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**Custom, Governance and Westminster
in Solomon Islands:**

Charting a Course Out of the Political Quagmire

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies

Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand

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2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates whether the people of Solomon Islands would be better served by a form of governance that is politically hybrid than through the current Westminster unitary-state model.

In remote provinces such as Choiseul, the reach of the state is limited. Here, notions of citizenship and national identity have gained little traction because kin group relations underpin society and form the basis for peoples' identity. In such societies customary institutions, in the form of chiefs, and the church provide order. In these self-governing rural communities governance is distinctly parochial in its application and often hybrid in form.

This study examines whether the hybrid polities of such communities have an application within the proposed Federal Constitution of Solomon Islands. The thesis, first, examines the international concepts of governance that have shaped and provided a framework within which the state of Solomon Islands, and its systems of governance, have evolved. State governance today, is very much a product of historical antecedents. However, an analysis of these antecedents demonstrates that Solomon Islanders have been particularly adept at appropriating introduced systems for their own purposes, and matters of governance are no exception.

Using semi-structured interviews, the fieldwork component of this thesis examines the hybrid form of governance that exists in a Choiseulese village to determine whether such models have an application within the proposed Federal Constitution, thus providing a greater degree of political legitimacy than exists under the current Westminster system. Three tiers of government are proposed in the Federal Constitution – Federal, State and Community Governments. Of these, Community Governments provide a particularly suitable political arena where hybridised forms of village governance, which locally have a considerable degree of political legitimacy, can be combined with such functions of state as are necessary to achieve good governance. This, it is argued, will allow the development of forms of governance that are much more suited to local conditions than is possible under the current constitution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to a great number of people, for without their help this thesis would not have been possible. In particular, I wish to thank my supervisors, Glenn Banks and Judith Bennett, and reader, Brian Ponter who, with patience and perseverance, challenged my assumptions and meticulously encouraged me to refine my arguments. Their timely and sage advice was much valued.

The field research in Solomon Islands was largely funded with a research grant from IPU New Zealand and support from the Massey University Graduate Research Fund. IPU New Zealand were particularly generous in granting me leave to undertake the field research as well as the flexibility, between lecturing responsibilities, to write the thesis. For this I am extremely grateful.

Without the support of the villagers of Nukiki I could not have undertaken this research at all. Once again, my numerous questions were answered with patience and good humour by so many as they freely imparted their detailed knowledge of governance in their community. I am particularly grateful to my long-time friend, Leslie Inokana, who paved the way for me to come back to Nukiki and ensured that my research progressed smoothly. To the chief of the Sarekana clan, William Peni and his wife Dorothy, who so graciously hosted me, fed me and ensured that I was well looked-after during my time in Nukiki. Once again, my old friend Solomon Zarabule, with his customary diligence and attention to detail, provided me with wonderful insights into the workings of village life. John Natabule, another old friend from 1991, called by most days to observe me writing in my journal as I escaped the afternoon heat in the shade of the house. My life has been enriched, more than I can say, by friends such as these.

Chief Danny Dokabule, of the Siropodoko tribe, graciously sanctioned my research in Nukiki village and explained his chiefly responsibilities. Pastor Frank Tqebatu carefully described the workings of the United Church in Nukiki, and Luke Soko the customs of the Siropodoko tribe as well as the workings of the Local Court. Many others in Nukiki assisted in this research and for this I am very thankful.

In Taro, Billy Savevai and his wife Nellie, provided numerous cups of tea as well as *storis* of Sirpodoko customs. The Premier of Choiseul Province, Jackson Kiloe,

was very supportive of this research and provided an in-depth insight into the workings of the province. Many others in Taro - provincial members, provincial and national government staff, and other leaders from throughout Choiseul - also contributed to this research.

In Honiara, long-time friend and colleague, Gideon Bouro and his wife Rose, provided me with much appreciated logistical support and, of course, company as I transitted through the capital.

Finally, but by no means least, I wish to thank my wife, Vicki-Marie, for her unwavering and enthusiastic support throughout the long and sometime arduous process that this research has entailed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES, TEXT BOX, MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.....	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
The purpose of this thesis.....	1
Questioning state governance.....	3
The issues - Westminster, poor governance and state failure.....	5
Hybrid political orders – a way of including custom in governance.....	7
Thesis objectives.....	8
Research questions.....	9
Thesis structure.....	9
CHAPTER 2: GOVERNANCE.....	13
Westminster constitutions.....	13
The emergence of governance.....	15
Good governance.....	16
Decentralising governance.....	18
Good governance and conditionality in aid.....	20
State failure and reconstruction.....	21
Hybrid political orders.....	26
Incorporating and legitimising political hybridity.....	30
Application of schema to analyse hybrid political orders.....	34
Summary.....	35
CHAPTER 3: SEGMENTARY SOCIETIES, WESTMINSTER, AND THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL HYBRIDITY IN SOLOMON ISLANDS.....	37
Land, kin group identity and segmentary societies.....	38
Overseas labour trade, the plantation economy and missions.....	41
Colonial rule.....	43
World War II – reformulating the narrative of ‘self’.....	49
Assertions of regional identity.....	52
Accelerating to independence.....	54
The end of British rule and the adoption of the Westminster system.....	58

