

Chapter 4

Westminster meets Solomons in the Honiara riots

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On Wednesday 19 April 2006, the Solomon Islands national capital, Honiara, woke up to the smouldering remains of the previous day's rioting, which had left much of Chinatown burned to the ground, shops looted, vehicles torched, a number of police officers injured and a newly elected prime minister in hiding.

That morning, the sky opened and sprinkled rain as though to cool the anger that had led to the mayhem. In some places, the flames flared on in defiance, eating away the old wooden structures that were once part of a bustling shopping district. In other parts of town, such as the Ranadi industrial area and the Kukum sea front, the looting and destruction continued. For example, the Pacific Casino Hotel, owned by Patrick Leong, was attacked and set on fire on Wednesday 19 April.

This was the first mass destruction of its kind ever seen in Honiara. During the social unrest of 1998–2003, the capital city had not been attacked or damaged in this manner. Even the riot of 1989 was nothing compared with what happened on what is now referred to commonly as 'Black Tuesday'.

Like the defiant flames in Chinatown, the memories of what happened in April 2006 will not go away easily. People will remember it for many years to come and many want an explanation—not only why it happened, but why, despite the presence and might of the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), it was not stopped. Further, many people want to know how such an event could be prevented from happening again. In search of an explanation, the Manasseh Sogavare-led government, which took office after the riots, set up a commission of inquiry to look into the riot.¹

Even before the fires on the streets of Honiara were put out, commentators and spin-doctors were quick to draw connections between the events of Black Tuesday and the civil unrest of 1998–2003, which led to the deployment of RAMSI. What happened in Honiara on 18 and 19 April cannot, however, be explained in terms of those events alone. In fact, it had less to do with civil unrest and more to do with what people perceived as the corruption of the democratic process. In particular, the protest (which led to rioting and looting) highlighted concerns about the process of selecting a prime minister, and allegations that domestic and international business interests had influenced the formation of government. Further, it raises broader questions about the representation that forms the foundation of the Westminster parliamentary system. It also raises questions about the appropriateness of the Westminster system for Solomon Islands.

My interest here is not to point a finger at those who might have had a hand in organising the rioting and destruction of property; that is a matter for the courts to deal with. Rather, I am interested in examining some of the underlying assumptions of the Westminster system and the challenges of implementing it in Melanesian countries such as Solomon Islands. Here, I discuss how Solomon Islander politicians used (and abused) the Westminster system, especially in the lead up to the April 2006 election of the prime minister, to produce an outcome that contributed to the riots, looting and destruction of parts of Honiara. I also explore how the Westminster parliamentary system, by virtue of its institutional design, exacerbated the situation. I suggest that there is a need to include some ‘Solomon Islands flavour’ in the Westminster system that we adopt.

I assert that there were two ways in which the Westminster system contributed to the April 2006 riots. First, the system is designed to be adversarial: it sets groups up against each other and assumes that ‘better’ decisions are made through political antagonism. Second, the first-past-the-post electoral system adopted by Solomon Islands often fails to produce candidates that receive a majority of the votes cast in an election, raising the question of whether the government that is ultimately elected by parliament reflects the choice of a majority of the public. Ordinary citizens have no direct control over the formation of government and the choice of prime minister. It is assumed that members of parliament will have the interests of their electorates at heart and form governments that represent those

interests. Consequently, there is frustration when such choices do not reflect popular support. In April 2006, that frustration spilled over into the streets of Honiara.

Westminster meets Solomons: issues and challenges

Discussions about how British colonial rule could be best administered in Solomon Islands took place in official circles long before the country gained independence in 1978. After the 1927 murders of District Officer W.R. Bell and a cadet on Malaita, for example, the Secretary of State for the Colonies appointed Sir H.C. Moorhouse to conduct an official inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the murders (Keesing and Corris 1980). Moorhouse's report, among other things, highlighted the need to put in place an appropriate and locally acceptable administrative system that reflected local systems of governance and was informed by Solomon Islanders' viewpoints. He also recommended that traditional leadership systems and leaders be recognised and utilised in the administration of the colony, especially in choosing headmen who represented the administration and enforced its rules at the local level. Moorhouse stressed the importance of ensuring that they were men with genuine authority and following in the community (Healy 1966:194–204). This led to the establishment of native councils and courts (Healy 1966). Solomon Islanders were, however, kept at the lower levels of the administrative ranks, as headmen and district constables, or '*ples men*' as they were referred to in Pijin. The term *ples man* was in reference to the fact that these men enforced the colonial government's laws at the local level, the *ples* (place).

