ISLANDS ON THE EDGE?

INVESTIGATING THE GEOGRAPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF CRISIS DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The perception of a peaceful Pacific has changed to that of a region in trouble. Oceania finds itself once again in the “colonial present” (Gregory 2004). This dissertation utilizes critical geopolitical theory to map crisis discourse and its effects in the contemporary southwest Pacific. Through the recent conflict in Solomon Islands and subsequent Australian-led military intervention, I ask how geographical discourse constitutes crises and leads to outside intervention. My research methods include historical geography, document analysis, and interviews in Australia and Solomon Islands.

I trace subordinating assumptions embedded in conventional geopolitical theory to see how 19th century European views of Melanesia underpin contemporary crisis discourse. I find the 1990s Solomon Islands’ conflict framed as “ethnic violence” occurring in a “Pacific arc of instability.” Next, Solomon Islands became a “failed state” posing a regional security threat. In 2003, Australia initiated an intervention to “stabilize” the Solomons.

Conventional geographical discourse views crises in state-centric and Eurocentric terms. Unruly spaces need management and intervention. Spatial practices of Othering and scripts of danger position the Other as a threat to modernity and our western way of life. Critical geopolitical theory sees the postcolonial state brokering natural resources to address debt and “development” in ways that clash with the values and needs of many Solomon Islanders. Through the latter lens, I find the causes of Solomon Islands’ distress
not simply internal or “ethnic,” but tied to the “development” imperatives inhering in the postcolonial state.

My fieldwork findings from Australia and Solomon Islands illuminate the intentions and the reception of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The intervention has a neoliberal agenda and continues earlier subordinating, paternalistic attitudes toward Melanesian countries. The intervention itself contains many contradictions in terms of legitimacy by force. Many Solomon Islanders view Australia, through RAMSI, as readopting a pacifying role within a civilizing mission. Discourses of neoliberalism and the global war on terror have justified preemptive intervention in countries such as Iraq and Solomon Islands. Critical geopolitical theory offers an alternative standpoint from which we might escape the unproductive cycle of crisis discourse and military interventions.
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Chapter 1: Crisis Discourse and its International Effects

My dissertation research utilizes critical geopolitical theory to map crisis discourse in the contemporary Pacific. I use the recent conflict in Solomon Islands as a case study through which to research on-the-ground lived experiences of economic stress and foreign intervention in the Solomons and to destabilize the conventional geopolitical theory that has driven Australia’s intervention. My question is how does geographical discourse constitute or lead to crises? I trace genealogies of representation and discourse from a social constructivist perspective to see that “‘crisis’ is not… merely an ‘objective’ historical process” (O’Connor 1987, 3). Through this study, I find many Pacific nation-states to be a projection of Eurocentric imaginaries, and I find conventional geographical discourse constituting crises in state-centric and Eurocentric terms. The conflict in Solomon Islands was first framed, through notions of contagion and intractability, as ethnic violence occurring in a Pacific arc of instability. It was next framed, through neoliberal assumptions that Solomon Islanders cannot govern themselves and pose a threat to the security of nearby countries, as a failed state. I trace the origins and effects of crisis discourse not only as an academic exercise but to reveal the material consequences that intervention brings to Solomon Islanders. My questions are posed for both theoretical and ethical reasons, to try to improve upon contemporary geographical discourses that “elide questions of responsibility for the Other” (Dalby and O Tuathail 1996, 455).

Security in a Post-9/11 World

Our geographies of danger have suddenly shifted focus. During much of the 20th century, Western security narratives focused on the containment of threats from powerful states such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. After the attacks of September 11,
2001, the American, British, and Australian governments made dramatic changes to their foreign policies. Whereas prior to the 2000 Presidential election, George W. Bush opposed nation-building and military intervention, his administration argued “that the post-Sept. 11 world, where poverty and hopelessness spawn terror and terror threatens US and world security, requires the United States to act to promote freedom and democracy” (Washington 2004). The security focus shifted to the danger and disorder involved in not intervening (Mitchell 2010); the choice was black and white: between good and evil, freedom and tyranny. Failed states were no longer viewed simply as humanitarian concerns but were considered a “major national security problem” (Walt 2001, 62) because they were a threat to global stability (Rotberg 2002a); terrorist networks could convene there. This has been the moment of my research into conflict in the ‘Pacific,’ a moment when places characterized as weak and unknown have become the new spaces of fear for the great powers.

**Realism and civilizational discourses of statehood**

It is impossible to launch into research into the political geography of any region of the world today without speaking of countries and governments, terms that in themselves are the bearers of ideology. I must begin to talk about Oceania, but in doing so, I realize that the map of nation-states carries assumptions about human nature, about the naturalness of states, and about the frightening fragility of human organization short of strong states. In medieval times, peace was considered the natural condition of humans while war was considered unnatural. Hobbes flipped this notion on its head and concluded that war and insecurity were, instead, the natural state (Stephanson 1998). In *Leviathan*, first published in 1651, Hobbes argued that for people who lived in a state of
nature – in other words without the social contract through which a government provided order – life was ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.’ He concluded savage people “have no government at all” and that reasonable people would agree to be governed by an absolute authority in order to stop the natural degeneration into war and chaos. Peace was thus enforced by a powerful monarch or government. *Leviathan* identified reason as the solution to civil and religious conflict (Campbell 1998b). Science and rationality were what kept Europeans from sliding back into “a state of nature typified by brutality, poverty, evil and imminent death” (Manzo 1995, 233). Hobbes described the disadvantages of war including that it hinders industry and commerce. Machiavelli’s *The Prince* also emphasized the need for a stable state.

The school of Realism in political theory assumes that humans are naturally inclined to be selfish and evil and that states are what tame human nature “by a hierarchical political structure of authority and rule” (Donnelly 1993, 87). Although the modern state system that exists today is presented as eternal, it has existed for fewer than four centuries. The nation-state emerged from the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia that ended the religious wars in Europe (Pettman 1996) and relied on having sovereignty over territory. Since then, the state has been touted as the solution to violent conflict as well as to economic and social problems (Milliken and Krause 2002, 762). Within the discourse of modernity, the individual is privileged “as the ultimate site of sovereignty”; at the same time, realists have “treated states as analogous to reasoning individuals” (Manzo 1995, 7, 9). Modernity is based on reason, rationality, and progress and is presented as a
universal good that will free people from oppression, ignorance, and backwardness (Gregory 2000).

When we use the terminology of conventional geography, states are considered the “primary building blocks of order” (Rotberg 2002a, 130) and conflicts within states are “destabilizing threats to international ‘order’ and challenges to norms of international ‘justice’” (Mount 2003, 272). According to this view, countries that pose a danger are those that have underperformed economically, that are not globally integrated (Barnett 2004). In his popular article “The Coming Anarchy,” journalist Kaplan (1994) continued a Hobbesian view of the world when he argued the world is split into two parts, one of civilization and the other of savagery. Kaplan contended that many people around the world endure such poor standards of living that war is an improvement rather than making their lives worse. Fear-based imaginaries of regional and global futures began to dominate news and foreign policy in the 1990s, just as the ‘peace dividend’ was supposed to pay off. A disarmed world was less thinkable, a de-stated world was less imaginable. I must begin my research using the terminology of nation-states, even while seeking a standpoint outside their inherent ideology of fear.

**Background to my study**

This study is an outgrowth of my MA thesis research on Japan’s aid to Pacific Island States. My thesis focused on projects funded by Japan’s Official Development Assistance in Solomon Islands. I investigated the intentions stated by the Japanese government and on-the-ground outcomes in Solomon Islands and found structural contradictions within the concept and practice of development aid. Development aid has
only served to widen the gap between rich and poor countries because development creates dependence and underdevelopment.

I completed my master’s thesis in 2000, the year of a coup in Solomon Islands. In spring 2002, I was taking a class in Pacific Islands Studies called “Coups, Conflicts, and Crises: the New Pacific Way?” and a class at UH-Manoa on genocide. In both classes, I learned about conflicts that had been described primarily as ethnic in origin in places such as Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Rwanda. When the conflicts were put in historical and political context, it became clear that ethnicity had been used as a tool or symptom but was not the origin of the violence. The next year, 2003, the Australian government stopped calling the conflict in Solomon Islands ‘ethnic violence’ and started calling the country a failed state, which led to a regional intervention in the Solomons, effectively an occupation by foreign forces. For my dissertation research, I decided to use Solomon Islands as a case study to investigate in more depth the process by which a conflict is termed and then becomes evidence of a failed state within the discourse of a war on terror. I sought to gain a better conceptual understanding of how these frames and discourses inform action, how they backfire, and have unintended consequences. I started my fieldwork in Australia and Solomon Islands after the Australian-led intervention had begun in 2003.

Analysis of the Pacific often assumes the Pacific region to be static and ahistorical. In this way, complex issues are reduced to simplistic explanations. Finin and Wesley-Smith’s (2000) “Coups, Conflicts, and Crises: The New Pacific Way?” argues these instances of conflict in the Pacific are related but not simply by outbreaks of ethnic
fighting. Rather, governments in the Pacific all face challenges to their stability and security because of colonial legacies, tensions between traditional and modern forms of government, corruption, and the erosive effects of globalization. This does not mean that violence is contagious and spreading like wildfire through countries in the Pacific that are unable to govern themselves. Outsiders have shown a profound lack of understanding of the processes and dynamics of Oceania. Violence can also be a product of neoliberal demands for resource marketization on less powerful countries. Said (2004, 124) argues American public discourse is “densely saturated… with interests, authorities, and powers” that insist upon “the acceptance of a neoliberal postwelfare state responsive neither to the citizenry nor to the natural environment, but to a vast structure of global corporations unrestricted by traditional barriers or sovereignties.” Confronting such public discourse, I wished to map my own geography of the Pacific.

**Crisis Frames, Solomon Islands, and the Australian-led intervention force**

In a five year period from 1998-2003, the Pacific Island state of Solomon Islands endured a coup, the murders of over one hundred people, and the forced migration of tens of thousands of citizens. There was a concerted effort both within the Solomons and outside to portray the situation as simply ethnic violence. Andrew Nori, a Solomon Island lawyer who helped to mastermind the June 2000 coup, argues the violence erupted because of deep-seated ethnic hatred by people from the island of Guadalcanal toward people from the island of Malaita. A closer look, however, shows the conditions and motivations underlying the violence were much more complex. During the June 2000 coup, a group of people from the island of Malaita overthrew the country’s Prime
Minister who was also from Malaita, which undermines the claim that ethnic tensions were at the heart of the conflict.

Several consecutive Solomon Islands Prime Ministers begged the Australian government for help but were all turned down, showing that even the misperceived ethnic violence was not reason to intervene. In early 2003, Alexander Downer, the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, argued it would be “folly in the extreme” to send Australian troops to “occupy” Solomon Islands because “it would not work ... Foreigners do not have answers for the deep-seated problems affecting the Solomon Islands” (New Zealand Herald, Aug. 1, 2003). Yet six months later, Australian Prime Minister John Howard initiated an intervention to “stabilize” the Solomons by sending more than 1500 Australian police and troops to Honiara, the capital of the Solomons. Australian forces have led the multinational effort of intervention – called Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, or RAMSI – which represents the largest Australian mobilization in the Pacific since World War II (Shanahan 2003). Downer stressed the “complete breakdown in law and order” in Solomon Islands forced Australia to form a new Pacific policy involving “nation rebuilding” and “co-operative intervention.” Downer emphasized “there isn’t really any alternative but for Australia to take a leadership role” (ABC Radio 2003b). Why did the Australian government’s policy toward the Pacific change so radically in such a short time?

Using the tension in Solomon Islands and the Australian-led intervention as a case study, I investigate the process by which something gets called ‘violence.’ I ask when ‘violence’ gets recruited into discourse as ‘ethnic violence’ and why this might nor might
not matter. I explore the ways in which space and place have been connected to the construction of identities. I ask how the case of Solomon Islands does matter within the frame of the ‘war on terror’ and the need for order and security. I explore what forces are at work to produce the dominant discourse and to mute others. I borrow from Foucault’s (1972) *Archaeology of Knowledge* and ask, for whom is crisis discourse an asset, and how is it an asset? Finally, I ask what these questions tell us about modernity overall. These questions are essential because theory helps to produce ‘fact.’ We need to be certain that we are asking the right questions so that the answers do matter.

My research includes an analysis of how Australians (have) construct(ed) a history of the Pacific based on tropes of paradise and savagery and how reality has been manifested through narratives of discovery, colonization, modernization, and neoliberalism. Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, a Solomon Islander who was involved in negotiating the peace process in the Solomons, argues the language and images that the Australian government and media have been using toward Solomon Islands and the Pacific in general are paternalistic and disempowering, reminiscent of earlier colonial times under the British (interview, 2003). The colonial assumption that Solomon Islanders cannot govern themselves continues today, as confirmed in my 2004 interview with Peter Noble, RAMSI’s second-in-command at the time. Noble told me, “Solomon Islanders lack leadership and responsibility; they need a core group of guardians…. Solomon Islanders are either rotten to the core or naïve to think they can do it themselves.” Accordingly, the Australian-led intervention force has inserted Australian ‘advisers’ into a number of government agencies in the Solomon Islands government and
has not allowed Royal Solomon Islands Police to possess guns or communication
devices. How has crisis discourse led to this kind of intervention? In order to understand
this process, we need to begin with a theoretical framework, which I will now discuss.

**Discursive Power and Geography**

In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1979) scrutinized scholarship’s
claim to objectivity. Said’s definition of Orientalism was three-fold: the academic study
of the Orient; the ways that this academic study created a body of knowledge which was
used by imperialists as a way to gain and hold power; and the making of epistemological
and ontological distinctions between East/West, civilized/barbaric, advanced/primitive,
and modern/traditional. Orientalism stressed the importance of the ‘Other’ in creating the
‘Self.’ Orientalism is not simply something that existed in the past; rather, the processes
of Orientalism continue today. Inequalities are embedded in such practices of
representation, and then these differences, organized in hierarchical categories, have
justified colonialism and imperialism.

Like the rest of the social sciences, the discipline of geography has aided and
abetted imperialism through the guise of objectivity (Harvey 1984; Shapiro 2002b). Its
academic discourse has “provided a legitimation for colonialism” (Brown 1999, 182)
while mapmaking has been an exercise of imperial power. The discipline of geography
has played a key role in the processes of Orientalism. Spatial practices are crucial in
creating Self/Other distinctions.

Geopolitical boundary narratives such as the war on terror discourse rely on
scripts of danger and difference to create distinctions between populations of ‘good’ and
‘evil’ (Jones 2009b). In these narratives, the Other is uncivilized, barbaric, and poses a
threat to modernity and our western way of life. In this way, the Self becomes the protagonist (Fuentes 1982) – the container of all things ‘good’ – both on the level of individual citizens and on the national level.

Traditional crisis discourse relies on the practices of Orientalism. One of the newest incarnations of a dangerous Other is a ‘terrorist.’ In Bush’s black-and-white declaration after the 9/11 attacks, “You’re either with us, or you’re with the terrorists.” The argument exists within the framing: you are either rational and good or you are the enemy. Much of crisis discourse implies that the people being ‘described’ are inadequate (Field 2003b) and require some sort of intervention.

Extensive new security projects including preemptive military action abroad have been legitimized in part through the discourse of the global war on terror. Jones (2009b, 292) argues this shift was possible because the ‘enemy other’ has been portrayed as violent and “outside the boundaries of modernity.” In his Sept. 12, 2002 speech to the UN, Bush warned, “We must choose between a world of fear and a world of progress. We cannot stand by and do nothing while dangers gather.” Military intervention has become a solution to these threats.

Both the discourse of neoliberal governance and the war on terror create “populations as subjects that ‘need’ to be governed in other ways... (They) underwrite an imperialist geopolitics of coercive enforcement rooted in liberal notions of spreading freedom and democracy” (Corva 2008, 191). In this way, the discourses of neoliberalism and the war on terror have become justifications for intervention in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Solomon Islands. My research questions the ways geographical
discourse constitutes crises and hopes to discover many scales of interlinked thought and action.

By discourse, I mean a regime of speech and silence: what can be said, what terms are recognized as valid, who has access to particular discursive formations. Discourse is “a set of rules for producing knowledge that determines what kinds of intelligible statements can be circulated within a given economy of thought.” In western discourse on gender, for example, there are two categories of bodies, thus referring to a “third gender will always sound fanciful, nonsensical, or just ridiculous” (Wilchins 2004, 60). Clay (2005, 14) explains, “Discourses are spoken or written in terms of shared cultural meanings and tropes, following rules and conditions.” Order is brought to society by regimes of truth, which constitute meaning in a shared way (Foucault 1989). There are a number of kinds of discourse: discourses on science, civilization, morality, development, security, as well as spatial, colonial, geopolitical, legal, and political, discourses. Power is exercised through such discourses (Foucault 1981). Specific kinds of individuals are produced through discursive power; such individuals have internalized social norms that control how they act (Wilchins 2004).

Gregory’s (2004, xv) *The Colonial Present* insists such critique is necessary because imperialism’s mix of knowledge, power, and geography continues “to colonize lives all over the world.” Colonialism is not a thing of the past but continues on today although it often takes on different forms. “Of the forms colonialism takes place in the present,” the most obvious take the forms of military interventions and development projects (Thomas 1994, 170). While focusing on on-the-ground outcomes, I also
recognize the crucial role that theory plays – how assumptions within the theories of modernity and development, for instance, affect policies that are made on state interventions. Like Gregory (2004, xv), I attempt “to trace the connections between the modalities of political, military, and economic power – the grand strategies of geopolitics – and the spatial stories told by the lives of ordinary people.” It is essential to do a critical reading of theory and discourse relevant to my study in order to expose its subjectivity because one problem with supposedly ‘neutral’ terms is that if you reproduce that discourse, you reproduce the exercise of power. We become relays if we describe ourselves within these discourses (Foucault 1995). I begin with a review of political geography over the last century.

**Political Geography**

**Political Geography into the 20th Century: Geostrategy and the Organic State**

Since its inception, conventional political geography has been concerned with the political organization of space. The state is considered the most important actor on the world stage and the focus is on states’ power as well as relationships between states. The term ‘political geography’ was first used in 1750 by a French *philosophe* who described the connections between geographical ‘facts’ regarding soil, agriculture, settlements, etc. In this sense, ‘political geography’ was a branch of knowledge for government and administration.

Key figures in the early development of geopolitics include Swedish political scientist Rudolph Kjellen, German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, U.S. Navy Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, and British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder. At the end of the 19th century, Kjellen created the term ‘geopolitics.’ In 1897, Ratzel published *Politische
Geographie, which established political geography as a subfield of geography. Ratzel developed the Organic Theory of the State, which employed a biological analogy of the state to nature. He described the state as a body in the sense that it was alive, possessed physical space, and was distinct from other bodies (states). Ratzel contended that just as an organism grows, so does a state expand its geographical area to fulfill its destiny. Later, Kjellen took Ratzel’s biological analogy of the state to nature even further and asserted that a state must expand or die.

In 1890, Mahan, a Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy, published The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, which stressed the importance of sea transport routes, the relationship between continental and insular landmasses, and how these patterns and processes affect national policy. In 1904 and 1919, Mackinder argued the end of the 19th century would also bring the end of the primacy of sea power over land power. Drawing attention to the geostrategic advantages of land power over sea power, Mackinder wrote that whoever occupied the heartland – the steppes in Central Asia – could exert a dominating influence over world politics. Key to Mackinder’s Heartland theory was the idea that if a country could not control the heartland, then it had to make sure that it denied control to any other power.

Karl Haushofer, a German general, used the ideas of Kjellen, Ratzel, and Mackinder to develop ‘geopolitik,’ a pseudoscience used as a policy tool by the German state to justify their aggressive expansion into other parts of Europe (Smith 2000). After World War II, interest in political geography waned because of its connections with Nazism. For some people, geopolitics became a kind of intellectual poison. Mackinder’s
views, however, continued to inspire geopolitical strategy throughout the Cold War as
theories of containment and dominos combined with Mackinder’s Heartland concept and
Spykman’s (1944) rimland theory to justify the continued need for geomilitary presence
and interventions in Western Europe and elsewhere aimed at ensuring that the Soviet state
did not spread.

In the 1950s, the few scholars who worked on political geography developed a
narrower focus. Hartshorne’s (1950) *The Functional Approach to Political Geography*
and Gottman’s (1951, 1952) monographs developed a new theory of centrifugal and
centripetal forces, which describes the movement of people, businesses, and industries to
(centripetal) and from (centrifugal) a core, or central, area. During the Quantitative
Revolution in geography in the 1950s and 60s, political geography continued to flounder.

**Radical geography in the 1960s: critiquing political geography, advocating change**

Radical geography emerged in response to political events of the 1960s, including
the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and growing awareness of the inequalities of
the spread of wealth. Through seminal works such as Harvey’s (1973) *Social Justice and
the City* and Peet’s (1977) *Radical Geography*, radical geography stressed the importance
of Marxian analysis and offered critiques of spatial science and positivism. Rather than
simply offering another form of analysis, proponents of radical geography advocated
change and offered the first radical critique of political geography.

**Rethinking Space as Socially Produced**

In addition to Harvey (1973, 1982, 1989), other geographers including Soja
(1989, 1996) and Howitt (2001) have forced a poststructural rethinking of taken-for-
Soja (1989) disrupts the binary opposition of physical/mental space that has been a hallmark of social science in general and geography more specifically by expanding on Poulantzas’s (1978), Lefebvre’s (1991), and Foucault’s (1986) ideas of social space, of spatiality as socially produced. Soja (1989) argues physical, mental, and social space exist in a set of relations with each other, that space is not fixed but rather is contingent and possesses transformative possibilities. Whereas western Marxism and western philosophy have focused primarily on time and history at the expense of space and geography, Soja (1989) reasserts the importance of space and rejects a rigid division between time and space as separate entities. Soja’s (1996) Thirdspace seeks to destabilize and open up alternatives to the established binaries upon which hegemony rests by including the lived spaces of representation and notions of hybridity.

**Welfare and Electoral Geography in the 1970s: inequalities and quantitative modeling**

In the 1970s, political geography concentrated on two areas: welfare geography and electoral geography. Welfare geography focused on inequalities in social well-being and social justice through studies of urban geography, areal differentiation and spatial inequalities in areas affecting human life such as crime, poverty, homelessness, and access to health, educational, and other services. Electoral geography was the first area of political geography to use the tools developed during the Quantitative Revolution but it was not able to revive political geography.
Revitalizing Political Geography in the 1980s: multiple scales and power in language

Political geography was revitalized in the 1980s when geographers expanded their focus beyond the state to include other scales of analysis and to reexamine concepts that were previously embraced without question. Taylor’s (1989) *Political Geography: World Economy, Nation-State, and Locality* promoted a world-systems analysis which provides a framework for analyzing phenomena across scales. Because Taylor highlighted the importance of nation-states in the rise of the economic integration of the modern world system, he and his ideas became an important focus for a growing critical perspective on power. During the late 1980s, questions of power in language began to resonate through the entire discipline of geography as the influence of poststructuralist thinkers spread through the social sciences. Blaut’s (1993) *The Colonizer’s Model of the World* and Lewis and Wigen’s (1997) *The Myth of Continents* offered critiques of academic terms and areal distinctions that had previously taken European superiority for granted.

Critical Geopolitics Emerges in the mid-1990s: questioning what was taken-for-granted

During the mid-1990s, as poststructuralist thought spread throughout the discipline, a new subdiscipline of geography, called critical geopolitics or critical political geography, arose, representing an ontological shift from conventional forms of political geography. Drawing on Foucault’s ideas about power/knowledge and space, Derrida’s (1978) deconstruction of texts, and Said’s (1979) *Orientalism* and concern for the Other, critical geopolitics challenges assumptions that earlier varieties of political geography accepted without question. Harley (1992, 12) explored how mapping “became the business of the state” and how maps exert power by facilitating “surveillance and
control." Manzo (1991, 14) examined how spatial practices constructed people and places that were assigned intrinsic values. While the West was composed of peoples and states that were rich, rational, educated, mature, and autonomous, outside the boundaries of the Western world resided “the ‘traditional other’; ungrown, dependent, emotional, authoritarian, illiterate, superstitious, and poverty-stricken.” Many subfields of geography reflected critically on the discipline’s history. In his Geopolitics in a Changing World, Dodds (2000) contends the starting point for critical geopolitics is to argue that conventional perspectives on geopolitics and international politics ignore the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin those positions in the first place.

**Comparing conventional and critical political geography**

Critical geopolitics stresses the need to open up political geography to methodological and conceptual re-examination as well as meta-level analysis of discourse and representation. While conventional political geography has been concerned with the political organization of space, including how physical characteristics of the land determine political outcomes and how to employ these principles for strategic uses, critical political geography uses multiple positionings and multiple scale analysis to encourage a “disruption of the taken-for-granted designations of political spaces” (Dalby and O Tuathail 1996, 455) and to expose the subjectivity inherent in traditional geopolitics (Sharp 1996). Where conventional political geography argues, “This is the way the world is,” critical geopolitics stresses the need to ask, “What are our assumptions about the way the world is and how did these assumptions come about?” Conventional political geography stresses it offers a neutral assessment; critical geopolitics counters
that studying geopolitics can never be politically neutral and that the views of
conventional political geography are privileged ones and offer simply one view of the
world. Conventional political geography’s assumption that the state is the primary actor
on the world stage is viewed as problematic by critical political geographers because the
state is no longer considered the most important unit of analysis and because the state is
considered to be an effect of a contingent set of relations rather than an entity standing on
its own. Critical geopolitics is concerned with interpreting theories of world politics as
well as the “interactions between geography, knowledge, power, and social and political
relations” (Dodds 2000, 33).

Conventional geopolitics has “the crucially important power to define danger,
and... the ability to describe the world in ways that specify appropriate political behaviors
in particular contexts to provide ‘security’ against those dangers. International security
and the practices of war are premised on some very powerful, taken-for-granted cultural
constructions, not the least of which are the cartographic assumptions about nation-
states” (Dalby 1998, 295). The tasks of critical geopolitics include problematizing
powerful geographical discourse (O Tuathail 1996) and questioning taken-for-granted
aspects of geopolitical knowledge. One way in which these tasks are achieved is by
deconstructing terms such as ‘state,’ ‘nation,’ ‘territory,’ ‘space,’ and ‘power,’ since these
critical thinkers argue that language is not neutral but rather is shaped to communicate
and even constitute power. They employ textual analysis in order to reveal intangible,
non-visible components of political hegemony, political dominance, and uneven power
relations. These disruptions are especially important “in light of contemporary ethical
thinking that ineluctably raises questions of how geographical discourses function” to suppress consideration of the Other (Dalby and O Tuathail 1996, 455).

Regionalization in geography demands the creation of homogenous, formal areas in which categories are identified and made the basis for difference. These regions establish edges and discontinuities. The history of the nation is tied to the history of the Western idea of the state; a nation facilitates a state because people agree to be governed. Boundaries are central to the discourse of sovereignty; they provide the means for differentiation: physical and cultural separation from another nation-state. Bonura (1998, 93) analyzes “geographical and sovereign boundaries in the production of national identity” and argues that in conversations of political culture, geography “inscribes bound cultural spaces necessary for the function of the nation-state as a unit of analysis and a meaningful political form.” Rygiel (1998, 107) argues, “The state constructs borders, those of both national identity and territory, by using spatial strategies that homogenize identity and space.”

Shapiro (1997, x) stresses that although nation-states are not natural but rather constructed entities, many scholars assume the state system is “the only spatial reality.” Instead of studying war, Shapiro seeks “to effect a political and ethical resistance to the enmities upon which it feeds” because geography is part and parcel of the construction of a hostile other.

**Critical Geopolitics: a shift in focus to neoliberal governmentality**

There has been a movement in critical geopolitical theory from concern over the sovereign control of people to the practices through which people are governed with their
consent. The new contagion of geopolitical crisis discourse focuses not on the territorial overrun of the domino theory but rather on the fear that if we do not pay attention to the welfare of populations, we will lose people psychologically; they will be less interested in being part of the global marketplace. Neoliberal governmentality has brought new forms of governance and a shift to spatial administration of people and individuals through concern for the welfare of ‘populations.’ In other words, the focus is not just on governance from the top down but also from the bottom up, on individuals as subjects. In neoliberal subjectivity formation, people are becoming entrepreneurial subjects. By investigating neoliberal governmentality, we can see how people become market subjects (Mitchell 2010).

Critical geographers have thus recently linked the topics of imperialism and the war on terror (Harvey 2003; Dodds 2005), global governmentality (Larner and Walters 2004), and neoliberalism and political geographies of control (Sparke 2006). Fluri (2009) explores a geopolitics of violence from below through the lens of gender in Afghanistan. Jones (2009c) investigates the ways the war on terror has been presented as a threat to the survival of the state itself and the ensuing consolidation of states’ sovereign power.

Critical Theory: reality is manifested through discourse

Because critical geopolitics is the expression of critical theory in political geography, it is essential also to examine critical theory. Critical interpretation differs both ontologically and epistemologically from mainstream approaches. Whereas empirical approaches view a one-to-one correspondence between reality and representation, and hermeneutic approaches seek to uncover the hidden meaning in things, critical approaches argue reality is always mediated and explore how reality is
manifested through discourse. Der Derian (1997, 62) contends it is necessary to disturb the convention “that reality is independent of any language used to describe it.” There is a real danger in assuming that “facts speak for themselves rather than through and for powerful discourses…” (Der Derian 1997, 65). Conventional international relations theory has not simply been a neutral assessor of ‘reality,’ but rather it has helped to form identities, give meaning, and accord status and privilege (George 1995). A realist approach to international relations is not only inadequate, but also dangerous because realism reduces what is complex to something simple and narrowly focused, and because it excludes and silences many people and positions. In contrast to realists who assume certain givens, postmodernists assert that “all is questionable” (Der Derian 1997, 58). Lyotard (1984) argued for the need to reject metanarratives or grand narratives and instead focus on ‘little narratives’ or ‘little stories’ that are able to include the heterogeneity of human experiences; a metanarrative is an impoverished view.

**A Genealogical approach to Power/Knowledge**

Foucault (1990, 1994, 1995) offers a genealogical method to explore how power operates with knowledge specifically on human bodies to control behaviors through normalizations. Whereas traditional history asserts that where we are is inevitable given the historical causes, Foucault shows the contingency of history and aims to remove the necessity that where we are is inevitable. One task of genealogy is to destroy the primacy of origins as well as narratives of continuity such as ‘progress’ and ‘development.’ Foucault has argued that depth metaphors are as unhelpful as origin stories. It is more instructive to look at the surface in order to understand the ways in which the state codes
bodies, for example, the way the military is carried on a person’s body through the uniform, posture, and hair. Like Foucault, Butler (1999) maintains it is unproductive to look at origins because origin stories make it harder to imagine a new future.

Foucault (1989, 205) explains, “In contrast to the various projects which aim to inscribe knowledges in the hierarchical order of power associated with science, a genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from… subjugation, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse.” The goal of this approach is not to offer an alternative truth but to facilitate our ability to think and act differently regarding contemporary problematizations. It is essential to go beyond the idea of a single story to multiple realities and multiple stories. Foucault’s genealogical approach allows us to see that certain forces are at work to mute whatever does not fit into the logic of concepts such as a ‘nation-state.’ Foucault shows how the state is not a pre-existing given but rather an effect of power (Deleuze 1988).

Derrida (1978) argues hegemony rests on binary oppositions such as self/other, civilization/barbarism, identity/difference, public/private, and center/margin. Each has meaning because of its relationship with its ‘opposite.’ Derrida calls this process logocentrism, a modernist process in which one imposes hierarchy on dichotomies in which the first term signifies a point of origin while the second term indicates a lack or absence of that origin. The first term is pure, needs no explanation, and is “the ideal, the model to which the latter must aspire” (Manzo 1991, 14). Whatever does not fit into either half of the dichotomy disappears (Wilchins 2004, 40). Binaries are not simply
descriptive; they are about power, they are political, they create hierarchies. “We should really write, white/black, men/women, masculine/feminine, upper class/ lower class, British/alien, to capture this power dimension in discourse” (Hall 1997, 235). Nandy (1993) would add parent/child to Hall’s list. Binaries such as self/other and core/periphery are about world space creating identity and difference, which I explore further in Chapter 2.

The best way to deconstruct a dichotomy is to give it a history and make it harder for it to appear as natural (Foucault 1971, 1972, 1973). By putting pressure on these dualisms, they start to unravel. Deconstruction is a method that can be used on categories and terms to destabilize and throw doubt onto authority claims. The assumption of progress as linear, culminating in a universal stage has worked in tandem with binary oppositions. For example, that which is ‘premodern’ is ‘not yet modern.’ Following this logic, Mamdani (1996, 10) explains, a student would be not yet a teacher, as if becoming a teacher were the natural and inevitable destiny of all students. Both the lead term and the residual term in binaries “are robbed of history.” It is essential to restore both agency and history to these terms that create hierarchies.

Critical interpretation offers tools such as semiotics, in which one can recover the act of meaning production, and deconstruction of texts. Critical theory argues both subjects and objects are historically produced. Mitchell (1995, 130) contends, “objects of analysis do not occur as natural phenomena, but are partly constructed by the discourse that describes them.” A genealogical approach attempts to politicize and historicize that which has been naturalized. The reigning discursive practices in various historical periods
constitute the differences that people accept and implement. *How* people interpret things is more important than the world they interpret. The problem of meaning is historicized as genealogists ask why does something mean *this* at this particular time? What forces determine why *this* meaning is dominant rather than that one? Meaning, therefore, is always subject to contention. By asking why certain things get problematized in certain ways at certain times, a genealogical approach stresses that knowledge is always situated.

Foucault (1989) viewed power/knowledge as a symbiotic relationship. What is important in genealogy are the effects of power, not power itself. In their monograph *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 109) stress Foucault’s conviction that power is a relationship and a strategy, but not a possession. “There is no subject, individual or collective, moving history.” Deleuze (1988, 25) calls Foucault a “new cartographer” and speaks of power as a social space. He maintains “power is not homogenous but can only be defined by the particular points through which it passes.” “We should not ask, ‘What is power and where does it come from?’ but ‘How is it practiced?’” There is hope in Foucault’s idea that “power is not essentially repressive” (Deleuze 1988, 71).

A genealogical approach involves using strategies that can disturb and unsettle what people take for granted (Campbell 1998a). A genealogical approach attempts to politicize and historicize that which has been naturalized, and focuses on theory as practice, not theory as separate from practice. Theory does not come about after the fact; “theories, instead, play a large part in constructing and defining what the facts are” (Zalewski and Enloe 1995, 299). “Theory is always for someone and for some
purpose” (Cox 1995, 31). There are ethical concerns for the Other within critical approaches that do not appear in traditional scholarship.

One way in which I will apply aspects of critical interpretation in my study is through the use of tools such as juxtapositioning in order to destabilize dichotomies, not to destroy meaning claims but to multiply them. Critical thinkers argue there are multiple ways to make things intelligible. One of the strategies used for this purpose is what Foucault (1977) refers to as “countermemories,” which result from the process of revealing subjugated knowledge. Likewise, Campbell (1998a) speaks of “counternarratives,” and Bal (1988) refers to “countercoherence.” A goal of this approach is to “intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged histories of nations, races, communities, peoples” (Bhabha 1994, 150).

Shapiro (1989) suggests using textual analysis to critically question privileged forms of representation. Textual analysis allows us to see that language is not simply a form of communication but rather is used to produce and reproduce structures of authority and control. Bourdieu (1991, 40) maintains “there are no longer any innocent words.” Arthur (2003, 17) contends “colonization is an event in language as well as in space.” Categories are not neutral but rather have various phenomena, including economic, political, social, and biological phenomena, embedded within them. A genealogical approach offers us tools to challenge the assumptions inherent in categories and labels that enabled systems of dominance to exist in the first place. “Each category valorizes some point of view and silences another” (Bowker and Star 1999, 5). Critical
thinkers argue it is less important to understand what people think and value “than how
dominant structures and agents have shaped why they do so” (Katznelson and Milner
2002, 15).

We need to question the narrative of modernity, a story we tell ourselves in which
“we are a culture defined by truth and guided by knowledge and science” (Wilchins 2004,
33). Modernity is often presented as the end result of progress, the culmination of a linear
evolution but modernity is not neutral or value-free. It is helpful to view modernity as a
project (Habermas 1983). Modernity is Western cultural hegemony (Liu 2003) and
modernization is a project of imperialism (Haddad 2005). I will explore theories of
modernization more thoroughly in Chapter 3. Embedded within the narrative of
modernity are ways of organizing the world politically through nation-states – entities
that assume territorial boundaries and coherent people – and economically through
capitalism.

Similarly, the law is an apparatus of power: it produces knowledge, and
“constitutes a regime of truth” (Leonard 1990, 11). As capitalism developed, the law
began to categorize what is legitimate and illegitimate, especially in terms of rights and
properties (Turkel 1990). The law is an instrument of the dominant to keep subordinates
under control; it puts pressure on some and leaves others free to operate (Foucault 1989).
All this being the case, there is still a lot of on-the-ground competition and shifting in
power and political life, the frames under which people are acting and choosing not to
act.
Discourse has material consequences. A poststructural critique includes an investigation of how power operates in space to discipline and govern bodies. Foucault (1991) argued we live in an era of ‘governmentality,’ which includes “the mentalities, rationalities, and techniques used by governments, within a defined territory, actively to create the subjects (the governed), and the social, economic and political structures through which their policy can best be implemented” (Mayhew 2009, 224).

Governmentality included state governance as well as the “biopolitics of the population,” which included control of the individual (the body) and the population through interventions and regulatory controls (Foucault 1990). Nation-states were trying to mobilize people for a work force and a military. Governments needed docile bodies to perform, therefore governance became about managing people and predicting behavior. The nation-state is about creating a citizen element.

We need to ask, what are the real effects of the exercise of governmentality? (Foucault 2008, 15) Whose interests does a state system serve? What is meant by security and what is being secured? Heffernan and Constance (1994, 43) maintain the global economy needs the apparatus of nation-states “to assist in resource extraction and market penetration.” Within modernity are specific notions of productivity, rights, security, stability, land regimes, and law. Stability is key for continued growth of the world economy. “In the modern world, we have come to view the nation-state as the ultimate unit of protection” (Daniel 1996, 192). Although the nation-state is presented as a permanent, eternal entity, critical thinkers view the state as something created and maintained.
The nation-state is an entity that assumes territorial boundaries and coherent people. The key to nation-states is to talk about what modernity is about. At one point, modernity meant industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization. A nation-state would become well established and would manage the economy in a centralized way. Centralized control over coercion begins when the state monopolizes violence.

Empirical theories of conflict stemming from geographic regionalizations include violence based on difference in the forms of ethnicity (Horowitz 1985; Gurr and Harff 1994) and culture (Huntington 1993). People including Huntington and Horowitz think they are finding the cause of conflict but what they are identifying is the effect of the political. We can just as easily talk about the violence that accompanies the imposition of an ethnic identity on people, as Hobsbawm (1983) and Connor (1990) have done. Within the dominant state-centered discourse, the conversations on violence are limited to ‘ethnic violence’ since, as Weber asserted, the state has a monopoly on legitimate violence. This erases the violence of nation-building (Shapiro 2002a). The nation-state has been ethnicized such that alternative nations have been turned into ethnic groups. “The state creates its own ethnicity which is called ‘nationhood’” (Slowe 1990, 6).

Violence is not an abnormality of “the state-sovereign system; rather, it is encrypted within the narrative … The boundary becomes the definitive site for the production of otherness, and thereby for the self.” Alternative stories of boundary spaces are rendered invisible in geopolitical discourse. “The hegemonic story told about boundaries… is overwhelmingly encoded as a discourse of danger” because boundaries are where dangerous people, ideas, diseases, and drugs enter a country. Protecting and
maintaining a national boundary “becomes the ultimate yardstick of a state’s efficacy and legitimacy” (Krishna 2003, 303-304). Absolute boundaries are essential for the construction of the modern nation-state because borders help to define a national “Self” versus “Other” (Kearney 1991). “Center’ and ‘periphery’ mirror the categories ‘native’ and ‘foreign.’ The distinction between native and foreign may appear to be a matter of birth or nationality” (van Bremen and Shimizu 1998, 5) although these categories are not natural but rather are social constructions. While “nationality and ethnicity are treated as primordial,” they are instead the effects of certain practices (Stevens 1999, 173).

The possibilities of resistance available to us in critical thinking are quite different from such schemas in mainstream approaches. An empirical approach seeks to define and to close a problem so that it can be measured and in a hermeneutical approach all the pieces fit together, whereas a genealogical approach has more loose ends, seeks to keep the questions open, and “challenges closure” (Campbell 1998a, 23). In her book Politics out of History, Brown (2001, 97, 102) advises that genealogists will experience a sort of vertigo “psychologically and physiologically as well as epistemologically” because “genealogy seeks to deconstruct essentialist and every other stable notion of the body and self; it disrupts coherent identities, both individual and collective.” The self is constructed and always in process, never complete (Haraway 1991).

Rather than investigating how to gain possession of power, critical thinkers view power as net-like, as circulating. Hegemony is not spread across space equally (Butler 1999). Brown (2001, 103) shows how to use genealogy to unsettle “the lines of determination laid down by laws of history” and find “a field of openings – faults,
fractures, and fissures.” There are lapses and areas of inconsistencies, and it is within these areas where hegemonic power does not spread uniformly that there exists the possibility of resistance and transformation. What makes Brown’s ideas especially challenging is she suggests doing political thinking without pressing it for solutions to the problems. She challenges us to live with ambiguity without trying to resolve it or grasp for the ‘certainties’ we have unraveled.

Scholars need to provide “histories that make evident the multiplicity and complexity of history” so as to remove the determinist sense that where we are now is the result of a natural evolution (Said 2004, 141). While the state is constantly scripted through “the imposition of meanings on citizen bodies as well as space” in order to create a narrative of coherence over what is fragmented and arbitrary, resistance to the state is possible through “counter-scripts including journals, diaries, novels, and counter-historical narratives” (Shapiro 2002a, 274, 278). In sum, this sort of critical scholarship does not accept the terms in which power is neutralized. Critical theory has a hopeful agenda; it “is concerned with how the existing order came into being and what the possibilities are for change in that order …(and) … with exploring the potential for structural change and the construction of strategies for change” (Cox 1995, 32). Once people can recognize and understand the processes, they can change them. “It becomes possible to say no, to ask why; to understand how” (George 1995, 69).

Such changes are not simply necessary for the marginalized and the powerless. Just as many people assume that gender studies is about women and that colonial studies is about people of color (Thomas 1994), it is all too common for people to assume this
work needs to be done by the people being oppressed. People who reside figuratively or literally in the center, who hold positions of power, also need to rethink the existing order. We need to understand and question the discursive practices that reinforce and perpetuate systems of inequality and oppression. Lakoff (2004, xv) argues, “Reframing is social change.”

Several literatures help to build an analytical path from discourse to international effects: a view of discourse as power; political geography’s movement toward critical geopolitics; how a world space is projected by colonialism; and how frames are a realm of competition and contingency. My theoretical interests are researched in the following chapters.

Research Questions, Design and Methods

Chapter 1 has shown two theories as starting points in political geography. Conventional geopolitical theory assumes that discourse on crises describes an objective reality while critical theory views traditional crisis discourse as anything but neutral because it has embedded within it modernist and neoliberal agendas. The difference between these theories launches the questions I will apply to ‘the tension’ in Solomon Islands and the subsequent Australian-led intervention.

Analyzing how humans perceive social reality, Goffman (1974) concluded that people understand the world through specific conceptual frames; as such, framing provides a context that gives an experience meaning. An individual’s experiences are organized through often-preexisting frames but the individual’s understanding of an experience is complex and contingent. In both Solomon Islands and the southwest Pacific, there are competing frames and material interests operating. In this dissertation, I
will examine the frames used to describe Solomon Islands and the frames under which the Australian government selectively decided to act. Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. and the 2002 Bali bombings, influential policymakers most frequently viewed the world in state-centric terms, in which sovereignty was supreme. Post 9/11, non-state actors such as the terrorist group al Qaeda were identified as the primary threats to other states as well as world order and stability. Within this framework, it makes sense that the Australian government chose not to intervene in the ethnic violence occurring in Solomon Islands and chose to intervene when Solomon Islands could no longer control its borders or institutions. In both discourses, the blame for the instability is internal but ethnic violence was not viewed as a threat to the security of Australia. Some discourses allow us not to act.

Specifically, Chapter 2 asks, in what ways do different frames underlie current international relations in the Pacific? This chapter provides an historical overview of regionalism in the Pacific, of cultural areas such as Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, and of nation-states in order to understand how power articulates space and how space articulates power. I apply critical geography to enable a rethinking of rigid spatial frameworks that limit our imaginations and highlight the subjectivity of terms such as Melanesia and *terra nullius* that appear as neutral descriptions. It is essential that we interrogate these terms in order to shed light on the values and assumptions embedded within them. Why, for instance, were Europeans in the early 1800s “so interested in a distinction between ‘dark’ and ‘fair’ peoples in Oceania?” (Tcherkézoff 2003, 182). I also ask what these racial classifications enabled European imperial powers to achieve as
explorers in the Pacific sought to establish a causal link between intellect, morality, and
skin color. How does Europe take discourse to the Pacific? How is space projected by
colonialism? Through which frames does Australia see the Pacific?

In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I find two separate stories of Solomon Islands:
one through the lens of conventional geopolitical theory and the second through the lens
of critical geopolitical theory. I begin by taking an empirical view in order to present a
conventional view of Solomon Islands, its history and place in Oceania, the crisis
discourse used to describe it, and the Australian-led intervention that began in 2003. In
the second part of each of these chapters, I examine the same topics through a critical
lens in order to illustrate how the frame through which one looks greatly influences the
results one sees. In this way, I hope to offer counternarratives and to multiply meaning
claims to produce a richer, fuller analysis and to resist the explanatory monopoly of the
neoliberal narrative of Solomon Islanders being incapable of governing themselves.