Parliamentary elections and forming a government.....	61
Political discontent, the decline in political morality and state collapse.....	64
The legitimacy of the state in Solomon Islands.....	68
Solomon Islands segmentary societies – limiting state formation.....	71
Summary.....	73
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK.....	75
Epistemology, research methodology and methods.....	75
Positionality.....	76
Semi-structured interviews.....	76
Research ethics.....	78
Official ethics procedures.....	78
Informed consent and confidentiality.....	80
Data collection and analysis.....	81
Interviews.....	81
Recording Information.....	82
Analysis of data.....	83
Field reflections.....	85
Summary.....	86
CHAPTER 5 NUKIKI REVISITED.....	87
Choiseul Province.....	88
Choiseul provincial governance.....	90
Taro Island – provincial headquarters.....	92
Nukiki village.....	93
Tribes, clans and chiefs.....	100
Nukiki United Church.....	101
Village population.....	103
The impact of population growth.....	105
Village sanitation and water supply.....	105
Land shortage.....	106
Sea-level rise.....	107
Development Issues.....	110
Logging.....	110
Education.....	113
A crisis in leadership?.....	115
Summary.....	117

CHAPTER 6: CHIEFLY LEADERSHIP.....	119
Big-men vs chiefs.....	119
Big-men.....	120
Chiefs.....	121
Articulating between custom and indigenous leadership on Choiseul today...	125
Nukiki village leadership.....	128
Chiefs and the church – a division of power.....	131
Siropodoko tribal leadership.....	133
Tribal mechanisms for dispute resolution.....	136
The divisive influence of logging.....	137
The legitimacy of chiefly leadership and the efficacy of community Governance.....	138
Political hybridity and the process of change.....	141
Summary.....	143
CHAPTER 7: CHURCH LEADERSHIP.....	145
The Nukiki church.....	145
The arrival of the Methodist Mission.....	147
Conversion to Christianity.....	150
The ghosts and gods of the Choiseulese people.....	153
Syncretism and appropriation.....	154
The indigenous church.....	156
United Church structure and leadership.....	157
The hybridisation of chiefly and church leadership.....	163
The role of the church in creating leadership opportunities for women.....	163
Summary.....	168
CHAPTER 8: THE STATE: REPRESENTATION, SERVICE DELIVERY AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM.....	170
Governance under the existing constitution.....	171
Choiseul Provincial Government.....	171
Area councils and wards.....	172
Challenges in providing government services.....	176
Provincial Governance Strengthening Programme.....	179
The proposed federal constitution.....	182
The constitutional drafting process.....	182
Proposed federal structure.....	185

Summary.....	190
CHAPTER 9: CHARTING A COURSE OUT OF THE POLITICAL	
QUAGMIRE.....	191
The application of justice – lessons for hybrid forms of governance.....	192
Community Governments - articulating between custom, church and state to achieve political hybridisation.....	196
Refining the discourse on hybrid political orders.....	201
Limitations of this research and possible directions for future research.....	202
Finally.....	203
REFERENCES.....	204
APPENDICIES.....	228
Appendix 1: Massey University Human Ethics Committee Approval.....	228
Appendix 2: Solomon Islands Government Research Permit.....	229
Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form.....	230
Appendix 4: Village Semi-structured Interview Schedule.....	231
Appendix 5: Schedule of Interviews.....	233
Appendix 6: Summary of 1986 Census Information_ Nukiki Village Hamlets..	237
Appendix 7: Nukiki United Church_ Congregational Statistical Data Report. 2010-2011.....	238

LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES, TEXT BOX, MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Figures

Figure 1: Forms of governance.....	33
Figure 2: Siropodoko tribal leadership.....	134
Figure 3: Nukiki United Church structure.....	161
Figure 4: Community governments – tripartite hybrid political orders.....	198

Tables

Table 1: Key categories identified from interviews.....	84
Table 2: Population history.....	89

Text Box

Text Box 1: Core dimensions of political hybridity as practised on Choiseul.....	199
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Maps

Map 1: Solomon Islands.....	2
Map 2: Choiseul Province – showing ward boundaries.....	90

Photographs

Photograph 1 Tarepasika 1991.....	94
Photograph 2: Nukiki village gardens 1991.....	95
Photograph 3: House-building in Tarepasika 1991.....	96
Photograph 4: Open fire copra drier 1991.....	97
Photograph 5: Tarepasika 2012.....	99
Photograph 6: Bait fishing 1991.....	99
Photograph 7: Nukiki United Church 2012.....	103
Photograph 8: Talaevondo Stream 1991.....	109
Photograph 9: Talaevondo Stream mouth 2012 – after the tsunami.....	109
Photograph 10: Logging camp at Mbirambira.....	113
Photograph 11: Nukiki village school 2012.....	115
Photograph 12: Danny Dokabule – Chief of the Siropodoko tribe.....	129
Photograph 13: William Peni – Chief of the Sarekana clan.....	130
Photograph 14: Frank Taquebatu – Pastor of Nukiki United Church.....	162