The push to improve the colonial administration and involve Solomon Islanders was disrupted by World War II. After the war, however, the colonial government continued to advocate local-level administration through the introduction of the Native Administration Regulation 1947, which provided for statutory sub-district councils. These were regarded as a preparation for larger councils that were introduced later. The establishment of larger councils was hastened by the demands of the Ma'asina Rule Movement, which led to the establishment of the Malaita Council in 1953 (Laracy 1983). Other councils were later established for other districts, giving Solomon Islanders greater participation in administration at the local level (Healy 1966; Bennett 1987).

By the 1960s, Solomon Islanders were beginning to participate, not only as headmen, *ples men* and local council leaders, but as members of the Legislative Council, which was established in 1960. One of the issues discussed in the Legislative Council was the need for an appropriate system of government. A Legislative Council paper of 1968 (BSIP 1968), for example, observed that the 'Westminster pattern of government has either failed, or had to be substantially modified to meet the political needs of some developing countries in the Commonwealth'. It went on to state that 'increasing doubt has been expressed whether in our [Solomon Islands] circumstance and for the foreseeable future political progress, following the Westminster model, is suitable or desirable' (BSIP 1968). In response to this paper, the Legislative Council, in December 1968, appointed a select committee to look into a proposal for an alternative to the Westminster system. This led to the British Solomon Islands Order 1974, which introduced a system of government by committee, in which a single council, known as the Governing Council, replaced the legislative and executive councils. Legislative functions were vested in the Governing Council, while executive functions were shared among committees set up to look after specific areas: finance, natural resources, social services, works and communications and internal affairs. The committees were responsible to the council, which acted as an executive body when meeting in private, and as a legislature when holding public meetings (Saemala 1983).

According to Francis Saemala (1983:4), the committee system was favoured over the conventional Westminster system because 'it had unifying features which were needed in our diverse situation; it was like a one-party system, and would prevent potentially divisive political parties emerging; it was wiser to have inexperienced elected representatives working closely with their senior civil servants; and the system was more in line with Melanesian traditions of consensus'.

The conventional Westminster system, with its emphasis on government and opposition, had the potential, in a culturally diverse Solomon Islands, of creating divisions along island, district or linguistic lines (see Paia 1975; Russell 1970).

After only three years, however, the committee system was rejected. In late 1972, the Governing Council set up a committee that undertook widespread consultations within the country and overseas. The committee recommended

against the Governing Council and its committee system, opting for a more conventional Westminster system of ministerial government. The British Solomon Islands Order 1974 consequently provided for separate legislative and executive bodies, it established for the first time the office of the chief minister and provided for a largely elected legislature and an executive with a majority of elected members (Saemala 1983; Ghai 1983).

The decision to adopt a Westminster system was made despite the fact that, at the community level, there was widespread demand for alternative forms of governance and for recognition of community leaders and traditional structures and systems of governance. The Constitutional Committee set up in August 1975 and tasked with the responsibility of consulting citizens on the independence constitution recommended, for example, that local government be strengthened and a 'large degree of autonomy' be given to local councils, and that 'a place be found for traditional leaders in an advisory or second-house capacity' (Ghai 1983:14).

At the local level, community movements and personalities emerged, providing alternatives to the colonial administration, or working in parallel with it. The most well known example of this was the emergence of 'resistance movements' such as the Ma'asina Rule Movement, which started on Malaita (Laracy 1983), the Moro Movement on Guadalcanal (Davenport and Coker 1967; O'Connor 1973) and Silas Eto's Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) in North New Georgia (Tuza 1977). Although these were sometimes described as millenarian or cargo-cult movements, they represented Solomon Islanders' attempts to establish alternative institutions based on local communities and drew their inspiration from *kastom*² and introduced norms and values. Although they borrowed some ideas and administrative structures from the colonial government and Christianity, their constituency was predominantly local and they recognised and used the cultures and political entities that existed before European contact. While the Ma'asina Rule Movement was disbanded by the colonial administration in the 1950s, the Moro Movement and CFC continue to provide alternative ideas and structures of governance, as well as alternative world-views and approaches to development.

Solomon Islanders recognised the challenges of adopting a system of government that had no resemblance to the systems that existed in their societies before colonisation and that continued to exist long after it. Further,

in opting for the Westminster system, the government not only marginalised traditional mechanisms of governance, it ruled out other options. On the eve of independence, there were discussions about the need to adopt a system of government that would suit a country such as Solomon Islands, which is culturally and linguistically diverse and geographically dispersed, a system that recognised and enabled local communities to govern themselves while being part of a central government. In this discussion some people, especially those from the Western³ and Guadalcanal provinces, demanded a federal system, or what was commonly known locally as the state government system. Central to the argument of proponents for federalism was the belief that it would decentralise and devolve power, and allow communities to exercise control over and benefit from the development of their natural resources. The Western and Guadalcanal provinces were quite aggressive in their push for federalism. In 1978, on the eve of independence, Western Province threatened to break away if the state government system (federalism) was not adopted (Premdas et al. 1983).