Specifically, Chapter 3 is an historical geography of Solomon Islands that asks,
what were the causes of distress in the Solomons? I explore the spatial, social, political,
and economic realms of Solomon Islands by investigating the pre-contact period,
discovery, colonialism, World War II, independence, the tension, and the intervention.
Conflicting material interests in Solomon Islands include subsistence rights and
marketizing resources, the theoretical literature of which I explore in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 examines crisis discourse in the Pacific – including doomsdayism,
ethnic violence, arc of instability, Africanization, and failed states – and asks, through
what frames has Australia understood Solomon Islands? I ask where these crisis terms
and ideas came from, when they first started to be used, how they migrated to the Pacific, and who first identified the situation in the Solomons in these frames. This investigation is essential in order to examine the processes and forces by which such crisis discourse is generated and to investigate how reality is manifested through discourse. Chapter 5 investigates the intervention in Solomon Islands and asks, how has the Australian government legitimized their exercise and what are the nature and effects of the intervention?

In Chapter 6, I conclude by identifying how geographical discourse has constituted the crisis in Solomon Islands. By questioning the modernist and neoliberal assumptions inherent in crisis discourse, I will attempt to destabilize traditional responses. I will use strategies of critical political geography to question assumptions made by the Australian government in developing and exercising the RAMSI intervention and to assess on-the-ground repercussions.

My study is qualitative in nature and incorporates local as well as global standpoints. Even though my study focuses on the locality of Solomon Islands, using a geographical approach I am able to analyze forces that operate at different scales. I apply a genealogical method to my case study in order to problematize traditional assessments of Solomon Islands. As Woods (1998) does in Development Arrested and Shapiro (2004) does in Methods and Nations, I will enact “a lived experience” of Solomon Islanders “that resists the explanatory monopoly” (Shapiro 2004, 8) of the Pacific as violent and unstable.
Since my goal is to multiply meaning claims rather than destroy them, I deliberately seek to avoid making truth claims. While modernity is about expunging contingency, genealogy embraces ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings. Juxtaposing discrepant historical, literary, and contemporary events is a “way to loosen the hold that assumptions of causality and coherence have on the entrenched truth” (Quinby 1995, 161). I use the strategy of juxtapositioning the stories in Chapters Three, Four, and Five to make more visible the complexities of what we call Solomon Islands and the intervention taking place there. Juxtapositioning challenges our taken-for-granted views, denaturalizes dominant regimes of truth, and prevents easy resolutions (Stevens 1999).

I follow James Clifford (1983) who suggested ethnographic writing as a way to resist the hegemonic authority of – and to avoid the simplistic, ahistoric ‘other’ so commonly found in – modern accounts of fieldwork. Clifford argued for the importance of using dialogue obtained during fieldwork in the final representative text – “to quote regularly and at length from informants” – as a “way to manifest the collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge” (1983, 139). I will denaturalize the dominant narrative of Solomon Islanders being incapable of governing themselves by recovering “seemingly invisible link(s)…” (Woods 1998, 21) between global and local forces. The idea that Solomon Islanders are not capable of governing themselves is based on a Western, capitalist imaginary of governance.

My project involved fieldwork in Solomon Islands and Australia where I conducted both primary and secondary data collection. To construct a historical context for my case study, I collected key historical data about Solomon Islands’ past in three
places – Solomon Islands, Canberra, and the University of Hawai‘i – to elucidate the effects of colonization, the introduction of capitalism, World War II, development, globalization, and internal corruption on Solomon Islanders. Specifically, I sought to determine how the colonial power (Britain) favored certain groups over others; to determine the geographical patterns of colonial development projects and the impacts of World War II on Solomon Islands; to determine how colonial and modernization policies have affected migration and urbanization within Solomon Islands; to discover how and when the formation of the current ethnic identities came about, and to elucidate how and when Australia took on the role of ‘deputy sheriff’ of the area.

I applied for and received an exemption from Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations by the UH Manoa Committee on Human Studies in August 2003. In my application, I stated I would assure anonymity to protect human participants from risks. For this reason, I have given numerous Solomon Islanders pseudonyms (noted with an asterisk) and have referred to other Solomon Islanders – and a few Australians living in Solomon Islands – only by where they are from. In a few cases, I have also altered the dates of interviews slightly to prevent identification. I also granted anonymity to a couple of ANU professors when the information they provided me was sensitive. My involvement with most of the Solomon Islanders with whom I spoke was limited to one or two interviews each. I sought a wide variety of ages and backgrounds. I interviewed some people through connections I had with Professors Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, Murray Chapman, Greg Fry; others I met by chance. These interviews are listed in Appendices 1 and 2.
In addition to conducting interviews on the ground, I read primary and secondary sources about the Pacific. To investigate the ontological and epistemological foundations of a Pacific ‘arc of instability,’ its sites of ‘ethnic violence,’ and ‘failed states,’ I returned to the map library to look at representations of Oceania as conceptualized in geographies, both political and regional. I also explored literature on the historic interactions between geography and politics.

For information about Solomon Islands, I used books such as *Headhunting in the Solomons around the Coral Sea* (Mytinger 1942), *Wealth of the Solomons* (Bennett 1987), *Happy Isles in Crisis: The Historical Causes for a Failing State in Solomon Islands* (Moore 2004), and *Politics and State-building in Solomon Islands* (Dinnen and Firth 2008). I used reports from the Solomon Star, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, ABC Radio, and Radio New Zealand International, as well as articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Age*, and the *Guardian*. I undertook a critical reading of data from news agencies such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Time Asia*, BBC News, and *The New York Times*, and from government literature produced outside the Solomons including U.S. Department of State and Central Intelligence Agency publications, and global institutions including the World Bank and the United Nations. I examine through a critical lens international sources including the United Nations Chronicle, and literature from various NGOs such as Amnesty International, Oxfam, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.
Fieldwork and interviews in Australia (also see Appendix 1)

I began my fieldwork in Canberra, the capital city of Australia, since that is where the dominant discourse has been generated on the conflict in Solomon Islands. During the four months I spent conducting fieldwork in Australia – from October through December 2003 and in July 2004 – I conducted interviews and archival research, collecting data on crisis discourse as well as on geographical discourse on regionalization and diffusion. Both times, I was a Fellow at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University (ANU). I took advantage of being in the political center of Australia by visiting the Federal Parliament and interviewing politicians and other leaders who might shed light on my case study. At Parliament, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, and ANU, I sought information on Australia’s policies in the Pacific, Australia’s conception of this region, and what the Australian government sees as its interstate responsibilities. I met frequently with Greg Fry, an ANU professor who stressed the ethical necessity of taking a critical view of how Australia frames Pacific islands and the Pacific as a region, and of the impact this framing has on the lives of people living in the Pacific. In addition to working with Fry and other ANU professors, I gathered historical secondary literature from ANU’s library and the National Library of Australia. I also attended numerous conferences and talks. See Appendix 1 for list of interviews in Australia.

Fieldwork and interviews in Solomon Islands (also see Appendix 2)

I conducted fieldwork in Solomon Islands for three months, from August through October 2004. My fieldwork consisted primarily of interviews and historical secondary
literature as I sought to map the social space of Solomon Islands and find where it coincides with the dominant discourse on the crisis there. During my fieldwork, I gathered evidence revealing counter-narratives through interviews with a wide variety of Solomon Islanders from different islands and ethnic groups. I learned Pijin, the lingua franca of Solomon Islands, so that I could incorporate the views of Solomon Islanders not normally heard by outsiders in order to include the multiple layers and dimensions that are not normally accounted for in prevailing models describing conflict in the Solomons. People within the Solomons have not simply been passive recipients of these outside concepts and descriptions; they have played an important role as well in manufacturing knowledge.

In the interviews, I tried to ask general questions so as not to lead them. I asked Solomon Islanders if they identified themselves with a certain group or groups and if so, which one(s); what they considered to be the cause(s) of the tension and why; what they thought of the intervention, and how large a role the Solomon Islands nation-state plays in their daily lives. Since words are a primary way to manufacture knowledge, I also interviewed members of the Australian-led intervention force to explore the language that RAMSI officials have been using within the Solomons. See Appendix 2 for list of interviews in Solomon Islands.

In the next chapter, I explore imperial practices of ordering space in Oceania. I understand the term ‘Oceania’ is problematic but for the purpose of this study, I use the term to talk about the area. I chose to use Oceania to talk about what is more commonly
called the Pacific region because it embodies Hau'ofa’s (1994) concept of a vast ‘sea of islands’ in which water – the ocean – is usable, livable space that connects islanders.
Chapter 2: Ordering Space: Regions, Cultural Areas, and Nation-States in Oceania as European Creations

In order to analyze how conventional geographical discourse constitutes crises, the main question I ask in this chapter is, in what ways do colonial frames underlie current international relations in Oceania? I ask this question in order to better understand the ways in which Britain and Australia (have) construct(ed) a history of the Pacific based on tropes of paradise and savagery and how reality has been manifested through narratives of discovery, colonization, modernization, and neoliberalism. Therefore, this chapter provides an historical overview of regional, cultural, and political borders in Oceania. Using maps from the past few centuries and colonial writings including journals of explorers and official government publications, I question the origins and shiftings of geographical boundaries in Oceania. I analyze terms such as ‘Melanesia’ and ‘terra nullius’ to shed light on racial assumptions embedded within them and on how these terms work to erase the violence of land dispossession and the extermination of colonized peoples. Such spatial analysis is crucial for understanding the implications of globalization and its effects on localities and because the ways in which we study colonialism too often reinforce the privileged status of the discourses, representations, and narratives that we are trying to critique (Thomas 1994).

The Pacific is and has been an imagined place to much of the world. From the earliest days of explorer encounters with Pacific peoples to the current rhetoric of the tourism industry, notions of the Pacific as paradise have been a consistent part of the global perception and relations with Oceania. Romanticism of the 18th century and Enlightenment during the 19th century affected European perceptions of native peoples in
fundamental ways. First, Captain James Cook was put in the role of bringing the blessings of the civilization to the Pacific. Inherent in this endeavor is the idea that Europeans were a superior race biologically and that natives were savages who needed to be led to a better place. Natives could not rely on themselves; they needed the hand of civilized people. The emergence of science and notions of evolution described natives in a ‘primitive’ stage of human development—so ‘studying’ natives would contribute to the understanding of the various stages of human beings as outlined by the Darwinian theory of evolution.

**Colonial Legacies in Oceania: Creating Borders and Classifying Peoples**

Colonial powers have left their legacy in the Pacific in many forms, including regional and cultural boundaries. As European explorers encountered land in the Pacific, they drew maps as symbols of ownership and markers of territory to other European powers. Mapping the world became an important tool of European imperialism as a way to stake claim to the land. Cartography and maps are exercises of power (Harley 1988, 1992). While native peoples sought to survive the onslaught of Europeans, “many British strategies concerned moral justification. Explorer texts of blank ‘undiscovered’ tracts; legal pronouncements of *terra nullius*; scientific theories of racial superiority and the assumption of dying races: all served such strategies” (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000, 82).

*Terra nullius* is an example of a term that justifies and legitimizes systems of domination and oppression such as colonialism. In the late 1700s, the British Empire declared Australia to be *terra nullius* (empty land), creating legal and moral justification for policies that dispossessed the natives of their land and culture. The Great Hall in
Australia’s New Parliament building has a large tapestry of “uncleared land.” History focuses not on the erasure or violent extermination of a people, but rather on the birth of an economy because land not cultivated was seen as wasted. Therefore, “those who used land for something other than commercial exploitation were not really there in the first place” (Shapiro 1997, 28).

The concept of *terra nullius* was built into Australian law and remained so until 1992 (Banner 2005). Although the doctrine lost its legal backing, the sentiment lives on. A 1998 workbook designed to teach geographic literacy argued that because Australia had such a miniscule native population at the time of ‘European discovery,’ it is “no wonder the British regarded Australia as nearly empty, an almost unoccupied land just waiting for colonization” (Stansfield 1998, 113). Yet, what was blank space on the maps of explorers and early empires was inhabited by native peoples. The process of exploring and settling these places was a violent one (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000).

Because critical political geography encourages the interrogation of terms with which we engage our analyses, in this chapter I examine the constructed borders and boundaries in Oceania, including regions, culture areas, and nation-states. We need to look at space as a practice rather than as a fixed phenomenon. Dividing Oceania, for instance, into the four divisions of Polynesia, Micronesia, Malaysia, and Melanesia “was not harmless and had little to do with geography” (Tcherkézoff 2003, 176, 182). We need to ask, “Why were Europeans in the early 19th century so interested in a distinction between ‘dark’ and ‘fair’ peoples in Oceania?”
Beginning in the 1800s, imperial powers relied on evolutionary ranking to classify different peoples and to justify their treatment of these peoples. As a colonial power, Britain assumed that white people were intellectually superior and it was Britain’s duty to rule over the “negroes” (Young 1922). A report prepared by the British Parliamentary Agency in 1884 declared that Britain colonized New Guinea without any “selfish motive” but rather “solely for the benefit of the natives.” The report described the natives as “primitive,” “savages,” “barbarians,” and “simple-minded.” Another colonial assumption was that societies, like individuals, develop along a linear path. Just as a child develops into an adult, societies were thought to progress from traditional to modern. The analogy of family and duty to colonialism was reinforced by the belief that the children (read: colonies) of Great Britain’s dominions “will ever hold fast to (their) parental control and council, despite many minor Imperial family disagreements” that may occur (Young 1922, 112).

The main strategic purpose of colonial discourse is to create “space for a ‘subject peoples’ through the production of knowledge…, to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha 2004, 65). Fanon (1963, 210) argued that colonial powers sought “to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives’ heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality.”
Colonialism has been as much a cultural process as it has an economic or political one. Culture became a way of locating a society as the bearer of peculiar attributes rather than an individual having certain attributes. In this way, culture became “analogous to nation or race…” The crucial attribute of all of these entities – nations, races, societies, cultures – is that their distinctiveness is naturalized; it is equivalent to species difference” (Thomas 1994, 94-96).

We need to rethink what have become rigid spatial frameworks because they limit our imaginations. Thomas (1989, 34) pointed out, “The development of Western thought concerning Pacific societies appears to have been constrained by the categories of those who initiated it.” We also need to interrogate these terms in order to shed light on racial and other assumptions embedded within them. ‘Melanesia,’ for instance, stems from the root meaning ‘Black Islands,’ a category referring to the ‘negroid’ race. It was not a value-free description of people with black skin but was part of a categorization system that placed people called Melanesians toward the bottom of a racial hierarchy. Gender was another key aspect in the evolutionary ranking of societies (Thomas 1994).

**Rethinking Space as Practice**

Bennardo (2002) explored space as a domain of knowledge, investigating how Oceania has become reified as a place and a region despite its cultural and geographic diversity. Regionalization in geography demands the creation of homogenous, formal areas in which categories are identified and made the basis for difference. Geopolitical boundaries need to be interrogated and the areas need to be explored historically. The term *Polynésie*, for instance, was created in the mid-1700s and included what we now call Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia (Douglas 2008a). Australia was considered
part of Australasia and then part of Melanesia for many years. Similarly, New Zealand was considered part of Australasia rather than Polynesia. Racial hierarchies were created by Europeans based on intelligence, morality, and progress. Polynesians were considered to be at the top of the Pacific hierarchy while Melanesians were near the bottom. Only Australian Aborigines were considered more savage and animal-like than Melanesians.

According to Dirlik (1992, 57), the mental idea of a place is quite powerful. Most definitions of the Pacific as a region contribute to a geographical bias, “a tendency to view the region as a geographical given.” Not only do we need to ask whose Pacific but also when, since regional delineations have changed so much over time. Dirlik (1992, 62) argued that “the Pacific region is an idea, if not just an idea.”

In discussing the Pacific, K.R. Howe (2000, 60) stressed that “the subject ‘region’ itself, the islands as a collective entity, only came into being through an imperial perspective that located it on a map of the world.” This process of categorizing, describing, and naming was presented as neutral. “It is now seen as a form of cultural violence by the powerful over the powerless. The indigenous inhabitants had no conception of belonging to any ‘Pacific’ entity.”

Like regions, nation-states within the Pacific also exhibit the arbitrary nature of colonial boundaries. The borders of Solomon Islands were constructed by Britain and Germany. Although the islands of Bougainville and Buka lie in the Solomon Islands archipelago, politically they are part of Papua New Guinea because that categorization fit the needs of the colonizers at the time that these units were being created. These political constructions overlooked tremendous cultural and linguistic diversity.
Just as mapping was a tool of imperialism, so was the production of knowledge. Scholarship as objective and absolute truth was deeply rooted in notions of science from the era of Enlightenment. Science was a direct response to religion as a source of knowledge; unlike religion, science was considered factual and unambiguous. The collection of ‘data’ from scientists was not thought of as representation, as a perspective, but rather the perspective.

For Said (1979), Orientalism meant the idea of creating a region, a people, by the West and for the West. Said highlighted the ways knowledge has been used to construct, represent, and control the Other. Orientalism is a critique of the practice of representation; it stressed the importance of the ‘Other’ in creating the ‘Self.’ Lin and Sun (2005, 4) explain, “Othering is a way of defining and securing one’s own positive identity through the stigmatization of an ‘other…’” One is superior because another is inferior. The processes of Orientalism became part of imperial projects and helped “to underpin and validate the Western exploitation of these ‘other’ lands” (Cloke et al. 2004, 348).

One of Said’s most important contributions is the view that these were not simply images reflecting things that already existed but also “the object of discourse, which is seen to construct a world, geographic domain, or ethnic grouping in a comprehensive way” (Thomas 1994, 37). Said (1979) argued that these constructions “are not merely historical, but persist in Western scholarship. Like the giving of names, representing the culture (or the past) of another society is an exercise in political power” (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000, 54). Dirlik (1992, 76) argues this critique is crucial because “there is a discourse on the Pacific that originated in the European invention of the region, produced
the region as we know it, and holds hegemonic sway over consciousness, including that of the people who inhabit the region.” In her study of colonial discourse in Papua New Guinea, Clay (2005, x) asks, “How did the words they used (or avoided), the images composed, the encounters described, reconstitute the islanders as well as selves?” Similarly, Jolly (2007, 509) argues, “Outsiders’ representations of the Pacific matter not just because of their geopolitical and discursive hegemony but because Islanders have, in part, come to see themselves through the Outlanders’ lenses.” Douglas (2008c) reminds us that locals were not simply acted upon but rather that European representations were affected by local agency.

Foucault (1989, 69) illuminated the nexus of power/knowledge, arguing, “Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory.” Exploring labeling as a political act, Butler (1999) contended people mistake cause for effect because they think they have discovered something when, instead, it was the act of reaching that created it.

Brennan (1993) emphasizes the importance of space in creating Self/Other distinctions. Absolute boundaries are essential for the construction of the modern nation-state because borders help to define a national ‘we’ versus ‘they’ (Kearney 1991). Using borders, we can define ourselves by knowing what we are not. Hobsbawm (1999, 69)
reminds us, “Germany was more easily defined by what it was against than in any other way.”

Lewis and Wigen (1997, 10, 42, 189) maintain that the system of continents and nation-states is embedded with European biases. Europe was given the status of a continent because Europeans were the ones making the maps and had the power to make those maps global ones. The myth of continents and nation-states leads to a belief in sharply bounded borders with no overlap, a sense that the world order is essentially stable, geography is static, geographic phenomena are necessarily and neatly hierarchically ordered, and that different units can be compared and contrasted. The myth of continents works “to consistently and unduly exaggerate the importance of Europe.” The authors argue that the system perpetuates a kind of environmental determinism that says “the configuration of landmasses must correspond to the distribution of cultural traits and social forms.” In a continental system that is based on the land fixation of property-owning people, small islands in a far away sea become less significant, except for how they can be exploited. The authors maintain, “it is no accident that the global geographical framework in use today is essentially a cartographic celebration of European power.” Boundaries represent constructed categories and these categories also encode a bias. Whenever a system of categorization is used, it is crucial to ask whose needs are being served by these classifications.

Callahan and Olive (1995, 77) argued that “naming is a method of exercising power.” Dirlik (1992, 76) maintained, “To define, or to name, is to conquer.” Similarly, Denoon and Mein-Smith (2000, 12, 30) concurred, “Naming a human community is
never politically or morally neutral.” If outsiders create a name, then “the naming reflects – and generates – the outsiders’ power… The naming of regions is as political as the naming of communities and countries.” Southeast Asia is an excellent example of the creation of a region to fit a colonizer’s needs. Graeme Dobell, one of Australia’s most experienced reporters of Asia-Pacific affairs, described Southeast Asia as “a military fact.” The term came about during World War II when Mountbatten was in Malaysia setting up military command and needed to describe the area. There was already a South Asia and an East Asia; Southeast Asia became a British construct (interview, Dec. 7, 2003).

**Investigating Regional Boundaries in Oceania**

Borders in the Pacific were created partly in an attempt to give the area a logical structure by compartmentalizing it. Fry (1997) concluded that regional boundaries that have been drawn are geographical illusions. Regions are subjective and reveal more about the people who created the term than the people who inhabit the regions. The fact that these boundaries are now accepted globally reveals the power of maps and of Euro-American scholarship, academia and literature. While Europeans initially drew the maps, more recently, Australia and the U.S. have played larger roles in defining the Pacific region.

**Asia-Pacific**

Rather than being a geographical given, the Asia-Pacific region is a mentally constructed region in which Europeans and Americans created arbitrary borders for their own self interest. In 2004, Eric Shibuya of the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, which is part of the U.S. Department of Defense, maintained the concept of ‘Asia-
Pacific’ depends on the U.S. government definition. Shibuya argued we should stop talking about boundaries and instead talk about the unit as a whole, especially regarding drugs and other problems.

The separation of Asia from the Pacific stems more from “European classification than to historical connections and discontinuities” (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000, 43). In 1876, Alfred Russel Wallace, a British naturalist, wrote *The Geographical Distribution of Animals* after he studied the complicated distribution of organisms in Southeast Asia and Australia. Noticing that the animals in the two areas were extremely different – there were many marsupials in Australia yet almost none in Southeast Asia – he drew a biogeographical boundary now known as Wallace’s Line. The line separated the Indonesian islands of Bali and Lombok, which are only eleven miles apart, and Borneo and Sulawesi. The theory was that there was a deep water gap 10,000 years ago that kept people, flora, and fauna from crossing, so they developed differently. This line remains controversial today. With this line, Wallace created a cultural distinction between New Guinea and Sulawesi that denies “real linkages” (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000, 43).

Similarly, boundaries between regions are not fixed but instead “are redrawn using varying criteria for different purposes” (Crocombe 2001, 592, 602, 592). When examining regions, it is essential to ask: who wants regionalism? Crocombe explored the contingent nature of boundaries by asking, “What region for what purpose?” Where does the Pacific end and Asia begin? Why, for instance, are the Philippines considered part of Asia when its islands lie in the Pacific? The dividing line of the regions of Asia and the Pacific was accepted as crossing between Indonesia and the island of New Guinea until
1962 when Indonesia took over West New Guinea (West Papua). At that time, “the boundary for most purposes shifted half-way down the island to the PNG border.”

**South Seas**

According to Hau’ofa (1998, 395), “The earliest general name for the region was the South Seas.” In the minds of many Westerners, the term ‘South Seas’ came to be “virtually synonymous with Paradise.” In 1513, the Spanish explorer Balboa named what we now call the Pacific the ‘South Sea.’ The name changed to the ‘Pacific’ primarily because of the “expanding European world economy and the competition it fueled among the European powers” (Dirlik 1992, 66).

**South Pacific / Pacific Islands Region**

The term ‘South Pacific’ came about during World War II as a military term (Hau‘ofa 1998). After the war, with the publication of Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific* and the production of the play *South Pacific*, the term became used by the general population. The phrase is misleading because it “covers the whole region” including islands north of the equator too. As countries in the Pacific gained their independence, the term ‘Pacific Islands Region’ started to replace ‘South Pacific.’ Australia and New Zealand were part of the ‘South Pacific’ but were not part of ‘Pacific Islands Region.’ Hau’ofa viewed this as a sign that Pacific Islands were becoming less important to the West as the cold war ended and as a sign that Australia and New Zealand were pursuing more links with Asia. Hau’ofa (1998, 396) wryly wondered what term the dominant powers would use next to describe the area, concluding, “As the Pacific Islands Region
we are no longer as needed by others as we once were; we are increasingly told to shape up or else.”

**Asia-Pacific Region, APEC, and the Pacific Rim**

Two newer terms for the region include the Asia-Pacific Region and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), both of which marginalize Pacific Islanders (Hau‘ofa 1998, 397). The United Nations and other international organizations use the term Asia-Pacific Region, which groups together the huge population of Asia and the, in comparison, miniscule population of the Pacific. APEC, on the other hand, includes countries of the Pacific Rim but leaves out all Pacific Island countries. “Thus in the United Nations’ Asia-Pacific Region we are an appendage (or perhaps the appendix) of Asia, and in APEC we do not exist. It should now be evident why our region is characterized as the ‘hole in the doughnut,’ an empty space.” Jolly (2007) illustrated how the term ‘Pacific Rim’ conveys not just a hole but also a lack. Since hegemony rests on binary constructions of difference, in this case the Rim becomes the dominant part of the binary while the area inside the Rim become the subordinate to the Rim. Hau‘ofa (1994, 158) argued Oceania is not the hole in the doughnut. The ocean provides stability for our global climate, a “significant proportion of the world’s protein requirements,” and marine and mineral resources.

**Australasia**

The terms *Australasie* and *Polynésie* were created by French scholar Charles de Brosses in the mid-eighteenth century to denote them as two of three geographic divisions (*Magellanie* was the third) he set forth in “this unknown southern world”
The term *Australasie* derived from the Latin word *australis*, which meant “southern” (Douglas 2008a) and encompassed everything “to the south of Asia” (Ryan 2002, 172). Although de Brosses never ventured beyond France and Italy, his book had an enormous influence on the way “late-18th-century Occidentals interpreted and represented the sea, land and humancapes of that extension of the Orient that today is most often reconstituted as ‘Oceania’” (Ryan 2002, 159). De Brosses incorporated into these divisions his understanding that different races had fixed traits and could be arranged in a hierarchy ranked on degrees of intelligence and civilization.

**Figure 2.1. Map of the Pacific** (Carte Générale qui représente La Mer Pacifique et principalement Le Monde Austral).

![Map of the Pacific](image)

Source: De Vaugondy, Robert. 1756.

In 1827, Bory de Saint-Vincent, a French biologist and soldier, divided humans into fifteen different “species.” The eighth species Bory created was named “Australasian,” which was mainly composed of Australian Aborigines. Bory described
Australasians as “the most brutish of Men” who had “the most deplorable facial resemblance” to baboons. These men were “totally foreign to the social state” (quoted in Douglas 2008a, 9).

**Figure 2.2. Map of Australasia.** Detail from Map of Oceanica Exhibiting Its Various Divisions, Island Groups &c. 73.

![Map of Australasia](image)

Source: Mitchell, Samuel Augustus. 1860.

According to Denoon (2003), in the nineteenth century, “Australasia was a political and cultural reality, expressing the shared interests of British colonists and governors, relying on the Royal Navy for security, London for capital, Westminster for
legitimacy and Christianity for salvation.” Once the founders of the federation of Australia chose its name, “Australasia lost its bearings. It has largely been suppressed in the public memory of the societies that formed it. Meanwhile Oceania has shrunk until Australia and New Zealand are outside it. While Australasia became increasingly British, arid and historical, Oceania became increasingly wet, ethnographic and French.”

Australasia was used infrequently. The term “refers to Australia and the islands of the Southwest Pacific... (and) implies that the islands are in Australia’s orbit. Not infrequently, however, Australians refer to the region as their ‘backyard,’ the sort of area that has to be guarded against intrusions from behind” (Hau‘ofa 1998, 395).

**Oceania**

Douglas (2008a, 12) emphasized the ethical, historical, and political need to deconstruct the term ‘Oceania’ to “expose its old racial implications,” to unsettle the taken for granted divisions of “national and ethnic” borders that Pacific Islanders inherited from their colonizers, and to recognize the widespread linkages and interactions throughout the region before colonial borders made such movement impossible. Like ‘Australasia,’ the meaning of ‘Oceania’ as a region has changed dramatically over time. From its first use, “Océanie was internally racialized, with skin color and physical organization the key differentiae in the elaboration of region-wide racial taxonomies” (Douglas 2008a, 8).

The French dominated the “early anthropology of Oceania. In 1756, de Brosses first used the word Polynésie, from the Greek word polloi, meaning “many,” as “an umbrella label for the ‘multiplicity of islands in the Pacific Ocean generally,” French
geographers Conrad Malte-Brun and Edme Mentelle created the name *Océanique*, or Oceanica, in 1804 to refer to the “fifth part of the world usually grouped under the generic name of *Terres australes*,” or “southern lands.” They kept de Brosses’s word *Polynésie* but “contracted it to what would become Polynesia and Micronesia and substituted *Océanique* for the regional whole” (Douglas 2008a, 6). British and American geographers kept *Polynesia* as a general term for the islands in the Pacific for the rest of the century. These geographers also used the term Oceanica longer than the French did.

French cartographer Adrien-Hubert Brué changed the term *Océanique* to *Océanie*, or “Oceania,” but the term was not used widely until the navigator Jules-Sebastien-Cesar Dumont d’Urville used it in 1832. Soon after, the French Navy formally adopted the term. The map below shows the first French use of *Océanie*.

**Figure 2.3. Océanie ou cinquième partie du Monde** (Oceania or fifth part of the world).

Source: Brue, Adrien-Hubert. 1814.
The word “Oceanica” first appeared in English in the 1820s (Douglas 2008a). Two decades later, two anthropologists - American Horatio Hale and Britain’s James Cowles Prichard - popularized its use in English. Hale (1846) defined Oceanica as “between the coasts of Asia and America.” Prichard (1947) described Oceanica as “all the insulated lands that have been discovered in the Austral Seas,” which stretched so far it included Madagascar. The map below shows early American use of the term.

**Figure 2.4. Map of Oceanica.**

[Image of Map of Oceanica]

Source: Mitchell, Samuel Augustus. 1839.

Although Oceania was a common term in the early 20th century, its usage by the British decreased over time. Some Pacific Islanders have alleged the decline in usage was deliberate. Hau’ofa (1994, 32) argued, “Hardly any Anglophone economist, consultancy expert, government planner, or development banker in the region uses the term ‘Oceania,’
perhaps because it sounds grand and somewhat romantic and may denote something so vast that it would compel them to a drastic review of their perspectives and policies.” At present, the United Nations defines Oceania as Australia, New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (UN Statistics Division 2009).

Promoting Regionalism from Within the Pacific

Hau’ofa (1998, 397) pointed out some subordinating features of regionalism in the Pacific. Other areas that had been colonized, including the Middle East and Africa, used regionalism as a tool of resistance against larger powers in an effort to gain independence. In the Pacific, however, “regionalism first emerged as a creation for colonialism to preempt the rise of revolutionary or even nonrevolutionary independence movements. This is the root of much of the problem of regionalism in the Pacific. We have not been able to define our world and ourselves without direct and often heavy external influences.”

Yet, as Pacific Island States were becoming independent, several leaders sought to create a regionalism from within based on commonalities among Pacific Islanders. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the first Prime Minister of Fiji, created the name ‘The Pacific Way’ in the early 1970s “to promote a Pacific-wide identity” (Crocombe 2001). The South Pacific Forum was created in 1971 as “the region’s premier political and economic policy organization.” The Forum’s name changed to the Pacific Islands Forum in 2000. Also in the 1970s, Bernard Narokobi from Papua New Guinea espoused ‘The Melanesian Way,’ which emphasized “Melanesian identity and solidarity” as well as cooperation between Melanesian countries without ignoring the tremendous diversity that exists there.
In 1987, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea created the Melanesian Spearhead Group to strengthen cultural, economic, and political relations among the Melanesian states. Scholars including Wendt and Hau’ofa proposed the idea of ‘Oceania’ for several decades. In “The Ocean in Us,” Hau’ofa (1998) stated his preference for the term ‘Oceania’ because it “refers to a world of people connected to each other.” He declared, “Our roots, our origins, are embedded in the sea.” Jolly (2007) argued when seen this way, “the relation between Islanders is seen as more independent of their relation to white settlers or Europeans.”

From an islander’s perspective, Oceania is not defined by what it lacks. Oceania is only dependent if viewed through the lens of modernity and development. Hau’ofa (1987) maintained that it is not because Pacific Islands “lack the necessary resources to be self-reliant” but rather that “they cannot be self-reliant because they are in an economy that will not allow them to be; they are too much part of the overall regional strategic alignment for the protection of that economy to be allowed any real measure of independence.”

Fry (2004, 5) challenged the idea of regional community by asking, “Who belongs to the community? And who can speak for it and determine its practices?... Who controls the idea of Oceania?” Fry (2006) also investigated ‘whose Oceania?’ as he explored the “debate about the self-determination of Pacific societies… about hegemonic regionalism” especially Australia, “in defining what the Pacific should stand for as an idea… (and) debate among Pacific Islanders about who represents the ‘self’ in regional self-determination.”
In addition to questions about Australia determining Pacific identities, an important question for Pacific Islanders might be whether or not it is possible to use terms that were created by colonizers in attempts for liberation. Or to paraphrase Audre Lorde, is it possible to use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house? Can the term Melanesia, for instance, a word embedded with racist assumptions, be used to promote pride and unity from within? Also problematic with the above attempts at identity is that they are based on the framework of nation-states, a framework designed to help facilitate capitalism and globalization. There is an “intimate relationship between the market and the imagined community of the nation” (White 1997, 20).

While post-independence regionalism in the Pacific stemmed from political solidarity of peoples’ movements and from intergovernmental cooperation, the promotion of regionalism in the Pacific is now part of a neoliberal project because it focuses on the integration of markets, which serves external interests more than the interests of Islanders. “New Pacific Regionalism departs substantially from the autonomous, self-determining regionalism of earlier decades and is indeed an ideological cloak for the ongoing program of liberalization…” that began in 1995 (Slatter and Underhill-Sem 2009, 202, 205). The Pacific Plan is “a framework for deepening neoliberal reform and trade liberalization in the region.” This new regionalism threatens Pacific Islanders’ self-determination by increasing economic insecurity and making sustainable development more difficult while doing nothing to address gender inequity.
European Creation of Cultural Areas in Oceania: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia

European scientists and explorers grouped together Pacific Islanders, despite their overwhelming diversity, initially into two categories – Melanesia and Polynesia – in order to “set them apart from both Asia and Aboriginal Australia” (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000, 17). Europeans not only classified peoples they encountered in the Pacific by skin color, they also ascribed inherent traits to these people based on skin color. Reinhold Forster, the naturalist on Captain Cook’s second voyage to the Pacific, was the first to create a systematic classification of peoples of the Pacific. In his book *Observations Made during a Voyage round the World*, first published in 1778, Forster (1996, 228) identified “two great varieties of people in the South Seas; the one more fair, well-limbed, athletic, of a fine size, and kind benevolent temper; the other blacker, the hair just beginning to become crisp, the body more slender and low, and their temper, if possible more brisk, though somewhat mistrustful.” Based on what was known about the fair race – from islands including the Marquesas, Tahiti, Tonga and New Zealand – Forster tried “to identify the second. This was done using skin color, since there was no linguistic unity or obvious shared cultural behavioral traits” (Tcherkézoff 2003, 193). Forster assigned the blacker ones – from New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, and Tanna – the lowest rank in his classification system.

In this way, Forster had created the basis for the distinction between Melanesia and Polynesia. Even though ‘Melanesia’ had not been created, “the ground was prepared to identify in negative terms a category which would be the opposite of the people and lifestyles glimpsed in present-day Polynesia” (Tcherkézoff 2003, 193). The fair race was
“amiable,” “beautiful,” and “civilized” while the dark race was “ugly and deformed,” “debased,” “savage,” and “primitive.” Forster’s son Georg, also a naturalist on Cook’s second voyage to the Pacific, wrote in 1786 that based on the structure of the “ugly blacks” (Negroes), “the Negro visibly corresponds far more closely to the monkey genus than the white man” (Douglas 2008b, 105). Bory called the “Negroes” of Oceania _Mélaniens_ - a term that came from the Greek word _melas_ meaning black and specifically referred to the color of the islanders’ skin - and said they were cannibals who enjoyed war (Douglas 2008a).

Dumont d’Urville set the boundaries of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia “as they have been understood in modern anthropology, geography, and related disciplines” in 1832 (Thomas 1989, 30, 170, 169). Melanesians were “much closer to a barbaric state than the Polynesians and the Micronesians.” Dumont d’Urville took Bory’s term _Mélanien_ and created the term ‘Melanesian’ to name the black race of Oceania. Dumont d’Urville described Melanesians as “degraded and wretched.” “They have no governing bodies, no laws, and no formal religious practices. All their institutions seem to be in their infancy. Their aptitudes and their intelligence are also generally largely inferior to those of the copper-skinned race.” Their leaders were tyrannical.

Even before Dumont d’Urville divided the people of Oceania into two different races, “the ‘black’ races” had already been “labeled in the most disparaging terms” (Tcherkézoff 2003, 195). A recurrent theme was that black people were incapable of governing themselves. Dumont d’Urville reestablished “the conjectural narrative of ancient racial migration and displacement (and) reworked it as modern history and
colonial necessity: ‘organic differences’ in the ‘intellectual faculties’ of races determined a ‘law of nature’ that the black ‘must obey’ the others or ‘disappear’ while the white ‘must dominate’” (Douglas 2008b, 124).

Jean-René Constant Quoy, a French naturalist who traveled with Dumont d’Urville through the western Pacific from 1826 until 1829, established a causal relationship “between the physical and the moral by attributing intellect and morality to biology.” Since Polynesians were friendly and welcoming, Quoy argued they would take “great strides towards civilization” while Melanesians, who refused “all contact,” would stagnate (quoted in Douglas 2008b). Prichard concurred that the black races in Oceanica were not only very different from but also “very inferior to the Malayo-Polynesians” (Douglas 2008b, 132).

According to Mitchell’s 1859 American map below, “Oceanica or Oceana… is usually represented as on the map in three great divisions, viz. *Malaysia, Australasia*, and *Polynesia*. Another division into five sections is now adopted by some geographers, viz, *Malaysia, Australia, Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia.*” In all of these categories, the only time that race is mentioned is for Melanesia, which is “peopled by dark skinned races with woolly or frizzled hair.” Mitchell did not mention the color of the inhabitants for any other area on the map.
In the 1920 book *British Possessions in Oceania*, the British based classifications of Melanesia and Polynesia on evolutionary progress rather than on biology. Tongans of Polynesia were “a highly advanced native race who have accepted Christianity” while Solomon Islanders of Melanesia were “naked savages scarcely beyond the head-hunting stage of development” and were “warlike, addicted to head-hunting and cannibalism” (9).

Similarly, in late 1920s, Gil Platten, an Australian missionary working in Papua New Guinea, referred to the people of New Ireland Province as “child races” (Clay 2005, 247). These essentialist representations attributing intellect and morality to biology
persisted. According to a 1908 issue of *National Geographic*, Fiji was the dividing line between Melanesia and Polynesia:

East of Fiji, life is one long, lotus-eating dream, stirred only by occasional parties of pleasure, feasting, love-making, dancing, and a very little gardening work. Music is the soul of the people, beauty of face and movement is more the rule than the exception, and friendliness to strangers is carried almost to excess. Westward of the Fijis lie the dark, wicked, cannibal groups of the Solomons, Banks, and New Hebrides, where life is more like a nightmare than a dream; murder stalks openly in broad daylight, people are nearer to monkeys than human beings in aspect, and music and dancing are little practiced and in the rudest possible state. (Grimshaw 1908, 2).

Just as delineations of Pacific and Asian regions changed over the years, so have the markers of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. The following maps illustrate the shifting nature of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia over the past couple of centuries. The delineations have also shifted depending on who was drawing the map and for what purpose.

**Figure 2.6. Map of Australasia, Micronesia, Parquasie, Polynesia.**

Source: De Rienzi, Domeny. 1831.
Figure 2.7. Map of Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia.

Source: Dumont d’Urville. 1832.

Figure 2.8. Map of Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia.

Source: Buck, Peter (Te Rangihiroa). 1938.
Figure 2.9. Map of Culture Areas of the Pacific.


Figure 2.10. Map of Polynesia.

Source: Denoon, Donald, and Philippa Mein-Smith, 2000, 26.
In Reed’s (1974, 2, 3) Map Book of the Pacific Islands, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia were described in simple terms:

There are three very big groups of islands in the Pacific…. The first group is Polynesian… ‘many islands.’ The people of Polynesia have brown skins. They are good sailors. The second group is Melanesian… ‘dark islands.’ The people of the islands of Melanesia have dark-brown skins. Many of them live in the jungle on the high islands. The third group is Micronesia…. ‘small islands.’ The people on the islands of Micronesia have brown skin too, but they aren’t as brown as the Melanesian people.

In the population map below, Reed (1974) emphasized the importance of categorizing by skin color, explaining that the map shows “us how many people live on each island group but they don’t tell us if the people are brown or white.”
Questioning the Cultural Areas of Oceania

When viewed through a critical lens, the culture-area-grid classification of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia is problematic on many levels. It reveals “far more about Euro-American society’s concerns for a neat, manageable, efficient, and logical ordering of the world” than about the people living on the islands (Hanlon 1989, 2). Peoples and islands that were once distinct and self-sustained were re-labeled and reorganized according to foreign interpretation and interest. Since that time, these cultural and political designations have taken on a life of their own for the region’s peoples and have been internalized as a firm part of their vast identities.

The racial taxonomies were not created out of European observations of Pacific Islanders, “but out of philosophical necessity. If, in the European view, ‘we,’ the
Europeans, had the one true religion and the one true civilization in the world, then someone else, somewhere must represent the other extreme – the non-civilized” (Bohannan and Curtin 1988, 7). The words Dumont d’Urville chose to describe Melanesian people and societies – “degraded,” “barbaric,” “infancy,” and “inferior” – serve just this purpose. Racial divisions of Oceania were not innocent and had more to do with an “intention to contribute to racial theories of human variation” (Tcherkézoff 2003, 176, 182). Justifications for western dominance have come, in part, from the dualistic classification system that Europeans created. That was why it was essential for European explorers and scientists to find differences between Melanesians and Polynesians: the “‘dark’ and ‘fair’ peoples in Oceania.”

This self/other binary worked not just for Europeans but also for white Australians. Irving (1999, 111) maintained, “A central, if unconscious, cultural strategy in demonstrating a share in progress involved the comparison between white Australians and ‘backward’ people. This group could not be white, or English-speaking, since the exercise might lead to conclusions unfavorable to the Australians.” It is similar to what the French social philosopher Montesquieu observed in 1748: “It is impossible for us to suppose these creatures to be men, because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christian.”

The term “Melanesia lumps together populations with quite different backgrounds,” including Papuans and Austronesians (Thomas 1997, 134). The people of Melanesia are not of a single culture; rather, “they are the product of long-lasting periods of sporadic migration and isolation that have resulted in the evolution of many differing
cultures” (McCoy 1990, 15). Polynesia, on the other hand, “is better understood as an offshoot or subgroup within Austronesian ‘Melanesia’ rather than a comparable entity” (Thomas 1997, 134). Dividing people of the Pacific into three distinct cultural groups is “no more than the product of a modern exercise in abstraction” (Davidson 1973). This classification is a static view of the region that does not allow for fluid movement and interaction between the three areas. It overlooks tremendous interaction that has taken place among these areas over thousands of years, interactions of trade, ideas, and people.

Interestingly, the National Museum of Australia in Canberra offers contradictory depictions in its exhibit on indigenous Australians, which includes Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. First it describes “complex regional trade networks” that already existed between Cape York, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea when Luis Baez de Torres arrived in 1606. Then, fifty feet away, in the same exhibit, a sign declares, “British colonization shattered 10,000 years of island isolation.”

The Need for a New Spatial Paradigm

The previous paradigm also included a view of the sea as a “uniform void between landfalls” (Denoon 1997, 75), which is contrary to Hau‘ofa’s conception of the sea as a livable, usable space enabling interaction. Hau‘ofa (1994) deconstructed the idea that Melanesia was the most fragmented of the three areas. In fact, “large regions of Melanesia were integrated by trading and cultural exchange systems that were even more complex than those of Polynesia and Micronesia.” The idea that Melanesians spoke so many different languages that they could not (and still cannot) communicate with each

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other is also incorrect. The majority of Melanesians have been multilingual and have created common languages to communicate. Hau'ofa argued, “It was in the interest of imperialism – and is in the interest of neocolonialism – to promote this blatant misconception of Melanesia” (1994, 154).

Scholars and researchers have challenged the notion that people living on islands in the Pacific, pre-‘discovery,’ existed primarily in isolation from people on other islands and from the rest of the world. New evidence has shown that these societies were not isolated, but rather were interactive. It is becoming increasingly clear that “insularity and isolation were partly real, but were exaggerated by eighteenth-century publicists and philosophers” (Denoon 1997, 69). If we accept that people living on the islands were in frequent contact with each other, then we begin to enter a new paradigm, which then entails asking new questions.

Casting these cultural areas in racial terms is not simply something of the past. In 2002, French geographer François Doumenge referred to Melanesia as a “black hole.” He also used “Africanization” to describe what is happening in Melanesia.

