon Islands state as a mediator of broader global (food) dependencies, even though they are uncertain about what these documents entail and even though they themselves distrust the legitimacy of the

state as issuing agency and as legitimate authority for determining and fixing “ownership” of land.

As Gwou’ulu villagers are certain that they *need* economic development, specifically the development of urban infrastructures and industrial production at the heart of the Suava Bay Development Project, they are then also certain that they need education to more equally participate in this development. As I showed in chapter 5 to obtain this education Gwou’ulu villagers also depend on the state. Christian churches, as the only alternative provider of school-based education, do not run a sufficient number of schools to offer Gwou’ulu villagers with a choice. Besides, Gwou’ulu villagers insist on sending their children to schools that corresponded to their religious affiliation and the Anglican Church only controls five per cent of all church-run primary and secondary schools (Bird 2007).

Additionally, even if mainstream churches had more control over the educational system, it is questionable whether they would be able to move beyond the distrust that some of Gwou’ulu villagers have developed toward the Anglican Church and its representatives in view of the church-state entanglements described in chapter 8. After all, during the colonial period, when colonial administrators relied primarily on churches to provide educational services, churches failed to fulfil Malaitan demand for quality education as well. As I noted in chapter 2 and in chapter 8, it was this failure that nurtured resentment among Malaitans towards foreign Christian missionaries who, from a Malaitan perspective, most visibly collaborated with the colonial state (even if they did not).

To sum up, Gwou’ulu villagers do not acknowledge the legitimacy of the state to rule their life, its representatives and laws. They are also able to not follow these laws in many contexts, to not even include them in their decision-making process in response to lack of state-based enforcement mechanisms. Nevertheless, Gwou’ulu villagers and their urban non-elite relatives are growing dependent on the centralized state because of a lack of alternatives to state infrastructures such as public health facilities and public schools, and because of their dependence on the state as mediator of villagers’ growing dependency on the global food-for-cash economy. In this context, even though the Solomon Islands state has failed to “legitimate the illegitimate” (Abrams 1988:76) or to become “an unthinkable object” (Bourdieu 2014:3) by being integrated into everyday routines as stabilizing force, villagers’ quest for autonomy from

the state is curtailed by a growing dependency on the state and its external responsibilities, its position within the global political-economic system that identifies the state as legitimate, dominant governing actor of Solomon Islands territory and its peoples.

I contend that, because of this integration—and especially in the reinforcement of this integration by the Australia-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands—the state is visible as a particularly disruptive force in the everyday lives of my non-elite respondents. Because of a growing dependency on foreign foods and goods and the Solomon Islands state as mediator in between, my respondents’ ability to make choices beyond and outside the state has been curtailed while further nurturing their resentment towards the state and therein undermining its attempts at legitimation as governing institution.

State Dependence in the Global System

At the same time, echoing Tucker’s (2010) argumentation, the Solomon Islands state itself—not only its citizens—is dependent on the global political-economic system for its own survival including for its ability to provide even the most basic services such as the inadequate yet existing primary and secondary schooling critiqued by my local respondents. A comprehensive discussion of these state dependencies in the global system goes beyond the scope of my thesis. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile noting, at least briefly, some of the external factors that limit the abilities of the Solomon Islands state to focus its attention and resources towards domestic needs and interests, thus contributing to my local respondents’ resentment towards the Solomon Islands state.

As I noted in chapter 3, between 2009 and 2011 Solomon Islands was the second most aid dependent country in the world, with aid flows being equivalent to about one third of its GDP. I also indicated that, however controversial, Constituency Development Funds—the primary means for channeling government funds to constituencies—rely on financial support from Taiwan. In addition, by drawing on the example of Japan, I alluded to how aid organizations and their countries of origin are vital for the implementation of infrastructure projects in Solomon Islands.

In chapter 3, I also briefly described Solomon Islands dependence on foreign investment, natural resource exploitation and export to allow for Solomon Islands participation in the global economy, as well as to generate any substantial tax revenues that could be used to improve basic service delivery within Solomon Islands. I indicated that Constituency Development Funds are not only closely connected to a dependence on Taiwan but also encourage candidates to potentially “sell out” during elections. According to Wood (2015a), CDFs benefit the campaigning of incumbent MPs encouraging other candidates to turn to the Asian-dominated foreign business community to fund their campaigns and further increasing outside influence on Solomon Islands politics.

In addition, Solomon Islands “independence” and state ability to more comprehensively focus on their internal affairs appear to be curtailed by Solomon Islands integration in regional and broader international organizations. Drawing on Corbett and Connell’s (2015) research I noted in chapter 3 how a perceived need to participate in international organizations negatively effects on the financial and human resources of the state. In particular the need for members of *gavman* to travel abroad to participate in meetings of international organizations stands out as contributing to the disappointment in the state that my local non-elite respondents expressed. At least to some degree, the problem with the “come back tomorrow” system—briefly described in chapter 7 as one of the reasons for why village leaders have to be increasingly based in town to engage with the state and its administration—appears to be connected to Solomon Islands politicians and bureaucrats’ multiple responsibilities abroad.