Despite this, federalism was dropped in favour of a provincial system of government, similar to that adopted in neighbouring Papua New Guinea (Premdas and Steeves 1984; Larmour and Qalo 1985). The desire for federalism, however, continued and was expressed publicly on various occasions in the post-independence period. It re-emerged as one of the central demands of the Guadalcanal militants during the recent period of civil unrest, it was taken on by Guadalcanal Province (Guadalcanal Province 1999) and was adopted as a central resolution of the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) signed between the conflicting parties on 15 October 2000. The government of Sir Allan Kemakeza then put in motion a process aimed at introducing a federal system. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assisted with nation-wide consultation, which led to the drawing up of a draft federal constitution. At the time of writing, however, the draft constitution has not been put through parliament, although the Sogavare government (like its predecessor) lists this as a priority.

Let me now outline some of the issues and challenges that influence how the Westminster system functions in Solomon Islands. First, the Westminster system—as it was adopted in Solomon Islands—has little institutional and emotional connection to people in local communities. The disconnect between local communities and *gaumane* (government) is compounded by

the government's weak capacity to manage the economy, enforce the law and deliver goods and services. This limits the government's presence in and impact on the lives of the majority of people. In colonial days, administrators were assigned to each district in the form of district officers, headmen and *ples men*, who were the foot soldiers of the administration, executing its instructions and enforcing its laws. Although many of these roles were relatively rudimentary, the fact that these government agents—especially the headmen and *ples men*—lived among the people and toured their districts regularly ensured that the *gaumane* was present in people's lives. For example the *ples man*, who was the constable and law enforcement officer at the community level, had a uniform that he wore during his tours. After independence, field and extension officers responsible to the provincial and central governments replaced the *ples men*. Over the years, however, because of the weakness of support mechanisms, many of these officers no longer performed their duties effectively or efficiently. Many substations were closed, resulting in a decline in the visibility of government and its impact on the lives of people in communities, especially those far from Honiara. This made the disconnect between government and communities more pronounced.

Solomon Islands is unlike places such as Samoa, Fiji and Vanuatu, where the *matai*, *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* (the Great Council of Chiefs) and the *Malvatumauri* (National Council of Chiefs) respectively link local communities to the national government and give people a sense of connection to the government. This is important; even if the traditional leaders have limited powers, their roles are only symbolic and the connection to local communities is nominal. The draft federal constitution for the Solomons, while proposing the inclusion of traditional leaders, does not incorporate them in the same way as the *matai* in Samoa.⁴ It does not provide the kind of recognition or confer the powers accorded to the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* in Fiji and the *Malvatumauri* in Vanuatu.

In Solomon Islands (as in other Pacific island countries), the Westminster system exists and functions, often uncomfortably, within a society in which people's relationship with leaders and their reactions to issues of public interest are determined by cultural norms and values and political structures different from those in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Consequently, the institutional structures of the

Westminster system and the values and norms it espouses have been difficult to impose in nations such as the Solomon Islands. This is complicated by the fact that the British colonial administration never attempted to blend the Westminster system with local cultures and traditions. This is different from countries such as Samoa and Fiji⁵ where, as mentioned above, the colonial administration recognised and included traditional leadership systems in the formal institutional structures of government, a practice that ensured the formal government was linked to local communities.

As stated in the introduction, the Westminster system is, by design, adversarial and can contribute to local and group antagonisms beyond parliament. It pits groups against each other—opposition and government—and assumes that improved decisions are made through these adversarial relationships. The parliament is like a stage where the drama focuses on debates, in which people with differing ideas and opinions confront and often shout at each other across the floor. Indeed, parliamentary debates are sometimes like a stage play, where politicians are the performers and the constituents are the audience. The physical design of the parliament—with MPs in a circular space below and the audience in a gallery overlooking them—often reminds me of the auditoriums of ancient Rome, where gladiators fought for entertainment. Here, politicians are like gladiators providing entertainment for their constituents, who expect them to perform on the floor of parliament. Those who are quiet, do not stand up, raise their voice and perform in dramatic ways are often referred to as ‘*nogud*’ (not good) MPs. This confrontational nature of the Westminster system is fundamentally different from the way in which discussions are conducted in traditional Solomon Islands contexts, where differences are worked through until consensus is reached, and shouting is generally shunned.