Solomon Islander David Gegeo (2001, 502-503) argued for the need to reexamine the culture-area grid:

First, we need to deconstruct and rid ourselves of the three-way division among Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (to list them alphabetically). These labels are colonial impositions that imply we can be reduced to characteristics of our physical spaces as perceived by outsiders. Thus, Melanesian people live on islands that appear, from the surface of the sea at a distance, to be black. Polynesians live on many islands, and Micronesians on tiny islands. The connotations of these labels as they have been applied to us historically are the problem. Generations of Pacific Islanders have learned these labels and taken them at face value, in
a way that divides us against ourselves. Yet we are all peoples with historically ancient cultures. We need to replace these imposed labels with terms that refer to us as human beings with multiple, interrelated, very vibrant cultures. We need to cultivate relationships among Pacific Islanders that emphasize our capacity for integration and cooperation. We need to have a unifying term or set of terms for ourselves as Pacific Islanders, rather than colonial, divisive – and derogatory – terms.

It is easy to get the idea that change happened upon this region, that islanders were victims who ultimately gave in or succumbed to foreign pressure. In many ways, they were victims but they were not passive. Despite the repressive regimes they were living under, they were active participants. Pacific Islanders “occasionally exploited stereotypical images of the ‘native’ or ‘savage’ to their advantage” (Hereniko 1999, 144).

Just as the distinct separation into categories of Asia and the Pacific has resulted in some awkward borders, so has the creation of these three cultural areas created some spaces that are not so easily categorized even if distinctions existed. One has to overlook a lot of diversity to create these pure categories. While Solomon Islands, for instance, is consistently described as Melanesian, the term ignores Polynesian outliers as well as the Polynesian, Micronesian, and Chinese populations that have migrated to the state.

Investigating Nation-States in Oceania

Oceania was not organized into nations prior to the arrival of colonialists. People’s identities and loyalties had been to their specific ethnic, tribal, or language group, their villages or extended family systems and networks. The concept of the nation-state was not relevant but the colonizers sought to organize what was unfamiliar. They created administrative structures that resembled nations in the sense of boundaries. Despite ethnicity or prior association, some loyalties shifted to colonial authority.
Although nation-states in the Pacific have begun to shake off their colonial shackles, Pacific Islanders are left to struggle with current-day issues stemming from their colonial legacies that include the arbitrary borders and place names created by Europeans. Pacific Islanders will continue to be affected by these colonial legacies as long as borders and place names go unexplored by more powerful countries. The argument has been made that if all nation-states are constructed, then the idea that boundaries of nation-states are arbitrary becomes irrelevant. What difference does it make if boundaries in the Pacific are constructed rather than givens? While acknowledging that argument, I contend it remains an important task to examine the boundaries in order to determine the biases inherent in the categorization because foreign involvement in the Pacific continues to reinforce the existing categories. The framework I am using, critical geopolitics, stresses the need to “challenge some aspect of taken-for-granted geopolitical knowledge” (Dalby and O Tuathail 1996, 452) and to expose the subjectivity inherent in geopolitics (Sharp 1996). It is important to recognize the legacies of colonially imposed borders and to facilitate the thinking of alternatives that are not constricted by these colonial legacies. If we continue to describe the Pacific region in the same way, we will also continue the biases which were bestowed by the Euro-American colonial powers many years ago.

**Australia**

The first European settlers arriving in Australia saw themselves as “British people abroad” (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000). Until the early 1800s, “‘Australians’ applied only to Aboriginal Australians; it then moved to describe the colonists, and Aborigines
were eventually excluded” (McCoy 1990, 15). Settlers in Australia erased indigenous identities by “consigning every community” on the continent “to the catch-all category ‘Aborigines’” (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000, 32). At different times, Australia was considered part of Australasia and as part of Melanesia. It was not until enough white people arrived that the European shift occurred from describing the country as an area filled with Australasians and then black people to an area of white Australians.

Nation-building is also nation-destroying. When Australia became a state, Aborigines were not included; in this way, the cartographic violence became institutionalized (Shapiro 1997). Aborigines were not allowed to be citizens of Australia until 1967. The following maps illustrate how Australia was first labeled as part of Melanesia, then Australasia.

**Figure 2.13.  Map of Australia as part of Melanesia.** Detail from “Carte pour l’intelligence du mémoire de M. le capitaine d’Urville sur les îles du grand océan (Océanie).”
Figure 2.14. Map of Australia as part of Australasia. Detail from “Pacific Ocean including Oceanica.”

Source: Mitchell, Samuel Augustus. 1859.

**New Zealand**

What the Maori called ‘Aotearoa,’ the colonial settlers called ‘New Zealand.’ Just as ‘Australian’ initially referred to Aboriginal Australians, so did the term ‘New Zealander’ refer to Maori “before the term was reassigned to the colonists” (McCoy 1990, 15). It was a similar process of cartographic violence becoming institutionalized. For a period of time, New Zealand was considered part of Australasia, rather than Polynesia, as seen in the map below.
Solomon Islands

The Spanish explorer Mendaña gave Solomon Islands its name – after the Biblical King Solomon – when he sailed through in the sixteenth century (Bennett 2002). When he created the three divisions of *Terres Australes* in 1756, De Brosses included Solomon Islands as part of Polynesia (Ryan 2002). It later was designated part of Melanesia.

Prior to the formation of a colonial state, Solomon Islanders had allegiances to a particular *wantok* or village group. In 1893, Solomon Islands was declared a British Protectorate. In terms of biogeography, “Solomon Islands are an extension of New
Guinea” (McCoy 1990, 13). The islands of Bougainville and Buka are part of the
Solomons’ archipelago in terms of geography, yet politically they are part of Papua New
Guinea. More than a century ago, Imperial Germany and Great Britain decided to include
Bougainville with Papua New Guinea (then called German New Guinea). Ogan (1999, 2)
stressed that this “artificial political boundary… constitutes one root of modern
secessionist unrest.” As with most colonial borders created around the world, indigenous
peoples “were not consulted” (Kabutaulaka 1994, 66). Mendaña’s place name remains.
Solomon Islands is a unit of territory that bears many meanings Europeans projected
through their maps. How this place name became today’s nation-state is the question of
the next chapter.
Chapter 3: A Case Study of Solomon Islands – Two Theoretical Lenses and their Consequences

How did Solomon Islands become ‘realized’ as a state? And how did it come to such ‘distress’ as to warrant intervention? To answer these questions, I examine Solomon Islands in terms of place, history, and its legal, political, and economic systems. In this chapter, I tell two separate stories of Solomon Islands. First, I explore Solomon Islands through the lens of conventional geopolitics in order to present a conventional view of Solomon Islands, its history and place in the Pacific, and the Australian-led intervention that began in 2003. Conventional discourse assumes the colonial state and its legacy is the right political form for Solomon Islands. Post-independence, any disorder in Solomon Islands looks like incompetence in managing the state that was left to Solomon Islands. The antidote for disorder is further modernization and legal change. Insiders are faulted for their inability to conform to outsiders’ assumed universals.

In the second part of this chapter, I examine the same topics through the lens of critical geopolitics in order to understand ‘development’ efforts that multiplied the political and economic systems co-present in Solomon Islands. This is to counter the narrative of failed modernization and to illustrate the plurality of institutions providing ‘security’ to Solomon Islanders. Two cases of the political consequences of these multiple systems conclude this chapter.

The critical approach also traces the colonial state form to the present-day State, but looks critically at modernization and Development as arenas in which Solomon Islands political life will necessarily strain. That is, the economy comes more into focus in several dimensions: as a losing battle between state debt and state revenues, as a set of
spatial and social displacements for citizens, and as injustices of the political system by the very fact of its being. The analysis will necessarily delve into ways resource security erodes, and ways in which disorder finally expresses the economic distress. A critical approach sees the political superstructure of the nation-state and outside expectations of it as part of the problem. The economic and political strains in Solomon Islands are made clear.

In order to conduct an historical and contemporary analysis of Solomon Islands, I analyze official government documents from the U.S. – Department of State, CIA – Solomon Islands, Australia, and New Zealand as well as official reports from RAMSI, the Pacific Islands Forum, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and think-tanks such as Heritage Foundation. I also use information from academic journals and manuscripts, newspapers, and radio programs in Australia, the U.S., Solomon Islands, the U.K., as well as contemporary travel guides and memoirs. I juxtapose official writings with findings from interviews I conducted with Solomon Islanders.

Conventional Geopolitical Overview of Solomon Islands

Place: An Isolated, Traditional Society in Melanesia

The nation-state of Solomon Islands is comprised of six major islands and over 900 smaller ones that lie in the southwestern Pacific Ocean 1,000 miles northeast of Australia between Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.
Solomon Islands is part of Melanesia, a cultural area of the Pacific that contains 85% of the people and 98% of the land area of Pacific Islands (Crocombe 2004). Its islands are small – “microscopic dots” – and isolated (Randall 2002, 6, 142). Pockel (1995) describes Solomon Islands as “nice but terribly backward.” The capital city is Honiara on the island of Guadalcanal.
Solomon Islands has a population of over 595,000 people, one of the largest in the Pacific. The population is 94.5% Melanesian, 4% Polynesian, and 1.2% Micronesian, with some Chinese and Europeans (CIA Factbook 2009). Its main exports are timber, copra, and palm oil. Moore (2004, 68) states that the economy of Solomon Islands “is desperately reliant on a limited range of exports and thus very dependent on world commodity prices.”

The U.S. Department of State’s Background Note on Solomon Islands identifies the most important features of the traditional Melanesian social structure as a subsistence
economy; a strong attachment of people to the land; egalitarian rather than hierarchical relationships; and the importance of kinship bonds. The majority of Solomon Islanders still adhere to the traditional social structure (U.S. Dept. of State 2009). More than ninety percent of Solomon Islanders live in rural areas. Many Solomon Islanders live near the coast and depend on the sea for food supplies, transportation, and leisure activities.

**In Eurocentric Historical Geographies: Discovery**

In 1567, the Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendaña first sighted Santa Isabel Island and explored some of the islands the next year. Mendaña gave Solomon Islands its name – in Spanish, *Islas de Salomón* – after the Biblical King Solomon because Mendaña thought he had found the source of King Solomon’s gold (Bennett 2002). When Spanish explorers attempted to find the islands again in 1595 and 1606, they were unable to. Over the years, cartographers questioned the existence of the islands and it was almost two centuries until the Solomons were correctly mapped after British and French explorers found the islands (Encyclopædia Britannica 2009b).

**Conventional Rationales for Colonialism: Britain Makes Solomon Islands a Protectorate**

Solomon Islands quickly gained a reputation as the most inhospitable place in the Pacific. In Wood’s 1870 monograph, *Uncivilized Races of Men in All Countries of the World: being a comprehensive account of their manners and customs, and their physical, social, mental, moral and religious characteristics*, he warned:

The natives of the Solomon Islands are so fierce and treacherous, that comparatively little has as yet been learned about them. They have displayed a great genius for lulling voyagers into a fancied security and then murdering and
eating them; so that the Spaniards lost nothing by Mendaña’s inability to find the islands again (968).

A century later, Paul Theroux (1992) had a similar reaction as he described Honiara in *Happy Isles of Oceania: Paddling the Pacific*:

My first impression was of a place so ramshackle, so poor, so scary, so unexpectedly filthy, that I began to understand the theory behind culture shock - something I had never truly experienced in its paralyzing and malignant form... And I also wrote (in my notebook), *Why should anyone come here?*

The Solomon Islanders in Honiara were among the scariest-looking people I had ever seen in my life—wild hair, huge feet, ripped and ragged clothes, tattoos on their foreheads, ornamental scars all over their faces, wearing broken sunglasses... Even the trees were shabby (155).

Solomon Islands was declared a British Protectorate in 1893, partially as a response to the French expansion into nearby New Hebrides and the Germans into New Guinea. As Germany made advances in the southwest Pacific, Australians asked the British for help. The British government agreed. Solomon Islanders were “of even less strategic value to Britain (than Papua) but valuable to Queensland as a labor reserve” (Denoon and Mein-Smith 2000, 188). According to the U.S. Department of State’s (2009) “Background Note” on Solomon Islands, it was “the evils of the labor trade (that) prompted the United Kingdom to declare a protectorate over the southern Solomons in 1893.” Similarly, the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (2009b) states the British established a protectorate over Solomon Islands “partly in response to abuses associated with labor recruitment and partly to regulate contacts between islanders and European settlers, but mainly to forestall a threat of annexation by France.” In 1897, Britain established the capital of Solomon Islands on the island of Tulagi in the Central Province because Tulagi
had a big protected bay (Sanga interview, Aug. 22, 2004). For the next few years, Great Britain exchanged control of southwestern Pacific islands with Germany, gaining Choiseul and Isabel Islands by 1900.

The British government’s primary goals in Solomon Islands were to protect Solomon Islanders and their land from exploitation and to protect them from themselves, especially to stop headhunting and cannibalism (Honan and Harcombe 1997). Charles Woodford became the first resident commissioner of the Solomons and served from 1896 to 1915. Woodford “was an enlightened chap – he never carried a gun – and is credited with planting the seeds of organized government in the Solomons” (Travelspedia 2007).

Randall (2002, 142) also praised Woodford and his accomplishments. In the two decades Woodford was in control,

with only a couple of dozen men to help him, he had been responsible for 100,000 islanders, most of whom were enthusiastic headhunters… In all that time, he had remained resolutely unarmed, attempting instead to convince the warlike islanders of the benefits of peace. He had installed a system of government and justice that was still in operation today.

Reed’s 1974 *Map Book of the Pacific Islands* highlighted the benefits and paternal nature of British colonialism: “Before the white man came the Melanesians on the island (of Guadalcanal) were headhunters…. Britain looks after the Solomon Islands.” Randall, an Englishman, also viewed Britain’s colonial experience in the Solomons positively: “The paternalism of the Empire, despite its clear failings, had at least put in place some legal and political infrastructure that might go some way to protecting them from other more unscrupulous foreign intervention” (Randall 2002, 23, 74).
Conventional Facts about WWII and its Effects: Bloody Battles and a New Capital in Honiara

World War II brought dramatic changes to Solomon Islands. In May 1942, Japanese forces occupied the islands. The battle in Solomon Islands between the Japanese and the Allies lasted six months, from August 1942 until February 1943, and was fought on land, in the air, and in the sea. Over 25,000 Japanese army and navy personnel and 1,769 Allied soldiers were killed on the ground. Including sea and air fatalities, the Imperial forces lost 30,343 soldiers while Allied forces lost 7,100 soldiers. Most of the Allied soldiers were American Marines.

The battle of Guadalcanal was one of the bloodiest battles of World War II. The battle is also considered the turning point of the war because it stopped the Japanese penetration in the southern Pacific and allowed Allied forces to take an offensive strategic position while the Japanese were, for the first time in the war, forced to take a defensive position (Frank 1990). After World War II, the British moved the capital from the island of Tulagi, which had been badly damaged in the war, to Honiara on Guadalcanal. This way, the British could take advantage of Henderson Air Field and other infrastructure built by Americans.
Figure 3.3. Map of Guadalcanal.


Figure 3.4. Map of Honiara and Northern Guadalcanal.

Conventional Views of Independence: Britain Grants Solomon Islands its Freedom

After World War II, a pro-American, political movement known as Ma’asina (brotherhood) Rule began on Malaita in an attempt to end British rule (Bennett 1987). The British response was brutal and overwhelming. By the time the last U.S. troops left Solomon Islands in 1950, the movement had been quashed. “Britain saw the post-colonial writing on the wall, however, and introduced local government, regional assemblies and, finally, an elected governing council in 1970” (Travelpedia 2007). The British government granted Solomon Islands its independence on July 7, 1978. Peter Kenilorea was elected the country’s first Prime Minister.

Prior to World War II, the British divided Solomon Islands into twelve administrative districts: Choiseul, Eastern Solomons, Gizo, Guadalcanal, Lord Howe, Malaita, Nggela and Savo, Rennell and Bellona Islands, Santa Cruz, Shortlands, Sikaiana (Stewart), and Ysabel and Cape Marsh (Encyclopædia Britannica World Atlas 1951). After the war, the British restructured Solomon Islands into four districts: Central, Eastern, Western, and Malaita. These were the administrative divisions Solomon Islands started with at independence. The Provincial Government Act 1981 created seven provinces by dividing two of the districts: Central District was divided into Central, Guadalcanal, and Isabel provinces; Eastern District was divided into Makira and Temotu provinces; Western and Malaita remained provinces (Moore 2004).
In 1983, Honiara became the Capital Territory while also remaining capital of Guadalcanal. In 1995, Choiseul split from Western province, and Rennell and Bellona split from Central province, making the nine provinces of today (Solomon Islands Mission to the UN).
Conventional Assumptions on the Need for Development: Progressing beyond Subsistence Agriculture

Although the Solomon Islands government is the “largest provider of formal wage employment,” the family household is the basic economic unit. Most families live off of subsistence agriculture grown on communally-owned land. Approximately 87% of land in Solomon Islands is communally-owned. The state owns 9% and the rest of the land is owned by individuals (Moore 2004, 90).

Customary land is owned by families or villages and is inherited through either the mother or the father depending on local custom (U.S. Dept. of State 2009). According to the Solomon Islands Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Hon. Selwyn Riumana, this land “remains outside the formal legal system and is recognized as one of the main constraints” of development (Solomon Times Aug. 25, 2008). The Heritage Foundation’s
2009 Index of Economic Freedom states, “Strengthening property rights is fundamental to improving development prospects” in Solomon Islands. Australian economist Helen Hughes (July 12, 2003) describes communal land ownership as “the crux of the Solomons’ troubles” because it “has become a key obstacle to the country’s development.”

Customary land law is linked to lack of development and corruption. Because land is held in customary law in most Pacific Island States, it has hindered the state’s ability to enforce policies, deliver services, and to function in general (Guy Powles 2003). Friedman (1999, 464) insists it is essential to change customary land systems because “markets function and flourish only when property rights are secure and can be enforced, which, in turn, requires a political framework protected and backed by military power.”

Lack of development is seen in the UNDP’s 2009 Human Development Index (HDI) rankings, Solomon Islands ranks 135 out of 182 countries. Created by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), HDI is designed to measure development in a country. Beginning with the first Human Development Report published in 1990, HDI ranks countries on a scale from zero to one, zero indicating the lowest level of development and one indicating the highest. In this way, countries can be compared and contrasted. The UNDP’s History of the Human Development Report states, “The goals of development are choices and freedoms.” HDI is measured by life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, gross school enrollments, and “a decent standard of living,” which is measured by “GDP per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollar terms” (Puri
Hughes (2003a, 11) argues, “Most of the Pacific has been stalled at the communal stage of development.”

Corruption is seen as the final outcome. According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index for 2004, Solomon Islands ranked poorly in terms of transparency; corruption there frequently takes the forms of nepotism, bribery, payoffs, and kickbacks (Roughan 2004b). Marks (2003) maintained, “The Solomons is a striking example of a Pacific paradise gone sour.” In 2009, the Heritage Foundation (2009) ranked Solomon Islands 163rd in the world for its level of economic freedom, which is “well below average.” Its regional rank is 37th out of 41 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

**Conventional Problems of a Post-Colonial Nation-State: Political Instability in Solomon Islands**

Politics is a parallel tale. Solomon Islands has a Westminster-style parliamentary democracy although as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, the country is technically ruled by Queen Elizabeth II, who appoints a Governor General as her proxy. The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade (2009) maintains party structures in the Solomons “are very weak, with members moving relatively easily between parties.” The U.S. Department of State (2009) reports governments in Solomon Islands “are characterized by weak political parties and highly unstable parliamentary coalitions. They are subject to frequent votes of no confidence, and government leadership changes frequently as a result. Cabinet changes are common.” Since its creation as a nation-state, Solomon Islands has struggled with separatist movements and with provinces wanting more autonomy (New Zealand MFAT 2004). Additionally, the government has been rife
with corruption since independence. In 1981, after Kenilorea’s government collapsed, Solomon Mamaloni became Prime Minister. Mamaloni, who served as Prime Minister three times, was involved in several corruption scandals, mainly involving logging.

**Figure 3.8. Prime Ministers of Solomon Islands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Prime Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978 (July)</td>
<td>Peter Kenilorea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 (August)</td>
<td>Peter Kenilorea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981 (September)</td>
<td>Solomon Mamaloni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 (October)</td>
<td>Peter Kenilorea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986 (December)</td>
<td>Ezekiel Alebua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 (March)</td>
<td>Solomon Mamaloni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 (June)</td>
<td>Francis Billy Hilly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 (November)</td>
<td>Solomon Mamaloni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 (June)</td>
<td>Bartholomew Ulafa’alu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 (June)</td>
<td>Manasseh Sogavare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 (December)</td>
<td>Allan Kemakeza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 (April)</td>
<td>Synder Rini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 (May)</td>
<td>Manasseh Sogavare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 (December)</td>
<td>Derek Sikua</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Moore 2008b.

**A Conventional View of Troubles: Ethnic Conflict Erupts**

The conventional frame on resulting social struggles has been ethnic conflict. In late 1998, small-scale ethnic violence erupted on Guadalcanal between Malaitans, some of whom had moved to Guadalcanal several generations ago to work on plantations, and Gwales, people indigenous to Guadalcanal. Gwales who formed the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) forced as many as 20,000 Malaitans to leave their homes on Guadalcanal (Miller 1999; ABC Radio Australia Jan. 31, 2000; Amnesty International Jan. 2000). In response, Malaitans formed the Malaitan Eagle Force (MEF) and staged a

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coup in June 2000 (Tuhanuku April 26, 2001). Malaitans are known throughout Solomon Islands as the most aggressive group while people from Guadalcanal are “historically a far more passive people” (Dorney 1999).

**Figure 3.9. Map of Guadalcanal and Malaita islands.**


**Conventional Views of the RAMSI Intervention**

Ethnic fighting continued for years until Australia spearheaded an intervention in July 2003 in response to a request by then-Prime Minister Allan Kemakeza. By this time, Solomon Islands was a failed state that could not control its borders and could not perform basic functions of governance, education, and finance. In the post-9/11 world, Australian Prime Minister John Howard viewed this failed state only 1,000 miles away as a threat to Australian security. Under the name RAMSI, an acronym for Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, Australia and fourteen other Pacific nations have sought to help the Solomon Islands government “restore law and order, strengthen government institutions, reduce corruption and reinvigorate the economy” (“About RAMSI” www.ramsi.org/node/5). The leaders of RAMSI invoked the Biketawa
Declaration, a regional security framework signed by Pacific Island Forum leaders in October 2000 in Kiribati.

The Pacific Islands Forum, an organization initially created in August 1971 as the South Pacific Forum, is comprised of “16 independent and self-governing states in the Pacific. According to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Forum is “the region’s premier political and economic policy organization.” The policies of the Forum are based on a neoliberal agenda and its key goals include good governance, security, and economic growth. Its objectives for good governance entail “improved transparency, accountability, equity and efficiency in the management and use of resources in the Pacific.” Neoliberalism is associated with development policy, banking, and open regionalism.

Like the Pacific Islands Forum, RAMSI is also based on neoliberal values as seen in RAMSI’s focus on state-building. The bottom line, according to the neoliberal view, is that good governance makes the market work. It is not the economy that is the necessary structure but rather a certain kind of state that is necessary for the market to work. This conventional narrative contains key linked elements that see political instability and ethnic violence. The prescription for these problems include strengthening property rights, increasing development, and quelling corruption.

**Critical Geopolitical Overview of Solomon Islands**

**Critical Views of Place: an indigenous perspective**

The fact that the most common way to locate Solomon Islands is as a nation-state within the south Pacific illustrates the power of the dominant narrative of ordering the
world into political units. The entity known as Solomon Islands came about from “an imperial perspective that located it on a map of the world” (Howe 2000, 60) and from the creation of a British protectorate over the islands. This process was viewed as neutral but is now seen as an act of imperial power. Scottish historian Neal Ascherson has argued that, although we talk about the ‘forging’ of a nation, almost all nations are forgeries. Most people living in Solomon Islands do not identify themselves with the nation-state. Robertson Szetu, a citizen of Solomon Islands, told me, “When our national soccer team plays, we’re one country.” Otherwise the underlying loyalty is to one’s wantoks first and then, perhaps, to one’s island. Gegeo (2001, 503), a Solomon Islander from the Kwara’ae district of Malaita, argues for the need to deconstruct colonial histories and experiences. This “deconstruction processes must be undertaken through the lenses of our own Pacific Islander ways of knowing—in other words, our own epistemologies.” Gegeo explains that for the Kwara’ae, ‘place’ means several things at once: ‘place’ refers to physical location, genealogy, having land, being fluent in the Kwara’ae language, having kin obligations, and sharing Kwara’ae epistemology and ontology. In general, Solomon Islanders’ sense of place is more holistic than a western sense of place. When a person from Malaita lives in Honiara, s/he likely would not describe the situation in terms of dualities such as ‘living in two worlds,’ but would view it as “contrasting aspects of a single world, inextricably linked” (Burt 1997, 8).

Popular representations of Solomon Islands since the 19th century have included dual images of paradise and savagery – a place that exists in “the furthest reaches of the back end of outer nowhere” (Randall 2002, 7) where savage cannibals live in “deadly
jungles” (Crichton 2004). The country has been described as remote, isolated, small islands lying in “the arse end of nowhere” (McCoy 1990, 16; Randall 2002, 7). These depictions of the Solomons as periphery rest on the assumption that the center of the world is far away, most likely the United Kingdom or the United States – the homes of Empire. Solomon Islands is only small, isolated, and dependent if viewed through a western lens of modernity and development.

**A Critical View of History: 40,000 Years of Human Settlement**

Solomon Islands was first settled over 40,000 years ago. Within the Solomons, at least 80 languages are spoken including two major Austronesian and Papuan languages. Papuan-speaking people first settled in the Solomons around 40,000 years ago. Then Austronesian-speaking people arrived approximately 5,000 years ago. Evidence points to the fact that Solomon Islands was one of the earliest places where modern humans settled (Carey 1999).

Although some scholars begin the history of Solomon Islands with the first contact with Western explorers, there is a rich history to the islands long before this contact. Because the history has been kept alive through oral rather than written means, it has been devalued and called ‘prehistory.’ As Kawaharada (2005, 141) explains, “It wasn’t as if the people of the Pacific had been sitting on their asses doing nothing before Europeans arrived in sailing ships, with pens and paper in hand.”

**Critical Historical Geography of Becoming a British Colony: Multiple Dislocations**

Colonialism is different in different places and times, thus we need to localize and historicize study of it (Thomas 1994). As a colonial power, Britain assumed that because
the average white man “will always be (intellectually) supreme… the so-called ‘white man’s burden’ is true, for the negroes must ever be under the domination of the white races” (Young 1922, 39). In Solomon Islands, “British policy… responded to native populations on the basis of social evolutionary criteria” (Thomas 1994, 109).

By the end of the 19th century, Solomon Islands had gained “the reputation as the most inhospitable place in the Pacific” (Treloar and Hall, 253). What is often left out of the ‘inhospitable’ narrative is the history of blackbirding. In the mid-1800s, whaling ships began to stop in the Solomons. Soon after, in the 1860s, the forced-labor trade known as blackbirding began and had a huge impact on populations that were raided for their young men. The practice of blackbirding resulted not only in Solomon Islanders and others being kidnapped to work on overseas plantations but also in the introduction of new diseases into the population. According to Solomon Islander Lloyd Maepeza Gina (2003), many of the kidnapped islanders were forced to work on sugar plantations in Queensland and Fiji. Most of the laborers who were kidnapped from the Solomons came from Malaita and Guadalacanal. This practice continued into the 1900s. When missionaries first came to the Solomons, “they made little progress” because blackbirding had “led to a series of reprisals and massacres” (U.S. Dept. of State 2009). Blackbirding stemmed in part from Australian and Anglo-American beliefs across the Pacific that white people were not meant to work on plantations in tropical environments.

In addition to the brutality of blackbirding, white traders of sandalwood and whaling products terrorized the natives shamelessly, and when these, naturally enough, often resorted to cruel modes of defense, they retaliated with deeds still more frightful,
and the bad reputation they themselves made for the natives served them as a welcome excuse for a system of extermination… Their methods were as various as they were cruel, murder was a daily occurrence, and, of course, the recruiters were hated by the natives, who attacked and killed them whenever they got a chance (Speiser 1913).

Given their history, it makes sense that natives in the Solomons developed a suspicion of white people coming to their islands.

The country’s boundaries are arbitrary and colonial in nature. As a political unit, Solomon Islands was created through a series of colonial accidents as the British took a few islands and added more little by little. More than a century ago, Imperial Germany and Great Britain annexed islands in the southwestern Pacific “to protect their own interests” (Encyclopædia Britannica 2009b). In 1884, Germany annexed northeast New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago. In response, Queensland annexed southeast New Guinea. In 1886, Germany gained control of the islands of Bougainville and Buka (Oliver 1991, 28), which lie in the Solomon Islands archipelago and are “geographically, culturally, and linguistically part of the Solomon Islands chain” (Regan 2003a, 134). Maps below from 1840 and 1859 show Bougainville and Buka (spelled ‘Bouka’ below) as part of ‘Salomon Islands.’
Figure 3.10. Map of Solomon Islands including Bougainville and Bouka. Detail from “Polynesia or islands in the Pacific Ocean.”

Source: Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. 1840.

Figure 3.11. Map of Solomons Archipelago including Bougainville. Detail from “Pacific Ocean including Oceanica.” 1859.

Source: Mitchell, Samuel Augustus. 1859.
The British government was hesitant to take control over Solomon Islands because it did not want to have to finance a new dependent territory. Britain reluctantly established a protectorate over some islands in the southern Solomons in 1893 – “on the proviso that they would pay for their own administration” – to prevent Germany or France from gaining control of it and to protect the Australian colonies, which were seen as vulnerable (Bennett 1987, 103). The annexation was not so much to stop “the evils of the labor trade,” as the U.S. Department of State’s “Background Note” on the Solomons contends.

In 1899, Britain gained control of the islands of Choiseul and Santa Isabel through a treaty with Germany, and the entire group became known as the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. When Britain and Germany were making up the borders, they forgot about the islands that became part of Temotu Province for five years. When they were reminded of these islands, neither Britain nor Germany wanted them. Finally Britain reluctantly agreed to take them as part of the Protectorate (Woods interview, Sept. 12, 2004).

When the colonial state of Papua New Guinea was created, Bougainville and Buka were included. Throughout this entire process, Kabutaulaka (1994) explained, indigenous inhabitants were never consulted. A fifty-year old man raised on Guadalcanal argued that the British and Germans had made a mistake when deciding the boundaries of his country. “Bougainville should be part of the Solomons. The people are similar and some are related from a couple of generations back. Some Solomon Islanders from the Shortland Islands go to the market in Bougainville for the day and come back the same day” (interview, Aug. 2004).
Bougainville is just six miles away from the Solomons’ Alu, or Shortland Island. People from Bougainville were trading with other islanders including Shortland Islanders for centuries before Europeans came to the Pacific (Oliver 1991). Ogan (1999) stressed that this “artificial political boundary… constitutes one root of modern secessionist unrest” in Papua New Guinea. The map below shows Bougainville separated from Shortland Islands by the international line dividing PNG and Solomon Islands.

**Figure 3.12. Map of International Boundary between Shortland Islands and Bougainville.**

![Map of International Boundary between Shortland Islands and Bougainville](image)

Source: Honan, Mark and David Harcombe. 1997, 170.

Even though at first Britain had little interest in these islands except for a strategic denial of German control, the impact on island life during the colonial era was tremendous. The British did not simply extract resources from the Solomons; they made
deliberate changes to the existing social, economic and political systems by introducing Christianity, capitalism, and new kinds of land ownership. Conversion to Christianity was “one of the strongest pressures inherent in European penetration of the (Solomon) islands” (Corris 1973). Randall (2002) argued that British annexation of Solomon Islands was done to create “some legal and political infrastructure that might go some way to protecting them from other more unscrupulous foreign intervention.” This statement rests on the idea that natives needed protection and could not rely on themselves as well as the belief that British rule was less violent or brutal than other forms of colonialism.

In order for Solomon Islands to pay for their own administration by Britain (whether they wanted this administration or not, C. M. Woodford, the first Resident Commissioner, sought ways to raise money. In order to make money in the Solomons, Britain needed to take advantage of land and labor. Woodford viewed the creation of “plantations as the only viable solution” and decided to apply the concept of “waste lands” – a concept “well established in British law, but… foreign to Solomons Islanders” (Bennett 1987, 103, 130).

Large areas of land that were deemed “unoccupied” by the British became alienated from Solomon Islanders and turned over to European planters including the British company Lever Brothers and the Queensland firm Burns, Philp & Company (Bennett 1987). The first step in the alienation of customary land for plantation use occurred in 1896 with the Queen’s Regulation No. 4, which “controlled land by preventing non-natives from acquiring vacant land unless approval was sought from a
colonial administration.” This Regulation allowed approved British subjects to purchase land directly from native owners (Foukona 2007).

On June 8, 1899, Woodford declared, “There has never been any conquest or cession of the British Solomon Islands and the rights of the natives whether chiefs, communities or private individuals remain precisely the same as before the Declaration of the Protectorate.” Then he instituted the Waste Land Regulations of 1900, 1901, and 1904, which gave the British control of “land which is not owned, cultivated or occupied by any native or non-native” (Bennett 1987, 131). “By 1906, Levers Pacific Plantation Ltd was in control of the most fertile land throughout the country” (Naitoro 2000a). But they wanted more. Sir William Lever stated in May 1912, “There are millions of acres of waste land in tropical countries waiting to be developed, and all that is wanted is a little help from the authorities to convert waste tropical possessions into veritable gold mines, producing wealth beyond the dreams of avarice” (Bennett 1987, 125). At the same time, people in Australia were excited about creating plantations in and extracting resources from Solomon Islands. At the beginning of the 20th century, stories ran in Australian newspapers about the potential wealth in copra and rubber, touting “The Wealth of the Solomons” (Bennett 1987).

Economic exploitation was erased through a colonial discourse of difference (Lepore 1999). Randall (2002, 142) praised Woodford and his accomplishments – being “responsible” for Solomon Islanders, trying to convince the warlike headhunters of the “benefits of peace.” The praise seems ironic when Woodford himself was creating laws that led to land alienation and, in general, implementing colonialism, a rather brutal
system in itself. Randall (2002, 142) commended Woodford for installing “a system of
government and justice that was still in operation today,” but does not seem to consider in
whose interest it was to have this western system of government and justice or if this
introduced system of governance might have created problems for the islanders by
ignoring their own systems of governance and justice already in place. Indigenous forms
of justice in Solomon Islands have been primarily restorative in structure while the
western justice system introduced through colonialism is based on retributive justice.

Like Randall (2002), Travelspedia (2007) described Woodford as unarmed and
“enlightened,” and the source of “organized government” in Solomon Islands. Yet, there
were already systems of organized government in the Solomons before Woodford arrived
– again, systems created by the islanders themselves – but these systems were not
familiar to Woodford or were seen as pre-modern. A member of the Western Province
government told me the British used English law as a way to colonize Solomon Islands.
The British colonizers would question ownership in order to separate people from their
traditional system. The western, capitalist concept of private property did not exist in
Solomon Islands before the British arrived; ownership of land was based on tribes and
communities. The implementation of the British court system in Solomon Islands was
problematic for many Solomon Islanders because court decisions about land would
mention an individual, which meant that individual could then make decisions about the
land (interview, Sept. 2004).

Colonialism redefined who and what was considered legitimate political authority.
In most of Melanesia, leaders were known as “Big Men” who gained their power not
through hierarchy and heredity as Polynesian chiefs did but rather through wisdom and ability, specifically the ability to amass and distribute wealth. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1963) described Big Men as leaders who secure influence over their kin and neighbors “by astute economic generosity and management.” Hau‘ofa (1975) criticized Sahlins’ description of Big Men, arguing that Sahlins “denies that traditional Melanesian leaders have any genuine interest in the welfare of their people and insists that their public actions are all motivated purely by selfishness.” Hau‘ofa insisted Sahlins was incorrect and pointed out that Sahlins’ view would not be of much importance except for the fact that Sahlins’ journal article continues to be required reading in Pacific Anthropology classes. Hau‘ofa called Sahlins’ description “an invidious pseudo-evolutionary comparison between the ‘developed’ Polynesian polities and the ‘underdeveloped’ Melanesian ones.” The system of Big Men was fluid and egalitarian; when a Big Man was no longer effective, he would be replaced by another man who could be effective.

In addition to redefining legitimate political authority, in 1921, the British established a head tax in Solomon Islands that brought people into the market economy because they were forced to earn a wage in some way (Bennett 1987, 164). Many people worked on plantations to earn this money. Western values of the nobility of work were forced on the islanders. British politician Joseph Chamberlain stated in 1901, “Under all circumstances the progress of natives toward civilization is only secured when they shall be convinced of the necessity and dignity of labor; and therefore I think that everything we reasonably do to encourage the natives to work is highly desirable.”
Economic activity was concentrated in a few companies focused on operations such as logging and copra production. Coconut oil was used to make soaps and chemicals, especially explosives. Under the British, many Solomon Islanders were forced to become coconut-growing peasants rather than interisland traders (Scales interview, Sept. 28, 2004).

Another impact of colonial rule was that colonial policy focused resources on particular parts of Solomon Islands. People started moving to where the resources were. Today, Solomon Islands still suffers from the legacy of the kind of development projects implemented there. During its colonial period, development was concentrated in just a few companies such as Lever Brothers who had interests in copra and logging. Since then, economic activity in Solomon Islands has been concentrated in a few areas, which have been like magnets attracting people from other islands within in the Solomons.

This displacement of islanders to Guadalcanal would have later consequences. The lack of opportunities to earn money on Malaita meant that Malaitans had to migrate to other provinces within the country to earn money to pay the tax (Sofield 2006). In the late 1990s, people of Guadalcanal resented the large-scale migration of Malaitans to their island because of increased violence as well as the loss of land to squatters and the lack of sensitivity to local customs, traditions, and laws (Liloqula and Aruhe‘eta-Pollard 2000).

After the British capital of Tulagi, which is now in the Central Province, was destroyed in World War II, the British moved to Honiara where Americans had built an infrastructure during the war. Honiara remains the capital city to this day and people from
all over Solomon Islands continue to move to Honiara looking for employment possibilities. Many unemployed people as well as squatters also reside in the area.

Coconut plantations were the backbone of the colonial economy in the Solomons. At independence, copra made up one-quarter of the Solomons’ export earnings. Since the early 1900s, there were numerous coconut plantations on the island of Guadalcanal. In 1971, an oil palm plantation called Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd (SIPL) was created as a partnership between local landowners, the Solomon Islands government, and the British-based Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC). The shares were not equal, however; the CDC held 68 percent of the company while the Solomon Islands government retained 30 percent and local landowners only 2 percent. Many of the workers at SIPL had come from Malaita. Land was used on Guadalcanal for the oil palm plantation and to house over 15,000 employees and their dependents. Thus, “large areas of Guadalcanal’s best agricultural land have been progressively alienated from customary owners, albeit by government-planned acquisition” (Moore 2004, 72-74).

Over time, as some people were alienated from their land and their means to support themselves, they became dependent on outside forces for work. More people were drawn into the market economy to survive. The film “Since the Company Came” (2000) highlighted this process and interviewed older people who had personally experienced these changes. One older woman said, “I never needed money growing up. It’s only since the company came that I saw money.” The company she refers to is the Kalena Timber Company (KTC) from Malaysia. An older man said, “Those who should be benefiting from this logging aren’t benefiting.” Not only were they not receiving much
in the way of monetary reparations, but they also were concerned about deleterious impacts on their natural environment. One woman complained that the logging affected the fish supply when she stated, “We don’t have enough fish now.” This kind of exploitation is now an internal dynamic as much as an external dynamic.

Alasia (1989b, 112, 115) also offered an insider view of the Solomons as he explored how the labor trade has affected Solomon Islanders. Alasia described capitalism as one of the primary pressures on Solomon Islanders. He wrote about a money economy [abundant free food versus “increased costs of food, clothing, and other household goods”] and how his people have acquired “a more intense desire for new things.”

A Critical View of the Origins of Ethnic Myth

During the colonial period, the British favored people from the island of Malaita because they saw them as more progressive and educated. The British chose people from Malaita to do the more skilled jobs, for instance, to be police officers in the colonial government but “did little to develop Malaita itself” (Moore 2004, 74). To this day, people from the island of Malaita make up most of the police force in the country and hold many of the top positions in government. Other Solomon Islanders have viewed people from Malaita as moving into their places, as privileged, and as hogging the resources.

Resentment of Malaitans’ favored status has been complicated by stereotypes that have been perpetuated for many years. In 1927, several years after Britain imposed a head tax, an Australian tax collector named William Bell and thirteen others were killed by the Kwaio tribe on the island of Malaita, an event known as the Gwane’eabe massacre.
A legend was born of the aggressive nature of people from this island. This incident has become an important part of school curriculum in Solomon Islands as well as media portrayals and anthropological writings such as Keesing and Corris’s (1980) *Lightning Meets the West Wind: The Malaita Massacre*. Aggressiveness became seen as “an attribute that is exclusively Malaitan” (Kabutaulaka 2001). This likely played a factor in the national government’s decision, when people from Malaita rioted in 1989, to give them what they wanted rather than risk their wrath.

Many other incidents of violence such as raids and murders committed by other Solomon Islanders, however, have been ignored (Kabutaulaka 1999, 2001). Warriors from New Georgia had, for many years, raided other islands including Choiseul, Santa Isabel, Russell Islands, and Guadalcanal on head-hunting expeditions (Kabutaulaka 2001). In 1845, a French missionary named Bishop Jean-Baptiste Épalle was killed by natives on the island of Isabel (Dunmore 2000). In 1927, the same year that William Bell was killed on Malaita, three police officers on the island of Guadalcanal who were representing the colonial administration were killed by locals (Bennett 2002) but this incident has largely been forgotten. It is not mentioned in any school curricula nor is there a book about it (Kabutaulaka 2001).

The myth of Malaitans being the most aggressive stems from the Bell incident while the myth of Malaitan superiority comes from the Ma’asina Ruru movement that erupted just after World War II to resist colonial rule (Laracy 1983). Both of these myths are historical and anthropological constructions. The problem is that “over the years, some Malaitans came to accept the stereotypes about them as being more aggressive than
other Solomon Islanders and, in turn, act that way – become as aggressive as their stereotype described them.” In the same way, other Solomon Islanders have accepted “the stereotype of being more passive... while suppressing their aggressive nature. This, in a way, legitimizes, or at least makes it seem right for Malaitans to claim dominance in the country” (Kabutaulaka 2001).

The police in the Solomons have also come to accept this myth. When Malaitans demonstrate without a permit, the police quickly acquiesce because they fear the Malaitans might act aggressively. The myth also affects how the government responds to Malaitan demands (Kabutaulaka 1999). Kabutaulaka continued,

In 1989, for example, a year after the Guadalcanal people went on demonstration, the people of Malaita went on an illegal rampage of Honiara and demanded compensation for something in which the alleged perpetrators were never caught or convicted for in a court of law. The government at that time paid a compensation totaling SBD$200,000 to the Malaita Province which represented a group of people who had earlier assembled unlawfully, destroyed properties, committed theft and whole lot of other crimes. Recently, when the Trade Union asks for the permit to demonstrate, the police refuses. Yet when Malaitans demonstrated without a permit and stoned the Guadalcanal Provincial Office, the police watches.

Ethnicity thus bears an explanatory burden that is rooted in both historical acts and mythical stories.

A Critical View of WWII and its Effects: Uprisings and Mass Migration to Honiara

Three effects of war beyond the Solomon Islands liberation narrative include losing life and property, being treated as equals by black American servicemen, and having an infrastructure built in Honiara. World War II was particularly devastating for Solomon Islands as Americans and Japanese soldiers fought fierce battles on Guadalcanal and many other islands throughout the Solomons. One older man from Guadalcanal told
me that during World War II, the Japanese who came to the islands “were quite cruel.” To
make Solomon Islanders work harder, they would whip them (interview, Aug. 22, 2004).

George* was a young adult living in the bush east of Honiara during World War
II. According to George, when the Japanese came to Guadalcanal, they stole food from
villagers: pigs, chickens, and all the fresh fruit and vegetables from the gardens of
Solomon Islanders. They raped and “took” Gwale women. They forced Solomon
Islanders to work for no pay, to work to build the airport, and so on. “Solomon Island
people hated the Japanese and were happy when the Americans landed.” Solomon
Islanders helped the Americans by fighting alongside them and by serving as coast
watchers and as carriers. George did not want to kill anyone so he was a carrier; he would
carry whatever supplies the Americans needed. The Americans would line up the men
from a village and take only one brother and be sure to leave the other brothers in case
that one got killed (interview, Sept. 16, 2004).

For the first time, Solomon Islanders were treated in many ways as equals by
American soldiers. They witnessed black American soldiers wearing the same uniforms
and doing the same jobs as white Americans. Solomon Islanders who worked for the
Americans made more money than those who worked for the British. Americans told
them they were being exploited. Their “dissatisfaction crystallized into a movement”
called Ma’asina Ruru, which erupted in southern Malaita in 1946 (Firth 1997).

During World War II, the U.S. military had developed an infrastructure in Honiara
including Henderson airfield. When the British moved their capital to Honiara after the
war, “the honor passed to Honiara” (Honan and Harcombe 1997, 122). This “honor”
made life for Solomon Islanders more complicated. Many Malaitans then moved to Honiara for job opportunities because the British regarded Malaita as “muscle/labor.”

Also, Malaitans are the largest population group in the Solomons but there has been very little development on island of Malaita itself. If there had been any large-scale development on Malaita in the last fifty years, many Malaitans would probably not have left the island (Moore interview, Oct. 6, 2004).