State distance from rural areas can be linked to foreign dependencies and influence as well. Not only is urban centralization of state governance closely intertwined with Solomon Islands colonial history and the governance system inherited from British rule (see chapter 2), but it is also, at least in parts, a product of structural adjustment programs in the 1990s intending, among others, to deal with Solomon Islands budget shortages and foreign dependencies. As suggested in chapter 7, by 1998, the year the Tensions broke out, local state-based governance institutions had effectively disappeared after an externally-encouraged abolition of area councils and local courts; and “while the precise casualty remains uncertain, there can be no doubt that the progressive withdrawal of the state from rural areas, as viewed through the prism of state policing and justice provision, has contributed to increased contestation and instability in many

parts of the country” (Allen and Dinnen 2016:83). Notably, RAMSI-led state-building in Solomon Islands has done little towards addressing the instability brought about through further centralization. On the contrary, as further indicated in chapter 7, RAMSI reforms have also focused on the importance of a small public service and on the strengthening of the centralized government and public administration system.

In other words, the Solomon Islands state finds itself in a double bind between its external and internal commitments, with external forces actively involved in shaping Solomon Islands internal politics, from RAMSI to aid agencies to foreign business interests. Further research on this double bind is required, especially with Solomon Islands politicians and bureaucrats, but it appears as if these commitments are unevenly distributed, seemingly skewed towards external responsibilities and commitments that are entangled with the dependency of the Solomon Islands state on external support for internal projects. This includes dependency on aid donors for infrastructure maintenance and improvements as much as a need for foreign investments for economic development—after all, also Gwou’ulu villagers expected to be eventually negotiating with a foreign company to build the cannery at the heart of the Suava Bay Development Project.

This double bind takes away resources from the state, financial and human, that curtail the already strained resources of the Solomon Islands state to reliably and independently provide any of the basic infrastructures and services that may encourage the development of a sense of entitlement among my non-elite respondents. As I pointed out in chapter 3, in 2014 Malaita’s Provincial Government did not even have the funds to convene for a meeting to elect a new Premier without help from the (Asian) business community in Auki. In this context of financial restraint, it seems to be hardly a surprise that the Provincial Government has, for example, been unable to more permanently fix—pave—the road between Auki and Gwou’ulu—one of its areas of responsibility—and by so doing become potentially visible as stabilizing and legitimate governing system to Gwou’ulu villagers and other non-elites.

Concluding Reflections

As previously suggested, a further discussion of, or even a proposal of solutions to the global dependencies and financial constraints of the Solomon Islands state and its provinces, and how these constraints intersect with the failures of the Solomon Islands state to establish its legitimacy and dominance as governing system among non-elite Solomon Islanders go beyond the scope of this thesis. This being said, the findings presented in this thesis provide some important insights to allow for a more careful investigation of the complexities of Solomon Islands entanglement with, or even entrapment in the global system, and what this means for state visibility among Solomon Islands imagined citizens—as I noted in chapter 1, imagined because at least my non-elite respondents are yet to consider themselves “citizens” with rights and obligations in the state rather than merely as residents within its territory—as well as for theoretical conceptualizations of the state.

First, my thesis reinforces argumentations that highlight the importance of studying the state not only through its political institutions—or the institutional capacity-building at the heart of RAMSI—but also, if not especially, through an analysis of mundane encounters with the state, of how the state becomes visible in the everyday lives of non-elites and how this visibility affects perceptions of the state as legitimate, dominant governing system. By foregrounding an analysis of state visibility it becomes possible to identify potentially unexpected traces and impacts of the state, its representatives and institutions. Most concretely, while at first sight the Solomon Islands state appears to be absent in rural Solomon Islands, my ethnographic research on mundane visibilities revealed an unexpected presence. Rather than continuously absent the state is at times intensely visible and thus present because of the uncertainties associated with the state and because of my local respondents’ anxieties about their future in global dependencies that are supposed to be mediated by the unreliable state.