Further, in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia, there are institutions and rules that regulate and mediate the adversarial contest to ensure it does not degenerate into violence. Much of the contest is channelled through political parties that have been built up over many years, and which play an important role in organising ideas, choosing candidates and wooing voters. The party becomes the avenue through which people express their different political opinions. In countries such as Solomon Islands, however, where parties are weak, other entities are sometimes mobilised and used to play out these differences. These include *wantok* groups, tribes,

political supporters, businesses and individuals. Further, in the absence of ideological platforms that have society-wide acceptance, people mobilise around local issues and personalities about which they feel passionate. Consequently, outward expression can at times become emotionally charged and potentially violent. As we saw in the case of Honiara in April 2006, the rivalry that is supposed to be contained in parliament spilled into the streets. As will be discussed below, certain politicians allegedly encouraged their supporters to cause violence if they lost on the floor of parliament. These politicians—if the allegations are true—knew that they could not appeal to their parties because they were weak or because they didn't belong to one, so they appealed to their supporters outside parliament.

Strong political parties are vital for the proper functioning of the Westminster system. Parties in Solomon Islands, however, tend to be weak and loosely organised (Kabutaulaka 2006; Alasia 1997; Fugui 1988). In his address during celebrations for the country's tenth independence anniversary, Sir Baddeley Devesi, the country's first governor-general, highlighted the difficulties of adopting the Westminster system in a situation in which there were no developed political parties: '[a]fter ten years, Solomon Islands has not been able to meet the demands of the Westminster model for a solid majority in Parliament by one party to allow it to govern effectively. While political rivalry is the essence of the Westminster Parliamentary system, Solomon Islands after ten years has not been able to get that established' (Devesi 1992).

More importantly, the weakness of parties results in loosely formed governments and political alliances, or what Steeves (1996) refers to as 'unbounded politics'. Further, party weakness has had an adverse impact on the process of selecting governments and on people's relationship with government. Because of the weakness of parties, when voters cast their votes in national elections they are concerned more with electing individual MPs rather than the party to which the candidates belong, and which they hope will subsequently form government. Parliament forms the government, and the voters have little (if any) control over it. It starts after the national election, as the potential prime ministerial candidates lobby and woo members for support—what Mary-Louise O'Callaghan (this volume) appropriately refers to as the 'auctioning' of MPs. Therefore, when voters cast their vote at a national election, they are not really voting for a government. Rather, they are voting only for an individual MP. In the choice

for prime minister (and hence, government) they become spectators, like those people who gathered outside Parliament House on 18 April 2006 and the thousands of other Solomon Islanders who listened on the radio. In this process, it is assumed that an MP's choices when in parliament will represent those of his/her constituents. This is often not the case, as politicians choose which party they will join and who they will align themselves with after the election and without consulting their constituents.

This is unlike the system in a place such as Australia, where a voter votes for a party to form government and therefore has a hand in choosing the government. The voter, in other words, votes for an individual because of his or her membership of a party that the voter wants to be in government.

The question of whether or not the electoral system produces majority representation is important to consider in this discussion because the Westminster system (and other forms of representative democracy) are built on the principle of majority rule. In Solomon Islands, one needs to examine the first-past-the-post electoral system that the country adopted, and the outcomes it produces. Experience shows that because of the design of the first-past-the-post system, most MPs receive less than half of the votes cast in their constituency. This means that the MPs are not the choice of a majority of voters.⁶

It follows that the prime minister and the government he selects also do not represent the choice of the majority. This, therefore, undermines the principle of representation through majority rule, which is fundamental to the liberal democracy from which the Westminster system draws its norms and values. The Westminster system is built and functions best on the assumptions of representation—that citizens are represented in decision making by the people that a majority of them have chosen. This, in turn, gives legitimacy to the MPs and the government that they, in turn, select. Let me now explore the events of April 2006 and see how they illustrate some of these broader issues.

Election, rioting, and looting

When Solomon Islanders turned up in large numbers to cast their votes in the national election of 5 April 2006, there was widespread hope that parliament would elect a new government to steer the country away from the path followed in the previous 27 years of independence. That hope

slipped away through the cracks in the parliamentary process when, on 18 April 2006, it was announced that MPs had elected Snyder Rini as prime minister.

Rini received a cold reception when the Governor-General, Sir Nathaniel Waena, declared him the new prime minister and presented him to the hundreds of people gathered at Vavaya Ridge, outside the national parliament building. For these people, Rini represented the 'old guard', the same group that his predecessor, Sir Allan Kemakeza, led in the previous parliament and who, in the eyes of many Solomon Islanders, failed miserably in the credibility stakes. Rini was Kemakeza's deputy in that government.