A Critical View of Independence: The Costs of Ruling Outweigh the Benefits of a Colony

Decolonization left a set of complicated challenges for Solomon Islanders that include timing, weak nationalism, regional needs, and spatial polarization. In the 1970s, the British decided to leave the Solomons. According to one Solomon Islander, independence was “untimely.” Solomon Islands was a protectorate, not a colony (interview with a member of the Solomon Islands government, Sept. 5, 2004). The people of the Solomons were ill-prepared to deal with the demands of a sovereign government. The infrastructure, educational system, and health systems were poor and remain so today.

While Travelspedia (2007) stated that the British government gave the Solomons its independence because “Britain saw the post-colonial writing on the wall,” it is more accurate to say that, for the British, the costs of ruling Solomon Islands outweighed the benefits. Solomon Islands became independent on July 7, 1978. Randall (2002, 74) described the process of Britain granting the Solomons independence as a time “for the Western world to remove its cosseting hands and, while remaining willing to assist, allow the islanders to make their own decisions, even if, from a perspective of greater
experience, they might deem unwise.” In this way, Randall (2002) continued the notion that colonialism was beneficial for Solomon Islanders because the colonizers, with their greater wisdom, knew better what was good for the islanders than the islanders themselves did.

Prior to the formation of a colonial state, Solomon Islanders had allegiances to a particular wantok, or ethnic group. When Solomon Islands was given the ability to self-govern in 1976 and at independence in 1978, its leaders faced the daunting task of having to forge a national consciousness out of their diverse societies. The imposition of the Western model of a nation-state relied on creating a cohesive nation within a territory known as a state. The idea of the modern state required people to consent to being ruled by that state, that the state has a right to rule. Like colonialism, the creation of the state also redefined legitimate political authority in Solomon Islands. The Solomons, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea entered independence as multinational states that were highly susceptible to secessionist movements. A breakaway movement by Western Solomons threatened to split Solomon Islands at the time of independence. Solomon Islanders in the Western Province had been dissatisfied for years with the central government because of what they perceived to be an unequal allocation of resources (Bennett 1987). The system of government adopted by Solomon Islands was so centralized that, at independence, power would be concentrated in Honiara. Western Province wanted more power to make decisions, especially regarding resource development. A primary concern was being taxed by the government “without any clear local benefit” (Moore 2004, 48).
Luke* from Guadalcanal told me this has been a common pattern ever since independence. In 1988 and again in 1998, the province of Guadalcanal said it wanted to be independent of Solomon Islands. The central government was not providing services for urban needs. There were squatter settlements on customary land and on government-owned land around Honiara. People had been raising the same issues and problems since independence and the central government always played it down. Luke said, “They figured, if we put it off, it’ll die down. Instead, the resentments built up and built up and finally exploded” (interview, Sept. 3, 2004). Moore (2004, 48) identified this pattern as the root cause of the recent tension and questioned the legitimacy of the government by prompting the following questions: “Does the government act on behalf of the people, does it properly distribute resources, and does it respect the traditional cultures of the nation’s peoples?” The instability seen in changes of governments are a reflection of these legacies.

**Questioning Conventional Narratives of Development**

Kabutaulaka argued that in order to understand the crisis in Solomon Islands, one needs to understand the kind of development that has taken place there. The pressures on the Solomons from outside in the form of development and modernization are now internal as well, taking the form of individuals and groups who want to see more development. Economic development in the Solomons is dependent on the exploitation of natural resources. In many developing countries, “the state was the main if not the sole avenue for rapid wealth accumulation for the new elites” (Uvin 1998, 20-21).

Complicating that scenario in Solomon Islands has been the emergence of corrupt
political leaders since the mid-1980s who have a desire for great wealth without doing any work (Roughan 2003).

Equally important is an understanding of ‘development’ as the emergent form of inter-state assistance in the postcolonial period. In the 19th century, the concept of development was viewed as a natural process as it was compared to and likened with evolutionary models. Peoples and societies were viewed as evolutionarily different and as existing at different points along a linear scale of progress. Development became connected with classical economists including Adam Smith, Malthus, and David Ricardo, whose theories combined moral judgment and economic analysis, balancing accumulation and desire, and focusing on modern, free individuals. Max Weber also stressed rationality and the importance of the nation-state framework to development. The ‘Development’ concept arrived in Solomon Islands before and after independence. The cargo of this project is the subject of the next several sections.

A Critical View of Modernization Theory

In the mid 1900s, when it was no longer acceptable to openly discuss hierarchies of race, a new framework was introduced which recast “the old racial hierarchy into cultural terms supplied by development theorists” (Hunt 1987, 161). The World Bank’s first program to an ‘underdeveloped’ country – Colombia – occurred in 1949 and was described in the Bank’s literature as a “mission” that could bring about “salvation,” both words echoing a colonial, civilizing project. By describing Third World countries as relying on natural forces that have not brought about the “most happy results,” the history of colonialism is erased through this discourse (Escobar 1992).
In the 1950s, development became connected with university scholars and the U.S. government and at this time, the modernization school was developed. Modernization was put forth as a non-radical, peaceful way to spread development through economic growth, eliminate poverty, and stave off of the spread of communism. Tradition and culture were seen as obstacles to development. The modernization school viewed development as a universal linear process from a traditional to modern society that all nation-states could achieve if they only implemented the plan correctly. It was presented as a rational, scientific, objective approach to ending poverty. By comparing modernization to a process of nature, these social scientists naturalized both modernization and capitalism.

Walt Rostow (1960) acknowledged that traditional nation-states would be particularly vulnerable as they began their pursuit of development. These countries would need a “big push” by increasing investment rates and importing modern, western technology. Nation-states that were peaceful and prosperous were viewed as “the inevitable outcome” of development, modernization, and progress (Denoon 2003). In modernization theory, Western-style democracy is “the end point of development,” as if it is the inevitable culmination of economic logic. “Political development was quintessentially about state-building” (Manzo 1995, 4, 13).

Structural Critiques of Development as Neocolonial Penetration

There have been several narratives about economic transformations across nation-states since Westphalia. Structuralist critiques of development – including structural Marxism, imperialism, dependency theory, world-systems theory, international regime
theory and regulation theory—rose during the 1970s in response to environmental and
debt crises and the increasing gap between rich and poor. The structuralist school was
based on Marxist and neo-Marxist ideas that capitalism creates uneven development and
relies on exploitation and wealth flowing from the periphery to the center. Capitalism has
inherent structural contradictions that will result in its downfall. All of these theories
require a strong state at the center.

These theorists rejected the linear assumption in modernization theory of a
trajectory of economic growth for all. Wallerstein (1979, 7) argued that “the economic
structures of contemporary underdeveloped countries is not the form which a ‘traditional’
society takes upon contact with ‘developed’ societies, not an earlier stage in the
‘transition’ to industrialization. It is rather the result of being involved in the world-
economy as a peripheral, raw material producing area.” Wallerstein rejected Rostow’s
analysis because it was based on individual countries. Modernization theory is politically,
economically, historically blind because it ignores the way that countries have interacted
with the peripheries; it assumes all nation-states in the Pacific hold equal historical
positions. Elsina Wainwright told me the maturation of a modern society, aka Rostow’s
process, is a necessary painful development. Western countries went through this process
over hundreds of years. What Solomon Islands and other Pacific countries are
experiencing is collapsed into a short time period. “It’s painful for us [Australia]. If we
can speed up the process, then modernization is a good thing. For the West to stand back
is inappropriate for moral and humanitarian reasons” (interview, Aug. 4, 2004). Although
more and more exceptions occurred, modernization theorists assumed that the problems
and solutions were technical in nature, rather than considering any problems with the theory itself.

Postmodern Critiques of Development

No matter how often it is assumed to be neutral or universally good, Uvin (1998, 233) argues, “Development is not a neutral, apolitical, technical matter.” Postmodern scholars argued development could never achieve its goal of eliminating poverty because the model itself was part of the problem. Development is presented as the antidote to poverty, low productivity, and poor health (Escobar 1992). By focusing simply on the technical aspects, development strategists had not had to address social or political problems. Escobar’s (1995) *Encountering Development* contended that development was a social construct rather than a natural process. Rahnema (1992) contended poverty – the justification for development intervention – is a myth, an invention. Shrestha (1995) argued that development is simply a way for the powerful to continue their dominance. Cowen and Shenton (1995, 29) argue, “The modern idea of development is necessarily Eurocentric” and is “a state practice.” Nevertheless, the pressures toward market growth under both modernization and neoliberalism placed heavy demands on postcolonial states.

Neoliberal development

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, in response to debt and environmental crises, neoliberalism arose as yet another challenge to the modernization school. Neoliberalism is a historical period in modernization and developmentalism, which has had post-colonial development expectations for nation-states. Neoliberalism rests on the belief that
the market will solve social problems. The global economic order supersedes the nation-state. The underlying belief is that government interventions had caused market inefficiencies, which then increased poverty and environmental degradation. Rejecting the Keynesian approach, which favored government intervention and regulation, neoliberalism stresses the need for privatization and liberalization of trade policies. Key aspects of neoliberalism include good governance and transparency. “At the root of neoliberal models is the claim that expanded private investor interest will advance the public good” (Anderson 2006).

According to Denoon (2003), the good governance agenda originated in the World Bank, which demanded “democracy, human rights, an impartial legal system, Public Sector management, an open economy and a vigorous civil society.” By the end of the 1980s, the World Bank started “to question its narrow focus on macroeconomic policy. The Bank’s Charter prevented it from addressing members’ domestic politics, but by re-naming them ‘governance,’ officials gained room for maneuver.” The Bank’s leaders found language that was indexable and measurable. The World Bank based its change on surveys “that found that poor governance (authoritarianism, corruption, abuses of human rights) inhibited economic growth… A new idea in the good governance agenda is that ‘democracy is a necessary prior or parallel condition of development, not an outcome of it’” (Leftwich 1993). Good governance has been legitimated in world speak. The focus is on accountability and the quantification of results through assessments, on dispossession, and personal responsibility.
These debates about development open the questions of the fit of the market and its consequences in this research. I ask, whose place? Whose resources? And for whose benefits?

**Contradictions inherent in neoliberal development agendas**

Critics have noted that neoliberal policies of good governance, structural adjustment, and poverty reduction in developing countries have caused “the erosion of the democratic state” (Anderson 2006). Roy (2006) calls democracy an arm of imperialism. After the coup, John Naitoro (2000b) argued that at the core of the Solomon Islands’ crisis was democracy’s failure to address injustice, especially land issues.

Democracy as understood by local people is vastly different to the kind of democracy promoted at the national level. The democracy currently promoted ignores customary land, historical injustices and has involved administrative demarcation unrelated to the cultural makeup of the country. It imposes a superficial system on the people. Thus the idea of democracy as ‘rule of the people, for the people by the people’ is quite different in the Solomon Islands. The version of democracy in the Solomon Islands is perhaps better represented as ‘rule of some people, for some people by some people.’

Former World Bank president Joseph Stiglitz (2003, xiv) said IMF requirements of poor countries are “antidemocratic” and stressed that “IMF and structural adjustment policies led to… hunger and riots in many countries.” Chossudovsky (1997, 15) stated the structural adjustment program supported by neoliberal discourse “constitutes a new interventionist framework.” In his 1999 book on globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Friedman reveals that the free market is not so free: “The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist... McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas... and the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies
to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps” (464). Yet in American aid projects in Egypt, for example, there is a silence in development discourse about the large role of the Egyptian military.

The financial effects of development were also counterproductive for human security. Nolen (2008, 12) called the structural adjustments the World Bank and the IMF imposed on African countries in the 1980s in exchange for loans “one more disaster.” National governments were forced to impose user-fees on health and education services, which meant these services became out of reach for many citizens.

The IMF crisis of 1997 hit Asian countries especially hard. Once again the IMF offered to loan countries money in exchange for implementing structural adjustments. National governments were forced to cut government spending, including subsidies for food, fuel, health, and other public services. Many countries were told to privatize national industries. Another outcome of structural adjustments in poor countries has been an increase in population growth. As social services have been cut, women have resorted to having more children to help with labor and to take care of the parents as they become older (Smith 2005).

Like modernization theory, neoliberalism is also development-based. Where modernization theory had espoused replication, neoliberalism stresses specialization where countries can find their niche in the global market. Also, where the nation-state was the primary agent of development in the modernization school, neoliberalism focuses on transnational corporations as agents. Property regimes (private, state, and common property) are a focus of neoliberal land policies, converting customary land to private
property based on individual rights so that land becomes a commodity. Gandhi believed private property was a source of violence.

The myth of the self-regulating free market

In 1944, Karl Polanyi published *The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, in which he identified three different types of economic systems that have existed throughout history: reciprocal, redistributive, and market systems. Reciprocal societies were based on subsistence rather than exchange. Polanyi argued that what we know as ‘the economy’ is a social construct and not the result of a natural or inevitable process. The concept of a self-regulating market system emerged in Europe in the 19th century. The market was “more than a mere given” (Berthoud 1992, 74, 76); rather, it was something that was “artificially produced.” Escobar (1992, 134) called the ‘economy’ an invention that became “an independent domain… separated from morality, politics and culture.” Polanyi (2001) referred to this process as the ‘disembeddedness’ of the economy from social relations, resulting in the commodification of labor and land. Another consequence was that different systems of economic organization “were disqualified and increasingly marginalized. Subsistence activities became devalued or destroyed.” Polanyi stressed, “Traditionally, land and labor are not separated; labor forms part of life, land part of nature, life and nature form an articulate whole. Land is thus tied up with the organizations of kinship, neighborhood, craft, and creed – with tribe and temple, village, guild, and church” (2001, 178).

Polanyi viewed the idea of a self-regulating, free market as a myth because the market required state intervention, in fact, the free market “increased the need and
frequency of control, regulation, and intervention” (2001, 147, 136). The market was something developed by the state. Under a market system, humans and nature needed to be dealt with as commodities. Humans were then called labor, and nature was called land; both of these were then “made available for sale.” The cost of purchasing labor became known as wages while the cost of using land became known as rent.

Polanyi’s self-regulating market philosophy – in which the market is “a master rather than a servant of society”– is what we now call neoliberalism. Polanyi viewed the market-based economy as “dangerous because it led to social and environmental crisis” (Buttel 1998, 281, 134). Similarly, Escobar argued the disembeddedness of the market economy has “led to unprecedented forms of exploitation of people and nature.” The goal of capitalism is “the endless accumulation of capital” (Wallerstein 1998, 142), but this capital is funneled to a small group of people while the majority are suffering from the repercussions of capitalist expansion. Because development is intertwined with the expansion of capitalism, development also benefits a few people while placing many people in worse situations than they were in previously.

The Critical Summary: Neoliberal development policies create instability, not peace

The legacies of colonialism and the forced imposition of neoliberal policies have set up countries such as Solomon Islands, Rwanda, Sudan, and Fiji for violence. Rwanda is a powerful example of “state killing in which colonial history and global economic integration combined to produce genocide” rather than ancient tribal hatreds, as journalists and governments asserted (Robbins 2002, 269). Left out of the narrative of
violence in Darfur were changes in land laws to convert communally-owned land to individual ownership (UN Report on Darfur 2005).

Property regimes based on private property are key to breaking down people’s access to resources. When they lose their access to their means of production, people are forced into the world economy. In Oceania, most land is communally owned. For many Solomon Islanders, the concept of “to own” land does not exist. Rather, you can “belong to” or be “from” certain land but not possess it (Kabutaulaka interview, July 2004).

Lautensach (2004) argued there is an assumption in the West that a developed world is also a peaceful world. Yet, “this is unfounded, especially for Pacific Island countries. The theory is that the development of states is a process leading to economic growth. However, increased consumption creates scarcity. Scarcity threatens peace. The definition of development is self-defeating and destabilizes international affairs. ‘Development’ should be defined as becoming better at managing scarcity.” I agree with Lautensach that a developed world is not necessarily peaceful but I object to her use of the term ‘scarcity.’ Allan Johnson (2006, 46) argues that it is capitalism itself that creates “conditions of scarcity for most of the population” by distributing wealth so inequitably.

Lautensach (2004) also investigates words that are too often taken for granted, and asks, ‘What is progress?’ The same words are used to describe peace. What is ‘peace’? Peace is the freedom of individual citizens to achieve self-realization and safety.” It is especially important to examine these words because people coming from different places may use same words but may be talking about them differently. Friedman (1999, 464) states that peace is maintained in part by the U.S.’s willingness to use its
power “against those who would threaten the system of globalization.” That is quite a different definition of peace from Lautensach’s.

In “A Weak State and the Solomon Islands Peace Process,” Kabutaulaka (2002) gave a glimpse of how the nation-state is tied to development, how it is part of an overall strategy, when he wrote, “States such as Solomon Islands are able to survive in the form Jackson called ‘quasi states,’ which lack domestic viability but are propped up by international aid, diplomatic recognition, and (sometimes) investment.” This quote also helps us to see how and when changes were made in the types of external intervention into weak states. The nature of the state is important. Kabutaulaka argued the weakness of the Solomon Islands state played a large role in why the conflict there continued over four years because the state did not have the ability to address the underlying issues.

**How the view of development as ‘progress’ devalues subsistence economies**

Krishna (2008) argued “capitalist economic development proceeds unequally on a global scale, and thus has winners and losers on a global scale as well.” The difference between these winners and losers rests on “the visible intervention of developmental states and their policy interventions.” Yet, these global capitalist processes and interventions become severed from view when measuring something such as the Human Development Index (HDI), which focuses on nation-states in isolation. HDI is designed to measure development in a country through social indicators such as literacy. The idea behind HDI stems from a modernist world view where everything is measurable and is based on assumptions of progress within capitalism. Moreover, the term ‘human development,’ which began as a critique of econometric GDP growth, soon became
another justification for further market growth. In Solomon Islands, HDI minimizes the low status of the majority of people and it overstates their level of education. HDI also has no metrics for things that have use value for Solomon Islanders; only the exchange value counts. HDI ignores evidence of underlying human security, and overlooks what might be called “subsistence affluence” as well as small, decentralized, community-based exchanges.

HDI is deceptive on several levels: it is overly optimistic because the rich/poor country gap is greater than the HDI rankings show, especially since people in the lowest ranked countries survive on less than $1 a day. Also, HDI does not measure sustainability in the use of a country’s natural resources. HDI should take into consideration at what cost does national development come and which choices people are actually exercising (Sagar and Najam 1998). Development indicators will fail because the focus is on the external rather than internal (Lautensach 2004).

In the UNDP’s 2009 HDI rankings, Solomon Islands ranks 135 out of 182 countries. Yet, the way in which the criteria for HDI is measured in the Solomons is problematic. As stated above, one factor calculated into the Human Development Index (HDI) is adult literacy rate. In determining the official literacy rate of the Solomons in 1992, Solomon Islanders were asked, “Can you read your Bible or prayer book in your own language?” John Roughan (2003), Director of the Solomon Islands Development Trust and a resident of Solomon Islands since 1958, explained, “It would be awful if they couldn’t so people said, ‘yes, of course.’ The official literacy rate was 70% but really it’s closer to 20-30%.”
In the 1999 Census prepared by the Solomon Islands National Statistics, many dwellings in the Solomons are ‘temporary housing’ and are devalued because they are made of palm leaves and straw. But in many cases, the dwellings are appropriate for that environment. Indigenous societies frequently view themselves as part of nature rather than viewing nature as something separate to dominate (Mander 1992). The biodegradable homes using nearby materials are better for the environment. Less concrete, for instance, means the groundwater level does not decrease.

Another way in which taking a development-as-progress view is unhelpful in the Pacific is that “if you are farming or fishing, you’re not considered ‘working’” (Nero 2004). Ninety percent of Solomon Islanders live subsistence lifestyles. As Australian economist Helen Hughes (2003b) explained, “Not only youths, but men now in their 30s and 40s [in the Solomons], have never had an opportunity to work productively and earn an income. Their entire lives have been wasted. It is little wonder that they have turned to crime and violence.” Hughes exposes her bias that ‘productive’ work necessarily involves wage earning in the formal sector and that a subsistence economy might predict criminal behavior.

We need to consider how our fundamental views and values affect people (Nero 2004). Pauline Tangiora, an elder in a Maori tribe asked (2004), “If fishing for oneself and one’s family is not recognized as important, how can people take pride in what they do?” Another way of looking at subsistence living is that it gives individuals control over their means of production. During five years of conflict in the Solomons, there were no

Many people choose this smaller-scale production because there are clear benefits, including increased food security. “India processes a minuscule one percent of the food it grows compared with 70 percent for the US, Brazil, and the Philippines. It is not that we Indians eat our food raw” (Shiva 2001). Rather, development experts ignore the vast majority of food processed at the household level in India.

In addition to household level work, small businesses are sometimes ignored by economists. Since the arrival of RAMSI forces in the Solomons, small business has made a 5.8% turnaround. Yet RAMSI ignored this increase, calling it “small stuff” and dismissing as naïve Solomon Islanders who point out this growth. Roughan asked rhetorically, “Who prepped these people from RAMSI? People who had never been to Solomon Islands but ‘had read about the country’” (interview, Sept. 2, 2004).

Kabutaulaka (2004a) pointed out, “The assumption in nation-building is that the problem is poverty and that the solution is development.” Yet, we can see the same problems that existed pre-conflict. “We can attract multinationals but the same issues that helped create the problems still exist.” In June 2004, Kabutaulaka ran a workshop in Honiara with Solomon Islanders from all areas of the country, asking them, “What can we do to capture the agendas and create the future of Solomon Islands?” Kabutaulaka thought it was important for Solomon Islanders to be proactive. Solomon Islanders see development as something delivered by the government; therefore you need to generate income for the government. An empowering option would be to view development as
something generated by community and something that the Solomon Islands government
could facilitate. The provision of social services could come from the community, as they
shift development away from government control to something controlled by the
community (interview, July 2004).

Although Hughes (2003b, 4) describes communal land ownership as the root of
problems in the Solomons because it obstructs development, she contradicts herself by
blaming the lack of private property in the Solomons for timber and tuna exploitation and
then blaming Solomon Islands for development strategies “focused on the exploitation of
gold, timber and fishing rights.” In fact, these development strategies are not only a
legacy of colonialism but also the prescribed way out of poverty for developing nations.

Roughan (2003) also argued land issues are critical to the crisis but for a different
reason than Hughes. “The assumption is that if we could find who owns this piece of land
and give him a secure title, then things are 90% okay. But in the Solomons, a person can’t
own land. Land owns him. You can’t sell land.” Traditionally in Solomon Islands, land is
a part of you. It’s not a commodity. It’s not been something that brings monetary gain
(interview with a man from Guadalcanal, Sept. 3, 2004). Gabriel* told me that in his
native language from Malaita, there’s no word that means ‘to own.’ They say they ‘have’

Jully Sipolo, a Solomon Islander from the Western Province, expresses her
frustration with the deleterious effects of development through fishing in the 1986 poem
“Solomon Blue.” The title of the poem refers to the main brand of canned tuna fish in
Solomon Islands, canned by the company Soltai, one of the South Pacific largest manufacturers of tuna products.

**SOLOMON BLUE**

You reap a harvest
you did not plant
You drain my resources
in the name of development
You fish in my waters
for bonito
You pay me a little
for permission
You process your catch
compressed into cans
You pour back your waste into our seas
Politics!
Then you sell back to me,
at a profit
Solomon Blue.

There are other problematic assumptions within capitalism and development, for instance, with concepts of time. Unlike Western notions of time, indigenous views of time have a cyclical nature (Howe 2001). “Pacific Islanders shared a circular view of life… This circle of life has no beginning and no end, and each living thing is part of that circle… This non-linear way of life contrasts with the Western view of the evolution of civilization, marked by development and progress” (Hereniko 1999, 140). Westerners using these measurements have viewed Pacific Islanders as ‘primitive’ and ‘uncivilized.’

Geopolitical Time has capitalist assumptions embedded within it – because time is a commodity – and is what the state uses. Time for many Pacific Islanders moves more slowly. There is a different way of dealing with conflict; it is a process in which participants talk story and talk with village leaders. Pauline Tangiora, a Maori elder who
works on mediation of indigenous areas and belongs to the Maori Women’s Welfare
League, contended (2004),

We have to acknowledge problems at the grassroots level. We need face-to-
face coming together over a meal. This defuses a situation. You can’t eat
together with anger. This is a key first step. Eating a meal together requires
spending time sitting together. This way you have time to listen to everyone.
Respectful listening is key from the heart and soul of a person. This sort of
mediation cannot come from the government. Values lay in the grassroots, not
the people at the top. People at the top can be bought off by others coming in.
People must make decisions at the grassroots because they have taken the time
to sit and talk and listen to make it work by sending it back to the top. You
can’t change anything in the Pacific except from the grassroots.

Unlike time in the West, “Solomons time is not an exact commodity measured by
a clock” (Moore 2004, 29). Pacific Islands cultures have values and negotiation styles
that differ from capitalist values and goals. The goal of negotiation for many Pacific
Islanders relates more to preserving relationships than paying the least amount. Solomon
Islander Lloyd Maepeza Gina (2003, 115) explains, “We control time for people, not as
the white man does, allow time to control people.”

Noble told me, “Solomon Islanders don’t think in a visionary way. They only live
in the present. They will cut down a coconut tree and then starve to death and wonder
why they’re starving, rather than climbing the tree to get one coconut. There is no
concept of the long-term or of prioritizing. Solomon Islanders’ worldview is rooted in
subsistence, a hand-to-mouth existence.” Hau‘ofa (1994, 159) offered a different
understanding. Those who argue that Pacific Islanders live only in the present “are
unaware of the elementary truth known by most native Islanders: that they plan for
generations, for the continuity and improvement of their families and kin groups.”
A Critical View of Political Instability in Solomon Islands

Tom Woods, a New Zealander specializing in constitutional law who was hired by the Solomon Islands’ government to write the drafts of the Solomon Islands constitution in 2004, argued that the Westminster system imposed on Solomon Islands will not work because it relies on conventions, political parties, and opposition. “In Solomon Islands, there are no political parties. It is more like clans. Names are given to groups in coalitions but there aren’t separate parties. Concepts of parties and opposition do not exist in the Solomons.” Similarly, concepts of ‘politician’ and ‘election’ are new to Solomon Islands. Previously, leaders were singled out because of their special abilities, not because of heredity. “The politician has become the legal leader while traditional leaders have been disenfranchised. This brings corruption. In order to get elected, politicians promise all sorts of things to people. Solomon Islanders are conscious that their custom system is not law so they have a tendency to believe that it must be inferior. It’s essential to restore confidence in their own system. Legal systems will now be their traditional ways” (interview, Sept. 12, 2004).

The U.S. Department of State reports that “Solomon Islands governments are characterized by weak political parties and highly unstable parliamentary coalitions. They are subject to frequent votes of no confidence, and government leadership changes frequently as a result. Cabinet changes are common.” The State Department makes no mention of how these changes happen. The implication is that it is solely an internal problem: Solomon Islands has difficulty governing itself. Research shows, however, that foreign companies have had a hand in several of the government changes, perhaps most
notably in 1994 when foreign logging companies paid three Parliamentarians to cross the floor and end their support of Prime Minister Francis Billy Hilly, causing his government to collapse. The State Department described this as simply “a shift in parliamentary loyalties.” Jacobson (1995) maintained simply, “Hilly resigned amid a political crisis.”

In his 1998 report for the World Bank, Kabutaulaka found irony in the descriptions of politics in Solomon Islands as unstable because there “is also a degree of stability as the same leaders are maintained in authority.” The highest positions have been held by the same small group of people. These are leaders “who have managed to survive through the pre- and post-independence period.”

**Figure 3.13. Events Taken as Political Instability in Solomon Islands.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Prime Minister</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Peter Kenilorea</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Francis Billy Hilly</td>
<td>Government is brought down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Bartholomew Ulufa’alu</td>
<td>20,000 Malaitans forced to flee Guadalcanal; up to 100 Gwale and Malaitan people killed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Ulufa’alu</td>
<td>Coup in Fiji; Ulufa’alu asks Australia for help; Malaitan Eagle Force holds Ulufa’alu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manasseh Sogavare</td>
<td>Solomon Islands coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sogavare</td>
<td>Townsville (Aust.) Peace Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Sogavare</td>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister Allan Kemakeza is dismissed on corruption charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allan Kemakeza</td>
<td>Kemakeza becomes Prime Minister</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My investigation into logging in Solomon Islands in the past few decades has shown that resource exploitation has resulted in instability. Figure 3.13 above, evidence of what some call political instability in Solomon Islands, leads into the next section of this chapter, which identifies more complex causes of instability than ethnicity and natural differences.

**Export Economic Model Erodes Political Cohesion: logging case**

I analyze here the case of logging in Solomon Islands to demonstrate the divisive effects of resource exploitation over the past thirty years. This serves to expose the ‘antinomies of community’ arising from resource competition and as a background to the ‘ethnic’ frictions of the most recent decade (Watts 2004). Resource owners of timber “receive the least benefit and have had the least control over the way the industry has developed” (Frazer 1997, 56) in Solomon Islands. Foreign companies based in Asia dominate the timber industry and, through political pressure combined with corruption, they have been able to override national interests in favor of their own interests. These companies have short-term interests and want to quickly exploit the natural resources
before they disappear. The people who benefit from the exploitation of natural resources in Solomon Islands are primarily foreign and wealthy or elite Solomon Islanders while those who have the most to lose are local people who are seemingly powerless to protect their own resources.

At independence, the forests of Solomon Islands were logged below what was considered the sustainable rate. The majority of logging activity took place in Western Province and 90% of it was exported. During Solomon Mamaloni’s first term as Prime Minister (1981-84), he made important changes to the logging industry. He invited Asian logging companies to the country. Much of the logging was done on customary lands. Asian logging companies had used up their own supply of whole hardwood timber. When they moved into Solomon Islands, they cut down trees extremely fast. The national and provincial governments in Solomon Islands were unable to monitor and police logging. Logging spread to Guadalcanal, Malaita, and Makira (Moore 2006).

Levers Pacific Timbers, which had done the majority of logging in Solomon Islands, logged at a much lower rate (Moore 2006). When Levers closed in 1987, it “marked the financial end of the colonial era” (Moore 2004, 50). In 1989, logging began on Choiseul. Starting in 1991, Malaysian companies arrived and soon controlled up to three-fourths of the logging industry in Solomon Islands. Two Korean firms controlled another 14%. Logging activity increased “to more than three times the estimated sustainable yield” (Solomon Islands Govt/AIDAB 1995). Moore (2006) charged, “These Asian companies often operated corruptly, putting pressure on and providing monetary incentives for local officials. They developed close relationships with politicians, and
forged lucrative agreements with local companies to use their license entitlements.”
Several of the companies were later fined for understating the number of logs they were exporting and for not paying royalties.

Mamaloni and his government had close ties to the logging industry. During Mamaloni’s second term (1989-1993), 11 of his 15 Cabinet members had ties to logging (Bennett 2000). Mamaloni also owned a logging company to which he gave a 100 percent tax exemption. It was during Mamaloni’s second term that logging activity increased dramatically as the number of logging licenses quadrupled (Dauvergne 2000). There was economic growth but it was based on the export of logs, which was done at an unsustainable rate (Roughan 2003). The IMF, World Bank, and aid donors tried to pressure Solomon Islands into adopting a more sustainable rate of logging (Bennett 2000).

Figure 3.14. Graph of Log Exports and Sustainable Rate of Logging in Solomon Islands.

![Graph of Log Exports and Sustainable Rate of Logging in Solomon Islands.](image)

Source: Bennett, Judith. 2000, 351.
Many Solomon Islanders opposed the large-scale logging taking place under Mamaloni’s watch. Opposition from rural people to large-scale logging began in the 1970s. Many land-owners believed they were not being compensated properly for their resources. A lot of the logging was done in Western Province, which contributed more than 50% of the national revenue but received only 16% of the total. Also, a number of people in Western Province protested environmental degradation that accompanied the logging, including the loss of top soil and the contamination of the ocean from run-off. Levers had clear-cut the islands of Gizo and Kolobangara; the company stopped logging in Solomon Islands in 1986 “because of protests over their operations on New Georgia” (Moore 2004, 50).

Mamaloni “must bear responsibility for allowing corruption to dominate the government” of Solomon Islands (Moore 2008b). There is a great deal of evidence that Mamaloni accepted bribes from foreign logging companies. His “ability to maneuver behind the scenes was greatly strengthened by the financial assistance he received from foreign business interests” (Herlihy 2003). In the mid-1980s, some of the Solomon Islands leaders learned what they could with corruption. In the 1990s, they turned the government apparatus into one big corruption (interview with ANU PhD student, Sept. 28, 2004).

### Figure 3.15. Logs as a percentage of total export earnings in Solomon Islands, 1991-95

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Logs as % of Total Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bennett, Judith. 2000, 347.
One of the most obvious examples of this corruption and the influence of wealthy
foreigners occurred in the mid-1990s. In a 1993 national election, Solomon Islanders
removed Mamaloni from power and voted in Hilly who “put the brakes on the speeding
logging industry” (Moore 2006). Hilly announced that he would collect revenues from
the logging and reduce the rate of export. This reformist approach was unpopular with
loggers and the politicians they supported. In 1994, three Cabinet members shifted their
allegiance from Hilly to Mamaloni, causing Hilly’s coalition government to collapse.
Mamaloni took over as Prime Minister for the third time. “Allegations abounded that
logging companies had bribed several of Hilly’s Cabinet ministers to cross the floor”
(Moore 2004, 56-57). Herlihy (2003) described the event as an overthrow, “which was
reputedly achieved by large donations from foreign logging interests.”

One well-connected man from the Western Province told me, “Logging
companies always support people like Mamaloni. After Hilly was elected, Malaysian
logging companies paid off three ministers to cross the floor” (interview, Sept. 24, 2004).
When people like Hilly are voted into office and seek to make reforms, corrupt people
make the government collapse (interview with a woman from the Western Province, Sept.
24, 2004).

An Australian who has worked in Solomon Islands for decades described the
collapse of Hilly’s government as a “foreign overthrow.” Malaysian and Korean logging
companies gave money to Robert Goh to pay three Ministers to cross the floor, making
the government collapse. (Robert Goh, a Chinese-Malaysian businessman, is a rather
nefarious character who operated behind the scenes in Solomon Islands politics for many
years.) A few months after this government collapse happened, the Australian was in Honiara and happened to have dinner with one of the three Ministers. He asked the Minister why he changed sides. The Minister said openly, “They paid me a lot of money” (interview, Sept. 2004).

An Australian who has researched the deleterious effects of logging on Solomon Islanders told me, “In every election, people voted for reasonable people who tried to reform the government but they were overthrown. In 1994, Billy Hilly was going to raise logging taxes. The foreign logging companies gave Robert Goh SBD$6 million, which at the time was worth AUD$3 million, to bribe three men in the government to change sides so that Billy Hilly’s government would collapse” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Robert,* who held a high position in the Solomon Islands’ media, confirmed that bribes “must have been happening.” Solomon Islanders were against the large-scale logging but the logging companies continued to operate unfettered. “Look where logging takes place. They have a worse standard of living. Solomon Islanders are not benefiting. Considering the amount of logs and money, if that money had been spent here in Solomon Islanders…” Robert trailed off. “We’re even poorer now after logging” (interview, Sept. 29, 2004).

An Australian living in the Western Province told me there are leaders who do whatever they want – bribe, kill, and so on – and they get away with it. “That’s the trouble and the people of Solomon Islands are powerless to do anything about it. They’re powerless to because they’re so poor. They’ll almost give their resources away” (interview, Sept. 23, 2004).
I visited a couple of logging camps in the Western Province including Nama camp on the island of west Vangunu and Ambu and Chuchulu on the island of New Georgia.

The forests had been destroyed as evidenced in Figure 3.16.

Figure 3.16. Logging destruction by Golden Springs (Malaysia) International. Ambu, New Georgia, Western Province.

Source: Photo by S. Dixon.

A former member of the Western Province government also told me that most people are powerless to protect their own resources. The people who invited logging always depended on legal decisions to exploit the resources. “Since independence, there has been corruption. There is political power in Solomon Islands but not economic power. Outsiders know this and that Solomon Islanders can be bribed.” He told me that
Solomon Islanders have a good understanding of conservation but some are tempted when a logging company offers $10,000 when most people in Solomon Islands make about $100 a month. It is more difficult for Solomon Islanders to govern themselves when foreign companies bribe people with huge amounts of money (interview, Sept. 2004).

Steve,* an Australian living in the Western Province, told me that even when Customs Officers are honest, they have a hard time policing and enforcing the laws over such a large territory. A good example of how state control is nonexistent in other parts of Solomon Islands occurred at a Malaysian company’s oil palm plantation in Marisu, Western Province. Members of the Solomon Islands government set up a visit to the plantation but the oil palm company would not let them ashore to look around. Logging corruption is not limited to bribery. A Malaysian company called Sylvania Products Pty Ltd (SPPL) had made an agreement with the government of Solomon Islands to build an oil palm company on the island of Vangunu in Western Province. Steve and other people in Solomon Islands believed the palm oil plantation was nothing more than an excuse to clear-cut the forest and export the logs, which the company did (interview, Sept. 2004). Ten years later, there was still no sign of an oil palm plant (Sasako 2009). An April 2009 article in the Solomon Star revealed that the owner of SPPL had secretly fled the Solomons and returned home to Malaysia. The plantation manager Joseph Nemaia, a Solomon Islander who previously worked for Solomon Islands Plantation Limited (SIPL), called the palm oil project “a cover up for the massive logging operations” SPPL
did on Vangunu. Nemaia explained that SPPL had done no harvesting of palm oil because “there’s no mill to process the fruits” (Mamu 2009).

Steve told me that logging companies convince landowners to get a license for logging so that it isn’t under the foreign companies’ names and they aren’t liable. I asked why Solomon Islanders would agree to a deal like that. Steve replied, “Nobody here says a word. Solomon Islanders are so respectful of authority and they think need outside help” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Also, Solomon Islanders who protested the large-scale logging faced jail time and worse. It was during Mamaloni’s third term (1994-97) that Martin Apa, a local community leader who fought against Malaysian over-logging on Pavuvu Island, was murdered. Years after Apa’s 1995 murder, the crime still had not been investigated by the government of Solomon Islands (Toni 1997). According to ABC Radio National reporter Kirsten Garrett, “The circumstances point to it (Apa’s death) being a way of intimidating the community” (Jan. 14, 1996).

Also in 1995, the Solomon Star accused three Cabinet ministers of receiving SBD $7 million in bribes from Kumpulan Emas Berhad, a Malaysian timber company (Moore 2004, 59). At the end of the year, Australia withdrew its aid program to Solomon Islands “because of the lack of logging controls.” Ironically, Jacobson described Mamaloni as having “something of an environmental track record” because Mamaloni had “rejected proposals by Western companies to dump industrial waste on the islands.”

In July 1997, a Pacific Islands Report announced that a logging company named SOMMA spent over US$1,000,000 during Mamaloni’s third term in his West Makira
electorate. SOMMA donated large amounts of money to Mamaloni’s constituency to provide “a wide range of new community projects” ranging from health and education services to building churches and sports sponsorship. Mamaloni corrupted the Solomon Islands’ institution of compensation because he started giving compensation for grievances from the state, which severed the idea of compensation from its cultural roots (Dinnen interview, Nov. 11, 2003).

Herlihy (2003) similarly stated that Mamaloni had “institutionalized a form of corruption that he rationalized as in the national interest… In most cases the benefits provided to such supporters were legalized by incorporation into the relevant laws under the guise of government incentives to promote development. Tax concessions to Mamaloni’s timber company were seen as encouraging national rather than foreign companies.” It was a “regular occurrence” for foreign logging companies to pay bribes to leaders from the local to the national level. Herlihy (2003) described Mamaloni’s legacy in Solomon Islands government, including his three terms as Prime Minister as “milking the national treasury dry.”

Mamaloni was by no means the only source of corruption in the government. Prime Minister Ezekiel Alebu (1986-89) set a bad precedent in 1988 when he used government funds to pay compensation to Malaitans who had been insulted by a letter posted by Bellonese and then young Malaitans went on a rampage for two days in Honiara. Steve said it did not make sense to give compensation to Malaitans in this case (interview, Sept. 2004).
For years before the coup, Solomon Islands “had felt the effects of Mamaloni’s erratic leadership.” In addition to increases in violence including arson, intimidation, and murder, the economy of Solomon Islands was nearly bankrupt by 1995. Public services that the national government should have been providing – including health, education, transportation infrastructure, and utilities – deteriorated because the government was not paying wages or bills. In many ways, the government during Mamaloni’s third term ceased functioning except as a means for its leaders to become richer.

During the 1997 election, there was “an unprecedented demand for more effective leadership across the country.” Bartholomew Ulufa’alu, a man from Malaita, became Prime Minister and introduced a number of reforms to cut down on corruption and to increase the financial solvency of the country. Ulufa’alu enjoyed popular support as citizens saw an improvement in public services involving health, education, and use of resources. Many of the reforms Ulufa’alu implemented “soon began to impinge on the way of life of those who had benefited from the easy access to the national treasury provided by former governments” (Herlihy 2003).

Within the dominant discourse, important factors such as logging companies become invisible (Pattison interview, Sept. 30, 2004). Although Solomon Islands has been described as having unstable governments since independence, much of this instability has been fueled by outside business interests, especially Asian logging companies. In 2004, former Prime Minister of Solomon Islands Bartholomew Ulufa’alu said that Asian businessmen had actively provoked problems in the Solomons (Crocombe 2004). The 1993-1994 government of Francis Billy Hilly was brought down when three
Solomon Island Parliament members accepted bribes from foreign logging companies to shift their support from Billy Hilly to Mamaloni. The “few Governments (including Ulufa’alu’s) that attempted to halt the rape of the forests… failed miserably against the combined power of the logging interests and their political cronies” (Moore 2006). Alasia (1988) wrote the poem “Logging” to express his frustrations with both Solomon Islanders and foreign logging companies who exploit forests in an effort to ‘develop.’

LOGGING

Virgin forests of my land
You attract foreigners
Who come empty handed.

Virgin forests of my land
There is potential in you
for investors who globe-trot.

Virgin forests of my land
You are being raped and reaped
By Aliens and wantoks,
For short-lived gains.

Virgin forests of my land
You moaned and wailed
At our mercy,
Will I ever know
If it’s DEVELOPMENT
or
DEVASTATION?

The U.S. Department of State (2009) asserted, “Exploitation of Solomon Islands rich fisheries offers the best prospect for further export and domestic economic
expansion” despite the fact that the waters surrounding Solomon Islands have been dangerously overfished. This suggestion to specialize and use fisheries in Solomon Islands as its niche is part of a neoliberal approach to development. A problem for Solomon Islanders with this approach is that, according to the FAO, tuna fleets of Distant Water Fishing Nations all fish “in the South Pacific, without any noticeable benefit for the local industry.” Fish is the most important source of animal protein for most Pacific Islanders, yet their stocks are quickly being depleted.

Scales told me Hviding’s (1996) *Guardians of Marovo Lagoon: Practice, Place, and Politics in Maritime Melanesia* is a seminal work but Hviding missed a huge part of the story. Hviding identified outsiders as the problem and did not look at the local elite who make deals with outsiders, and are also part of the problem (interview, Sept. 28, 2004). Keesing’s (1993) description of development in Solomon Islands has provided a helpful framework for understanding both the internal and external pressures that have come into play. Keesing asserted that the situation in the Solomons cannot be blamed solely on foreign development strategists or foreign investors; he recognized the roles played by leaders of the Solomon Islands and warned that, if current trends continue, these leaders will leave future generations with nothing but the shell of a country.

Keesing, however, relied on the same development model that portrays Pacific Islands as poor and lacking resources. He used Solomon Islands as a case study that he believed applied throughout the Pacific, “as the Pacific slides into greater pauperization and dependency within a world system that no longer needs most of its primary products and is rapidly wiping out those that it still wants.” Keesing’s analysis is the reverse of
Hviding’s in that Keesing puts the blame for overdevelopment primarily on Pacific Islanders. It is deceptive to say that the world system no longer needs the primary products of Pacific Islands (the ones that have not been overexploited). Resources of Solomon Islands, for instance, including tuna and palm oil, are still highly valuable and continue to be exported to people who can afford to buy the products.

Other Pacific Islands also have highly coveted resources. A copper mine on the island of Bougainville was so important to the national government of Papua New Guinea that they fought a war with the natives of the island to keep the mine open. Saying that Pacific Islands are poor and lacking resources is a way to justify outside intervention in the form of development and ‘progress.’ The fact that the economy is “desperately reliant on a limited range of exports and thus very dependent on world commodity prices” (Moore 2004, 68) is a relic of Solomon Islands’ colonial past. The colonial economy was based on only a few resources. Also, when Solomon Islands became independent, their lack of capital made them desperate for cash so that they were more willing to accept lower prices for their resources.

**Questioning the Narrative of The ‘Tension’**

I asked Solomon Islanders what they viewed as the causes of the civil unrest. I found events understood in economic terms before ethnic terms. It was three unemployed men from Guadalcanal who started a militia group in 1998 after a Guadalcanal woman was murdered in Honiara. Unemployment in Solomon Islands is high. Many Solomon Islanders do not have access to education, which means they do not have many options to
secure jobs. A lot of young people from different islands move to Honiara seeking work. Since few find jobs, most of these people hang around with nothing to do.

The militia group started by the three unemployed men was initially known as the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) and later became the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM). The group quickly grew. They asked Guadalcanal politicians to raise their issues in Parliament but none of the politicians wanted to raise these issues. Their concerns had existed for a long period of time but had not been addressed. The group resorted to violence and then led an uprising on Guadalcanal.

The periods before and after independence are crucial to understanding this crisis. The large influx of people from outside Guadalcanal caused resentment because the migrants took jobs and created squatter settlements. There were problems of land, development, and leadership structure. James* of Tenaru, Guadalcanal told me the conflict was ignited when twenty-five Gwale people were killed by Malaitans (interview, Sept. 2004). Gwale people felt they had been ignored. Robert* explained, “These are important issues to us that the government was not addressing” (interview, Sept. 2004).