Second, my thesis challenges conceptualizations of the state that focus solely or primarily on its internal properties, its internal legitimacy, dominance and unity as defining features of a state without consideration of its external entanglements and dependencies therein. From the perspective of my non-elite respondents the Solomon Islands state is not “unthinkable” as defined by Bourdieu (2014); it is by no means integrated into social norms and practices in such

a way that its legitimacy and dominance as governing system are rarely questioned. In other words, the Solomon Islands state is not able to exercise power “in such an invisible way that people are unaware of its very existence” (163). On the contrary, to my non-elite respondents the Solomon Islands state is continuously visible in routines of uncertainty, e.g. in villagers’ ongoing search for good or at least adequate schooling for their children (chapter 4); and it has become visible in such a destabilizing way that it has encouraged them to seek alternatives and relative autonomy from the state. At the same time, the state is an important feature in the everyday lives of my local respondents through its external entanglements, as mediator of the global food-for-cash economy that they feel increasingly dependent on. It is this dependency and the failures of the Solomon Islands state to fulfill its role as mediator of these global dependencies that further intensifies the visibility of the state as destructive and potentially uncontrollable to non-elites.

In other words, from the perspective of Gwou’ulu villagers and their non-elite urban relatives the Solomon Islands state is then defined by (1) my local respondents’ desire for autonomy from the unreliable and untrustworthy state by means of a prioritization of village needs and wants (2) combined with my local respondents’ inability to comprehensively choose such autonomy because of their growing global dependencies. This definition explicitly situates state dependence without legitimation in Solomon Islands’ positioning in the global state and economic system, and it demonstrates a struggle between Gwou’ulu villagers and this system for domination. This struggle is above all about a redefinition of centre-periphery relations from a position of (some) centrality—Gwou’ulu as part of a global whole—to a perceived position of marginality at the periphery of the global state and economic system.

Third, my research does not deny the significance of Bourdieu’s “unthinkability” as foundation for a legitimate governing system. On the contrary, the global recognition of state legitimacy and dominance may, indeed, be rooted in the “unthinkability” of the, among others, French or Japanese states discussed by Bourdieu (2014)—after all, these and comparable states are at the center of the contemporary global system encouraging state-building elsewhere. In the context of my research the state can then also be defined as governing system that is acknowledged and significant in its existence because of its integration in a global political-economic system that identifies the state as legitimate, dominant governing system to coordinate the relationships between specific places and their people. In this system, the state is

“unthinkable” at the loci of global power. On the other hand, at the peripheries of the global system, such as Solomon Islands where the state has never been comprehensively interwoven with its population, the state is more accurately understood as mediator of global dependencies. The state is a symbol for these dependencies and a constant reminder of Solomon Islands position at the margins of this global system. As such the state is not necessarily a stabilizing force but a source of insecurity.

Fourth, my research indicates that if statebuilding is meant to bring stability to a particular place and its people and to interlink this place and its people more “securely” with the global system, a focus on capacity building—on replicating the institutional structures of e.g. the French state—is insufficient. Instead, it appears more appropriate for statebuilding to focus, first and foremost, on increasing the legitimacy and dominance of the state as governing system in such a way that it masks the dependencies and insecurities that are part of this system; or perhaps more accurately statebuilding needs to focus on increasing internal acknowledgement of the state as governing system that is “most likely” succeed in negotiating global dependencies for its residents.

Fifth, from a statebuilding perspective, the state has to be more comprehensively interwoven with its population through mundane encounters. So far the lives of my non-elite respondents are closely intertwined with the state in broader structural dependencies on it but not in everyday decision-making processes, e.g., in the mediation of conflicts. There is an administrative void that fails to entangle the lives of the imagined citizens of the state with the state through the “myriad mundane actions of officials, clerks, police officers, inspectors, teachers, social workers, doctors and so on” (Painter 2006:761) that state theorists such as Bourdieu (2014) and Mitchell (1991) have identified as foundational for the unthinkability of the state. Barely any such mundane actions were visible to Gwou’ulu villagers. There were only teachers, no officials, clerks, police officers, inspectors, social workers or doctors; there were no forms that needed to be filled in at least from time to time—most villagers did not even have a birth certificate.

In other words, for statebuilding to succeed there appears to be a need to bridge the distance between the state and its imagined citizens. I suggest that this is possible through a form of decentralization that acknowledges the communal aspects of decision-making processes and

that intertwine autochthonous principles and religious institutions with state governance on the ground, in the village rather than from afar. “Nationalist appropriation” (Douglas 2007:163) that requires the creation of special-purpose clans and that claims adherence to Christian principles without adequately demonstrating them in mundane encounters, is likely predestined to fail. At least in Gwou’ulu, nationalist appropriation that merely focuses on bringing clans and Christianity to the centralized state (to town) has been inadequate for addressing village suspicion towards the state. Instead these nationalist appropriations have increased suspicion towards clan-based and Christian actors’ participation in the state, and from a village perspective, *in absentia*. By so doing nationalist appropriation of clan- and church-based discourses seem to have contributed to further fracturing or “breaking away,” at least in Gwou’ulu, possibly further destabilizing the Solomon Islands state by continuously disregarding the voices of Solomon Islands silent majority and their desire for a comprehensive system of governance that accounts for, and values the village community and its autochthonous flexibilities and theocratic aspirations most of all.

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