So, how did Rini manage to win the election for prime minister and bring the old guard back into power? To answer this question, one needs to examine the process of selecting a prime minister in Solomon Islands, the weakness of party systems, the fluidity of political alliances and the nature of Solomon Islanders' participation in and reaction to parliamentary politics. This provides an insight into how Solomon Islanders use the Westminster system and the outcomes it produces.

After the national election (which international and local observers declared as being generally clean and fair) the newly elected MPs gathered in Honiara to elect the prime minister. As usual, in the period between the announcement of the election results and the vote for prime minister, the various coalitions (referred to commonly in Solomon Islands as 'camps') lobbied intensely and tussled to win the support of MPs, especially the new ones who had not yet been attracted to a particular camp. There were allegations that lobbyists, especially businessmen—mostly Chinese, or *Waku*, as they are known in Solomon Islands⁷—paid large sums of money to individual MPs to ensure that any government that was formed served their interests.

After the national election, two major camps were formed and they gathered at different hotels in Honiara. The first camp comprised the Association of Independent Members of Parliament (AIMP), the People's Alliance Party (PAP) and the Lafari Party. Many of the MPs who had been in the previous government were present, including Kemakeza (the parliamentary leader of PAP) and Rini (the parliamentary leader of the AIMP and deputy prime minister in the previous Kemakeza government). This group stayed at the Honiara Hotel, owned by local ethnic Chinese businessman and national president of the AIMP, Thomas Chan (known

commonly as Tommy Chan). He was also allegedly the financial sponsor of the group, enticing MPs to join this camp.

The other camp, which assumed the name ‘the Grand Coalition’, was a coalition of a number of parties: the Nasnol Pati, the Rural Advancement Party, the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party, the Social Credit Party (SoCredit) and some independents. They camped at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel, owned by Alex Wong, an ethnic Chinese (Taiwanese) businessman and naturalised Solomon Islander. This camp included veteran politicians such as Job Dudley Tausinga and three former prime ministers: Bartholomew Ulufa’alu, Francis Billy Hilly and Manasseh Sogavare. The group also included two other important figures: Charles Dausabea, the MP for East Honiara (who is a colourful character with a shady reputation), and Nelson Ne’e, the newly elected MP for Central Honiara. Both allegedly had connections with Malaitan militants during the height of the civil unrest and both emerged as important players in the period after the election of the prime minister. The two drew much support from the squatter settlements behind Honiara that are populated predominantly by people from Malaita, who harboured a certain degree of antagonism towards RAMSI, which was invited into the country by the Kemakeza government. In their political campaigns, Dausabea and Ne’e expressed anti-RAMSI sentiments. Further, during a campaign debate at the Panatina campus of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), Dausabea and other candidates for the East Honiara constituency raised concerns about the influence of *Waku* in the country’s political and economic affairs (Solomon Star 2006a).

After the national election, those MPs who were undecided about their political affiliation were ushered to join either of the two camps. In one incident, two newly elected MPs from Temotu Province arrived in Honiara on a flight from the provincial capital of Lata and were whisked off to the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel, while their luggage was taken to the Honiara Hotel. Dausabea was reportedly the Grand Coalition member who went to the Honiara Hotel to retrieve the two MPs’ luggage and moved them to the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel. In the days that followed, the two camps engaged in an intense competition to gain the numbers necessary to form government in what is sometimes referred to as the ‘body-count’ competition.⁸

As this political drama unfolded, one of the key protagonists (although sometimes an elusive player) was Manasseh Sogavare, the MP for East

Choiseul. His SoCredit Party had won only two seats in the election despite its intensive political campaign and controversial policies promoted by its Filipino secretary, Roman Quitales. From the beginning, Sogavare wanted to become prime minister but knew that he did not have the numbers to form a government, and could not join the AIMP/PAP/Lafari coalition because of his past differences with Kemakeza. In 2000, as prime minister, Sogavare sacked Kemakeza, who was then his deputy, over allegations of the misuse of funds allocated for compensation payments for properties damaged during the civil unrest. This soured relationships between the two. Sogavare, therefore, teamed up with the Grand Coalition camp, hoping to be nominated as its candidate for prime minister; however, he lost the nomination to Tausinga, a veteran politician and MP for North New Georgia. After his loss to Tausinga, Sogavare withdrew his support for the Grand Coalition and created a third camp, pulling with him a number of MPs. They camped at the Pacific Casino Hotel, owned by yet another ethnic Chinese businessman, Patrick Leong. It was also alleged that he had the support of businessman Bobo Dettke, whose mother is from Guadalcanal and whose father is Chinese.