The grievances of the people of Guadalcanal include the large number of people from other provinces, especially Malaita, settling throughout Guadacanal; the loss of the land where Honiara is from traditional owners; and the desire for compensation to be paid for all of the people of Guadalcanal who have been killed by people from other provinces (Tuhanuku 2001). In other words, many people of Guadalcanal are not happy the “honor” of being the capital “passed to Honiara” as Honan and Harcombe (1997) had claimed. These grievances had existed since Solomon Islands became independent in 1978. Each
government since independence had been “unable or unwilling to address these
Malaitans’ dominance of Honiara politics and business.”

The IFM forced at least 20,000 Malaitans to flee their homes. According to many
Malaitan people who were forced out, they were willing to leave but only if they were
paid compensation (Tuhanuku 2001). In May 1999, the Malaitan settlers who had been
forced to flee requested US$600,000 in compensation from the provincial government of
Guadalcanal. They also asked the national government to help resolve the issue (Pacific
Islands Report May 27, 1999). When the response was not quick enough, Malaitans
created the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), a militia group that set out to get their demands
met (Tuhanuku 2001).

In April and May 2000, as security quickly deteriorated, Ulufa’alu asked the
Australian government for help maintaining law and order; Australia refused. On May 19,
2000, a coup occurred in Fiji. Soon after, MEF joined forces with many Royal Solomon
Islands Police and raided police armories. The central government gave SBDS$5 million
“to both Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces. This money was to be distributed as
compensation but the people of the provinces never saw the money. Guadalcanal Premier
Ezekiel Alebuia never accounted for the money, and MEF seized the money meant for
Malaita Province” (Moore 2004, 135).

On June 5, 2000, members of MEF staged a coup and overthrew Malaitan Prime
Minister Ulufa’alu. Manasseh Sogavare was elected Prime Minister on June 30, 2000. In
TIME Asia, Smellie (2000) argued that ethnic tensions were the main cause of the
conflict; he also identified economic factors including the IMF reforms that Ulufa’alu was implementing that “upset powerful politicians and businessmen.” The answer to who benefited from the coup is “the leaders, many of whom received enormous monetary returns.” The violence that had taken place before the coup was mostly interpersonal and intergroup (Herlihy 2003).

In December 2001, Allan Kemakeza was elected Prime Minister. Many Solomon Islanders were dismayed at this outcome because Kemakeza was known to be corrupt. Under Sogavare, Kemakeza became Deputy Prime Minister as well as Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation, and Peace. He was fired in August 2001 for paying himself SBD$800,000 in “compensation” out of the funds to pay victims of the conflict (Dorney 2001; Kabutaulaka 2002a). Just a few months later, Kemakeza became Prime Minister.

The situation in Solomon Islands had descended into lawlessness. The instability caused three of the biggest export operations in Solomon Islands to shut down: the SIPL oil palm plantation, the Gold Ridge gold mine, and the Solomon Taiyo tuna cannery. In 2002, the Solomon Islands Finance Minister was forced at gunpoint to give SBD$3 million to police for “compensation” (Riddell 2004). In mid-2003, arguing that Solomon Islands was a failed state, the Australian government instigated an intervention. Although one of the prime goals of the intervention was to end corruption, the leaders of RAMSI backed Kemakeza.
The Economic and Political Influence of Ethnic Chinese Businessmen in Solomon Islands

I asked in what sense ethnicity might be a category of concern to Solomon Islander, and discovered another narrative of ethnically identified economic concerns. Despite the intervention, Solomon Islanders continue to be frustrated about the tremendous economic power held by Chinese people. (Often when people in Solomon Islands used the term “Chinese,” they were referring to ethnic Chinese regardless of the nationality.) A Member of Parliament told me this came about as a partial result of British colonialism. In the 1960s, the British brought in Chinese people from Hong Kong as traders. Moore (2004) stated Chinese people first came to Solomon Islands in the 1910s “as tradesmen and now controlled many commercial activities” (41). Being commercially successful, the Chinese are viewed by many as distinct and dubious political actors. In 2004, a Malaitan living in Honiara told me the Chinese controlled the economy in Solomon Islands (interview, Oct. 1, 2004). The above-mentioned Member of Parliament said that Chinese people in Solomon Islands took advantage during the tension but they started working twenty years earlier to get power through corruption and paying people off (interview, Sept. 5, 2004).

A man who was raised on Guadalcanal said that the Chinese population on Guadalcanal owns a lot of land and money, and has an enormous amount of power in the national government (interview, Aug. 22, 2004). Robert Goh, mentioned earlier in this chapter, was widely accused of delivering the bribes to the three Ministers of Parliament in 1994, bringing down Billy Hilly’s government. In 2001, Goh became Kemakeza’s Special Advisor for $1 per year. A Member of Parliament told me Goh was being paid $1
per year on the books plus “$1.8 million which goes straight into Goh’s pocket.” It was
going to RIPEL (Russell Island Plantation Estates Ltd) and to Goh. RIPEL does not exist
anymore. “It’s insolvent. There’s a new company now – ICSL (International Comtrade &
Shipping Ltd) – a subsidiary of Goh’s RIPEL. The money still goes directly into Goh’s
pocket” (interview, Sept. 5, 2004).

Another key player was Alex Wong, a Chinese Malaysian who became a
naturalized Solomon Islander. Wong, who owned the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel, was
arrested in 2004 for trying to bribe a Customs officer on behalf of the Malaysian logging
compity Earth Movers (RNZI May 22, 2004). Given this history, “It is no wonder that
Solomon Islanders are suspicious of Chinese business operations” (Moore 2008a).

Robert* viewed this arrest as a sign of hope for Solomon Islanders because
bribery usually works: “We know how much money customs officers get paid and yet
they have cars and so on. Unless they found gold somewhere…” he trailed off. “This
woman and her boss who stood up to Alex Wong give us hope. We need to say no to
outside forces. People are raising issues now and calling on leaders to account for money
they should have gotten” (interview, Sept. 29, 2004).

Solomon Islands audits “confirm that some Asian businessmen intentionally
funded and promoted violent conflicts between Solomon Islands ethnic communities in
recent years in order to destabilize the government and so stop it from controlling their
corruption.” A pattern of corruption can be seen throughout the Pacific Islands because
“most crime in logging and fishing is associated with Asian entrepreneurs” (Crocombe
2007, 181, 183).
Tommy Chan, an ethnic Chinese businessman born in Solomon Islands, owns the Honiara Hotel along with both Wings Supermarkets, Wings Shipping, and more. A number of Solomon Islanders told me Chan is corrupt. Members of MEF stayed at Honiara Hotel for a long time during the tension but did not pay any money. Chan is Party President of the Association of Independent Members of Parliament (AIMP). Both Chan and his son Laurie Chan have served as Members of Parliament. One Member of Parliament told me Chan “gets together people in Parliament and makes sure no one defects to the opposition in order to maintain stability” (interview, Sept. 2004). A man with close ties to the government told me that a lot of members of Parliament will say they’re independent so that people will buy their vote for Prime Minister. “This is when people like Tommy Chan pay big bucks to buy people’s votes” (interview, Sept. 2004).

In the 2006 national election, Chan was accused of paying bribes in order to help Snyder Rini become Prime Minister. ABC Radio reported that when the Governor General announced that Rini had been chosen Prime Minister, “there were crowds at the Parliament who screamed out: ‘Chinese money! Chinese money!’ alleging that some of the people they thought who were going to vote for the former Opposition, which yesterday was thinking it had a chance of winning, that they were bought overnight and switched sides” (Dorney 2006).

After the election, “fierce rioting” broke out. “Most of the violence was directed against businesses owned by ethnic Chinese in Honiara.” The Chinatown commercial district in Honiara was almost completely destroyed. Kabutaulaka (2006b) emphasized the protest and rioting was not about the social unrest that the intervention sought to stop.
It was, instead, more about “what people perceived as the corruption of the democratic process.” Rini resigned and Sogavare was elected Prime Minister in May 2006. In December 2007, Derek Sikua became Prime Minister and remains in the position today (U.S. Dept. of State 2009).

The ethnicity of the rich and powerful is not problematized in conventional views of the Pacific. Local actors with ethnic heritage in the metropoles of the Pacific Rim may be conduits for foreign pressure. They are simply not in the conventional frame of “ethnic violence.”

**Conclusion**

The entity of Solomon Islands did not exist before European colonizers created it; its name comes from a Spanish explorer and its borders from Britain and Germany. When viewed through a western lens of modernity and development, Solomon Islands may appear small, isolated, and dependent. Proponents of development argue stability and security increase with higher levels of development as if every country could reach the same stage but development policies create dependence and underdevelopment (Watts 1995, 50). Uneven development is an inherent characteristic of capitalism; underdevelopment is a result of participating in the world economy (Wallerstein 1979). Development provides a justification for intervention. While the conventional narrative assumes that RAMSI is the answer bringing more development, the critical approach sees development as creating economic, social, and environmental problems and as unlikely to undo the strains already created.

This chapter shows how the critical approach is useful in analyzing the impossible position of the postcolonial state in a subsistence economy; in showing the development
model as imposing a superstructure on the islands that can only be supported by exporting the resource patrimony; in viewing the displacements and dependencies of society shifted to the capital Honiara and to unreliable wage work while most of the parallel functionality of the subsistence economy is undervalued and undermined; and, thus, understanding how parliamentary instability is not a surprising outcome where leadership legitimacy and resources for elites are in play in a very small formal economy. The state itself is an arena that is going to be unstable.

The colonial legacy of Britain and Australia viewing Solomon Islanders as inferior and incapable of ruling themselves has continued through theories of development and neoliberalism. In the next chapter, I explore how this assumption of inferiority has also continued through crisis discourse in the Pacific.
Chapter 4: Examining Crisis Discourse in the Pacific

In this chapter, I ask, through what frames has Australia understood Solomon Islands and how do Solomon Islanders perceive purported crises in their country? Since the late 1990s, scholars and journalists have used words such as Africanization, Balkanization, and Caribbeanization to describe the ‘Pacific region.’ Other phrases such as arcs of instability and doomsdayism have also been used to depict countries in Oceania. Dividing the chapter into five sections, I investigate five terms of crisis – doomsdayism, ethnic violence, arc of instability, Africanization, and failed states. First, I analyze discourse from academic, government, and media publications. Then I juxtapose these theories and discourses with on-the-ground interviews I conducted in Australia and Solomon Islands. Although these terms are the ‘conventional’ thinking, their roots are sometimes obscure, so it is my project in these pages to trace origins as well as impacts. I present each of these five terms as if they are descriptions of an objective reality; then I examine the same terms through a critical lens in order to illuminate what functions these terms of crisis discourse serve. I investigate how Australian framings of the Pacific continue to rely on assumptions from colonial, development, and neoliberal discourses and how these terms continue earlier portrayals of Islanders as subordinate to Australians. I ask about Australia’s inaction or action in response to these five tropes, and find the contingencies that finally drove Australian intervention in Solomon Islands in 2003.
Section One: Doomsdayism

Conventional View of Doomsdayism

Doomsday images have been applied to the Pacific for over a century by missionaries, by people worried about native races dying out, and more recently by Australian politicians, academics, and journalists predicting a nightmare from crises in population and development following the end of the Cold War. The recent doomsday idea stemmed in part from fears of a high population growth rate occurring at the same time Pacific economies were stagnant or faltering. Callick (1993) argued Pacific economies could not be self-reliant; they needed stability to attract foreign investment and aid. To do so, these island countries would have to get rid of indigenous traditions in order to be economically successful. Callick warned the region’s population explosion is “out of control” and predicted a bleak future if leaders in the region did not take bold actions to stem these problems.

In June 1994, Gordon Bilney, Australian Minister for Pacific Islands Affairs, addressed the Australian Foreign Correspondents’ Association, delineating key factors that needed to be addressed “with a sense of urgency” for sustainable development to be possible. Bilney (1994a) stated he did not intend to “paint a picture of a region in a state of crisis” yet he implied that quick action had to be taken for crisis in the Pacific to be averted. At the same time, Wright (1994) wrote an article in the Sydney Morning Herald titled “Visions of Paradise Blur as South Pacific Sails off the Map.”

In August 1994, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation aired the “Pacific Nightmare” Lateline program and reported Prime Minister Paul Keating had “reiterated the Australian Government’s bleak view that the South Pacific has only one generation to
get things right or face (an) social and economic nightmare” (O’Brien and O’Neill 1994). Pacific Island leaders were warned that development aid, which flowed steadily during the Cold War, might slow down, especially since the economies of the Island States were failing.

As Solomon Islands was being touted as the Pacific’s first failed state at the beginning of the 21st century, doomsday images resurfaced. Hughes (2003a) warned in an influential article called “Aid Has Failed the Pacific” that an “excess of population over income growth” meant “serious trouble.” In June 2003, Michael Jeffrey, Governor General designate of Australia, described the situation in the Pacific as a “clock ticking on a time bomb, whose fallout will directly impact on Australia and New Zealand” (quoted in Hughes 2003b).

ANU Political Science professor Michael McKinley told me Pacific Island States are “embryonic, to be polite... The whole Pacific is a basket case. And because of that, it’s always going to be causing problems by poverty and inequality” (interview, Nov. 17, 2003).

In 2004, Greg Urwin became the first Australian to lead the Pacific Island Forum. As Secretary General, he gave a Keynote Speech at the “Securing a Peaceful Pacific” conference in New Zealand. Urwin talked about failed states, corruption, pessimism, and then added, “It must be accepted that some Pacific Island countries suffer from issues of size, remoteness, and lack of resources.” Urwin then wondered aloud if the region was going to hell, later deciding it was not.
Critique of Conventional View of Doomsdayism

A number of prominent scholars have criticized the doomsday images applied to the Pacific. While Callick argued population growth in the Pacific was careering out of control, other scholars disagreed. Pirie (1994a) maintained the population growth rate in Oceania was slowly decreasing. In August 1994, the Prime Minister of Cook Islands argued, “If a nightmare exists at all, I tend to think that that nightmare exists in the mind of Western trained, schooled economists… From the point of view of the Pacific Islanders, we don’t have a nightmare.” Instead, Pacific Islanders have different values and different ways to measure progress (O’Brien and O’Neill 1994).

The Australian use of doomsday images of the Pacific is belittling, disparaging, and exaggerated. For centuries, Europeans depicted islands in the Pacific as paradise but this paradise existed in the European imagination rather than as some actual past state. Recent referrals to doomsday scenarios in the Pacific seem especially horrific in contrast to the promotion that the Pacific used to be paradise (Fry 1997). Fry (1997, 56) stressed,

At the center of such conceptions has been an unquestioned, and often unacknowledged, belief that Australia has a right, or even a duty, to speak for the inhabitants of this region, to represent them to themselves and to others, to lead, and to manage them... At the heart of the new doomsdayism is the assumption of a special right to manage, steeped in old racist premises.

Fry told me about a cartoon in the Sydney Morning Herald in June 2000 where different countries such as Fiji and the Solomons were represented as dominos with palm trees (interview, Nov. 21, 2003). The same newspaper had an editorial cartoon by John Tiedemann in mid-2003 that depicted all Pacific Island States in view burning in disaster as kangaroos representing Australia watched (Figure 4.1).
Generalizations of violence are unhelpful because violence is unlikely to occur in three-quarters of the countries in the southwest Pacific (Firth 2004). Lautensach (2004) agreed, “We can’t generalize the Pacific. It leads to misunderstandings, wrong policies, and problems. We need to rethink culture and region.” Generalizations of violence are also problematic because they ignore the historical and political context underlying each case.

Concepts such as doomsdayism displace “concern away from the hegemonic agendas of outsiders and toward the presumed incompetence of indigenous others in the modern world” (Chappell 2005). Promoters of doomsday scenarios continue to apply Western models and values to Oceania. Doomsday scenarios lack “attention to local circumstances, the ongoing role of outside economic forces, and the concern of many indigenous peoples to protect their cultures from relentless globalization.” Within the narrative of the war on terror, the doomsday threat has new meaning for Australia as
deputy sheriff; unruly spaces require pre-emptive intervention to keep metropolitan powers safe.

Section Two: Ethnic Violence

Conventional View of Ethnic Violence

Empirical theories of conflict stemming from geographic regionalizations include violence based on difference in the forms of ethnicity (Horowitz 1985; Gurr and Harff 1994) and culture (Huntington 1993). As the Cold War ended, many policy makers and scholars in international relations attempted to create new models that would predict and explain the way the world would work with only one superpower. Fukuyama’s (1992) *The End of History* stated liberal democracy in conjunction with market economies could fulfill basic human needs, thus rejecting Marxist claims that capitalism is not the final stage. Fukuyama was one of the few optimists in the field; others portended chaos.

Huntington (1993) argued that with the demise of the bipolar world of the cold war, conflicts would no longer be based on the dual ideologies of capitalism and communism but rather would likely occur between seven or eight major civilizations. In other words, differences between groups would incite conflict. Kaplan (1994) wrote about “The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying our Social Fabric.” Homer-Dixon (1994, 1998, 1999) contended violent conflict would erupt from environmental scarcities caused by population pressures and the interconnectedness that came with globalization. Gurr (1993) argued that since the end of the Cold War conflicts between communal groups and states would provide the most serious threats to both domestic and international security in most areas of the world. Gurr used past conflicts to identify factors leading to ethnic conflict.
Ethnic Differences Lead to Violence

In *Ethnic Violence*, Hull (1997, 6) argued all over the world, “ethnic identity is also at the root of violent conflict and civil war.” Ethnic violence begins when one ethnic group hates another. Hull maintained that experts including most historians, educators, and scientists concur that hatred between groups is a primary factor in ethnic violence.

In February 2000, CIA Director George Tenet gave a statement before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in which he argued “traditional ethnic hatreds and conflicts” were frozen by the cold war “within the global competition between two superpowers.” Tenet contended these ethnic hatreds had thawed since the end of the Cold War, resulting in conflicts in Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, and Rwanda. The CIA (2000) concluded that in the coming decade, internal conflicts were the types of conflict that would most frequently threaten global stability.

Fuller et al. (2002) in “Potential for Ethnic Conflict in China” considered the potential for ethnic conflict against the geographical background of a specific country, including the human geography and demographics. The study focused primarily on the factors themselves that lead to conflict rather than attempting to determine which area is most likely to result in an “ethnic fracture zone.” Their approach focused more on territory since they viewed the one common factor among potentially explosive ethnic groups to be dissatisfaction with the established territorial order. Like Mikesell and Murphy’s (1991) study, Fuller et al. argued ethnic conflict was rooted in lack of territorial control since territory is necessary for autonomous control over one’s own affairs within the modern state system. If democracy is instituted too quickly in developing countries,
it can exacerbate tensions between market-dominant minorities and the poorer majorities (Chua 2003). Ethnic nationalism “corresponds to some enduring propensities of the human spirit that are heightened by the process of modern state creation” and, in typical ‘us and them’ fashion, is a foundation for cohesion and hatred (Muller 2008, 35).

Ethnic conflicts have occurred all over the world including throughout Africa, in former communist states, the Middle East, China, and Sri Lanka. Two of the most violent ethnic conflicts in recent history have taken place in Rwanda and Darfur. When the genocide began in Rwanda in 1994, the media and numerous governments described it as ethnic, “preordained and impossible to prevent” (Melvern 2000, 169). Similarly, in Darfur, human rights groups, the UN, and media sources including The Washington Post and The Chicago Tribune have charged ethnic violence (UN Radio 2006; Kessler 2005; Ali 2006; Human Rights Watch 2004). Kristof (2006) argued that although “shorthand descriptions are simplistic, they’re also essentially right… The Janjaweed and Sudanese government leaders are Arabs and their victims in Darfur are members of several non-Arab African tribes.”

Violence in the southwestern Pacific has also been described as ethnic in origin. In Fiji, the two coups in 1987 were described by foreign media as “inevitable race wars” between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians (Robertson 1998, 8). The coups in 2000 and 2006 were also described by numerous media outlets as ethnic in origin.

**Ethnic Violence in Solomon Islands**

Many politicians, journalists, and academics portrayed the beginning of the crisis in Solomon Islands as ethnic violence. The charge was that this conflict erupted out of
primordial tensions between two ethnic groups: Malaitans versus people from the island of Guadalcanal. Andrew Nori, a lawyer from Malaita who helped to mastermind the June 2000 coup, argued (2001) the violence erupted because of deep-seated “ethnic hatred” that people from the island of Guadalcanal have expressed toward people from the island of Malaita.

A year before the coup, Radio Australia referred to “Solomon Islands ethnic violence,” and an “ethnic crisis” (May 27, 1999; April 14, 1999). The New York Times, the U.S. Department of State, the Red Cross, and Amnesty International reported on ethnic violence in the Solomons. The video “New Battle for Guadalcanal” referred to the “two tribe tension” in Solomon Islands and the “sea of ethnic hatred” there. In April 2000, the Australian and New Zealand Foreign Ministers issued a joint media release discussing the “Solomon Islands ethnic violence” (Downer and Goff 2000). Renowned Pacific Island scholar Robert Kiste (2001) described the conflict as one of “guerrilla warfare between the people of Malaita and Guadalcanal” while Finnish scholar Jari Kupiainen (2000) referred to the “current ethnic conflict” in the Solomons.

The outside world began paying more attention to the events in the Solomons after the coup on June 5, 2000. That day, Reuters reported “about 60 people have been killed in fighting in the past year and a half between rival ethnic groups from the main island of Guadalcanal and Malaita island.” Other news sources including Asia Times, the (UK) Guardian, TIME Asia, the Washington Post, and the International Press Institute also described it as ethnic violence. Just after the coup, Australian Prime Minister John Howard explained his decision not to intervene because the problem in Solomon Islands
“is a longstanding ethnic one, involving the people from Guadalcanal and from Malaita, and this root cause has to be addressed if there is to be a permanent solution to the crisis” (June 6, 2000). Reilly (2000, 262) claimed the Solomons were suffering from “an ethnic civil war between rival ethnic militias culminating in the forced resignation of a prime minister.”

Less than a year later, the U.S. Department of State issued a warning to its citizens to avoid travel to the Solomons due to “ethnic unrest” (Pacific Islands Report March 1, 2001). The CIA’s World Factbook 2001 also warned of “severe ethnic violence.” In the video “Happy Isles,” the narrator described “three years of violent ethnic disputes” and “fighting between Guadalcanal people and people from Malaita island.” In 2003, the BBC described it as “a brutal ethnic war” (“Solomons Warlord Surrenders”). The Sydney Morning Herald wrote about “hundreds of killings” in the Solomons “during seven years of ethnic violence” (Skehan 2004) and about “ethnic cleansing” (Skehan 2006a).

**Critique of Conventional View of Ethnic Violence**

Although scholars including Gurr, Horowitz, and Huntington have argued conflict erupts naturally between different ethnic and cultural groups, critical thinkers contend these scholars are not simply describing a neutral, independent reality; rather, they are prescribing a very specific interpretation to events occurring in the world. Theories in which the world is viewed in state-centric terms portray ethnic violence as part of a fight over territorial borders and/or an effort to gain control of natural resources and “established political institutions that define state power” (Mount 2003, 268). Critical
theory, on the other hand, asserts ethnicity – like other forms of identity – is an outcome of a set of power relations (Campbell 1998b). We need to ask why ethnic conflict has become such a salient concern in the post-Cold War period (Mount 2003). The presumption that conflicts will be ethnic in origin colors the perceptions of researchers and policymakers and affects how they design research projects.

**Questioning Ethnicity: Classification & Meaning**

Traditional geography views the state as territory – physical terrain with fixed boundaries – while critical thinkers consider the state to be an effect of a contingent set of relations, something that is produced. Nation-states contain powerful narratives of race and ethnicity’s connection to land. People are often said to acquire their affiliations of ethnicity, race, and sex at birth. Political societies determine the kinship rules that are used to reproduce political societies. The notion of ethnicity depends on the implicit or explicit invocation of a past, present, or future political society (Stevens 1999).

Nationality is a construct based on “an imagined political community” (Anderson 1991, 6). Unlike nationality, ethnicity is not directly linked to territory. Ethnicity does, however, share with race and nationality the sense of an imagined community. All of these identities are constructed, imposed, and/or manipulated, but their effects are real (Nixon 1997). “It is not what is, but what people believe is that has behavioral consequences” (Connor 1993, 75).

Identity is always in process, never fixed. The self-identification of a group is neither natural nor invented but rather a positioning that develops from historical,
environmental, political, and social factors and patterns. Identity is articulated both through an explicit commonality and contingent connection (Li 2000).

Understanding “when ethnic differences generate conflict… requires a deeper understanding of how ethnicity works” (Habyarimana et al. 2008). When investigating a conflict described as “ethnic” in origin, it is crucial to ask, “How did ethnicity become a prominent issue? Who constructed and perpetuated the ethnic discourse? What are the underlying causes of the crisis?” (Kabutaulaka 2001, 2). In other words, just as Connor (1990) asked, “When is a Nation?” we need to ask, “When is ethnicity?”

It is essential to “go beyond simply describing and mapping difference and instead chart the varied processes by which difference is constituted” (Shaw 2002). I start with the word itself: Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2009) defines “ethnic” as “heathen,” which it says also means “uncivilized.” This definition is especially enlightening as it helps us to see that words and definitions are not neutral, but rather can tell us about power structures and assumptions that are hidden in language. Modernization theorists have equated ‘ethnic’ with the backward and traditional other (Mount 2003).

After World War II, anthropologists more frequently used the terms ‘ethnic groups’ and ‘ethnicity’ instead of ‘tribes’ and ‘race’ when speaking about a group of people who shared a similar cultural and linguistic heritage (Keyes 1997). A discourse of ethnicity began to “eclipse premodern discourses of cultural diversity” (Keyes 2002, 1174, 1171). Ethnicity gained importance as colonial territories became independent. These new states sought “to capture state power” by promoting, or rather creating, “dominant narratives about the cultural heritage and the destiny of those claimed to
constitute a national community. Nationalist discourses have created an environment in which ethnicity has flourished.” More recently, ‘ethnic group’ has been used primarily to distinguish a minority group from the dominant national culture. In national narratives, “the histories of some indigenous peoples have often been ignored, marginalized, or even specifically rejected” (Keyes 1997, 153).

Ethnic identities are unstable, dynamic, and malleable; in other words, they are anything but fixed. Definitions of ethnic groups are “difficult, inconsistent, and confusing” (Assefa 1996). Ethnic identities are essentialist in that they assume a uniformity and homogeneity, and they overlook incredible diversity and long histories of intermarriage.

Durkheim and Mauss (1963, 8) argued it is essential to explore what forces lead to human classification, observing, “Every classification implies a hierarchal order for which neither the tangible world nor our mind gives us the model.” Barth (1969, 13) stated ‘ethnicity’ is not an objective category but entails “self-ascription and ascription by others.” One project of colonialism was to use censuses as tools to reify “systems of classification of cultural differences” among the people in the territories (Keyes 2002, 1175, 1164, 1171).

Like race, the concept of ethnicity assumes an inherent difference between people that could be decided scientifically yet the science of ethnic classification is “fundamentally flawed.” Classifying people into different ethnicities “has been a product of politics, especially the politics of modern nation-states.” Classifications are “powerful technologies” that produce meanings and then disguise the act of producing (Bowker and
Star 1999, 319). Only certain people – mainly non-whites – are regularly identified as belonging to an ‘ethnic group.’

In order to deconstruct the concept of ethnicity, it is helpful to look at specific “ethnic groups” and to ask: are these natural groupings? How pure are these groups? Kurds are a good example of how “a political territory constitutes a people” because they speak two distinct languages and are not physically different from non-Kurds nearby (Stevens 1999, 146). Prior to the establishment of the modern states of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey were established, ‘Kurd’ did not refer to an ethnicity but rather to a socio-economic level.

**Questioning Ethnic Violence**

Ideas of ethnic conflict are infused with the belief that shared ethnicity will be enough for social harmony while people of different ethnicities will have conflicts (Assefa 1996); then the assumption that conflict between ethnic groups becomes inevitable (Habyarimana et al. 2008). Keen (1998) asks how the ancient hatreds analysis can explain why conflict suddenly erupts between people who had been living together peacefully for many years. Psychological studies done by Milgram in the early 1960s and Zimbardo in 1971 provided evidence that violence is situational and contextual rather than an intrinsic trait in people. This prospect goes dramatically against earlier ideas that intellect and morality are based on biology, especially skin color.

‘Ethnic violence’ often implies that the violence is a natural result of primordial hatred. This characterization suggests the threat of danger from fragmentation of nation-states, and that these sites of conflict are intractable because they are based on long-term
hatred among different groups. This depiction, however, relies on essentialized, monolithic ethnic groupings. It implies that the conflict is due to internal strife and that the blame lies internally as well, confirming ‘these people’ cannot govern themselves. The term “ethnic violence” naturalizes situations in way that disconnect them from other processes that are going on. It is important to ask, as Clifford (1988, 275) does, “What processes rather than essences are involved in present experiences of cultural identity?”

**Questioning State Power**

State elite trying to hold onto power has been the primary motivation for much of what has been described as ‘ethnic violence’ (Chirot 1998). Ethnic classification is not neutral but rather “has been deployed as a technology of power only by modern states.” It is not simply a categorization of difference but also the consequences of the hierarchical relationships embedded in these classifications. Another factor that makes these categorizations problematic is “the assumption that peoples belong within borders” because people have many connections across borders, especially in areas where indigenous peoples were deliberately separated by colonial powers through the establishment of borders (Keyes 2002, 1174).

Ethnic hatred is a byproduct of ethnification rather than its source (Kuran 1998, 623). In Bosnia, the ethnic and nationalist conflicts “are an exacerbation rather than an aberration of the logic behind the constitution of political community” (Campbell 1998a, 24). Particular identity narratives are especially dangerous in terms of the violence they encourage (Shapiro 1997; Krishna 1999).
Once categories of identity have been destabilized and the nation is no longer considered a natural entity, one can more easily see the violence and exclusion that occurs with nation-building. Viewing nation-building as simply the aggregation of diverse people into a coherent political community launders the violence of nation-building (Shapiro 2003). Within state-centered discourse, violence committed by the state is erased as ‘policing’ since the state has a monopoly on legitimate violence.

“Ethnic violence” can be a “lazy shorthand explanation” (Kabutaulaka 2001, 2). This framework does not just describe a situation, it decontextualizes it and presents it ahistorically. ‘Ethnic tensions’ makes it sound like an inevitable clash, something preordained. It takes away agency and shifts blame and responsibility away from where it truly lies. It also makes people outside of the situation less likely to get involved. Nixon (1997, 76) argued, “Ethnicity serves as an ethical leveler. If the conflict can be designated as “ethnic”… it can be smoothly dismissed as “natural,” thereby cheapening the lives at stake.”

Instead of requiring intervention, the framework of ethnic violence reinforces the view that it is an internal matter within a sovereign country and that other countries should not intervene. Within this framework, conflicts that are described as ethnic in origin often appear unsolvable. The discourse of ethnic violence has a hidden agenda that these conflicts are not resolvable. We lose the sense that solutions can be found.

According to traditional geography, sovereignty is essential because nation-states are the primary political unit in the world today. A critical approach shows that sovereignty only matters to those in power when it is convenient.
**Similarities among Conflicts in the Pacific**

Finin and Wesley-Smith (2000) argue that instances of conflict in the Pacific are related but not simply by outbreaks of “ethnic fighting.” Rather, governments in the Pacific all face challenges to their stability and security because of colonial legacies, tensions between traditional and modern forms of government, corruption, and the erosive effects of globalization. Denoon (2004) maintained “the continuing impact of old ideas and new international models helps explain why we often see the Pacific as a region in crisis, an exception... we can get a better perspective if we set Pacific problems in a wider context.” Similarities also exist between the violence that has erupted in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea and what has been labeled ‘ethnic violence’ in other countries such as Rwanda and Burundi, which also have experienced weak states, development crises, and divided societies due to colonial policies. By using simplistic models, we lose the connections that highlight how current problems relate to the processes and pressures of development, globalization, and modernity overall.

Similarities underlying the conflicts in Fiji and Solomon Islands include the results of capitalism, (neo)colonialism, globalization, and the imposition of Western ideals and models onto non-Western people and land. The central issues in both countries are “ethnic identity, uneven development, resource extraction, internal migration and urbanization, land use, unemployment, the lack of legitimacy of centralized models of governance, the legacy of colonial rules in boundaries, practices and laws, and the tension between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ sectors” (Fry 2000, 3).
Because the June 2000 coup in Solomon Islands took place just a couple of weeks after the Fiji coup, it was convenient to use the same language of ‘ethnic violence’ to describe what was happening in the Solomons. On June 7, 2000, the (UK) Guardian referred to it as a copycat coup. It is quick and easy to describe a conflict as ethnic in nature, to package it in ethnic or tribal terms, so that it fits in the thirty-second sound bite allotted to it. Terms such as ‘ethnic tension’ and ‘social inequality’ are convenient catchphrases when, in fact, “unequal access to resources has been the root of all conflicts” (Teaiwa 2004). Regarding the term ‘ethnic tension’ being used to describe the conflict in the Solomons, John Roughan (2003) maintained the term “social unrest” is more appropriate because it gives greater coverage of what happened. Because the coup in the Solomons happened two weeks after the coup in Fiji, the same language was used. “But ‘ethnic tension’ is the least useful terminology to describe what happened.” Moore (2004, 52) stressed, “‘Ethnic tension’ became the short-hand catch-cry to describe the events on Guadalcanal from 1998, even though the circumstances were much more complex.”

My Findings from Solomon Islands: Not an Ethnic War

My fieldwork findings provide on-the-ground stories to unsettle the conventional history of the tension. Giving the crisis a history and putting it in context helps to illustrate that ethnic conflict was not the primary impetus for violence there. In June 2000, the Malaitan Eagle Force (MEF) removed Prime Minister Ulufa’alu, a Malaitan, from power. Kabutaulaka (2001, 4, 2) stressed, “In the past two years anyone exposed to the Guadalcanal crisis would have heard of it being referred to in ways that suggested
ethnicity as the most important underlying issue.” He provided convincing evidence that the crisis was not about ethnic differences but rather, ethnicity was the arena through which the crisis manifested itself in overt form and was the avenue through which frustrations were expressed:

The crisis could… be understood as the consequence of processes of change, rather than as merely the result of ‘hatred’ between the peoples of two islands. There is a need to explore beyond ethnicity and look at the poor policies of successive governments, weak and ineffective structures and systems of government, poorly planned large-scale resource developments, the inequitable distribution of development benefits and the need for institutional and constitutional changes.

A Member of Parliament told me the problems that led to the tension had been brewing since before independence. In 1968, Malaitans on Guadalcanal were spreading “bad publicity about the people of Guadalcanal.” Guadalcanal people wanted compensation but their request was ignored. At independence in 1978, the people of Guadalcanal cautioned the national government about people from Malaita who were squatting on their land, a practice that had been happening for a long time. But Malaitans were in high positions in the police and in the courts, and it took the government ten years to act.” In 1988, there was a peaceful demonstration by people from Guadalcanal before then-Prime Minister Ezekiel Alebua. They asked that the land taken by squatters be returned to Guadalcanal people but Alebua, who was from Guadalcanal, did not solve the problem. In 1998, the people of Guadalcanal wanted their own government. “These concerns weren’t addressed” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Nanau told me about secessionist movements by different provinces in Solomon Islands. Pre-independence, Western Province wanted to be independent. In 1988 and
again in 1998, Guadalcanal said it wanted to be independent. “The issues were pretty much the same. People had been raising the same issues and problems since independence and the central government always played it down. They figured, if we put it off, it’ll die down. Instead, the resentments built up and built up and finally exploded” (interview, Sept. 3, 2004).

To posit the crisis in Solomon Islands as ethnic violence renders invisible the connections that the outside world has had with the Solomons. If the crisis erupted because of deep-seated hatred among two different groups, other issues disappear from view… the repercussions from colonization by the British, the introduction of capitalism, and more recently the extraction and unfair distribution of resources like timber and fish. Suddenly it is more difficult to see how aid agencies and development projects have contributed to producing a climate that has benefited the Solomons’ elite at the expense of the majority.

As stated in the preceding chapter offering a critical overview of Solomon Islands, the British colonizers favored people from the island of Malaita and gave them opportunities not afforded to other Solomon Islanders. In addition to resenting Malaitans, many Solomon Islanders have resentments based on what they perceive as the unfair distribution of development benefits and a government that is too centralized. The province of Western Solomons has contributed yearly more than 50% of the national revenue but receives back only 16% each year since the revenues are distributed based on population. As early as 1978 when Solomon Islands became independent, the people of Western Solomons wanted to become independent because they did not like the strongly
centralized nature of national government. Many people in the country are also upset about the high level of corruption that has existed within the government for years. The conflict continued in large part because the state lacked the capacity to address the underlying issues (Kabutaulaka 2002). That is a very different assessment than conflict erupting from primordial hatred.

Dinnen told me the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA), signed in Townsville, Australia in October 2000 by members of IFM and MEF, framed the conflict in ethnic terms. “It legitimated the process. Rather than helping to bring about peace, the TPA actually made it much harder for peace to come about because of the way it was framed. It didn’t address the issues and grievances. The conditions of the agreement “reflected the views of the militant groups” but not the “voices of the wider Solomon Islands civil society, who had been the most active proponents of peace and moderation.” The provisions of the TPA assumed that the two militant groups were cohesive and structured bodies capable of fulfilling their obligations under the agreement. In reality, divisions had always existed in both entities based on loyalties to particular leaders, places of origin, language, kinship ties, etc. After signing the TPA, the IFM fragmented, a process that “hinted at the critical role of a more complex and dynamic local politics being played out beneath the rubric of ethnic tensions and discrete military groups” (interview, Nov. 11, 2003). Yet, on December 20, 2002, Radio Australia reported, “Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer says the Townsville peace agreement has been successful in ending ethnic conflict in Solomon Islands.”
Once the agreement was signed, people started turning on and fighting with their own and old family disputes rose up again (Nanau interview, Sept. 2004). The TPA was a completely different process than the peace process in Bougainville. In Townsville, the Solomon Islands representatives were “given four days to fix the problems in the Solomons, to sign an agreement and to get out of Australia” (Kabutaulaka interview, Oct. 2004).

The root cause of the crisis in Solomon Islands was not ethnicity but rather the unfairness of the national government in terms of resource distribution and local autonomy (Moore 2004, 48). Land plays such an important role in the Pacific in terms of defining identity “especially when there is a mine and forest connection. People will organize along ethnic lines to get resources from the state” (May 2004).

Wainwright also argued against the idea that the conflict in the Solomons is primordial: “Land and population issues are inherent in this conflict.” Ethnic violence arises when there are other pressures, such as economic issues, service delivery problems, and people losing confidence in their government (interview, Dec. 2003). Similarly, Downer and Phil Goff, New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs And Trade, identified (2000) “issues of resource allocation, land ownership, employment opportunity and administrative capacity” as sources of tension. Ethnicity became important in the conflict as “a response to an economic collapse that was a partial outcome of failures of national governance and a flawed political system” (Connell 2006, 116).

Describing the crisis in the Solomons as an ethnic conflict obscures the complexities of the situation. It is true that some people from Guadalcanal formed a
militia known as IFM and that some people from the island of Malaita who were living on Guadalcanal formed a militia known as MEF. It is also true that members of the IFM and MEF were fighting each other. But to describe the conflict as ethnic in origin belies the nature of the conflict in several ways. It reinforces the idea that people from the island of Malaita share a common ethnicity as do the people of Guadalcanal. The description that the fighting occurred along ethnic lines ignores the diversity, tensions, and infighting within these two groups. It also ignores numerous other Solomon Islanders from other provinces who were also participating in or affected by the fighting since the conflict was not limited to Guadalcanal; there was fighting in the Western Province, on Malaita, and other places within the Solomons. Finally, foreign companies, especially logging companies, are invisible in the dominant discourse (Pattison interview, Sept. 30, 2004).

Women Working for Peace

Women were also invisible in the dominant discourse yet played an active role in working for peace. Alice Pollard and other women belonging to the group Women for Peace (WFP) took action toward peacemaking as soon as the coup took place in June 2000. Less than a week after the coup, women had come to Honiara representing all provinces and groups. Pollard got permission to meet with the IFM, and she asked Andrew Nori if she could cross the border to speak with MEF members. Some women went before they received permission. Many of these women risked their lives in an effort to bring about peace. Pollard (2004) stated, “We observed looting, rapes, and killings.”

WFP members “mainly have no qualifications, no academic degrees.” In other words, they are not experts in the modern sense. Yet, women felt the impact of conflict
much more quickly because their livelihoods were threatened. “Conflict and peacemaking are not new. The history of the Solomons says both have existed for a long time and have existed at all levels. This gave women the strength to take a different approach.” What is new is the modern technology including high-powered weapons.

Pollard also stated, “In the Solomons it is quite evident that there has been an increase in guns, which is a spillover from the Bougainville conflict. Prime Minister Mamaloni thought the conflict might come into the Solomons so he ordered a big amount of guns into the Solomons to protect the country but it worked the other way.”

WFP took a neutral stand. They had a cultural means of peacemaking as a background and their peaceful role was based on having a clear conscience. The women “took a peaceful, motherly role in the conflict.” They reminded militia members of their wives, daughters, and mothers and told them to come home. They held meetings with militants in camps, with the Prime Minister and Governor General of the Solomons.

Pollard continued:

We participated in peace talks although we were not allowed to speak. We went back and forth between the different groups. We wore uniforms of torn Solomon Islands flags because the conflict was tearing the country apart... This is work from the heart... Women for Peace held prayer meetings, called for soldiers to lay down their arms, called on politicians to work together.

Yet, women were excluded from the TPA. Like Pollard, Karlyn Tekulu, Coordinator of WFP, recalled (2004) that women brought food and prayed with militants in an effort to build peace. Tekulu discussed both the role of Solomon Island women in bringing about peace and the ways that women contributed to the conflict. Women intervened through creative peacebuilding methods such as throwing women’s clothing into the men’s area
and the men would stop fighting; having a swearing ceremony so that men had to stop fighting or they would have to pay women compensation; reaching Gwale women behind the blockade and giving products from Honiara in exchange for market food. On the other hand, some women in the country encouraged the conflict by praying and supporting men as they fought. Tekulu stressed women can affect peace in areas of life where women are responsible. “Women have taken responsibility for their part in the conflict. There is power in the actions you choose. You can be a peacemaker or a peace-breaker.” Relations between Solomon Islands women in WFP have continued as they meet every Wednesday of each week.

**Malaitan and Gwale Identities**

As stated earlier, the crisis was most often described as one between Malaitans and people from the island of Guadalcanal. But where did these ethnic identities come from? Ian Scales, a Ph.D. student at the Australian National University, has lived in the Solomons for more than a decade. Years ago, Scales was conducting research in the Western Province and married a local woman. Scales told me the first known reference to ‘Malaitans’ occurred between 1911 and 1913 when a fight broke out on a plantation near the Western Province town of Rendova. Men from Roviana, an island that is part of the New Georgia island chain, fought a group of men from the island of Malaita. The local district officer described the second group as ‘Malaitans’ (interview, Sept. 2004).

Malaita has long been the most densely populated island in the Solomons (Connell 2006). So many people live on the island that, for centuries, people created artificial islands just offshore to live on. Overcrowding and competition for resources...
along with the imposed head tax have led many Malaitans to migrate for work to other parts of the Solomons.

The local sense of a Malaitan identity first surfaced in 1944 during the Maasina Ruru Movement, which was critical of the British and lasted less than ten years. At least ten different languages are spoken on Malaita alone, which underlies the constructed nature of a ‘Malaitan’ ethnicity. Some people from the island of Guadalcanal now refer to themselves as ‘Isatabu,’ another constructed identity. In fact, there are no such pure identities as ‘Malaitan’ or ‘Gwale.’ Identity in the Solomons is not so clear or rigid as it may appear on the surface, in part because many Solomon Islanders are the products of intermarriages.

**Infighting in the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF)**

There were also numerous examples of infighting, both on Guadalcanal and on the island of Malaita. A number of important people from Malaita living on Guadalcanal did not support MEF. Robert* held a high position in the Solomons media when the June 5, 2000 coup took place. Robert is from Malaita but he disagreed with what MEF was doing (interview, Sept. 2004).

The fact that Malaitans were fighting other Malaitans undermines the assessment that the conflict was simply primordial hatred between two ethnic groups. Why would MEF overthrow a Malaitan Prime Minister in the June 2000 coup? The leaders of MEF viewed Ulufa’alu as sympathetic to the people of Guadalcanal because he had land and business interests on Guadalcanal and because he was from an area of Malaita, which was predominantly Catholic, setting him apart from most of the inhabitants of Malaita.
Two Malaitans I met in Auki talked about how Prime Minister Ulufa’alu is Malaitan and yet he did nothing to protect his people and how betrayed they felt (interview, Sept. 2004).

Yet, a Malaitan close to MEF told me, “Prime Minister Ulufa’alu asked both sides (MEF and IFM) to turn in their guns. He didn’t take sides in the conflict.” MEF members refused because they believed that “Guadalcanal people were planning to attack and kill them in Honiara” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Dinnen also dismissed the myth of two discrete ethnic groups (Gwale and Malaitan) and of each group as a monolithic entity. While he was visiting Guadalcanal during the conflict, Dinnen was driving along an area in a car with some people from MEF. He saw three MEF bunkers – one on a hill, one on the ground, and one on the beach. Each bunker had people in it from one certain group from Malaita. Dinnen was surprised to learn that the men in different bunkers did not interact or talk to each other (interview, Dec. 8, 2003).

John,* from the island of Malaita, was a member of the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP) stationed in Honiara. Several weeks before the June 2000 coup in the Solomons, John was sent away from Guadalcanal. He thought this happened because the other Malaitan police officers knew he would be against the coup. For a couple of years after the coup, it was difficult for John and other police from Malaita who had not joined MEF to do their jobs because they feared reprisals – that they or their families would be attacked by MEF if they did anything to intervene in MEF’s plans. “The police who did
not join MEF did not get salaries for up to a month at a time, the same with teachers, health workers, and others” (interview, Sept. 2004).

MEF leaders had made other preparations to ensure the success of the coup. Randall Biliki had spent 20 years working in the government. When the tension started, he was the Head of Disaster Management for the national government. Then in 2000, just prior to the coup, he “lost” his job. I asked what exactly he meant by that. He told me people had tried to kill him two different times and he realized he had better not stay in his position so he “lost” his job and returned to Choiseul where he was from (interview, Sept. 2004).

People in MEF did not want Biliki in charge of Disaster Management because, as he put it, “Disaster Management isn’t just about weather stuff.” Biliki’s specialty was conflict management. He had spent time working on the Thai-Cambodia border working on the refugee situation. MEF leaders didn’t want him advising the Prime Minister on how to handle the increasing conflict. So they tried to kill him twice. I asked Biliki who was chosen to replace him as the head of Disaster Management. He said his assistant got the job. I asked where his assistant was from and Biliki said, “From Malaita.” Several years after I talked with Biliki, he was killed in Honiara.

A taxi driver from Malaita who stayed in Honiara throughout the tension explained it was dangerous during the tension especially for taxi drivers “because militants would stop us and demand our pay.” I asked, “You mean MEF?” He said yes. I said, “But they’re from Malaita and you are from Malaita, right?” He said, “That didn’t make any difference to them. Only if you knew one of the commanders, then they would
leave you alone. Otherwise, if you had your window rolled down a couple of inches, you’d see gun barrels poked inside and MEF people would make you stop” (interview, Oct. 4, 2004).

At the time of the June 2000 coup, Peter* from North Malaita was living in Honiara. Four days after the coup, Peter went back to North Malaita from Honiara, thinking it would be safer. He said, “It was even worse there, it was more dangerous. There were raskols [thieves, criminals] going around in trucks, drunk, shooting guns at random. They demanded food, money, whatever they could get” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Not only is there evidence of Malaitans fighting each other but perhaps more startling is the revelation that wantoks were fighting each other, especially in Northern Malaita. A taxi driver in Honiara from Northeast Malaita stayed in Honiara for a while after the conflict started. Then he went back to his village on Malaita but he did not stay there because he said it was too dangerous for him there even though he was with wantoks. “People there in the North were drunk and they would demand that you pay them money, they’d come to your house and demand stuff.” His wife was from Southern Malaita so he and his family went there where it was safe (interview, Sept. 2004).

Noel, a young man in his twenties, was born on Guadalcanal to parents from the Baelalea region of Malaita. Noel’s grandfather had moved to Guadalcanal from Malaita to work on a plantation east of Honiara when Noel’s father was young. Later Noel’s grandfather negotiated with landowners east of Honiara to buy a plot of land. Following the customary way of buying land, he gave the landowners shell money and food. Noel’s father sold supplies to many builders in Honiara. He made a good living but in 1998,
when the conflict started and they fled, he lost his land and his business. Noel fled with his family to Malaita where they lived until 2000; they returned to Honiara after the Townsville Peace Agreement was signed in October 2000.

While Noel was living on Malaita, “guys on the island were cruising around with guns and fighting with each other.” In 1999, Noel was walking along the road when a truck full of men from the same ethnic group as Noel stopped him and bought the fish Noel was carrying. While the truck was stopped, someone near Noel threw a stone at the men. As the truck was about to drive off, one man in the back of the truck yelled up to the driver that Noel was the one who threw the stone that had broken something this man owned. The men pointed their guns at Noel and demanded payment. Noel didn’t have any money except what he had just received from them for the fish. Another truck drove by and Noel ran into the woods. The men in the truck fired their guns into the air. Later Noel’s father paid the men compensation for the item even though Noel hadn’t thrown the stone. Noel said if his father had not paid the men, they would have come after Noel and most likely shot him. Life on some parts of Malaita during the conflict became chaotic. Noel told me, “Some Malaitans closed down schools because they said they owned the land that the schools were on and they refused to let the land be used like that” (interview, Sept. 2004).

John is in his fifties and was raised on Guadalcanal. His father came from Malaita to work on a Lever Bros. plantation in eastern Guadalcanal. Like Noel’s grandfather, John’s father also bought land from people of Guadalcanal. John and his family lived there for thirty years, growing some fruit and vegetables and running several services.
John told me some of his brothers and sisters can speak the language of eastern Guadalcanal because that was the language used in their school. I asked him about the ‘primordial’ hatred that people talk about and he said they had been friends with the Guadalcanal people around them for a long time. John and his family left their land on Guadalcanal in 1998 when the conflict started and went back to Malaita. When they left, the Guadalcanal people around them were sorry to see them go. John told me people from the Weathercoast were stirring things up and convincing other people from Guadalcanal to take over land.

I told John the story of what happened to Noel and asked why people in Northern Malaita were fighting with each other. John said even though these people are wantoks, “These were young guys who had guns stolen from the armories. These guys wouldn’t listen to the elders, to the traditional leaders, to anyone. They just did whatever they wanted” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Judith Pattison and Valerie Stanley, directors of AusAid Community Peace and Restoration Fund (CPRF) also recalled the contradictions of the ‘ethnic’ tension. They knew an engineer from Langa Langa, on the western side of the island of Malaita, who could not go to North Malaita; it was much safer for him to go to Guadalcanal (interview, Sept. 2004).

Janet,* a woman I interviewed in Honiara, was from eastern Malaita but had been living on Guadalcanal for many years. In late 2004, she told me there was still fighting going on in Malaita. I asked why wantoks were fighting with each other. She said a lot of it was because Malaitans who have lived on Guadalcanal for generations were moving
back to Malaita trying to escape the conflict. People who had never left Malaita were not happy about this because they say the Malaitans who have been living on Guadalcanal no longer belong on Malaita (interview, Sept. 21, 2004). A businessman in Western Province concurred with Janet that when Malaitans went back to Malaita after the coup, the people who had stayed on Malaita the whole time did not want them. “There weren’t enough resources in the first place” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Mark*, living in Auki, was born on Malaita and had gone to school in Honiara. He moved back to Malaita a year or two after the tension started and has lived there since. Mark told me, “Before RAMSI came, young guys dressed up in camouflage would ride around with guns. Often they’d be drunk or high. They would demand money or compensation or food or anything from people, including their wantoks” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Tom Woods explained there was so much conflict between wantoks, especially in Northern Malaita, because dysfunctional systems had led to breakdowns in society. Traditional systems weren’t being allowed to work and the imposed systems were dysfunctional (interview, Sept. 12, 2004). Kii (2001, 6) similarly argued traditional leadership belonged to chiefs and elders but during the conflict, young men had guns, which “created a new kind of leadership by those who assumed commanding positions during the conflict.”

Polynesian Citizens’ Perspectives on Solomon Islands Identities

There are three groups of Polynesians living in the Solomons – on Ontong Java and Sikaiana Atolls, which are politically part of Malaita Province, on Rennell and
Bellona (known together as ‘Renbel’), and on Tikopia. In colonial days, Melanesian ships sailed through Renbel and, at first, people living on Renbel were Melanesian. Then Polynesians came and pushed them out. Some Renbel people joined IFM to protect their people and things from Malaitans (Pattison interview, Sept. 30, 2004).

A tapa print artist I met in Honiara also illustrates that identities in the Solomons are not as clearcut as we have been led to believe. He is from Ontong Java Atoll, which is approximately 200 miles northwest of the island of Malaita.

**Figure 4.2. Map of Malaita Province with Ontong Java Atoll.**

![Map of Malaita Province with Ontong Java Atoll](source: Wikitravel.org. 2010.)

This tapa print artist has traveled several times from his home on Ontong Java to Honiara to sell his wares. The boat takes three days to get to Honiara, and it only makes the trip to Ontong Java Atoll once a month. Although he lives in Malaita Province, he lives a world away and has a completely different culture.
I asked if he ever has trouble with Melanesians since he is Polynesian. He answered, “Yes, sometimes, especially with Malaitans.” A lot of his friends in Honiara are from Renbel. He said, “Since we are all light-skinned [i.e. Polynesians], we have to stick together.” It was interesting to hear that because he is dark-skinned, definitely darker than Malaitans I met. I asked if people can tell by looking at him that he’s Polynesian. He said, “Yes, people can tell that I’m from Ontong Java Atoll by looking at me” (interview, Sept. 2004).

A teenage student from the island of Rennell told me he had returned from Honiara to Rennell during the tension, explaining that only people who were half-Renbel and half-Malaitan stayed in Honiara then. Renbel people had no problems with people from Guadalcanal during the tension. When Renbel people first came to Guadalcanal in 1942, they came to Tenaru to work copra. At that time, they lived in Tenaru but over the years, they fought so much with Malaitans there that they moved to White River, Guadalcanal, in the 1950s to get away. But White River is much closer to Honiara and it was very difficult for Renbel people to get a job in town. He viewed this as a form of discrimination by Malaitans. “The population of Renbel is so small and Malaita so big” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Henry* told me he feels lucky to have a mother from Bellona and a father from Malaita because he has been able to experience both cultures. He appreciates the diversity within the Solomons and sees it as a strength rather than something divisive. Yet, when I asked specific questions about his experiences, it seemed that his mixed identity often
caused him problems. Henry told me there is prejudice against Polynesian people in the Solomons and that he had experienced such prejudice (interview, Sept. 19, 2004).

‘Reality’ of Malaitans as an Island Group

The idea of a Malaitan ethnicity or identity is not something that is simply felt by people who refer to themselves as ‘Malaitan.’ Many other Solomon Islanders resent Malaitans because they have managed, through the colonial system and then the wantok system, to get the best jobs, to give education opportunities to other Malaitans (Stanley, interview, Sept. 2004). A person from Malaita stated, “People get jealous of Malaitans but Malaitans are the only ones with the skills necessary to do most of the jobs.” This man used to work for a palm oil plantation called SIPL (Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd.) in north Guadalcanal. “To work at the palm oil plantation, you need skills. Gwale people don’t have those skills and they’re lazy (interview with anonymous person from Malaita, Sept. 2004).

I told James, who comes from Tenaru, Guadalcanal, that when I talked with Malaitans, they would often tell me that they are the most skilled and the smartest of Solomon Islanders. James replied, “Yes, many of them believe that.” Next, I told James one person from Malaita had told me that the Solomons needs Malaitans desperately because they supply the labor force and have the skills necessary to keep things running. This person had given SIPL as an example, that it closed down when Malaitans left during the tension and that Gwale people could not keep it running. James answered, “It’s true that SIPL closed but not because Gwale people couldn’t run it. It closed at the height
of the tension. The work is harvesting, just like the work I do in my garden. We could easily have done it” (interview, Sept. 2004).

A woman from Guadalcanal who married a man from Malaita told me, “Most Solomon Islanders are afraid in general of Malaitans. Malaitans have fought with people from Temotu, Renbel, etc throughout the years in Honiara. During the tension, people from other provinces were behind the Guadalcanal people because they don’t like Malaitans too much. People from Malaita hold a grudge, unlike others in the Solomons. Even if you pay compensation for, say, a murder, that’s not enough. Someone in your family will be killed in the next couple of years. Also Malaitans think they are better than everyone else and that they should have the best jobs and opportunities” (interview, Oct. 2004).

The national soccer team was invited to participate in a reconciliation process at Rove Prison. It was initiated by all the churches, by SICA – the Solomon Islands Christian Association. One member of the soccer team recalled, “In one block of the prison, the reconciliation process occurred between Gwale people and Malaitans. They apologized and prayed together.” When he looked at the Gwale prisoners, he felt so bad for them. They did not look at all like fighters. He thought the IFM leaders had convinced them to fight and used them for their own purposes. He said the same about MEF leaders using their fighters for their own purposes but that the Malaitan prisoners looked like fighters. “They were big and looked tough and scary.”

Another member of the national soccer team told me Malaitans have kind of a bad reputation among Solomon Islanders. At one point, this interviewee, who is part
Malaitan, said he thinks Malaitans should just go back to the island of Malaita and create their own development opportunities. I asked about the land system on Malaita and how I had heard about how some tribes cannot come to an agreement on development projects. He said that there are a lot of development opportunities on Malaita – for example, a Spanish company tried to build a cannery – but because it’s a tribal decision what to do with the land, they often can’t agree.

A third member of the national soccer team told me many young people like him “have a lot of passion for this country” and they want to determine their own future. The main reason he wants to play on the Solomon Islands National Team is because he sees soccer as an instrument to unite the country. “It’s a powerful way to unite people.” When the soccer team arrived back in the country after tying Australia in the Second Round Qualifying match for the World Cup, they were stunned to find tens of thousands of people at the airport to cheer them on. This interviewee and his friends from Solomon Islands (from all different provinces) get together and talk about what they need to do to set this country right. They want what’s best for the country, not for their own provinces (interviews, Sept. 2004).

**Infighting in the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM)**

Just as there was infighting among MEF, so was there among IFM members. Gabriel,* a Malaitan living on Malaita, repeated a stereotype I heard numerous times in the Solomons: “People who are full-blooded Guadalcanal aren’t aggressive; Malaitans are aggressive people.” According to Gabriel, before the conflict began in the late 1990s, Malaitans had killed many Gwale people. People from Guadalcanal had killed only a few
Malaitans. It was the people who had half-Guadalcanal blood who instigated the full-blooded Guadalcanal people to fight. Harold Keke, one of the leaders of the IFM, is part-PNG. Andrew Te‘e, another leader of the IFM, is part Malaitan. He was adopted by a Guadalcanal family but kept his Malaitan last name: Te‘e.

In 1988, Malaitans in Honiara fought with people from Rennel and Bellona. In the mid-1990s, Malaitans in Honiara fought with people from Temotu province. “A lot of people throughout the Solomons were angry with Malaitans because they started fights and because they took over land. Malaitans had homes in the valley behind Honiara. They gave their villages Malaitan names which made people from Guadalcanal angry” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Many of the men who fought as part of the Istabu Freedom Movement were part-Malaitan. Primarily, their mothers were from Guadalcanal; since Guadalcanal is matrilineal, these men have rights to the land. They were angry that Malaitans were coming to the island and taking so much land. But, again, this conflict was more complex than that. Even having a Malaitan father and Gwale mother– and, thus, the matrilineal connection to land – did not automatically mean that person would fight with IFM. Moses* is a good example. His mother is from Guadalcanal, and his father is from Malaita. Yet, Moses was part of MEF. He stayed at the blockade at Alligator Creek in 2000 for months. When I asked Moses if he had a gun, he replied, “Yeah!” I asked where he got it. Moses said, “From the armory here. But I didn’t want to shoot anyone on the other side because they’re my blood too. I just went to hang out, play music, and eat the good food” (interview, Sept. 2004).
The fact that there was in-fighting among the leaders of the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) also undermines the description of the conflict as ethnic in nature. Some of the infighting within the IFM came from old family issues. Dinnen revealed the overlap that came through personal connections. People from the different sides kept talking to each other throughout the tension. “A lot of them grew up together. There were Malaitans who lived in the Weathercoast fighting on the IMF side” (interview, Dec. 8, 2003).

Even brothers were fighting on different sides of the conflict. Andrew* fought on the side of MEF during the tension but his brother fought with the Gwale people. During the tension, though, the two brothers never fought against each other. I asked Andrew what it was that they were fighting for if they did not even fight each other. He said, “Land.” Then he added, “But the problem didn’t start with Harold Keke or with MEF. It started in Parliament… long before the coup. For starters, they paid some people compensation but not others” (interview, Oct. 2004).

Two IFM leaders, Harold Keke and Andrew Te’e, “fought with each other a lot” (interview with anonymous woman from Guadalcanal, Sept. 2004). Ken* from the Weathercoast explained the cause of the rift that separated the two leaders of the IFM: “Andrew Te’e is a dirty player. Te’e took money along with Alebua so Harold Keke split from him in 2001.” Ken said the Kuma River became the border between Keke’s area and Te’e’s area. Te’e’s area on Guadalcanal was centered in Makaruku (central southern coast) and stretched through central Guadalacanal to the north. Keke controlled western Guadalacanal and the Weathercoast.
Ken said, “Harold’s men didn’t treat us very well. We lived just to the west of the Kuma River kind of in between Keke’s and Te’e’s areas. We stayed neutral and Keke’s men wanted us to join them. We had to ask Keke for permission any time we wanted to go to town during the tension. As long as he knew about your movements, it was okay (interview, Sept. 2004).

According to Mary,* “People here still view Keke as somewhat of a hero and a champion of their rights because squatters from Malaita were taking over. A lot of Solomon Islanders don’t understand or know what was behind Keke’s fighting, about the plan to take over the island. Andrew Te’e had followers because he would point a gun at them and say, follow me or die. He would force Gwale women to wear grass skirts. They weren’t allowed to wear trousers. Te’e worshiped the devil and thought it would give more power to the devil if the people went back to the ways before Christianity. That was why he tried to force women to wear grass skirts. Men had to wear certain things, too.”

Not surprisingly, other people from Guadalcanal viewed the situation differently. I told Ken from the Weathercoast that I heard from a couple of people from Guadalcanal that, while Harold Keke is a very religious man, Andrew Te’e worships the devil. Ken answered, “No. Te’e is part of the Moro Movement. It’s a Christian group that seeks to keep traditional culture alive and strong. That’s why Te’e told Guadalcanal people to wear the traditional grass skirts, and so on.”

Yet Mary and her relatives were convinced Te’e worshiped the devil. “Keke disagreed with Te’e. Keke followed Christianity and would get his soldiers to go to church, or at least pray, in the mornings and evenings. MEF and the government tried
desperately to kill Keke before RAMSI arrived because they knew the kind of information Keke had, and they were afraid that he would tell RAMSI. If RAMSI found out about the plan Malaitans had to take over the island and how many people on Guadalcanal they had killed, RAMSI would side with Guadalcanal people. The government tried to get him to surrender. He said no because he knew they wanted to keep him quiet. They put a price on his head, SI$100,000. Keke killed people in self-defense when they came to kill him” (interview, Sept. 2004).

This description of Keke is very different from the way he was being portrayed by the outside media. It makes sense though that the Solomon Islands government was still working with MEF at the time and wanted to kill Keke. The national government was corrupt but it had the advantage of legal authority and the monopoly on violence.

I spoke with James, from Tenaru, Guadalcanal, telling him, “When I read or hear about Harold Keke from Australian or American news, I always hear that he’s a really bad person, a warlord who has killed many people. But when I talk with Gwale people, I often hear something very different, that he’s been fighting a just cause.” James responded, “Keke has at heart the people of Guadalcanal and their land. That’s the focus of his struggle, not money. He’s fighting for our freedom. We are not happy at all to hear people say those things about him.”

When I asked James about the killings that Keke had committed, he gave me the example of if he offered his friend a lot of money to go and kill Keke. Then when his friend got there, Keke killed him in self-defense. I asked, “How about the six missionaries people that say Keke killed?” James responded, “The Tasiu… that’s the
name of an organization from the Anglican church. Keke found out one of them was dirty and he didn’t trust them.”

James told me Keke surrendered to RAMSI forces when they arrived in the Solomons. He had waited until they arrived to surrender because he didn’t trust the Solomon Islands government. I asked James if he thought Keke should be in prison. He replied, “Yes, I think it’s the safest place for him now.” Others living in the Solomons told a different story about Keke’s surrender, for instance that he thought he was going to make a deal with the Australians rather than go to jail.

According to Mary, after Keke surrendered to RAMSI, he was kept on a ship for about a week and then put in prison but he was being held separately from other people. “Keke is talking with RAMSI and giving them lots of information. Solomon Islanders keep wondering how RAMSI is getting the information on people to arrest them.” She gave the example of Alex Bartlett who had been arrested the previous week.

An interviewee from an area of Guadalcanal just east of Honiara told me that when the fighting broke out, he took his family to hide in the bush when he realized the extent of the conflict. They stayed there for a couple of years. I asked what he thought about descriptions of the violence as ‘primordial’ hatred between the two ethnic groups. He replied, “The tension really took us by surprise. Before the tension, we Gwale people were living side by side with Malaitan people, and we got along fine. They were our friends just like any other people. I did not join in the fighting at all because I didn’t know what was going on, what they were after.”
I asked if he thought the colonial period when the British favored the Malaitans in terms of education and jobs contributed to the conflict. He answered, “Yes, Malaitans are running the Education Office so they favor Malaitan students. Even if Gwale people pass exams, the Education Office people pass Malaitans instead” (interview, Sept. 2004).

**Fighting in Western Province**

The dominant discourse of ethnic violence occurring between Malaitans and people from Guadalcanal also obscured the fact that other parts of the Solomons were affected by the conflict as well. Malaitans belonging to MEF, for instance, did not confine their operations to Guadalcanal (United Nations March 2002). On a 2003 *Lonely Planet* map, I saw an airfield near Viru Harbor on the island of New Georgia, Western Province. I met a man from Viru Harbor and asked him about the airport because I had not seen any flights listed in or out of it. The man said, “Oh, that’s closed.” I asked why. He said that during the tension, Malaitans would fly in and cause trouble. They were trying to steal resources like timber to raise money for their weapons “so we put a mountain on the runway so they couldn’t land and we had no more trouble” (interview, Sept. 2004).

A businessman in Western Province said Malaitans had been coming to the Western Province to grab resources because “the West is where so much of the Solomons’ income comes from.” He recalled that Malaitans came to Seghe, in the West, trying to get World War II weapons in addition to trying to buy or take resource-rich areas of the Western Province. Officials in the Western Province responded by setting up the province’s own security task force. The officials hired Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) members to protect the Western Province, especially the Marovo Lagoon area,
from Malaitans. A group of Malaitans had tried to slip into the lagoon in a boat but were sunk. The few Malaitans left swimming in the water were shot. There were other serious incidents including a shootout in Gizo, the capital of the West, between Malaitans and the BRA, and two Malaitans were killed.

During the 1989-1997 conflict in Bougainville, the BRA set up in the Honiara Hotel. The interviewee told me he believes BRA members were probably a catalyst telling Gwale people to get rid of Malaitans. He said, “Malaitans are pushy. It was harder for us to get business as Malaitans took over the government and businesses. They have no respect for anyone. They think, ‘As Malaitans, if we see a gate, it’s something we walk through. If it’s locked, we climb over it’” (interview, Sept. 2004).

The UN’s (2002, 56) Common Country Assessment of Solomon Islands stated, “The western Solomons (Western and Choiseul Provinces) have been affected strongly by the conflict in Guadalcanal and by the instability and uncertainty now faced by the whole nation.” A secondary school teacher in the Western Province confirmed the UN report. “People in the Western Province were affected by the tension in several ways. People received no salaries. They were scared to travel, to go out in general, because they were afraid. There was no border patrol so people were coming from Bougainville and causing trouble. There was a shoot out in Gizo Hotel where two Bougainvilleans shot Solomon Islanders who had been working on the other side during the Bougainville conflict. There were Bougainvilleans in Noro shooting Malaitans” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Once again, however, the identities of the people described above are not so discrete. Ian Scales told me there had been so much Malaitan intermarriage in the
Western Province, a phenomenon that started in the early 1960s. When so many Malaitan men were marrying women from the Western Province, the local people began to argue whether they should allow so much intermarriage (interview, Sept. 2004). The assertion that the conflict in Solomon Islands started because of ethnic tensions renders invisible the role capitalism has played and the effects it has had on the country and its people.

Section Three: Arc of Instability

Conventional View of Arc of Instability

The arc of instability is one of many metaphors within traditional geopolitical theories of power and stability. Mackinder’s theory of the Heartland in 1919, developed from his 1904 idea of a geographical pivot, provided a framework of strategic thinking for political geography that persisted until the end of the Cold War. Theories of containment and dominos combined with Mackinder’s Heartland concept and Spykman’s (1944) rimland theory to justify the continued need for geomilitary presence and interventions in Western Europe and elsewhere aimed at ensuring that the Soviet state did not spread.
A Global Arc of Instability

In 1979, President Carter’s National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski coined a metaphor of an arc in the Middle East in which danger lurked not only for the countries in the region but also for the U.S. Brzezinski came to this conclusion because of events in the Middle East, such as the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, coupled with the Soviet Union’s ambitions to extend its influence in the region (Sidaway 1998). The Middle East constituted the central core of the arc of crisis and “its strategic position is unequalled” (Lenczowski 1979, 796). The U.S. needed to maintain access to oil while keeping the Soviets from gaining control in the Middle East. The American government wanted to keep the region as democratic, capitalist, and stable as possible. *TIME* ran a series of
articles on Iran, explaining that Iran was the “center of gravity of this arc” (Ogden and Wierzynski 1980). The cover of the magazine showed a Soviet bear lurking over the “crescent of crisis.”

**Figure 4.4. TIME Cover: Crescent of Crisis.**

Brzezinski had used the phrase ‘arc of crisis’ to describe the region because a number of countries there faced “widespread regional turbulence.” The Soviets were exploiting that turbulence and trying to “project its power into it.” Brzezinski warned that the Soviet Union’s actions would likely destabilize the region and warned the Soviets not to be too aggressive (Ogden and Wierzynski 1980).

Since the 1980s, the arc metaphor has been used numerous times. In October 2003, *U.S. News & World Report* ran a story on Pax Americana and the arc of instability (Figure 4.5). This arc covered a much larger area than Brzezinski’s and included most of Africa, Southeast Asia, and some of South America. Once the U.S. became the sole superpower, American strategic planners shifted their focus to threats posed along this arc. Since they can no longer ensure law and order, these countries risk attracting terrorists networks. In addition, American access to essential resources such as oil may be at risk (Mazzetti 2003).
Figure 4.5. Map of Global Arc of Instability.

In a 2003 *Esquire* story and his 2004 book, *The Pentagon’s New Map: War and Peace in the 21st Century*, Barnett laid out a new security paradigm for the U.S. On a world map, Barnett marked places where major U.S. military operations occurred between 1990 and 2003. He then drew a line around these countries, describing them as places that are disconnected from the world, where globalization has not taken root. He discerned from this a pattern of instability and danger, referring to the places within this circle as the ‘Non-Integrating Gap’ (Barnett 2004).

Barnett (2004) called the rest of the world the ‘Functioning Core,’ arguing this strategic terminology is more appropriate to the post-Cold War world than ‘east’ and ‘west’ or ‘First World’ and ‘Third World.’ Core countries are closely integrated in “a dense web of mutually-assured dependence.” These countries have “stable governments (and) rising standards of living.” Barnett argued “the less globalized the economy” is, the more likely the U.S. will have to conduct military operations there because that country will become a threat from internal instability or a threat to the region. These places are “plagued by politically repressive regimes, widespread poverty and disease, routine mass murder, and – most important – the chronic conflicts that incubate the next generation of global terrorists” (Barnett 2003). Barnett (2004, 50) referred to globalization as the U.S.’s “gift to history, the most perfectly flawed projection of the American Dream onto the global landscape.” Barnett explained this strategy is not unilateralist but rather shows that the U.S. is willing “to bear the bulk of the Core’s burden in managing and ultimately reducing threats emanating from the Gap.” The concept of Core and Gap, Barnett said, are central to post-9/11 U.S. strategic policies.
Figure 4.6. The Pentagon’s New Map.

**Australia’s Arc of Instability**

After the Cold War ended, Australia, like the U.S., tried to “construct a geopolitical foundation for a secure regional future” (Rumley 2006, 11). Australia has, for a number of years, been concerned about an arc of instability growing to its north. Paul Dibb, then a senior intelligence analyst with the Australian Joint Intelligence Organization, first used the term in his 1986 policy report *Review of Australia’s Defence Capabilities*, better known as The Dibb Report. Although Dibb maintained, “Australia is one of the most secure countries on earth,” he also warned about threats coming from the “arc of instability.”

Beginning in the late 1990s, Australia debated how applicable and important the ‘arc of instability’ concept was for Australian security and strategy (Singh 2006, 98). Reilly (2000, 262) said democracy in the South Pacific was “in serious trouble.” According to Dobell, Dibb used the term ‘arc of instability’ as “a polite way to refer to Indonesia.” In May 1998, Indonesian President Suharto resigned after three decades of authoritarian rule. As Indonesia was falling over, it was no longer a barrier for Australia. Dobell argued that ‘arc of instability’ is a useful phrase “to capture policymakers and force them to do something. It is a description without a prescription. It is a useful shorthand if it carries more weight” (interview, Dec. 7, 2003). Though the application of the term ‘arc of instability’ is fairly new, its conceptual basis stretches back to World War II (Dobell 2007).

Lal told me he was the first to use the term ‘arc of instability’ about the Pacific to describe instability arising within island states. He said he still believes the term ‘arc of
instability’ applies to the southwest Pacific. I asked, “Do you mean in a sense that the instability/violence is contagious as that term implies?” Lal replied, “Yes, in the sense that the Fiji coup in 1987 caused people in the Pacific to think differently.” They were questioning and accepting the legitimacy of the state less and questioning using violence as an instrument of state policy. Also, questions of state and ethnicity arose. Lal explained, “I don’t mean the term ‘arc of instability’ in a pejorative way” (interview, Nov. 18, 2003).

Lal was the first to stretch the arc out to Fiji. Prior to this, people had used the term to describe Southeast Asia – spreading from Aceh to Papua New Guinea. Lal added Fiji to the arc, and it took on a new meaning. Lal used the term after the May 2000 Fiji coup because he wanted people to focus on Fiji. He was telling Australia that it should be more involved, “in the sense of ‘you’ll be sorry if you don’t pay attention’” (Fry interview, Nov. 21, 2003).

Dibb (2003) maintained the threat from the arc of instability north of Australia could become Australia’s arc of crisis if poor governance in the southwest Pacific continued. Alan Dupont (2003), another of Australia’s leading strategic thinkers, rejected Dibb’s assertion, arguing “the alleged ‘arc of crisis’ to Australia’s north has been a convenient peg to hang arguments for increased military spending or to endorse a strategic posture that bears little or no relationship to the region’s underlying problems which are overwhelmingly economic, social and environmental rather than military.”

Wainwright, who at the time was the Strategy and International Program Director at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said she thought the term being applied to the
southwestern Pacific was helpful in a strategic context. “This is a region in which stability can’t be presumed. It’s helpful for strategic thinking and policymaking but Australian people need a more nuanced view of the region. People in Australia know more about U.S. states and Europe than they do about Pacific Island countries” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).

To create stability in countries that lie in the arc of instability, we have to create institutions that are sustainable. The keys to sustainable institutions are foreign investment and economic reform to help local entrepreneurs (Wainwright interview, Aug. 4, 2004). The stability of nation-states is essential because development cannot be achieved without it.

In 2006, Brendan Nelson, Australia’s Defense Minister, stated the arc of instability meant Australia has a responsibility to defend the interests and values of the nations in its region. Nelson said the deployment of the Australian Defense Force to Solomon Islands after the Chinatown riots in April 2006 and to East Timor in May 2006 were examples of how fast Australia could “respond to security problems in the arc” (Dobell 2006).

In 2007, Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd said Australia’s arc of instability used to be a strategic concept but now has become a reality. The Australian government needed to change its approach to countries within the arc of instability because, Rudd argued, “The key problem here is that so much of the instability: ethnic, tribal, political, is being driven by economic underdevelopment.” The first priority should be economic development and then security issues will be easier to handle (Jones 2007).
Critique of Conventional View of Arc of Instability

The arc of crisis metaphor was inspired in part by Mackinder’s Heartland concept. Mackinder is often referred to as an environmental determinist for his views that certain geographical patterns lead to certain outcomes. Assumptions embedded in the concept of an arc of instability include the contagion of destabilizing threats to international ‘order,’ peace, and stability. It is a state-centric approach that offers justification for strategies of containment in order to protect “the civilized state and the international system of states” (Mount 2003, 272). The term ‘arc of instability’ has been used by strategists around the world as “a catchall phrase to denote a geographical region that is defined by wide-ranging security challenges” (Singh 2006, 83). Almost all of the countries within the arc of instability are former colonies. Instability is one more label to justify intervention by more powerful states into less powerful ones.

Questioning A Global Arc of Instability

The key when looking at discourse is to learn something about the issues of production of that discourse. When Brzezinski talked about the arc of crisis in 1979, the U.S. was concerned about maintaining access to strategic oil reserves and other raw materials in the Middle East. It was in this context that the ‘arc of crisis’ entered Western geopolitical discourse.

The cover of TIME showing the ‘crescent of crisis’ was a powerful ally in convincing Americans of this threat. The crescent contained a script of danger and instability. There are several points of manipulation in the production of the map: the way the countries from Ethiopia to Pakistan were manipulated into the shape of a crescent; the
use of a crescent, a typical propaganda symbol that suggests movement and action both of instability; and the Soviet bear about to pounce. Such symbols are frequently used around “areas threatened by encirclement” (Campbell 2001, 263, 260-261). Maps are “often used to convey impressions that are helpful to a given cause, regardless of the truth of the information shown.” Instead of describing a neutral series of events, Marshall (2008) argued, American and British policy makers used the ‘arc of crisis’ as part of a strategy of containment of Soviet influence and to keep any country in the Middle East from gaining too much power.

In drawing *The Pentagon’s New Map*, Barnett (2003, 2004) used familiar geographical concepts of core-periphery, or in his case, core-gap. This is another example of hegemony resting on binaries. The core is equated with civilization while the gap, by definition an empty space, lacks civilization. An arc of instability can be used to justify intervention. In this case, Barnett suggests spreading globalization as far and as wide as possible. Tellingly, Pacific Island States do not appear on most of Barnett’s maps.

**Critiquing Australia’s Arc of Instability**

The Australian government’s use of arc of instability images has framed the South Pacific with messages of doom. These images suggest Pacific Island States where leaders are generally corrupt, “administratively incompetent, irresponsible, duplicitous, uncaring about their children’s futures and that they have failed to deliver ‘development’” (Fry 1997, 326). In other words, these people cannot govern themselves. Being labeled part of an arc of instability renders Melanesian countries “perpetually unstable, on account of their often volatile political systems, poor economic performance, and low human
development indicators” (McLeod 2008). The term ‘arc of instability’ is an overgeneralization. Once again, successful examples in the region are ignored. Rumley (2006, 18) called the phrase an oversimplification because “Australia’s immediate region is not homogeneously unstable…”

Australia’s justification for not sending help to Solomon Islands in 2000 when its leaders begged for help was that it was not appropriate to intervene in a sovereign country. With the existence of an ‘arc of instability,’ however, the focus of the Australian government’s framework becomes the stability of the region rather than sovereignty. Dusevic (2006) argued in TIME, “Sovereignty is a slippery concept in the arc of instability to Australia’s north.” Given this framing, it does not matter if an intervention is not sustainable or if it is not good for Solomon Islanders. Rather, it only matters that the threat to Australia stops (Dinnen interview, Aug. 3, 2004). The Australian government’s use of the phrase ‘arc of instability’ “had some traction and leverage for the Australian voter.” The model is based on security of Australia and of the region (Dobell 2006).

When the Solomon Islands coup occurred in June 2000, media outside the Solomons called it a “copy cat” coup and “naively invoked the domino theory, using phrases such as ‘arc of instability,’ and ‘Balkanization,’” and suggested that Papua New Guinea would be next to fall (Moore 2004, 9). After the 2002 terrorist attacks in Bali, the Australian government had adopted Reilly’s discourse of an arc of instability and began “to challenge the self-government of Pacific island states, especially in Melanesia” (Chappell 2005, 316).
In October 2002, ANU’s Bronwen Douglas testified to the Australian Parliament that many in the Australian academic community were opposed to the idea of an ‘arc of instability.’ The term is “overdramatic” and “essentially hides the very many positive factors occurring” in the countries in the southwestern Pacific and “the ways in which the countries themselves are dealing with their particular problems.” The term also obscures the deeper causes of conflict.

Firth agreed, “To talk about it as an arc of instability I think is to paint a pretty broad brush” (Dobell 2006). The term ignores the instances where conflict has been resolved peacefully. In May 2001, the leaders of Vanuatu were able to successfully handle the constitutional crisis and government infighting that arose there. The peace process in Bougainville and Papua New Guinea challenged the “widely held perceptions in Australia (and elsewhere in the neighboring region) that the Southwest Pacific is becoming an ‘arc of instability’” (Regan 2003b, 25). Papua New Guinea is an example of a country within the so-called arc that has sustained a relatively “high degree of stability” and good relations with its neighbors (May 2006).

The arc of instability may be “nothing more than a mirroring of Australian geopolitical concerns” (Singh 2006, 99). Hegarty viewed the term ‘arc of instability’ as of more interest to Australian policymakers. “It’s a way to frame the region to fit both domestic and foreign agendas and to shape the way Australian voters respond. The long history of Australian isolation and introversion plays strongly into Australia’s consciousness.” If the term ‘arc of instability’ is used too much or out of context, it is offensive to people in the region. The term justifies intervention. “But the problems are
not common across the region. One needs to understand how problems emerged historically. An examination of the complexities and diversities of what happens on the ground diminishes the threat to Australia” (interview, Dec. 8, 2003).

If there is a Pacific arc of instability, “then there must be a core of stability, a condition seen as normal and desirable; Melanesians and possibly others are unfit for self-government now and for the foreseeable future; and this constitutes a problem for Australian officials in partnership with others – a coalition of the stable” (Denoon 2003).

The arc of instability term is nothing more than “a new way of expressing a kind of fear of the unknown held by Australians since Federation.” Australians now view the Yellow Peril as a racist label “but it is an early expression of the same fears” (Dunn 2006). Australians have praised authoritarian regimes such as Suharto’s in Indonesia because the regimes have provided stability but such stability is short-lived and superficial. Also, stability that comes from authoritarian rule may facilitate development but at what cost? The majority of people under authoritarian rule will likely suffer, which might lead to increased instability.

ANU’s Michael McKinley told me, “There is no arc. Certain countries have been unstable for structural reasons and inequality” (interview, Nov. 17, 2003). Similarly, Ratuva (2005) argued the phrase ‘arc of instability,’ which was used “uncritically and simplistically” to describe Melanesian countries, is unhelpful because it “undermines any attempt to fully understand the historical, political, cultural and economic dynamics of these states.” Like ‘doomsdayism,’ the idea of an arc of instability to Australia’s north has
new meaning within the war on terror. The security focus for Australia has shifted to the
danger involved in *not* intervening (Mitchell 2010).

**Section Four: Africanization**

**Conventional View of Africanization**

European colonialism of Africa provided numerous benefits including raising the
living standards of Africans as well as the “creation of virtually the whole modern
industrial and commercial sectors of many African countries.” It was only when the
European colonizers left Africa that there was “widespread retrogression.” Many places
were then plagued with political chaos, including military coups and failing economies.
Africans were better off when they were ruled by Europeans (Sowell 1994, 75). Problems
that plague Africa – civil wars, poverty, environmental crises, and ethnic conflict – may
spread to the rest of the world (Kaplan 1994). *The Economist* (2000) condemned the
entire continent.

In the late 1990s, Pacific scholars compared “violent conflict and the failure of
democratic government in Africa” (Reilly 2001) with events occurring in several Pacific
Island countries. In 1998, Kurer, a Swiss economist who taught at the University of
Papua New Guinea in the late 1980s, warned, “PNG is in danger of replicating the main
elements of African development. This may result in the African malaise: low rates of
economic growth in the agricultural and industrial sector of the economy, and dismally
low levels of performance in a public sector that is riddled with corruption” (89).

In late 2000, Reilly coined the term ‘Africanisation’ to compare what was
happening in the South Pacific to problems in sub-Saharan Africa. The criteria for using
this term were the fragility of government institutions, the increasing conflicts between
civil governments and military forces, the combination of ethnic identity and competition to control natural resources, and the growing importance of the state as a primary means of obtaining wealth in poor countries. “Taken together, these factors indicate a growing weakness of democracy and an increasing likelihood of further troubles in the region in the future.” Reilly described “frightening parallels” between Africa and the South Pacific because he was concerned that “the South Pacific is rarely viewed through the prism of the international system” and hoped his use of ‘Africanization’ would help to highlight dangerous similarities. Governments in Fiji and the Solomons have often not been able to competently solve conflicts and people who used violence to solve their grievances frequently were more successful and garnered more support than the governments they challenged. “This is a trend that major governments across the region should find deeply worrying, as it suggests that democratic institutions generally have little broad legitimacy and could easily fall victim to the same kind of pressures evidenced in Fiji and the Solomons” (2000, 262-68).

Reilly received a lot of criticism for using ‘Africanization’ to describe the South Pacific. In an interview, he explained his motives to me: “‘Africanization’ is a catchy phrase to highlight a range of problems. It was a way to get the seriousness of the problems highlighted. Unless you can tie Pacific problems into a bigger issue or an arc of instability or the rise of China, it is hard to get policymakers and the public to pay any attention at all. The idea was that something bad could happen to us in Australia. It was a similar motive as Brij Lal had by using the phrase ‘arc of instability.’” Despite this
explanation, Reilly said he may have overstated the case by using the word ‘Africanization’ (Nov. 21, 2003).

Later Reilly told me, “People talk about Pacific as if it’s unique but it’s similar to what’s happening in Central Asia, Africa, etc. A lot of people in Pacific Studies talk about Pacific exceptionalism. They’re in a bubble, especially the anthropologists in Pacific Studies who dominate the field and say you can’t generalize.” For Reilly, ‘Africanization’ was a way of saying that the underlying problems are similar. “It was a way of putting what was going on in the Pacific into international comparative context by focusing on similarities such as weak states, deterioration, subjected to forces of globalization” (interview, Dec. 9, 2003).

**Critique of Conventional View of Africanization**

In “The Africanisation of the South Pacific,” Reilly (2000, 262) himself argued for South Pacific exceptionalism when he stated that the frequent changes of government, or the “turnover test” of democratic maturity, “points to the exceptional nature of the South Pacific compared to many comparable regions.” The four criteria Reilly identified as leading to the Africanization of the South Pacific are issues that exist within nation-states yet the term ‘Africanization’ implies a sense of contagion, the spread of problems. Reilly makes a jump between problems that have occurred within countries such as Solomon Islands and Fiji and does not explain how these problems might spread to other countries in the region. In his generalizations, Reilly also includes “grim” incidents in Samoa and Vanuatu yet these countries successfully resolved the incidents.
Denoon (1999) pointed out “‘Africa’ is a real continent but also represents an abstract evolutionary phase” and, I would argue, an abstract development stage as well. To Africanize, then, means to deteriorate or revert to a more primitive stage. Numerous scholars and journalists have argued against Africa as doomed; they view ‘Africa’ as a problematic category. Since Africa was colonized, it has served as “the supreme receptacle of the West’s obsession with, and circular discourse about, the facts of ‘absence,’ ‘lack,’ and ‘non-being,’ of identity and difference, of negativeness – in short, of nothingness” (Mbembe 2001, 4).

O’Keefe (2008, 11, 15) critiqued Reilly’s Africanization thesis because it assumes a particular view of Africa and of the state. This conception relies on “many indicators of governance and living standards” that show Africa to be “stagnant or in decline.” Africanization is equated with weak and failing states. O’Keefe turned Reilly’s idea of Africanization around and argued that what Reilly calls weaknesses are actually strengths. The wide diversity in languages and ethnicities in countries such as Papua New Guinea may result in a more democratic state because no one group can dominate the government. “This possibility is probably excluded because of the implicit focus on an ideal type of democratic state.” O’Keefe (2008, 15) reminds us why African analogies are so important, “because their application has serious ramifications for public policy, aid and development.”

In fact, analogies to Africa are as old as the first contact Europeans had with people in the Pacific. European explorers frequently compared Melanesians with Africans since they were both “negroes” who were “intellectually and morally deficient” (Douglas 220).
In 1832, Dumont d’Urville called Melanesians “a branch of the black race from Africa” and said, “These black people almost always live in very small tribes whose chiefs wield an arbitrary authority that they exercise just as tyrannically as any small African despot.”

Denoon (1999, 285, 289, 282) also illustrated how African analogies of the Pacific are not new. The Australian Commonwealth and British-born Australians, in particular, viewed “Melanesian affairs through an African lens.” Rather than using African analogies to describe what they were seeing, every stakeholder in colonial Papua New Guinea, except for Nasion landowners and provincial officials, used African analogies because they “helped to limit the range of possibilities.” These analogies tell us more about “the patterns of colonising thinking” than about what was happening in Melanesia. The only trait Melanesians have in common with sub-Saharan Africans is skin color, which meant the comparative practice was especially dangerous in Melanesia because “untested African analogies shaped perceptions and policies” there.

In the 1960s, as decolonization spread through Africa, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies saw similarities between Australia and South Africa. Menzies did not believe Melanesians or Africans could run democratic institutions and thought Britain’s decision to decolonize was unwise. More recently, Kurer, Reilly, and French geographer François Doumenge have continued this practice. While Reilly used ‘Africanization’ to describe processes occurring in the South Pacific, Doumenge (2002, 23) used the term specifically for Melanesia. In a French article titled “Melanesia: Black Hole of the
Pacific?” Doumenge pointed to New Caledonia, the only French colony in Melanesia, as “the counter-model of the Africanization of the rest of Melanesia.”

Chappell (2005, 15) argued Doumenge’s use of ‘Africanization’ is racial, especially since Doumenge referred to Melanesia as a “black hole” where “violent vendettas are a ‘distinctive trait’ of the dark-skinned Melanesian peoples, which the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ (British and Australian) removal of ‘colonial constraints’ has allowed to resurface.” Doumenge stated, “Order based on positive law is a notion foreign to Melanesian societies.” Positive law is “law actually and specifically enacted or adopted by a proper authority for the government of an organized juridical society” (Black 1990). Doumenge’s statement is based on implicit Western values and institutions and assumes that order based on positive law is the best way to organize a society.