Three names were subsequently put forward as contestants for prime minister: Rini for the AIMP/PAP/Lafari coalition; Tausinga for the Grand Coalition; and Sogavare. On 16 April, the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC), the national radio station, reported intense lobbying, with the AIMP/PAP/Lafari coalition claiming to have 28 MPs, while the Grand Coalition claimed 27 MPs (which totalled 55 MPs in a 50-member parliament). Meanwhile, Sogavare's group also claimed to have a majority. The SIBC reported that 'the three groups are tossing around the same people in the 50-member parliament' and 'where an MP does not make up his mind on which group to join, the dollar will make the decision for him' (SIBC 2006). On 18 April, in the first round of voting, Tausinga received 22 votes, Rini 17 and Sogavare 11. Sogavare was subsequently eliminated. He and all but one⁹ of his supporters threw their lot in with the AIMP/PAP/Lafari camp, which meant that Rini won with 27 votes against Tausinga's 23 votes.

After Rini's victory, there was a protest outside the national parliament. Many of those who gathered there were from eastern and central Honiara constituencies and were supporters of Dausabea and Ne'e, who had hoped that their camp would form government and that they would be given

ministerial portfolios. Rini's victory, however, meant that their MPs not only failed to capture government, more importantly, they lost the competition between the two camps. For Dausabea's supporters, this was humiliating for a man who had a reputation as a tough guy, and who was regarded as a linchpin and kingmaker in the election of the prime minister.¹⁰ There were widespread allegations, therefore, that Dausabea and Ne'e had a hand in orchestrating the mob's activities. At the time of writing, they had been charged with inciting the riots and were awaiting court hearings (SIBC 2006). If the allegations are true, one could interpret the actions of the two MPs and their supporters as an example of the adversarial character of the Westminster parliamentary democracy spilling into the streets. Conscious of the weakness of parties and the inability of their political camp to form government, the men found it convenient to mobilise supporters outside parliament. Many of these supporters took the competition to form a government seriously. When their side did not win, those supporting Dausabea and Ne'e took matters (and their anger) onto the streets of Honiara. Consequently, a competition that, according to the Westminster system, was supposed to be contained to parliament unravelled into rioting, looting and the destruction of commercial and residential property.

It is unclear whether or not Sogavare anticipated the violent public reaction to Rini's election. It is evident, however, that he eyed the situation with interest and manoeuvred his way to capture the prime ministership. Right after Rini's election, Sogavare was outside parliament with other MPs and the Speaker of Parliament, Sir Peter Kenilorea, asking the crowd to be calm. Rini was in power for only eight days before being forced to resign on 26 April 2006, after four of his supporters crossed the floor (Solomon Star 2006b).

After the violence and Rini's resignation, Sogavare withdrew his support for the AIMP/PAP/Lafari coalition and made a deal with the Grand Coalition, earning himself its nomination for prime minister and pulling his supporters along with him. The other camp nominated the MP for Central Kwara'ae, Fred Fono. In the second prime ministerial election on 4 May 2006 (conducted in the shadows of the violence that had followed the first election) Sogavare emerged victorious, with 28 votes to Fono's 22 votes (Solomon Star 2006c).

Reflections

The events leading up to the election of the prime minister and the violence that ensued raise important issues about how the Westminster system works in Solomon Islands and the political outcomes it produces.

First, those events highlight the need for post-colonial societies such as Solomon Islands and other Melanesian countries to think seriously about the appropriateness (or otherwise) of the system of government they inherited from their former colonial powers. There is a need to reform the Westminster system to ensure its relevance to and appropriateness for their societies. This was highlighted by Sir Arnold Amet from Papua New Guinea, who chaired the Pacific Islands Forum Observer Team at the April 2006 national election in Solomon Islands. Discussing the Honiara violence, he noted that the challenges faced by countries in the South Pacific were

...legacies of colonial democracies that have imposed these political structures upon culturally different peoples of the Pacific. These institutional structures and processes are not necessarily compatible with our traditional cultural ways of governing our people...After these 20 to 30 years of independence in our small island nations, we must ask the question, are these structures and processes really working? (Amet 2006).