The ‘Africanization’ of the Pacific is an orientalist discourse that justifies domination by western powers. Such analysis is ahistorical and essentialist (ethnic, traditional); it ignores structural changes imposed by imperial powers over several centuries and the ways that such changes destabilized traditional societies. Instead of trying to solve problems in consultation with locals, the discourse of Africanization of the Pacific suggests “outsider police presence will always be necessary” to protect larger powers from looming disorder and that “indigenous peoples are deemed too incompetent to run modern states” (Chappell 2005, 317). The peace process between Bougainville and Papua New Guinea indicates the Melanesian Way might offer support in Pacific Islanders’ ability to govern.
Scholars including Reilly and Doumenge write about instability in Oceania as the result of perpetual cultural failings that prove these states should not have been granted independence. The process the West had to go through in order to modernize was traumatic and only produced stable nation-states after a period of violence (Chappell 2005). Imperial rule hinged upon ‘unequal contracts’ between colonial powers and indigenous leaders. This interaction “led to a series of crises that could no longer be contained locally but spilled over to affect the perceptions of European powers about their security needs” so that they incorporated more and more of the periphery into their empire. This process in the Pacific was happening around the globe (Hempenstall 1994, 30).

Dinnen maintained that Reilly’s ‘Africanization’ was used to provide justification for interventions, i.e. ‘we had no choice but to intervene.’ Dinnen also argued the use of the term is racial and feeds prejudices (interview, Dec. 8, 2003). Africanization is taken in Australia as another trope of fear.

Section Five: Failed States

Conventional View of Failed States

The idea of the ‘failed state’ “first gained prominence in international relations” when Somalia collapsed in the early 1990s. The current nation-state system does not offer a state for every ‘nation’ (Gurr 1993, 1998). The keys to keeping states together are searching out creative political and social possibilities to gap the bridges between the interests of communal groups and interests of the state, and beginning this process early in the open conflict. Failed states are ones that are not able to negotiate such a compromise.
In 1995, former Canadian diplomat Geoffrey Pearson defined a failed state as one which is “unable to provide basic security for their people because of a collapse of authority.” Pearson’s view of what makes a state a success or failure includes more than security, however; he also argued that failed states could be avoided with good governance, “balanced development,” democracy, and foreign aid.

As Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia collapsed, they were considered humanitarian problems. At this time, neoliberals considered intervention to be a waste of time, money, and energy. Since World War II, the assumption underlying U.S. national security policies was “that only an advanced state can truly threaten us” since states were considered the primary actors on the world stage. That assumption died after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Barnett 2003).

**From September 11, 2001 to Solomon Islands**

The attacks of 9/11 “triggered the most rapid and dramatic change in the history of U.S. foreign policy.” The war on terror changed the main focus of American foreign policy. Several months after the attacks, Harvard professor Stephen Walt (2001, 62) warned that failed states could no longer be viewed as simply humanitarian problems but must be viewed as a “major national security problem.” State weakness and state failure became “a huge strategic challenge” (Fukuyama 2004, xi).

A failed state is defined by the fact that it can no longer control its borders, can no longer provide services, is bankrupt, has civil unrest and ranks near the bottom of the development scale. Since failed states cannot control their borders, they can serve as ideal breeding grounds and safe havens for terrorists, as Somalia and Afghanistan did for
Osama bin Laden. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (2005) argued the danger posed by failing states is “unparalleled” because they can “serve as global pathways that facilitate the spread of pandemics, the movement of criminals and terrorists, and the proliferation of the world’s most dangerous weapons.” After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. decided that international law and the United Nations were unable to deal with threats of this new kind of terrorism (De Blij 2009). U.S. National Security strategy soon focused on failing states “as a major threat to U.S. security” (DeYoung 2006).

Rotberg (2002a, 130) said failed states presented both “strategic and moral imperatives.” Maintaining a realist view of international relations, Rotberg argued, “State failure threatens global stability because national governments have become the primary building blocks of order.” The primary role of the state, then, is to provide its citizens with security. A successful state is also one in which citizens are able to participate freely in the political process, in which there is an effective judicial system and the rule of law enforcing “security of property and inviolable contracts.” Rotberg continued:

Other political goods typically supplied by states and expected by their citizenries (although privatized forms are possible) include medical and health care (at varying levels and costs); schools and educational instruction (of various kinds and levels); roads, railways, harbors, and other physical infrastructures—the arteries of commerce; communications networks; a money and banking system, usually presided over by a central bank and lubricated by a nationally created currency; a beneficent fiscal and institutional context within which citizens can pursue personal entrepreneurial goals, and potentially prosper; space for the flowering of civil society; and methods of regulating the sharing of the environmental commons.

State failure occurs when violence is uncontrollable and services can no longer be delivered to its citizens. In these cases, citizens lose faith in their government (Rotberg
Both Walt (2001) and Rotberg (2003b, 6) included a regional component in their positions, as Rotberg stressed, “Failed states breed regional instability and regional failure.” Walt (2001) warned that to deal with these new threats, the U.S. “should begin to devolve responsibility for regional security onto other countries or regional associations…” Rotberg (2003b, 8) later praised this devolution when he said, “The Australians and their Pacific Island allies acted in the Solomons to avert a similar cascade of destruction throughout the mini-nations of their region.” In 2003, Reilly warned of the regional threat posed by failing states in the South Pacific. The Sun-Herald agreed, “There are so many countries in the collapsing house of cards around Australia that are in alarming condition” (Walsh and Benns 2003).

According to Kabutaulaka, John Roughan was the first to use the term ‘failed state’ to describe Solomon Islands, writing in the Solomon Star in February 2002 that the lack of national security in the Solomons “guarantees it the distinction of being the Pacific’s first failed state.” In February 2003, The Economist warned, “The Solomon Islands faces the prospect of becoming the Pacific’s first failed state.” That same year, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), a leading defense and security think-tank, issued a report that the Solomons was a ‘failing state’ that posed a security threat to Australia because terrorists might convene there. The Australian intelligence agency Office of National Assessments (ONA) also warned of “terrorist camps” and “money laundering” in the Solomons.

At this point, the Australian government’s policy toward states in the South Pacific shifted dramatically, especially towards Solomon Islands. Australian Foreign
Affairs Minister Alexander Downer stressed that the “complete breakdown in law and order” in Solomon Islands had forced Australia to form a new Pacific policy involving “nation rebuilding” and “co-operative intervention.” Downer emphasized “there isn’t really an alternative but for Australia to take a leadership role” (Dobell 2003).

**Critique of Conventional View**

A critical approach to the concept of failed states would be to ask, what are the assumptions underlying the policy approach to ‘state failure’? Why we are interested in states in the first place, failed or otherwise? Whose interests does such a state system serve? What forces create discourse on failed states and mute others? Perhaps it says more about modernity and how we seek modern solutions to modern problems.

Whenever we talk about failed states, we are making “assumptions about what normal or appropriate state of affairs within nation-states should be” (Elkins 1995). If we have failed states, that implies that we also have successful states. Elkins also drew attention to questions about the viability of nation-states in general as a part of a New World Order in which non-state actors such as the WTO and transnational corporations are playing increasingly important roles. States were, from the beginning, premised on the idea of sovereignty where rulers had control over territory; with globalization, however, the amount and degree of sovereignty a country has is declining.

The policy approach to state failure rests on several assumptions. The most important assumption is, perhaps, “the triumph of the state as the solution to the problem of political order.” The nation-state was normalized “as an institutional and political ideal” (Milliken and Krause 2002). The modern sovereign state has become “the
universal norm for political organization” (Halden 2008). The state was presented as the answer to social and economic disorder and war. During the decolonization period, “statehood was rendered as the only possible mode of governance for the world” (Milliken and Krause 2002).

Rotberg’s requirements for a successful state – especially the security of property, arteries of commerce, and a beneficent fiscal and institutional context within which citizens can pursue personal entrepreneurial goals – mean that a successful state is one that is capitalist and participates in the global economy. Rice (2005) stressed the modern state system that emerged from the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia “has always rested on the concept of sovereignty. It was assumed that states were the primary international actors and that every state was able and willing to address the threats emerging from its territory. Today, however, we have seen that these assumptions no longer hold.” In failing states, “threats that would and should be contained within a country’s borders can now melt into the world and wreak untold havoc.”

The Right State for Neoliberalism

Rotberg (2003a, 1) wrote about “desirable international norms such as stability and predictability.” For whom are these international norms desirable? The norms benefit the economic world order yet Rotberg presented them as universally beneficial. In whose interest is a strong state? Ron May (2003) insists “strong states” are not necessarily a great place to live and offered Burma and Indonesia under Suharto as examples. According to the neoliberal view, a certain kind of state is necessary for the market to work. Yet, the bankers’ idea of security causes insecurity for many people.
According to a neoliberal view, the tensions and conflict that broke out in the Solomons was clearly because they did not have a state. For scholars such as Polanyi or Wallerstein, however, Solomon Islands would not be a failed state, but a reciprocal or minisystem society where the modernist notions of a state fail to apply or fail to appeal to the citizenry. In 2005, *Foreign Policy* and the Fund for Peace, a U.S. think tank, began publishing an annual index of failed states. Based on twelve social, economic and political indicators, the index places countries into one of four categories: alert, warning, moderate, or sustainable, which indicate how vulnerable and likely a state is to collapse. In the five years the index has been published, only two of 166 countries given an alert rating are run by white people: Bosnia/Herzegovina was ranked #22 in 2005, and Georgia was ranked 33 in 2009. The rest of the countries ranked “alert” are filled with people who are non-white and often non-Christian. Almost all of these countries are also former colonies.

*Failed State label is ahistorical and apolitical*

‘Failed states’ were generally countries in the third world that had been affected by three geopolitical factors: the end of the Cold War, the heritage of colonial regimes, and general processes of modernization. The Cold War two superpowers had “kept shallow-rooted regimes artificially in power, preserving them as potential allies.” Colonial regimes had existed long enough to weaken “traditional social structures but not long enough to replace them with Western constitutional structures and an effective

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2 In 2005, 33 countries were classified as red alert; in 2006, there were 28 countries; in 2007, there were 32 countries; in 2008, there were 35 countries; in 2009, there were 38.
identity as a new State.” Finally, processes of modernization created change within states but did not include nation-building (Thürer 1999).

Milliken and Krause (2002) stressed,

In retrospect, the vision that new states were to build legitimate nations, provide wealth, and guarantee security within the span of a few decades of achieving formal independence was, to be kind, somewhat naïve... One can only expect such success if the idea of the state is taken completely out of its historical context, and regarded as an institutional form that owes little or nothing to the historical forces that created it... One (somewhat ironic) way to think about the contemporary anguish over state collapse is to note that what has collapsed is more the vision (or dream) of the progressive, developmental state that sustained generations of academics, activists and policy-makers, than any real existing state.

The ‘failed state’ label looks at a situation in isolation, taking it out of political and historical context and severing the connections a nation-state has had with the global system. It is ahistorical because it removes the impact of colonialism from the analysis. Using the term ‘failed state’ allows people to analyze problems using the scale of the nation-state when it is convenient for them to do so. Rotberg (2002a, 128) wrote in his article, “Failed States in a World of Terror,” that failed states are “almost always” caused by “destructive decisions by individual leaders.” He offered the example of Zaire’s former president of over thirty years, Mobutu Sese Seko, whose “kleptocratic rule sucked Zaire... dry.” Rotberg conveniently overlooked the fact that in the early 1960s, the U.S. helped to overthrow Patrice Lumumba, the democratically-elected leader of Zaire, and helped to install Mobutu in power. Also, Mobutu would never have been able to maintain his grip on the enormous country if the U.S. had not given him billions of dollars in support for three decades. The U.S. government wanted to keep its access to the...
incredible mineral riches in Zaire, including the uranium the U.S. used in the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in World War II.

Rotberg (2002a, 128) stressed that in the case of failed states, “More than structural or institutional weaknesses, human agency is also culpable, usually in a fatal way.” Through personal greed and supporting the greed of others, such leaders “preordain” their state’s failure. Rotberg (2003a, 14) also argued, “To fail a state is not that easy… Leaders and states engaged in self-destruction usually possess too little credibility and too few resources to restore trust and claw back from the brink of chaos. Many leaders hardly recognize or care about the depths of their national despair.”

What is once again left out of this assessment is the role of the United States in removing or helping to remove democratically elected leaders from power in many Third World countries. Many leaders who wanted to use the resources of their countries for the benefit of their own citizens were “thrown out in coups or assassinated” when such governments threatened the interests of U.S. corporations (Perkins 2008, 103). Democratically elected leaders overthrown or assassinated with U.S. help include Mossadeq of Iran in 1953, Arbenz of Guatemala in 1954, Trujillo of the Dominican Republic in 1961, Qasim of Iraq in 1963, Goulart of Brazil in 1964, Sukarno of Indonesia in 1965, Nkrumah of Ghana in 1966, Allende of Chile in 1973, and Torrijos of Panama in 1981 (Bhagwati 2004; Blum 2004; Perkins 2008). These leaders were often replaced by dictators with the help of the U.S. If, as Rotberg’s argument about corrupt leaders leading to state failure is correct, Americans might need to look at their country’s role in supporting many of these corrupt leaders. When Rotberg (2003a) stated, “Many leaders
hardly recognize or care about the depths of their national despair,” that could be in part because those leaders were chosen and installed because they were corrupt and they could be controlled by their greed. In the Solomons, Francis Billy Hilly, who sought to halt the overlogging of the country’s forests, was removed from power in part because foreign logging companies bribed several ministers to shift their support away from Billy Hilly. Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu, another Solomon Islands reformer who sought to stem corruption, was overthrown in a coup in 2000.

Although Rotberg argues for the primacy of agency in failed states, numerous scholars maintain states fail because of structural issues. Failing states are the result “of a collapse of the power structures providing political support for law and order” (Thürer 1999) and “are a structural trait of the contemporary international system” (Liu 2005).

In 2006, the World Bank declared the number of failed or failing states had increased sharply since 2003, “despite increased Western efforts to improve conditions” in these countries. Their “deepening poverty puts them at risk from terrorism, armed conflict and epidemic disease.” Therefore, the Bush administration “set economic development in ‘failing states or states emerging from conflict’ as a key objective” (DeYoung 2006), even though global poverty has increased as a result of integration into the global economy (Chossudovsky 1998).

The definition of state failure is so broad it has become “a useless catchall for diverse maladies” (Call 2006, 9). The biggest problem with the state failure framework is that it leads to a single and dangerous prescription for diverse problems: more order. The index prescribes stronger ‘state institutions.’ But in many cases, this tactic
will bolster the worst traits of corrupt or abusive states. Would we really want to make the current North Korean regime’s military and police more effective? Applying a cookie-cutter solution to symptoms ranging from poverty to civil war to ethnic diversity is a recipe for disaster.

The idea of failed states has become not just a security issue; it is the framework for security. Kabutaulaka (2005) identified “the perception that international terrorism has made it difficult to separate external and internal security.” The notion of ‘failed states’ serves people in power. So does the concept of ‘regime change’ which means nothing more than an illegal change in government, for example, in Iraq. When the 2002 coup in Venezuela briefly deposed Venezuela’s democratically elected leader, Hugo Chavez, the Bush administration praised the coup as a “victory for democracy” (Chua 2003).

The rules of the international system have changed along with what powerful countries view as most important. For instance, “the structure of the Westphalian international system is based on states upholding one another as sovereign actors” (Liu 2005). Prior to 9/11 and the October 2002 Bali bombings, the Howard administration in Australia insisted that they could not and should not intervene in the Solomons because a country’s sovereignty was of utmost concern. Once the Howard government decided the Solomons posed a security threat, however, sovereignty became, according to Downer, “not absolute. Acting for the benefit of humanity is more important” (Allard 2003a). The international community often uses the term ‘state failure’ when deciding whether to override a country’s sovereignty by intervening (Kasfir 2003).
The notion of a ‘failed state’ focuses on the nation-state itself, where boundaries matter, but the global economy does not play by the rules of the nation-state. Boundaries between countries “are of decreasing legal and moral relevance” (Held 2002, 61). States are being seriously challenged by the WTO, multinational corporations, and other institutions. For small states especially, it’s not internal problems so much as the conditions imposed from outside that may create ‘failing states.’ Also, the very nature of states is problematic in that terrorist networks, environmental disasters, and diseases like AIDS do not follow the logic of state boundaries.

In September 2004, the U.S. Defense Department delivered the Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication to President Bush. The report, written by strategic, defense, and policy experts, was extremely critical of the way the Bush administration was waging its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to the war on terror. It is not, as Huntington (1993) suggested, a clash of civilizations, a war between Islam and the West. In order to succeed, the U.S. government “must think in terms of global networks, both government and non-government… If we continue to concentrate primarily on states (‘getting it right’ in Iraq, managing the next state conflict better), we will fail” (emphasis added).

In an Op-Ed in the Washington Post, Rice (2005) stressed the same idea but couched it in softer tones of democracy and freedom. She spoke of the ‘freedom deficit’ and said, “Unlike tyranny, democracy by its very nature is never imposed.” Rice recalled earlier claims that African, or Asian or Slavic cultural values would make democracy

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impossible. Arguing that these claims have been proven wrong, Rice (2005) insisted, “Our statecraft must now be guided by the undeniable truth that democracy is the only assurance of lasting peace and security between states, because it is the only guarantee of freedom and justice within states.” Rice revealed more clearly her neoliberal approach when she stated that we must promote throughout the world “the institutions of democracy: the rule of law, an independent judiciary, free media and property rights, among others.” Democracy has become a code word for free market capitalism.

Chomsky (2006, 38) argued the U.S. was one of the leading failed states in the world and defined failed states as those that “do not protect their citizens from violence” and those with leaders who “dismiss international law and treaties with contempt.” Chomsky described a “democracy deficit” in which there is an enormous gap between public policy and public opinion” (March 2006). The state and the failed state are debatable on many grounds, yet the discourse on failed states infused Australian policies in life-changing ways for Solomon Islanders.

The Nation-State and Failed State in Oceania

The nation-state has been the model for Pacific islands as they have gained independence. Since independence, there have been prevailing expectations of Pacific Island States, and these postcolonial states have faced certain challenges. Fijian scholar Steven Ratuva (2003) stressed that since independence in the Pacific, people have been trying to understand the nature of Pacific states. In the 1980s, Pacific states were looked at broadly in post-colonial terms; governments and scholars used the Weberian model to understand Pacific Island states. Ratuva referred to this model as the ‘collapsed state
outsiders have used words such as ‘Africanization,’ ‘Balkanization,’ and
‘Caribbeanization’ to describe the ‘Pacific region.’ Ratuva argued that they have been
using “a precomposed template of how the Pacific is moving.” When Australia wants to
do regional work, they turn to a security link (McKinley interview, Nov. 17, 2003).

Greg Fry told me, “There’s definitely more emphasis now on the term ‘failed
state.’ It’s new for this area [the Pacific]. It had been used before but not in a while.
During the 1990s, the talk was about corruption. During the 1970s and 80s, the focus was
on ‘viability’ rather than failed states, for example, ‘How viable is Brazil?’”

I asked Fry what he thought about the term ‘failed state’ being used to describe
what was happening in Solomon Islands. Fry said he wondered, “What is ‘failure?’ The
state definitely has failed in terms of providing what a state should provide to its
citizens.” In regards to ‘failing’ states, Fry added, “the mainstream government view of
outside donors and island states remains focused on the strengthening of the centralized
state” (interview, Dec. 1, 2003). Fry (2004, 1) maintained, “We might in passing ask if
the state is failing why not look down to local governance as an alternative as well as up
to the Pacific regional level.”

The term ‘failed state’ is not neutral but rather is laden with baggage. It is
structured by a set of imperatives driven from outside. Expectations are elevated, and
places such as Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have to conform (Wesley-Smith
interview, July 21, 2004). Embedded within the concept of ‘failed’ states are “specific
ideas about causes, consequences, and possible remedies” (Wesley-Smith 2004, 6). The
‘failed state’ label implies that the problem is internal, more or less ignoring the external factors that contributed to the situation.

The Australian government has shifted from viewing countries to its north as a shield from danger and to viewing the north as a source of danger. According to Rolfe, Oceania itself poses a problem for the wider region, including East Asia, Australia and North America, “because Oceania lacks the resources to solve its own problems and if it doesn’t solve its own problems those problems could become a problem for the rest of the region.” Rolfe’s statement is another way to argue that Pacific Islanders cannot govern themselves. According to Maev O’Collins, a professor and consultant to the ADB, World Bank, and UN as well as the Australian government, Australia uses the word ‘consultation’ frequently but, in this context, it often means “we have the model you should accept.” O’Collins (2003) argued the process of consultation is failing far more than any failed states.

One of the causes of instability in Pacific Island states is our desire to have strong states. We try to keep the state, rather than allowing federalism or decentralization (Larmour 2003). Denoon (2003) agreed, “The policy of all Prime Ministers in Australia has been, ‘Keep the buggers together.’ It’s global and external pressures that make Pacific Islanders have to look from the outside.” Failure to one group could mean independence to another. “We can get a better perspective if we set Pacific problems in a wider context. Wherever empires collapse or withdraw, similar problems arise for the liberated societies and the successor states.” Examples include North America in the 1770s, South America in the 1820s, tropical Africa in the 1960s, and central Asia in the present day. If we
compare the Pacific region with the rest of the world, “the Pacific Islands are performing exceptionally well by comparison with other countries in similar post-imperial circumstances. We might even propose that instability is the least of their problems - perhaps a strength rather than a weakness; perhaps a strength in the Pacific protecting citizens from violent dictatorships. But never did any state builder acknowledge that this is not how states had been developed in Europe. In consequence we are all surprised when the dynamics of island societies fail to match the machinery with which government is supposed to be carried on.”

Solomon Islands

“The ‘failing state’ discourse is not simply a description of what occurred in Solomon Islands. Rather, it reflects Australia’s long-term perception of both the Pacific Islands and Australia’s role in the region. It fits comfortably with the long-term tendency of Australian policy makers, bureaucrats, journalists, and academic political economists to represent the region with predominantly negative images” (Kabutaulaka 2005a, 296).

Fry (1997, 306) called this practice ‘Framing the Islands’ with messages of doom. These images, as Said’s Orientalism suggests, tell us more about Australians – the ones inventing the images – than the people they are ‘describing.’ What is crucial to note, is that, “Such images do not simply provide interesting insights into the Australian imagination; they affect the lives of the people they depict.” It is also illustrative of how Australians have held for more than a century “an unquestioned, and often unacknowledged, belief that Australia has a right, or even a duty, to speak for the
inhabitants of this region, to represent them to themselves and to others, to lead, and to manage them.”

When a report came out in late 2003 on RAMSI and Australia’s response to state failure in the Solomons, there was a launching party in the Australian Parliament. Not only had no Solomon Islanders been consulted for the report but they were also turned away from the party at the Parliament door, including John Naitoro, a well-known scholar from Solomon Islands (interview with ANU professor, Dec. 2003).

In *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, Rotberg (2003a, 28) described the school of thought represented in this monograph he edited, which harks back to the colonial attitude that indigenous peoples cannot govern themselves. Some scholars, including Christopher Clapham and Jeffrey Herbst, suggested that state failure is not the result of “artificial borders, colonial mistakes, colonial exploitation, or insufficient or misplaced tutelage, but from the automatic and premature assumption by former imperial administrative units of unsustainable state-like responsibilities.” Fraenkel (2004b) warned, “The ‘failed state’ argument strongly suggests the need for a full-scale takeover. It does not suggest any route back to self-government.” It makes it harder to see domestic successes and solutions.

Dinnen offered another way of looking at the situation. “If you look at the dynamics underneath the surface in the Solomons, the system actually is and has been working. It is an alternate order, a durable pattern of disorder. You can apply a racist approach and view what’s happening from the outside as ‘irrational’ and ‘an aberration’ because you just see chaos. But just because it doesn’t fit into our box of ‘order’ does not
mean the system is not working. Parts of sub-Saharan Africa and islands in the south Pacific are continuing the process of decolonization rather than collapsing. Colonial institutions are being questioned by indigenous people. We see it as pathological and immediately define it in terms of conflict” (interview, Nov. 11, 2003).

Dinnen continued, “What we see now may be another process of decolonization. Institutions and formal systems put in place in the 1960s and 70s are being taken out. People are rejecting these because they haven’t worked out, and outsiders see it as failure rather than searching for something that works better. The foreign intervention is trying to rebuild these institutions. There is no questioning how these institutions are implicated in the problems. This approach is like putting a lid on a boiling pot rather than trying to turn the heat off” (interview, Aug. 3, 2004). Problems in Solomon Islands stem less from a failing state and more from “the unraveling of the apparatus of colonial rule” (Fraenkel 2003).

Gordon Nanau, then-Head of Research and Planning at SICHE (Solomon Islands College of Higher Education), thought describing Solomon Islands as a ‘failed’ or ‘failing’ state was biased. “It is based purely on economic and political terms. But if you look at the people here throughout the tensions, they were not starving or begging. It wasn’t like Darfur in Sudan. There wasn’t that kind of poverty. Without subsistence living, it would have been a disaster. Subsistence agriculture is a buffer to extreme poverty but economists don’t consider subsistence agriculture in their reports or they view it as Stone Age kind of stuff.”
After the tension, Nanau realized how scholars approach issues regarding traditional and modern economies: “The big farms, the corporations went down during the tensions. What survived were the small cacao patches, etc. In 2003, most income was from semi-subsistence agriculture.” John Roughan told me the same thing: “People were gardening and tending their cacao farms and selling the small amounts to exporters.” Nanau viewed this example as a way that traditional and modern can work together (interview, Sept. 2004).

Stewart Firth argued that although Australia used the idea of a failed state as justification for intervening in the Solomons, the prospect that Solomon Islands could be a place that harbors terrorists, “most people who knew the Solomons thought that this was a pretty way-out idea. Nevertheless, it had some traction and leverage for the Australian voter and I think that in that sense it was a justified kind of approach” (Dobell 2006).

Kabutaulaka (2003) argued Solomon Islands would not be attractive to terrorists. “It’s too small. If terrorists came, it wouldn’t be a secret. If I was a terrorist in Indonesia, I don’t have to come south” to the Solomons to set up. Kabutaulaka viewed drug trafficking and money laundering as more realistic possibilities. “Other Pacific island nations are already doing it. You don’t need a collapsed state.” Rolfe similarly contended that Oceania is “not a region in which terrorism is a problem.” There was no evidence that terrorists were setting up camp in Pacific Island countries (Wesley-Smith 2007b).

By playing off of old fears, Australian journalists Walsh and Benns (2003) connected the threat posed to Australia by failed states in the Pacific to the threat
previously posed by Pacific colonies. They began their article titled “A Paradise for Terror Gangs” in this way:

Crime gangs. Self-styled freedom fighters. Even tribes of headhunters. And now, as if our Pacific neighbors didn’t pose enough of a danger, there is the threat of world terrorism exploiting their vulnerabilities.

The article juxtaposed the type of black-and-white duality that colonizers often used to describe the Pacific. Walsh and Benns (2003) depicted the Solomons as “just part of a struggling constellation of islands to Australia’s north and north-east that are breeding grounds for criminals and political and religious terrorists.” They warned, “There are so many countries in the collapsing house of cards around Australia that are in alarming condition — including the strategically sensitive Papua New Guinea and East Timor — that acting as sheriff in the area could become one of Australia's most explosively growing cost burdens.” Walsh and Benns (2003) provide but one example of what Clay (2005, x) referred to as boundaries constructed between self and other that “have continued well beyond earlier images of distant ‘primitives’ and ‘savages’ whose warped designations are now generally relegated to unenlightened Western predecessors. Yet essentializing distinctions reemerge in contemporary, equally questionable guises — ‘terrorists’ — those new others who have burst the boundaries of distant enclaves to confront and threaten the modern self.”

A lot of the state failure literature is informed by an “ahistorical inevitability,” leading to the pessimistic belief that “South Pacific states are basket cases beyond repair.” Countries in the South Pacific “are criticized because they have failed to live up to the
model of democratic statehood that informs state failure typologies… And, indigenous agency and culture are implicated in this failure” (O’Keefe 2008, 14).

In talking about Pacific Island countries, McKinley contended, “They aren’t failed states because they were never states to fail. There was no state apparatus” (interview, Dec. 2003). May (2004) agreed, “There was never much of a state there to begin with.” Dinnen maintained that Solomon Islands was not a failing state but rather the state had never really been built. “It’s a similar situation to Papua New Guinea. In the Solomons, the institutions of a state were put in only in the last ten years. At first the Solomons was a colonial state, then a modernized state but without the institutions” (interview, Nov. 11, 2003). Interestingly, Rotberg (2003b) referred to Solomon Islands as a “once stable” state.

John Roughan (2003) questioned, “Is Solomon Islands a failed state? People have failed the government. Kemakeza has said that given the poor economic situation, the government couldn’t do much for the people. There has been poor governance and poor service.” The village is the prism through which Solomon Islanders see the world. The Solomons, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea are all nations of villages. According to Roughan, for many Solomon Islanders, “the best way of living is village life but people in power don’t want anything to do with village. People in the Solomons feel like the state is a necessary evil.” Judith Pattison, Director of AusAid’s Community Peace and Restoration Fund in the Solomons, agreed the government was and is irrelevant in villages, in remote places (interview, Sept. 30, 2004).
A Canadian volunteer with the Canadian University Service Overseas in the Solomons also refuted the failed state notion. He told me, “No one was starving; there is a land tenure system here. Only a few hundred people were killed. It could have been much worse. Anywhere else, it would have been much worse. When institutions in Solomon Islands fell, people did govern themselves” (interview, Sept. 5, 2004).

Moore (2004, 63, 31) concurred, “It would be wrong to depict the events of 1998-2000, or the coup of June 2000 and the subsequent events that led to the 2003 RAMSI intervention, as a nationwide catastrophe. While the events of 1998-2003 affected the entire nation because government finances collapsed and the central government ceased to govern except in name, the principal events were concentrated on Guadalcanal and Malaita.” In addition, in Solomon Islands, “The churches are often far more important in the lives of individuals, both rural and urban, than the government. They provide many of the basic health and education services.”

I spoke with a student who had taken Robert Rotberg’s class on failed states at Harvard. He told me that in class one day, Rotberg said the Solomons is a failed state. Because this student had just spent time in the Solomons, Rotberg turned to him and said, “You remember how bad it was.” The student told me later, “But it wasn’t. It was much more dangerous in the Solomons in 2000 and Australia did nothing” (interview, Oct. 2004).

Auckland University economist Ross McDonald similarly argued that the use of the failed state label for the Solomons was not justified because the situation in a lot of areas in Solomon Islands was stable and people were self-sufficient and well organized.
“On a local level the place is thriving and has a huge quality of life. In those places where commercial exploitation has taken place you get the attendant misery.” What McDonald found especially troubling was that the term failed state “came with the implication that the people were inadequate.” On a global level, it is easier to see that more powerful countries create relationships with countries such as Solomon Islands “that are basically extractive” and they take as many of their resources as possible at the cheapest prices possible (Field 2003b).

I found in literature and academia as well as among Solomon Islanders a view of the failed state discourse as unfounded and unhelpful. The problem is not failure but rather the state itself. Although the state has, for centuries, been posited as the answer to disorder and savagery, I argue the postcolonial state is incapable of protecting its citizens from the instabilities the market will cause.

Conclusion

The perception of a Peaceful Pacific has changed through discourse and its consequences. This change started in 1987 with the coup in Fiji that forced people to look at security within the region as a threat. Peace and security were then seen more in terms of internal factors such as land disputes (Neemia-Mackenzie 2004). Fry told me Suharto’s fall in Indonesia in 1998 started the language, along with the fighting in the Philippines and Papua New Guinea. “Everything started to change; people began to use words like ‘Balkanization’ to describe the Pacific region.” This area of the world had shifted in Australia’s eyes from being a shield from other invaders to being explosive and a danger to Australia’s interests.
By themselves, terms such as ‘ethnic violence’ and ‘arc of instability’ can be used to describe a situation objectively. The problem is that they are associated with other theories such as intractability and a certain tone of voice about the natives. The trouble with a term such as ‘arc of instability’ or describing the Pacific as a ‘basketcase’ is that it becomes so general. It paralyzes people from seeing the positive outcomes, the positive role models in the southern Pacific, for example, the Bougainville peace process, the assassination in Samoa that was handled well, New Caledonia; these are all successes. Likewise, ‘arcs of instability’ and sites of ‘ethnic conflict’ serve the interests of those who define and impose the label than it serves the people who are being ‘described’ in such a way (Fry interview, Dec. 1, 2003).

The World Bank, among many other actors, has promoted generalizations that violence that has broken out in a few countries represents the situation in the region as a whole (Fry 1997). Australian academics including ANU professors Greg Fry, Sinclair Dinnen, and Donald Denoon insist we need to challenge our assumptions about the way the Pacific is constructed. In the 1940s and 1950s, Stanner and Keesing started a long process of people outside the region trying to sum up the nature and condition of the territories. We need to think about who is summing up the region. In fact, this process of summing up (and constructing) the region began at the point of contact with colonizers. Outsiders have constructed a history of the Pacific based on dual tropes of paradise and savagery. Fry maintained we have an ethical imperative to look at the way outsiders frame Pacific islands and the Pacific as a region (interview, Dec. 1, 2003). This is not intended as an academic exercise but an investigation of how “such conceptualizations
are generated and to ask what ethical judgments might be made about the exercise of power inherent in this longstanding practice” (Fry 1997, 56). Fry echoed Epeli Hau‘ofa’s assertion that outsiders’ depictions of islands in the Pacific have “mattered for island societies.”

It is not only outsiders who promote negative stereotypes of Pacific Island countries. Solomon Islander Ashley Wickham (1997, 1) maintained,

“The world has come to hold certain stereotypical perceptions about Pacific Islanders. These have changed but slowly over time. First, uncivilized savages, sorcerers and sensuous islanders, then noble savages, chiefs and intrigue, then Christianized docile islanders. Now we are seen as politically independent but economically dependent islanders, trying to survive in romantic tourist destinations in a vast ocean. Many of our elite promote those perceptions. Our media reinforce them.”

There is a lot of pressure on Pacific Islands to follow a neoliberal path. “Much of this dictation is couched in nice language such as a ‘good governance’ agenda.” The war on terror agenda goes hand in hand with neoliberal strategy and is another way that Pacific Islanders are being dictated to. The rationale is that the fault lies with the country trying to implement the economic changes so it needs to be re-ordered and re-structured. It is a rationale for intervention (Small 2004).

Neemia-Mackenzie (2004) concurred. “Security and good governance are now dominant issues in the Pacific Forum.” But Australia and New Zealand’s perception of peace and security is different from Pacific Islanders. Robert Underwood (2004), who served for ten years as Guam’s Congressional Delegate to U.S. Congress, revealed small Pacific states are encouraged to talk about the same security issues that larger countries
talk about. “This way, small states can get more funding and resources within the desired justification.”

“The continuing impact of old ideas and new international models helps explain why we often see the Pacific as a region in crisis, an exception, an aberration” rather than viewing the model itself as problematic (Denoon 2003). Action by the Australian government turns on these geopolitical imaginaries transported and adapted from other places to Solomon Islands. The five large discourses discussed in this chapter do not in themselves determine intervention. Instead, these discourses are a kind of set up for the Australian mind-set and a menu from which Australia can draw for action. Discourse does not drive people in a deterministic way.

The fifth trope examined in this chapter, ‘failed states,’ proved a turning point. In the war on terror reading, a state has failed if it cannot control its borders and its monopoly on legitimate violence. When the Australian government assumed that Solomon Islands could not control their weapons and their institutions, and felt that the instability in Solomon Islands could pose a threat to Australia’s security, Australian leaders decided to intervene. National interest is still a driving theme for powerful states. They shift these discourses strategically to rationalize whatever their response will be.

The Solomon Islanders in this chapter have different interpretations of the use of this discourse to describe them and their country. The majority of citizens in Solomon Islands have a different understanding and view of the nature of state institutions, the nature of economic institutions, and the nature of laws than most Australians assume to
be normal, natural, and desirable. The next chapter explores in depth what happens when
the actions based on such differing assumptions collide in Solomon Islands.
Chapter 5: Australia’s Intervention in the South Pacific

This chapter investigates the Australian-led intervention in Solomon Islands and asks the following questions: What set of circumstances drive an intervention? How has the Australian government framed and legitimized their exercise in Solomon Islands? What are the nature and effects of the intervention? How do Solomon Islanders view the intervention?

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, or RAMSI, which is the embodiment of the intervention, came to Solomon Islands in July 2003 and remains there today, in 2010. Once again, I tell two stories: first, a story of the intervention seen through a conventional lens and then a story of the intervention seen through a critical lens. The methods I use are a combination of researching secondary literature and asking questions in the field. I compare official rhetoric from political leaders, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, RAMSI, news sources, and conferences with information I gained from interviews with Australian academics and Solomon Islanders.

Conventional View

My analysis of conventional views in the preceding chapters has identified how Australia’s motives and frames regarding the southwest Pacific have been set up over the past few centuries. My findings in Chapter 2 have shown that since the imperial age, evolutionary theories ranked the colonized – especially people with dark skin – as inferior to whites, as savages. Therefore, it was the duty and obligation of whites to rule over darker skinned peoples. Because Europeans were attributing intellect and morality to
biology, they determined that Melanesian savages – including Solomon Islanders – needed more direct intervention than the relatively fair-skinned Polynesians.

Chapter 3 has shown Solomon Islands as a Third World country in need of development. Because development is a technical problem that can be solved by following the advice of experts and implementing their technology and values, the leaders of Solomon Islands need to incorporate more thoroughly modern systems of law as well as modern political and economic institutions. More recently, neoliberalism has identified economic and political problems in certain countries that impede the spread of globalization, including communal land holdings and a lack of resource marketization.

My findings in Chapter 4 illustrate that the southwest Pacific is a region in crisis that continues to suffer from problems such as poverty, isolation, and instability. For more than a century, Australians have believed they have a right to speak for and lead peoples of the southwest Pacific (Fry 1997). More recently, the war on terror has put pressure on Western countries including Australia to act preemptively to stop the threat of terrorism.

These findings set up Australia’s frames and motives in dealing with states in the southwest Pacific, particularly Solomon Islands. Australia has long viewed Solomon Islands through a lens of crisis. The common theme throughout these narratives has been that Solomon Islanders cannot govern themselves and need outside intervention in one form or another, while the explanatory reasoning has shifted in focus from biological and cultural to economic and political inferiorities. Australian intervention in Solomon Islands has taken many forms over the years, culminating in 2003 with the most extreme
form of intervention: “boots on the ground,” which came about when the violence and
instability in Solomon Islands began to pose a threat to Australia and the region. In the
following section, I explore what drove the sharp change in Australian policies regarding
interventions.

**A Policy Shift to Intervention after the Attacks of 9/11**

As stated in the previous chapter, in the 1990s, failed states such as Somalia,
Rwanda, and Bosnia were viewed primarily as humanitarian concerns (Connell 2006). At
this time, neoliberals considered intervention to be a waste of time, money, and energy
(Dempsey 2001). The assumption that threats to national security came primarily from
other advanced states ended with the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Failed states shifted from
being humanitarian problems to being security problems (Walt 2001). Whereas states had
previously been able to separate clearly internal and external security, this ability became
more difficult because “the new terrorism knows no geographical, ideological, or moral
borders… This has had significant influence on security policy, especially in countries
that see themselves as potential targets of terrorist attacks” (Kabutaulaka 2004b, 3).

British strategist Robert Cooper, known as Prime Minister Tony Blair’s foreign
policy guru, was ahead of most conservative strategists when he proposed interventions
Cooper argued that after the end of the Cold War, the world had a choice “between
empire or chaos.” In the ancient world, order and civilization came from empires while
the rest of the world lived in chaos. “We need to get used to the idea of double standards.
Among ourselves, we operate on the basis of laws and open cooperative security. But
when dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of states outside the postmodern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era—force.” The new security order of the post-9/11 world took a more rigid position in this interpretation, where ‘irrational’ was seen as threatening. Like Rotberg, Cooper stressed, “The order provided by the state is vital to survival.” Cooper (2002) referred to failed states as ‘premodern.’ He argued instability posed by failed states brought “threats which no state can ignore.” Therefore, the world needed “a new kind of imperialism… which aims to bring order and organization.” Security has been more important than sovereignty when dealing with the threat of failed states. A more effective approach to fixing failed states is for a regional body take control and then to slowly “relinquish authority to an indigenous transitional administration” (Rotberg 2002a, 138).

**Australia’s Intervention in the South Pacific: Securing a Peaceful Pacific**

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the bombings in Bali in 2002, the Australian government’s rhetoric regarding Pacific Island States changed from respect for sovereignty to the need for intervention to stop security risks to Australia. Announcing the RAMSI deployment of July 2003, Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer stressed that the “complete breakdown in law and order” in Solomon Islands had forced Australia to form a new Pacific policy involving “nation rebuilding” and “co-operative intervention.” Downer emphasized that “there isn’t really an alternative but for Australia to take a leadership role” (Dobell 2003).

This statement is representative of a major shift in Australian policy toward the Pacific, one that the *New Zealand Herald* called “an about-turn of startling proportions”
Only six months earlier, in January 2003, Downer had argued that it would be “folly in the extreme” to send Australian troops to “occupy” Solomon Islands because “it would not work ... Foreigners do not have answers for the deep-seated problems affecting the Solomon Islands” (Downer 2003). Similarly, in November 2000, Ashton Calvert, Australia’s Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, said (2000b) the countries of the South Pacific “must manage their own affairs, find solutions to their own problems, and take responsibility for their own actions” (emphasis original). Two months earlier, Calvert (2000a) insisted, “It is not our role, however, nor is it in our interests to try to step in and run South Pacific countries in times of trouble… The island countries’ futures must be for them, not us, to determine.”

Elsina Wainwright, ASPI’s Director of Strategic and International Program, told me the policy shift came about because “we realized it is in our interest to be engaged in our region... Previously, Australia was disengaged because of respect for sovereignty.” The attacks of 9/11 and the Bali bombings that killed 88 Australians on October 12, 2002, shook the country and raised concerns about security threats in Australia’s “backyard” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).

By supporting the invasion of Iraq, the Australian government had allied itself with the United States to fight a global war on terror and the expectations that Australia would play a larger regional role increased. “Responding to state failure is at the top of the international security agenda... A failing state is a regional issue, and often requires a regional solution” (Wainwright 2003a). Wainwright told me, “We realized we have a responsibility; we are the regional metropole.” The policy shift shows that “Australia
doesn’t want states to deteriorate to the point of the Solomons.” In Australia, there has been a real shift in language from ‘ethnic violence’ to ‘failed states’ (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).

After the Iraq war began in March 2003, Australian Prime Minister John Howard spoke repeatedly of Australia’s “special responsibility” to fix up “our patch,” or region of the Pacific. He said, “The rest of the world expects Australia to shoulder a lot of the burden” in the Pacific (Farouque 2003). In August 2003, Hugh White argued in the Sydney Morning Herald that Howard had shown caution and calculation in his sophisticated manipulation of the levers of alliance management (by) sending a small but effective military contingent (to Iraq), and then bringing most of them home as soon as possible, before things turned ugly. This was no accident. Our contribution was planned that way from the start. And it was the same in Afghanistan.

Howard faced an election the next year and showed his adeptness at gaining points with the world’s superpower while avoiding Australian casualties that would have hurt his election campaign. The United States and the United Kingdom reassured Howard they understood Australia’s intervention in the Solomons as part of Howard’s commitment to cleaning up his neighborhood and that they did not expect him to send more troops either to Iraq or Afghanistan.

**Operation “Helpem Fren”**

The Australian government decided not to act when Solomon Islands Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu repeatedly requested assistance in 2000 prior to the coup. The complete turnabout in Australian and New Zealand foreign policy happened in mid-2003. Howard announced on June 25, 2003, that the Australian government had
made the decision to send troops to stabilize Solomon Islands (Shanahan 2003). Two days later, an editorial in *The Age*, an Australian newspaper, stated that now, five years after the conflict in the Solomons began, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza “made it clear that his country needs outside help simply to restore law and order. Endemic violence, the loss of parts of the country to control by warlords and a failing economy have placed Solomon Islands in a perilous position… Australia has acceded to this latest plea and is merely awaiting a formal request to intervene.” Howard explained the shift in policy came about because having failed states in the Pacific was not in Australia’s interest. The intervention force would consist of “200 Australian police backed by around 1500 military personnel including combat troops.” The same day, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the intervention was “the latest action involving Australia outside the auspices of the UN” (Allard 2003a).

*The Australian* (June 26, 2003) said the ASPI report, “Our Failing Neighbor: Australia and the Future of Solomon Islands,” published a month earlier, had clearly influenced the Australia government’s decision to intervene in the Solomons. Wainwright, the author of the report stated, “There is a growing recognition of the need to intervene in failing and failed states—that it is in the interests of regional and global security to reconstruct the institutions, governance and economy of such countries.” Wainwright described the situation in Solomon Islands as following “the more or less universal pattern of post-independence state failure around the world.”

On June 26, 2003, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer defended the Australian government’s change in policy. “Sovereignty in our view is not absolute.
Acting for the benefit of humanity is more important.” Downer explained “Australia is not a neo-colonial power, and we are sensitive to regional concerns about our role, but we will not sit back and watch while a country slips inexorably into decay and disorder.”