The crucial questions, however, are: how is this done in a country such as Solomon Islands, where there are diverse traditional systems of governance? How are traditional structures, norms and values incorporated into the Westminster system when the two are often incompatible? In cases where traditional forms of governance exist, they are often marginalised, shunned or described as cult movements because they do not fit with Western-introduced governance, religious beliefs and ways of thinking. In Solomon Islands, classic examples include the Moro Movement on Guadalcanal and the CFC in North New Georgia. For nearly five decades from the late 1950s until his death on 21 November 2006, Pelise Moro instituted an alternative governance system drawing inspiration from Guadalcanal *kastom*, or what he often referred to in the local language as '*ghoro ghoru ni ghita* [our way of living]' (Davenport and Coker 1967). He and his Gaena'alu Movement (formerly called the Moro Movement) were often dismissed as 'backward' and cultic. The movement was never brought into discussions about governance and development as a legitimate local entity that could provide

alternative forms of governance and the means for mobilising villagers and communities. In fact, when the Moro Movement began, part of its objective was to establish *bisinis* (business) in an attempt to become self-sufficient and not remain dependent on the colonial administration, which Moro saw as having failed to meet the needs of the people of the remote Weather Coast, in particular, and Guadalcanal more generally. The movement, therefore, started coconut plantations, bought outboard motors and fibreglass canoes and taxis, which it operated in Honiara. It also collected 'taxes' from its members. These attempts to enter the business world failed largely because of poor management. They demonstrated, however, the ability of a local leader to mobilise support and govern at the local level (see O'Connor 1973; Davenport and Coker 1967; Kabutaulaka 1990).

The CFC was shunned somewhat less because it assumed an identity as a Christian church and was therefore seen as 'modern', unlike the Gaena'alu Movement which was often viewed as an impractical attempt to return to *kastom*. The CFC was sometimes described initially as a cult and was shunned by the mainstream Methodist Church, from which it broke away. As Jutta Bruenger (1988:5) notes, however, the CFC leader, Holy Mama Silas Eto, 'showed amazing abilities for organizing and leading peoples, young and old. He developed quickly into the religious as well as the secular leader of the village.' By the 1930s, he had developed a model village and over the years organised his followers into an economically productive unit, which financed its own schools and health care centres. By the 1960s, the colonial administration was appreciative of the CFC's commitment to finance its own projects and provide social services for its followers (Bruenger 1988; Harwood 1974; Tuza 1997).

Today, the CFC is included in mainstream discussions about development. This is partly because one of the late Eto's sons, Job Dudley Tausinga, is a prominent and long-serving politician and deputy prime minister at the time of writing. Further, the church organises its followers around the local *butubutu* (clans), mobilises them for economic productivity around the establishment of forest (teak) plantations (Fa'anunu n.d.) and continues to fund social services such as schools and health care for its followers. The CFC is therefore recognised for its active participation in the Solomon Islands cash economy through the establishment of forest plantations and the exportation of timber. The government's recognition of the CFC was epitomised by the

knighthood, in October 2005, of Reverend Ikan Rove, the spiritual authority of the CFC and Eto's elder son. He was awarded a Knight Commander of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (KBE) in recognition of his 'long and committed service to community development and dedicated leadership to the Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) in Solomon Islands' (People First 2006a). Despite this recognition, the CFC is rarely discussed as providing an alternative governance structure, especially in the post-conflict era, when such alternatives are needed. The goals and experience of the Gaena'alu Movement and the CFC are often viewed as being not applicable to current political issues and are, in fact, marginalised in governance discussions. They need to be brought into mainstream discussion and put forward as alternative ways of exercising local-level governance and of mobilising people for development.

Similar suggestions about the potential for local communities to take on roles often played by government are found in discussions of law and order—as in the case of Sinclair Dinnen's (1997, 2002, 2004) discussions about Papua New Guinea. While there is validity in the argument for greater local involvement in addressing law and order problems, there is often the challenge of ensuring that local communities do not act outside the law. This is illustrated in the recent case of Wagina, in Choiseul Province, where community leaders imposed corporal punishment (whipping) for anyone found to have broken community rules. They were subsequently visited by a high-level delegation from the Ministry of Police and Justice, who told them to stop such punishment because it was unlawful (People First 2006b). In Papua New Guinea, such action has been mitigated by instituting a piece of legislation—the Village Courts Act of 1973—which regulates and standardises the administration of justice at the village level.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges, it is possible to incorporate traditional or local-level entities into the governance process alongside the Westminster system, and entities such as the CFC and the Gaena'alu Movement could become central to discussions of systems of governance. Such entities are important for connecting the central government with local communities and making

people feel part of government—a vital perception for creating a sense of belonging in countries such as Solomon Islands, which are culturally and ethno-linguistically diverse.

In the draft federal constitution currently being examined by the Constitutional Review Committee, chiefs (or community leaders) are recognised and included in the institutional structure of government through a provision that allows them to participate in decision-making processes. It is envisaged that this will help connect local communities with the central government and mitigate some of the problems associated with the inappropriateness and irrelevance of the Westminster system.

The Honiara experience also indicates that it might be worthwhile to put in place legislation to regulate how politics is played out—outside and within parliament. Two of the most important issues are the electoral system and political parties. Institutional strengthening alone, however, will not change political outcomes, as there is also a need to change the political culture. That will take a long time to achieve. For now, it is obvious that the first-past-the-post system is not producing representative governments; therefore, it is important to review the electoral system with the objective of introducing one that produces representative government.

Related to this is the need to regulate political parties to ensure that competition for power is kept within parliament and between parties, rather than spilling onto the streets in public violence. Solomon Islands could learn from the experiences of Papua New Guinea and the impacts of its Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates. This legislation is yet to be implemented in a national election; however, experiences from by-elections have highlighted some of the challenges this law will encounter.¹¹

The violent events in Honiara on 18 and 19 April 2006 were manifestations of long-standing issues that were inherent in the institutional structures, norms and values of the Westminster system of government. They highlight the need for reform in Solomon Islands—reforms that recognise the importance of traditional systems of governance and of changes to the political process to ensure that it produces representative government. Failure to do this will risk politics pouring out into the streets in violent ways such as those we saw in April 2006.

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Notes

- 1 At the time of writing (September 2006), there was intense debate surrounding the terms of reference for the inquiry and the appointment of 'disgraced' former Australian Federal Court judge Marcus Einfeld. This led to the dismissal of the Attorney-General, Primo Afeau, and the appointment of controversial Australian lawyer Julian Moti as his replacement. This raised concerns about political interference in the judiciary. It culminated in the expulsion of the Australian High Commissioner to Solomon Islands, Patrick Cole, resulting in a diplomatic row between Canberra and Honiara. At the time of writing, this had not been resolved and Australia had not yet appointed a replacement for Cole. On 29 September 2006, Moti was arrested in Port Moresby by PNG authorities at the request of the Australian government. His arrest was in relation to child sex offences in Vanuatu in 1997 (see Sydney Morning Herald 2006). He later boarded a PNG military aircraft and flew to Munda in the Western Province, where he was arrested and charged with travelling to Solomon Islands illegally. The diplomatic stand-off between Canberra and Honiara continues.
- 2 Here, the term '*kastom*' is used loosely to refer to what are generally regarded as traditional customs, or those from *taem bifo* (the past) and connected to ancestors. The term 'tradition' is also used loosely throughout this paper to refer to past beliefs and practices, although I acknowledge that some of these have relatively recent origins, or have changed over time.
- 3 At that time, the Western Province included what is present-day Choiseul Province.
- 4 In Samoa, only *matai* can contest and hold seats in parliament. The draft federal constitution in Solomon Islands provides for chiefs (community leaders) to participate in governance at the local community level.
- 5 It should be noted that the situations in Fiji and Samoa are complicated and that *matai* and *ratu* do not always represent the interests of the community. Hence, the authority of the *matai* and *ratu* is often challenged and there have been allegations that these traditional leaders are corrupt and fail to redistribute wealth, as required of them by tradition. In the 2006 Fiji coup, for example, one of the issues emerging from the initial stand-off between the military and the Great Council of Chiefs, and the overt defiance of chiefly authority, was accusations that chiefs misused their power. Morgan

- Tuimaleali'ifano (2006) discusses not only the expenses required for installing a *matai* title, but the corruption that weaves through it.
- 6 For more on the electoral system, and in particular the 2006 national election, see Jon Fraenkel's chapter in this volume.
 - 7 For discussions on Asians (Chinese) in Solomon Islands, see the chapter by Clive Moore in this volume. Also see Laracy 1974 and Willmott 2005.
 - 8 For details on the events after the national election, see Jon Fraenkel's chapter in this volume. Also see Mary-Louise O'Callaghan's chapter in this volume.
 - 9 It was later rumored, although never confirmed, that although Sogavare encouraged his supporters to vote for Rini, he voted for Tausinga.
 - 10 An alternative view is held by Dr Transform Aqorau, who insists that Dausabea no longer had the clout he enjoyed when he was in parliament and when the late Solomon Mamaloni was prime minister. Aqorau argues that Dausabea was not the linchpin or kingmaker in the selection of prime minister. Rather, he asserts, the real linchpins were 'some fairly well known power broker[s] lurking in the background somewhere, seemingly oblivious to the situation, but certainly strenuously working in the background to influence...[the prime ministerial] election results'. See <http://www.solomonstarnews.com/?q=node/8011> (accessed 26 October 2006).
 - 11 See, for example, Gelu 2005.

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