On July 1, 2003, Howard maintained, “Too often we have seen rogue and failed states become the base from which terrorists and transnational criminals organize their operations, train their recruits and manage their finances. If we want to be secure, we need to work with other nations to ensure collective stability. And sometimes we will be called upon to take action.” In a press conference on July 22, 2003, Howard announced the impending arrival in Solomon Islands of Australian and New Zealand troops, along with a few troops from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga. Howard stated, “We were asked to be involved by the Government of the Solomon Islands. The Parliament of the Solomon Islands has approved the request, legislation has been passed providing the necessary immunities... This is a very important exercise in Australia being a good neighbor. It is important to Australia that things in our part of the world on our patch aren’t allowed to deteriorate.” He continued:

This is not some kind of colonial hangover exercise by Australia, it is a response to the request of a friend and the operation itself will carry the name of Operation Helpem Fren, which depicts very much the motivation of Australia and the sense of comradeship that we are extending to the people of the Solomon Islands. This is our responsibility. I think the Australian people recognize that it is not in the interests of this country that we have failed states on our doorstep, and it would be a failure of our duty as a relatively large and prosperous, stable country in the region, not to extend a helping hand to a neighbour who’s asked for our help, particularly when it is going to be done in cooperation with other countries in the region.
In response to a journalist’s question about the Australian government’s choice to intervene in Solomon Islands when there are other quite troubled countries close to Australia, Howard replied,

The reality is that, with the greatest goodwill in the world, many of these countries are too small to be viable in the normal understanding of that expression and we really have to develop an approach that I could loosely call, you know, pooled regional governance.

Another journalist asked Howard, “Prime Minister, won’t these small countries see this Australian-led pooled regional governance as a new form of colonialism?” Howard responded,

No, it isn’t. The point I’m simply making is that if you have a country of fewer than 100,000 people and you have a couple of other around 50,000 and they all want to have an airline because they’re very isolated, the point I’m making is that it’s better to try and have one airline that covers the whole area than to have four separate airlines. That’s the sort of thing I’m talking about. I can’t for the life of me see how that’s got anything to do with colonialism. I think it’s got a lot to do with commonsense.

On July 24, 2003, Howard said, “If we do nothing and the country slides into further anarchy, and then it becomes a haven for evildoers, whether they’re involved in terrorism, or drugs, or money laundering, or anything else, we will rightly be condemned, not only by the Australian people, but also by countries around the world. This is our patch and we do have a special responsibility here, and we’re doing it in a very careful deliberate cooperative fashion. We’re not throwing our weight around, but we’re willing to do our fair share of the heavy lifting in an area that the rest of the world sees as very much Australia’s responsibility” (Sydney Morning Herald 2003).
Wainwright (2003b) wrote, “Conceptions of sovereignty and intervention are also changing. The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty’s 2001 Responsibility to Protect contends that a state has a responsibility to protect its citizens, and if a state is unable or unwilling to do so, then there arises an international responsibility to protect.” In a 2006 speech celebrating the third anniversary of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), James Batley, the Special Coordinator of RAMSI, said, “Sovereignty is not just about being an independent country, having a flag and a national anthem. It’s about winning the respect and the cooperation of other countries.”

A week after the intervention started, Hugh White (2003), head of ASPI, spoke sardonically about defense experts having a “lively debate” about how defense policy should change after 9/11. While these experts satisfied themselves with “theoretical ruminations,” White and the Australian government had to make “real choices” about national priorities: “Our backyard still takes priority. The ability to operate independently of the US is still important. And we still need to prepare to fight conventional wars.” In speaking to the Australian Parliament in October 2003, President Bush “praised the precedent” the Australian government had set by intervening in the Solomons and East Timor and then stated, “By your principled actions, Australia is leading the way to peace in South-East Asia” (Forbes 2003b).

Wainwright pointed out that Australia and New Zealand’s perceptions are different because of geography. “Australia has more of a sense of an acute threat because
of its position, that it’s closer to PNG and the Solomons, and so that affects policy” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).

Although many scholars and policymakers around the world have paid little attention to events in the Pacific, Rolfe (2004), a former Policy Advisor in the New Zealand Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, stressed it is crucial that the rest of the world pays attention to events in Oceania, primarily because “problems in one country leave gaps in the international security barriers that can be exploited to the detriment of other countries and regions.” Oceania itself poses a problem for the wider region, including East Asia, Australia and North America, “because Oceania lacks the resources to solve its own problems and if it doesn’t solve its own problems those problems could become a problem for the rest of the region.”

As keynote speaker at an October 2004 conference on “Securing a Peaceful Pacific,” Australian Greg Urwin, then Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, wondered aloud if the Pacific region was “going to hell.” Urwin spoke about failed states and the need for external intervention. “From the beginning, the concern was about the impact of external security on the Pacific region.” In his speech, Urwin referred to the Biketawa Declaration signed by Pacific Island Forum leaders in October 2000 in Kiribati. Urwin was part of the Australian delegation to that Pacific Islands Forum meeting where the Declaration was created. The Biketawa Declaration “is a security framework building on a number of other frameworks dating back to the Honiara Declaration of 1994” (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, “Security”). The Biketawa Declaration “provided, for the first time, a firm political basis for regional co-operation in security” (McDonald
Urwin described the guiding principles of the Declaration as non-interference but, in times of crisis or request by a country, the Forum needs to address the issues. In such a case, the Secretary General would assess the situation, then consult with Forum leaders, at which time a decision would be made on which actions to take “to assist in the resolution of the crisis” (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, “Biketawa Declaration”).

When Urwin spoke in October 2004, the Biketawa Declaration had been invoked twice: first in the Solomons in July 2003 and then in Nauru in July 2004. Urwin maintained the Declaration enabled RAMSI to be mounted and described RAMSI as “a considerable success so far. We have created stability but the easy bits have been done there. It’ll take years to help Solomon Islands.” Urwin acknowledged there is “a small amount of cynicism” and that some people say Australia and New Zealand are cloaked in regional rhetoric but he refuted this allegation, maintaining that countries with the most resources ought to help. When Urwin spoke about the Solomon Islands problem, he said that any action has to be decisive and that “people within Solomon Islands need to think that there is no sensible alternative to peace except intervention.” Urwin stressed it must be accepted that some Pacific Island countries suffer from issues of size (smallness), remoteness, and lack of resources.

After his keynote speech, Urwin was asked about the difference between the Pacific Island Forum’s policy toward Solomon Islands and Fiji, specifically why they did not intervene in Fiji. Urwin replied, “Fiji was still operating as a country and was big and ugly enough to look after itself. Solomon Islands was staring into a pit of apparent disorder.”
site states, “RAMSI is a truly regional response to a regional challenge.” The web site also shows an organizational chart that stresses the intervention’s regional aspect.

Figure 5.1. RAMSI Triumvirate Organization Chart.

On August 25, 2003, Graham Fletcher, the Head of the Solomon Islands Task Force for Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, stated RAMSI’s official mandate is “to reinforce and uphold the legitimate institutions and authorities in Solomon Islands, and ensure respect for the Constitution and implementation of the laws.” The intervention was to be based on respect for Solomon Islands’ sovereignty. Wainwright later told me that creating a partnership is one of the toughest challenges and stressed it is important to ask, “With an intervention, how do you avoid creating dependency?” (interview, Aug. 4, 2004) Similar to Howard’s declaration that “Helpem Fren” indicates Australia’s motivation and sense of “comradeship” with the Solomons, Wainwright also
Stewart Firth (2004), ANU professor and head of Canberra’s Pacific Centre, said the Biketawa Declaration did not mean much until 2003 when it was first invoked in the Solomons. In 2001, the Australian government had said it could not use Biketawa to intervene in the Solomons because there was not enough in the Declaration. Yet, in 2003, Alexander Downer used Biketawa as a justification for intervention. Firth argued, “Political will is what gives meaning to mechanism.” By invoking the Biketawa Declaration, which was “unprecedented in endorsing the intervention of Forum members in the internal affairs of another State,” the Australian government therefore “saw no need for UN involvement or a Security Council mandate” (Connell 2006).

In its official statements, the New Zealand government continually emphasized the cooperative nature of the intervention in the Solomons. According to the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade’s Solomon Islands: Country Information Paper, “RAMSI was undertaken under the auspices of the Pacific Forum Biketawa Declaration which agreed in 2000 that action would be taken ‘within the Pacific family’ in times of crisis… RAMSI’s regional mandate and full backing from the Pacific Islands Forum has been a key feature of its success… Without the strong support and involvement of the countries of the region RAMSI would not have had the success it has had, nor would it have come with and retained the overwhelming support of the people of Solomon Islands. This is the first time the countries of the region have worked together on such a large and multi-faceted mission. All members of the Pacific Islands Forum take pride in the success of RAMSI and their contributions to it.”
stated, “‘Helpem Fren’ is the name to show that the Solomons is in the lead” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).

According to Wainwright, “The Solomon Islands state should play a larger role in Solomon Islanders lives. The state is not helping people in the provinces. It has to provide services, security, generate enough economic activity to employ enough people.” Wainwright maintained that it was essential to manufacture a national identity in Solomon Islands. “That’s something a country must do on its own. Australia needs to give Solomon Islands space for debate and not to impose. Education is critical, as is the political education of Solomon Islanders so they know what their rights are and what they can require – to have accountability and transparency of their government” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).

Wainwright stressed there can be no nation-building without first state-building. There need to be fundamental institutions to build a state that people want affinity with. In order to have stability, you have to create institutions that are sustainable. The keys to stability include foreign investment and reforming the economy to help local entrepreneurs. You need to create and/or adapt institutions that draw on cultural processes through a process of trial and error. “It is not just about creating industries but we also have to think creatively about labor mobility.”

When I asked Wainwright if there were any risks to intervening, she replied, “A one-size-fits-all template is not culturally attuned to a place. It has to be culturally attuned. RAMSI is adjusting a nation-building template to Solomon Islands culture. The intervention force has been culturally sensitive because its leaders have Melanesian
experience. In RAMSI, there are excellent leaders with Melanesian experience, for instance, Nick Warner and Ben McDevitt, and in the Civil, Police, and Military forces.”

Wainwright told me RAMSI has to facilitate to make sure that issues are addressed in a timely way. It has to be a long-term commitment on Australia’s part (interview, Aug. 4, 2004). She also told me “Australian people have a real sense of success with the Solomons. The place has turned around” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).

New Zealander Peter Noble, then-RAMSI’s Deputy Special Coordinator, was second in command when I interviewed him in Honiara. His interview was the most revealing one I conducted in my fieldwork. He explained why the intervention in the Solomons had to happen, saying the main problems are leadership and Solomon Islanders’ inability to develop economically. He talked about the Solomons’ need to transition from its subsistence economy into a cash economy. While people focus on conflict, Noble said conflict is irrelevant because the root causes of the conflict are “development and lack thereof.” He said the same is true all over the Pacific: in PNG, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, and Cook Islands. The people are “unable to exploit their own resources.” He asserted, however, “We can pre-empt conflict.”

Noble also described the paradigm shift that had occurred. He explained that when Prime Minister Ulufa’alu asked for help in 1999 and 2000, New Zealanders thought it was not their problem or responsibility, because Solomon Islands was a sovereign country. It wasn’t until December 2002 that New Zealand and Australia realized they’d have to intervene. They recognized that the participatory role they’d been playing wasn’t enough. “We can’t have failed states here because they affect us equally. New Zealand
realized there was a globalization of international crime, smuggling drugs, and money laundering.” Noble said that the intervention is “not really about terrorism.” Instead, “we’re tar-babied by these countries.” The term ‘tar baby’ refers to a sticky situation that is made worse through continued contact.

What the French have done in New Caledonia is a model for RAMSI’s mission in Solomon Islands. Noble explained, “The French realized New Caledonia wasn’t fit to make decisions independently, much less be independent. So, the French took over to create economic development.” Similarly, in Solomon Islands, the focus is economic reform. Noble said the Solomons and its people need money. It has a $2 billion debt. “RAMSI is about simple but brutal prioritization. We have to get the government to work by making money. RAMSI is not about funding economic development but getting economic development.” However, despite a great need for economic justice, Noble said, “You can’t invest in Solomon Islands while it’s a traditional society. You need to know you can protect your investment.”

Noble also said, “RAMSI is based on the post-WWII Japanese model,” with the plan being to “create a strong bureaucracy and enforcement. We’ll break the nexus of political influence on bureaucracy. We’ve already broken the nexus of police influence. We’re working with people we want eventually to lock up.” I asked Noble if he meant people like Kemakeza since so many Solomon Islanders are convinced he is corrupt. Noble responded, “No, he’s one of the only ones doing the right thing.”

Noble said that Solomon Islands is institutionally “ruined” and that “every institution in Solomon Islands is defunct.” It is RAMSI’s mission to “control certain
institutions in Solomon Islands to stop things from moving backwards.” When I spoke with Noble in 2004, he said, “RAMSI is in its micro-tactical phase. We have secured order.” They had gotten control of the money and were restoring governmental and provincial institutions. They had “gotten rid of 400 Solomon Island police officers.” He said, “You can’t just pick a few of the institutions you like. You have to fix pretty much everything.” He estimated that institutions would be fragile for the next five to ten years, comparing Solomon Islands to a patient in intensive care at a hospital, crippled and needing a long time to recover. He concluded, “We didn’t realize how ruined Solomon Islands is institutionally or we might not have intervened at all because it is too messy.”

Noble said that RAMSI is beginning with the Honiara government, “but that’s not where the real game lies.” Regional leadership, transportation, and communication need to start functioning in order to facilitate business. Because 80% of Solomon Islanders live in provinces and their societies don’t have freedom of movement, RAMSI aims “at decentralized development with mobility and/or a way of sharing” and “basic infrastructures developed throughout.” It must begin in Honiara, though, because “RAMSI can’t do it bottom-up. We have to do it top-down.”

Noble said, “RAMSI’s strategy has changed radically since May 2004 partially because our understanding of what we’re up against has changed.” The approach has had to be dynamic and adjust to the change in Solomon Islands’ leadership. “The implementation of our development strategy is a lot harder than we expected. If we had known it was this bad before, we probably wouldn’t have intervened.”
When people ask what RAMSI’s agenda is, Noble says, “There isn’t one. RAMSI doesn’t care what society Solomon Islanders have. There is no blueprint for economic and social development or population control. Either you get involved or not. RAMSI won’t work out your land policy or whatever. That’s far ahead, for Solomon Islanders to figure out once Solomon Islands is functioning. Now it’s so early in such a long process.”

When asked how Solomon Islanders have responded to the intervention, Noble said, “Solomon Islanders are more receptive about new ideas. They understand what it’s like to be powerless in the face of armed youth and police. Solomon Islands people did not like that.” He added, “In 2001, there was a prayer week for economic revival. No one did anything practical. Solomon Islanders think that God sent RAMSI to solve their problems.”

When I asked Noble if he thought the intervention was an act of neocolonialism as others had charged, he responded,

It’s not neocolonialism but rather conditionality. Because what happened before didn’t work, we need to try something new. We need to put in adequate resources, not a piece-meal approach. We need a long term commitment. There needs to be conditionality; we can’t give money anymore and just say, ‘Here, do it your way.’ The mess we’ve found all adds up to this intervention. Because of globalization, we’re stuck. If you leave Solomon Islands now, it will come back to bite you twice as hard. We’re experimenting with people’s lives, but we have no alternative. The world won’t stand by anymore and let this happen. We need to develop leadership. The way out is not to put money into ‘post-conflict’ resolutions or PTSD treatment but to put money into things that need to happen like another outside auditor” inserted into the Solomon Islands government.

I got an overwhelming sense from Peter Noble that he and RAMSI think poorly of Solomon Islanders and the condition of their country. Noble had no trust in Solomon Islanders to govern themselves. His exact words were: “Solomon Islanders are either
rotten to the core or naïve to think they can do it themselves. They need to jump six levels to keep stable and Solomon Islanders can’t do that. They can only jump one level. They can’t do it!” He said that they aren’t visionaries, that they only live in the present, that they have “no concept of the long-term or prioritizing. Solomon Islanders’ worldview is rooted in subsistence, a hand-to-mouth existence. It’s the result of a lack of education or a lack of pressures to do things differently.” He also told me “the Solomon Islands is a cannibal society. Their natural instinct is to run away. This permeates all of society. Confrontation usually means you may be eaten.”

Noble told me, “For a long time, New Zealand said we’re in a partnership with Solomon Islands but we realize now we can’t have a partnership if there is no one to be a partner because Solomon Islanders aren’t competent to be partners.” He told me that the Solomons needed guardianship. “They need mentorship, learned practices, education, people getting used to a system that works. There needs to be economic development. Then it will change the social order of things.”

He spoke about corruption in the Solomons, especially regarding money, saying, “Solomon Islands is like a playground with no monitor. We need to keep things this way until it becomes accepted. We need to totally destroy Solomon Islands culture as we know it. No culture stays the same. The world won’t let Solomon Islands stay the same.” Noble has told Solomon Islanders: “You have no alternative: Change or die.”

Noble said that “corruption is a virus” and that you have to “scare people into knowing they can’t get away with it anymore...” He explained that Solomon Islanders don’t take responsibility or have any leadership, although they do have technical skills.
Solomon Islanders find security in the wantok system, but Noble said it was important to make that system unnecessary. “We have to make decisions for them now” until they get to a cash economy. “The big question is, will they still have the ability to manage businesses without screwing it up? Can they create good management?” He said that Polynesians see the Solomons as “a Third World dump” and that “they can’t believe how much Solomon Islanders have screwed up.”

In the years prior to the intervention,

government revenue has been given away as tax concessions or stolen by MEF, the government, police, and for false compensation. The Solomon Islanders who were in charge killed the golden goose. Even Africans aren’t stupid enough to take so much that the whole thing crashes. Solomon Islanders need a core group of guardians. It’s more than mentoring. It’s more about guardianship. They’re greedy bastards.

Solomon Islanders have told Noble they should be in charge of rebuilding their country. Noble has replied, “No way.” Noble told me the Solomon Islanders gasp.

Does Noble think there’s any hope for the Solomon Islands? He told me he has become hardened but he’s still optimistic about the Solomons. “There is a chance here. There are huge obstacles but they aren’t intractable ones like in other places. The tension here was a flash in the pan.”

These were my findings concerning Australia’s understanding of its RAMSI intervention from mid-2003. How did Solomon Islanders view RAMSI? Although this chapter will continue to show many critical views of the Australian-led intervention, I did find some appreciation in Solomon Islands for RAMSI as in these six entries among my interviews.
A Positive View of RAMSI from Solomon Islanders

Robert* was positive about the presence of RAMSI. He viewed RAMSI not as a sign of neocolonialism but as “just a helping hand.” Robert used an analogy to describe the situation: “The Solomons fell to bottom of a well. We need RAMSI to help pull us out. Now we’re at the hospital and we need to recover.” RAMSI is trying to put the ringleaders in prison so that the environment in the Solomons changes to make guns redundant, so people don’t need to use the guns. RAMSI is trying to get people engrossed in good things for themselves and for their country. Robert placed more of the responsibility on Solomon Islanders to take the initiative. He told me RAMSI has focused a lot on public affairs to make sure Solomon Islanders knew exactly what RAMSI was doing. “People think RAMSI is now the government. People ask RAMSI, ‘Can you do this?’ But RAMSI is doing nothing similar to what the Solomon Islands government was doing. RAMSI doesn’t want their label” (interview, Sept. 29, 2004).

Henry* told me, “It’s great that RAMSI came. Otherwise it would still be dangerous.” I asked what he thought about Australians being inserted into high governmental and financial positions in the Solomons. He answered, “If they are working alongside Solomon Islanders to train them, that’s fine. But if they are just doing the jobs by themselves and not training Solomon Islanders, then what’s the point? When they leave, they’ll take the knowledge with them.” He made it clear, “We don’t want them here forever. Australia should be careful because if they try to stay too long or if they treat people badly, they’ll have a revolt on their hands” (interview, Sept. 19, 2004).
A man from Makira told me he is “very happy about RAMSI coming.” Before the conflict, he had been living in Honiara and working as a taxi driver. He said, “It wasn’t safe here for people who aren’t from Guadalcanal or Malaita so I returned to Makira during the conflict.” He and his family left in 2000 after some men pointed guns at his brother and made him give them his car (interview, Sept. 15, 2004).

A woman from Guadalcanal and her cousin told me they were so happy when RAMSI came. They could finally feel safe and have a normal life again, go to school, etc. (interview, Sept. 16, 2004). Mary said, “It’s good that Australia is inserting people into the government because the government here is so corrupt.” I asked what she thought about the idea that Solomon Islanders can’t govern themselves and she agreed. She said, “The first couple of Prime Ministers were all right but since then, they have just been taking money from the government that is supposed to go to the entire country and stealing it.” I asked why she thinks it is that Solomon Islanders cannot govern themselves since a lot of Solomon Islanders are really good people. She agreed and said that maybe the lure of so much money takes over but it is obvious Solomon Islanders cannot govern themselves (interview, Sept. 16, 2004).

A primary school teacher who has lived in Marovo Lagoon, Western Province all of his life said he believes RAMSI’s presence has made life better for the country because “criminals have been put in jail. There has been a crack down on corruption. Before, if you reported corruption, no one took action. The company would pay off people who spoke out” (interview, Sept. 24, 2004).
Kabutaulaka was hopeful about RAMSI’s role in longer-term when James Batley was chosen to replace Nick Warner as Special Coordinator of RAMSI. Batley is a diplomat and had previously served as High Commissioner to the Solomons. Kabutaulaka told me, “Solomon Islanders respect [Batley]. He has a lot of connections in the Solomons and drinks kava with people” (interview, July 2004). These were the few, guarded moments of hope or acceptance I found in Solomon Islands.

**Critique of Conventional View**

Next I explore the intervention through a critical lens. Critical analysis in the preceding chapters has revealed how the Australian government has framed and legitimized their exercise in Solomon Islands and has revealed Solomon Islanders’ interests, motives, frames, and views of RAMSI. Chapter 2 has shown that Solomon Islanders were categorized by European colonizers as Melanesians because of the dark color of their skin and placed toward the bottom of a racial hierarchy. Over the past few decades, Hau’ofa and other Pacific Islanders have worked hard to offer more positive, empowering alternatives not only to such categorizations but also to the idea of the smallness of Pacific Islands. Regional movements including the Melanesian Spearhead Group have also increased pride in local epistemologies and ontologies.

Chapter 3’s findings show that modernization theory has continued to reinforce the above-mentioned racial hierarchy through cultural and development narratives that defined colonies and newly independent countries as needing outside assistance. Although people of Solomon Islands have had legal, political, and economic changes imposed on them, they have not simply been passive recipients of colonialism and imperialism. Rather, they have resisted the oppressive rule of the colonial system and,
later, the economic and political impositions forced by the institution of the nation-state on the islanders for the benefit of the elite.

My findings in Chapter 4 illustrate that instead of being descriptive, crisis discourse has embedded within it certain assumptions about the world and how it should be. Australian framings of the Pacific continue to rely on assumptions from colonial, development, and neoliberal discourses. These terms of crisis continue earlier portrayals of Islanders as subordinate to Australians. Many Pacific Islanders find the Australian use of crisis images of the Pacific to be belittling in part because they ignore successful examples of negotiation and conflict resolution that have occurred. Solomon Islanders have a long history of being controlled and governed by the British and Australian governments. Many Solomon Islanders have different values and world views than what is considered normal in a state-centric, ‘modern’ world. What security in Solomon Islands is to international bankers, for instance, looks like insecurity for many of its citizens.

I found most evaluations of the Australian-led intervention to be critical; academic, media, and Solomon Islander views questioned Australia’s assumptions and motives. I group the doubts into the following themes: an imperial exercise, self-interest, timing, state-building, corruption, legitimacy, governmentality, and neoliberal demands.

**Intervention as an Imperial Exercise**

Over the past few centuries, the discourse of progress has changed according to political expediency. The discourse was first based on biology, such as ‘primitive’ and ‘advanced’ races and then on culture, e.g. ‘backward’ and ‘traditional.’ Where scholars
previously talked about failures of development, they now speak more of failed or failing states as a reason for intervention. These concepts all have a similar assumption running through them: these people cannot govern themselves, or at least cannot govern themselves according to western standards of governance. The term failed states “came with the implication that the people were inadequate” (Field 2003b).

Numerous strategists and policymakers have, in their justifications for intervening in failed states, implicitly reasserted a colonial, paternalistic view that ‘we’ know better what’s best for ‘them’ that endorses the use of force (Cooper 2000, 2002b; Rotberg 2002a). Rice (2005) took a similar stand when she said, “The goal of our statecraft is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system” (emphasis added). It is as if a parent is helping to raise a child to behave ‘responsibly’ in the world.

This sort of colonial view has persisted in the Pacific. As recently as 1974, a map book of the Pacific Islands stated, “Before the white man came (to the British Solomon Islands) the Melanesians on the island (of Guadalcanal) were headhunters…. Britain looks after the Solomon Islands” (Reed 1974, 23). This statement was made just prior to independence. More recently, in 2003, the Sydney Morning Herald ran a story about the Pacific Islands refusing “to fall in line” (Allard 2003b).

Pha and Symon (2003) argued globalization and imperialism are the same thing. Their defining features include wars, occupation and colonization of foreign territories, and rearranging state borders. “The theories used to legitimize imperialism’s aims and the methods used to achieve them, however, do change according to historical
circumstances.” In the current time period, places are labeled ‘failed,’ ‘unstable,’ ‘rogue,’
‘uncivilized,’ and ‘chaotic.’ These labels “suggest questions of organizational and
managerial skills which may be learnt with some assistance from the better educated and
more experienced ‘civilized’ states.” Within this paradigm, “it is the duty of the
‘successful states’ to intervene and restore order and impose good government.” These
theories “cover up the maneuvers of the main imperialist states as they interfere in the
affairs of nation states, occupy them and take over their governments.”

**Australia’s Intervention in the South Pacific: Serving Australia’s Self-Interest**

Unlike the people of Polynesia, Melanesians have long been viewed as “black
savages, backward, primitive and necessitating external intervention to secure
development.” The islands of Melanesia have been continually framed with messages of
doom that require salvation. Embedded within the current concept of salvation are ideas
of progress and modernity that during colonialism had linked capitalism with
Christianity. Australian agendas in Melanesia were justified through discourses of
Orientalism “that implied subordination and required domination, restructuring and new
authority. It was a process in which imaginative geographies essentialized cultural and
geographical difference” (Connell 2006, 119). The Australian-led intervention in
Solomon Islands is therefore part of a long tradition of Australian interventions.

There was a dramatic shift in Australian foreign policy after the attacks of 9/11
and the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 88 Australians; Australia became much more
willing to “play a more assertive role in the domestic affairs of Pacific
countries” (Kabutaulaka 2005a, 283). Canberra is ideologically driven and is aligned
closely with Bush and the war on terror (Dinnen interview, Dec. 8, 2003). By organizing interventions in PNG and the Solomons, the Australian government “has begun to challenge the self-government of Pacific Island States, especially in Melanesia” It has inserted Australian “inspectors in local finance ministries to see that aid money is spent the way Australia wants it to be spent, and engineered the election of an Australian as head of the regional Pacific Forum, despite indigenous opposition” (Chappell 2005, 316).

Paul Roughan, a Solomon Islander who was a fellow at the Solomon Islands Knowledge Institute as well as the National Biosafety Framework Coordinator for the Solomons, stated (2004) the problem in the Solomons has been presented as one of ‘law and order.’ Roughan continued, “That’s a useful hanger especially when the media played along by using ‘beheading’ and ‘warlords’ as manifestations of a law and order problem.” By defining the problem as one of ‘law and order,’ people in power can more easily justify intervention since the case of the Solomons could fit into the security framework developed in response to the attacks of 9/11 and the attacks in Bali. Gordon Nanau, Head of Research and Planning at SICHE, also said that the attacks of 9/11 and fear of terrorists helped create the RAMSI intervention (interview, Sept. 3, 2004).

Howard said it was likely the Australian government would participate in more interventions. Howard’s prediction made many people nervous. In August 2003, a reporter for the (UK) *Independent* noted, “Australia’s military intervention in the Solomon Islands is already fueling concerns that it regards itself as a regional policeman” (Marks 2003). Australia’s policy is not just affecting Solomon Islanders but
rather it seems to be a framework Australia is going to use on other Pacific nations like Papua New Guinea, and possibly Fiji and Vanuatu (Dinnen interview, Dec 10, 2003).

In 2003, Gary Leupp, a professor of History at Tufts University, sarcastically described Australia’s intervention in the Solomons as “their heroic assumption of the white man’s burden in their patch.” Although Howard included the Solomons as part of the patch “that the rest of the world sees as very much Australia's responsibility,” Leupp has argued that he doubts “whether the world actually acknowledges that Howard’s ‘patch’ extends beyond the borders of his continent-nation.”

A highly respected Australian journalist told me when the Howard administration decided to intervene, there had been no massacre or media event in the Solomons.

But leaders tell stories to their people. The leaders said, ‘We’ll decide it’s a crisis now.’ The elite decide to define a crisis in certain way, to frame it in language that justifies their response. They need to reframe language into ‘failed states,’ ‘law and order,’ and ‘terrorism.’ There is a difference between real policy and stated policy (interview, Dec. 2003).

In October 2003, The Sydney Morning Herald published an editorial cartoon (Figure 5.2) to accompany an article titled “A New Urgency to Save a Region that’s All at Sea.” The drawing reverses a famous photograph from World War II in which a Papua New Guinea man – a “fuzzy wuzzy angel” – leads a wounded Australian soldier. Many Pacific Islanders are concerned about Australia’s new policy and fear the Australian government itself may become a threat to stability in the region, an irony that seems lost on many Australians (Fry interview, Nov. 21, 2003).
A Member of the Solomon Islands Parliament disagreed with Solomon Islands being called a ‘failed’ state. “It was the law and order that the Solomons needed help with. We don’t need help with the economic and political parts” (interview, September 2004). Using the term ‘failed state’ helped to get the intervention but it may not have been for good reasons. The reasons should be a responsibility to protect Solomon Islanders, to diminish the potential of humanitarian disaster, and to keep the political system out of the hands of thugs (Hegarty interview, Dec. 10, 2003).

In July 2003, when a journalist asked Howard if small countries in Oceania would not view RAMSI as a new form of colonialism, Howard responded, “No, it isn’t.” He compared RAMSI with a regional airline serving sparsely populated, isolated countries. “It’s better to try and have one airline that covers the whole area than to have four separate airlines... I can’t for the life of me see how that’s got anything to do with colonialism.” Howard’s answer is telling. Rather than answering the question about whether these small countries would view this Australian-led pooled regional governance
as a new form of colonialism, Howard simply asserted that it is not a new form of colonialism. On December 23, 2003, Howard continued his rhetoric, “This is our patch, this is our part of the world in which the countries of the Pacific have a particular responsibility” (Canberra Times 2003).

Howard’s concern about his neighborhood was clearly a recent development. After the May 2000 Fiji coup, Howard “was criticized for a lack of interest in this immediate part of Australia’s neighborhood when it was noted that he had not attended the last two meetings of the South Pacific Forum,” now known as the Pacific Islands Forum (Gurry 2001). Soon after Howard announced the intervention in the Solomons, he again raised fears of Australian neocolonialism when he “forcefully supported” a common currency – the Australian dollar – at the August 2003 Pacific Islands Forum (Marks 2003). Appointing Nick Warner as head of RAMSI showed the Australian government’s intent because Warner has worked in counterintelligence in the past (McKinley interview, Nov. 17, 2003).

Another example of Howard asserting Australian dominance occurred when he pushed for Greg Urwin to become Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2004. “Island leaders resisted, not at Urwin personally, but at the idea of an Australian taking the job and at Howard's prescriptive approach to regional problems.” Howard insisted Urwin was not “just some blow-in from Canberra” and strong-armed Urwin into the position (McDonald 2008).

Secret deals such as Australia’s ‘Pacific solution’ to asylum seekers suggest “Australia may be part of the problem, not necessarily the solution” (Denoon 2003).
Davidson (2002) described the ‘Pacific solution’ as a cynical move by the Australian government to treat “Pacific Island nations as if they were simply client states: non-whites can be safely kept off-shore in what have become our very own Bantustans.”

The cover of the ASPI report “Our Failing Neighbor: Australia and the Future of Solomon Islands” is an example of how Australians have constructed a history of the Pacific based on tropes of paradise and savagery. The cover shows a masked Solomon Islander carrying a gun juxtaposed with a beautiful island sunset. The ASPI report is titled and framed so that the discourse is aimed at Australia. It does not specifically say that Solomon Islands is failing but rather starts with the word ‘our,’ bringing it home to Australia.

**Figure 5.3. Cover of ASPI Report “Our Failing Neighbor.”**

Some Solomon Islanders view RAMSI’s actions as arrogant, and they fear the Australian government is pursuing its own interests at the expense of Solomon Islanders. One man from Guadalcanal told me, “They’re even shipping in water from Australia. There are a lot of streams here. They could easily drink water from here” (interview, Sept. 2004). When I spoke with Australians working with RAMSI, they told me they were purposefully shipping in supplies like water so that they did not create a false economy that would disappear when RAMSI forces left the Solomons. Yet, Kabutaulaka told me the economy of Solomon Islands for 2004 would come 100% from aid donors, making it an artificial economy (interview, July 2004). Kabutaulaka (2004a) said, “When they pull out, it will be a disaster.”

Roughan (2003) also stressed that aid would not solve things. “If you’re a bad driver in a broken-down jalopy and I give you a Mercedes, you’re still going to be a bad driver.” A Member of Parliament in the Solomons told me Australia’s aid package was not very genuine. “It has strings attached. It’s more like a boomerang. They throw it into Solomon Islands but goes back to Australia” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Another reason some Solomon Islanders think the Australian government is meddling in its sovereign affairs stems from a leaked email. The day before the April 2006 election of Snyder Rini that set off riots and arson in Honiara’s Chinatown, Mick Shannon, a RAMSI adviser in the Solomon Islands Department of Finance, wrote an email that was soon leaked. As the Australian newspaper The Age stated, the leaked email showed the “hand of Canberra in Honiara.” Shannon had written that Australian High Commissioner Patrick Cole “had talked to Tommy and Laurie Chan as to why Rini had
been selected given that they had given him assurances that he wouldn’t be… Looks like Tommy Chan’s main business interest is in getting a second casino license and he can no doubt depend on Rini for that. There is no way Rini will make Boyers Finance Minister and we will end up with no effective voice in Cabinet to guide economic and fiscal policy” (Skehan 2006b). Manasseh Sogavare, who soon replaced Rini as Prime Minister, frequently spoke publicly of his distrust of RAMSI motives, which will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming section “RAMSI Decisions are Made in Canberra.”

**Operation “Spoilem Fren”**

Given the colonial nature of the relationship between Australia and Solomon Islands, the intervention needed to be handled from the beginning with a great deal of sensitivity. Wainwright had told me the name “Helpem Fren” was used to show that the Solomons is in the lead” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003). The name is ironic because in almost every other way, Australia is in the lead. Wainwright also told me, “Australia has to make sure that its rhetoric indicates that this is not a neocolonial beginning. We need to be very careful about our words.”

Many Solomon Islanders with whom I spoke asked why Australia waited to intervene until 2003. Why didn’t Australia offer help in 2000 when Prime Minister Ulufa’alu begged the Australian government for help? Moore (2005) asks, “What caused the dramatic change in policy in mid-2003 when Australia and other regional nations sent in 2,000 troops, police and administrative helpers, and Australia committed itself to possibly A$2 billion in assistance over the next decade?”
Ulufa’alu made repeated requests in 2000 “for Australian and New Zealand security assistance in the six months leading up to the armed takeover… It is the only case of a Pacific Island state being refused help despite repeated requests for assistance from the friendly governments of Australia and New Zealand” (Henderson 2003, 237). Just before he was overthrown in the coup, Ulufa’alu asked the Australian government, “Why won’t you help us? It is not a question of Australia coming in and invading. It is a question of everybody in the country – the premiers, the church leaders, the trade unions, even the warring parties – all have concurred to a neutral body coming in” (Wright 2003).

Instead of showing respect for sovereignty, the Australian government was seen as following its own self-interest. When the coup occurred on June 5, 2000, Laurie Brereton, Australia’s Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs noted, “The Solomon Islands Government repeatedly appealed for international police assistance, especially from Australia, to help maintain law and order as it sought to revive peace negotiations between the rival militant groups. The Howard Government’s response was minimalist…”

In 2000, the UN “signaled that it thought the crises in Fiji and the Solomon Islands could best be dealt with by regional neighbors, but Australia and New Zealand made quite clear that they were not about to send in the substantial peacekeeping force for which Prime Minister Ulufa’alu had pleaded” (Moore 2004). That same year, the Australian government had released a Defense paper that emphasized keeping Australia free from other nations getting too close, for example not engaging in Solomon Islands (Fry interview, Dec. 1, 2003).
Fraenkel (2003) argued, “If there was a state failure, it occurred back in 2000, after months of entreaties from beleaguered Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu that fell on deaf Australian ears.” Bennett (2004) recalled how, in 2000, Ulufa’alu asked the Australian government for a small number of police to help reinstate him. Australia’s view was “Let them stew in their own juices. They can work it out.”

It is important to note that in April 2000, when Ulufa’alu asked Australia for help, he was not asking for an intervention but rather “a three-month commitment of Australian police personnel as part of a 50-person multinational group to work alongside Solomon Islands police to maintain law and order” (Moore 2004, 3-4). It is probable that such a force would have stemmed the violence and the coup.

Although the U.S. Department of State (2005) described RAMSI as “a multinational police-centered force (that) arrived in the country at the invitation of the Government to assist in restoring law and order and rebuilding the country’s institutions,” Kelly, a Member of Parliament in Solomon Islands, rejected the American and Australian governments’ version of how the intervention came about. He argued instead that Australia came into Solomon Islands because of a change in the Australian government’s foreign policy. “Australia created RAMSI not because Prime Minister Kemakeza requested Australia’s assistance” but rather for their own gain. In 2000, when militia were extorting money from the Solomon Islands government, Prime Minister Ulufa’alu had asked the Australian government “for help several times and got nothing” (interview, Sept. 2004).
The day of the coup, an Australian radio program reported, “The Malaitan militants, the Eagle Force led by [Andrew] Nori, [were] holding the Prime Minister at gun point.” Phil Goff, New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, told the radio program, “Well, in the end, no country outside of the Solomons can control the situation, we can simply try to influence it” (Hall 2000). The day after the coup, Howard admitted to the Australian Parliament that Ulufa’alu “had called for armed and interventionist troops or police to put down the insurgency in Guadalcanal. That included a quite specific request for the deployment of Australian police to line positions in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force. That matter was considered by the government, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs indicated to the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands that the government of Australia did not believe it was appropriate for us to respond to that request.” Yet, even in light of the coup, Howard insisted, “Australia has acted correctly.” Howard defended the Australian government’s decision to turn down Ulufa’alu’s request for Australian police to help restore law and order, saying, “You do not willy-nilly commit the police of this country to a hostile situation without knowing what the exit strategy is” (June 6, 2000).

Wainwright told me that when Ulufa’a’lu had asked Australia for help prior to the coup in 2000, “at the time, Australia was busy with East Timor and the Olympics.” Also, Australian officials on the ground in the Solomons told Wainwright that “the majority of Solomon Islanders weren’t ready for outside intervention at that point. It had to deteriorate so far for Solomon Islanders to be open to it” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).
The attacks on 9/11 and the 2002 Bali bombings marked a key point in the Australian government’s policy shift. Bennett (2004) explained, “Australia and New Zealand realized our internal security could be threatened from outside by drugs, toxic waste, passport scams, etc.” Crocombe (2004) described an identical scene: In 2000, both prior to the coup and after, Ulufa’alu asked the Australian government for help but Australia refused. In 2002, Australia’s interests changed, in part because of a growing Indonesian and Chinese influence. “The problem in the Solomons was pretty irrelevant. Australia only did something when it was in Australia’s interest.”

Several academics at ANU told me the rationale for the Australian government’s sudden reversal in policy regarding an intervention in Solomon Islands was that Indonesia was in negotiations with the Solomons to intervene. One professor told me he had not seen any hard evidence but he is sure it happened. He surmised that Prime Minister Kemakeza asked Indonesia to intervene because Kemakeza would have preferred an Indonesian intervention rather than an Australian one because the Indonesians are “softer so Solomon Islanders could control it more. Also, Solomon Islands isn’t thrilled with Australia because they see Australia as imperial power” (interviews, Nov. 2003).

Australia’s and New Zealand’s relationship with the Pacific is determined largely by their perceptions of themselves. “New Zealand sees itself as part of the Pacific while Australia doesn’t. Australia sees problems as ‘out there.’ The Australian government takes the approach that ‘our role is to solve their problems and tell them what to do’” (Kabutaulaka 2004a). For example, Australia’s approach to drugs is that Pacific
countries cannot control their borders to keep drugs from passing through “but we don’t hear where the drugs go; the primary consumers are in Australia.”

Fry (2004, 2) agreed the Howard Government’s “new commitment to a more effective regional effort is explicitly motivated by a security imperative – the war against terror – and has to be seen as part of the Howard Government’s new doctrinal approach to the Pacific underpinned by its view that Australia has a ‘special responsibility’ to look after ‘our patch’ defined in this context as the Pacific islands region.” Events occurring in the Solomons in 2003 suggested a level of breakdown that had not been there before. In May 2003, an Australian missionary was beheaded in the Solomons; the Solomons’ banks closed down; and Prime Minister Kemakeza had been threatened for months by Solomon Islands police seeking to extort money as they shot bullets at his house (Fry interview, Dec. 1, 2003).

Denoon (2003) maintained that since Australia is now the “deputy sheriff of the U.S., Australia is held responsible for implementing globalization in the Pacific.” Leupp (2003) concurred that the war on terror narrative “provided legitimating rhetoric and precedent for Australian action” in the Solomons. The ‘failed state’ concept has become critical to this new thinking. For Australia, the focus has been on the threat that the Solomons poses to the island continent (Dinnen interview, Aug. 3, 2004).

What is especially troubling about the way that the Australian government framed the situation in the Solomons is that many of Australia’s policies have been set up and carried out by people with no experience in the Solomons. At the beginning of 2003, the newly appointed Solomon Islands Police Commissioner, William Morrell, a senior
British police officer, arrived in the Solomon Islands “to take on one of the most challenging jobs in the whole region,” and yet “has no experience of Melanesian culture” (ABC Radio Jan. 29, 2003). Wainwright, the primary author of the ASPI report, “Our Failing Neighbor: Australia and the Future of Solomon Islands,” which according to The Australian (June 26, 2003) clearly influenced the Australian government’s decision to intervene in the Solomons, wrote the report without ever stepping foot in the Solomons. Dinnen pointed out that Wainwright assessed the situation in the Solomons and created a policy analysis with no first-hand experience. “She took the strategic framework from Kosovo/Bosnia where she had worked before and plunked it down into the Pacific” (interview, Dec. 8, 2003).

Australia acts in terms of external criteria—in this case, external to Solomon Islands. The focus of their framework is the stability of a country rather than sovereignty (Dinnen interview, Nov. 11, 2003). It does not matter if the intervention is not sustainable or if it is not good for Solomon Islanders. “It only matters that the threat to Australia stops” (Dinnen interview, Aug. 3, 2004). Since what was important about the decision to intervene was what was in Australia’s best interest, it did not matter that Wainwright had not been there before she wrote the report because “there” didn’t really have anything to do with the decision, except that it posed a security threat to Australia. The people and the situation in the Solomons were otherwise extraneous.

Reilly told me the Australian government sold the intervention in the Solomons domestically as protecting Australian citizens. The Howard government said the ASPI report “Our Failing Neighbor” gave them justification for intervention (interview, Nov.
According to Reilly, however, the reverse is more accurate since Defense had input in the report. The Howard government used the report to signal and justify policies, to put the issue on the agenda and to justify policy change (interview, Dec. 9, 2003). Julie, a woman who is close to MEF, also told me that Australia used the notion of ‘failed state’ to justify the intervention (interview, Sept. 2004). Fraenkel (2004a, 181) similarly argued, “The claim that the Solomon Islands was a ‘failed state’ played a key role in Canberra’s 2003 justification for intervention.”

Gabriel* told me that in April 2003, about a month before the Australian government made the decision to intervene in the Solomons, an ABC Australia documentary that was shown in the Solomons called the country a failed state and said that its people needed help from outsiders. Several Solomon Islanders told me the footage shown along with the narration was actually several years old. The documentary showed burned-down buildings in the Solomons but did not mention that the buildings had been burned down a few years ago. There was no recent footage (interview, Sept. 9, 2004).

Joel,* a Solomon Islander from Malaita, was living in Australia at this time. He saw a similar documentary on Australian TV describing the Solomons as a failed state. The footage supposedly showing the current situation (in 2003) in the Solomons – images of burning houses and people shooting – was from the year 2000; there was nothing recent. Many people in Australia think Solomon Islanders are all violent (interview, Oct. 1, 2004).

I asked Fry if he saw a correlation between the way Australia views and treats Aborigines and Pacific Islanders. Fry answered, “Especially since the late 19th century,
white Australians have viewed both Aborigines and Pacific Islanders as less than human, as children or savages who need to be civilized. There were parallels in policies, too – aid for people to work out what they wanted. Then, in the 1990s, both Aboriginal and Pacific Islander institutions were seen as corrupt, and Australia felt it needed to take over again” (interview, Dec. 1, 2003). Australia is readopting a pacifying role within a civilizing mission (Dinnen interview, Dec. 8, 2003).

In 2004, Dinnen told me, “This is an election year in Australia. The time frame of the RAMSI intervention isn’t talked about much. The focus in Australia is that everything has been achieved” and RAMSI is viewed as a massive success. “Australia is strategically aligned with Washington. The success of RAMSI is more symbolic. It’s important in terms of domestic politics to exaggerate Australia’s role. Security is a way to whip up national identity. This is something the Australian government does very effectively” (interview, Aug. 3, 2004).

Julie,* a woman close to MEF, told me the intervention coalition is a disguise for Australia; the Australian government is trying to use other island countries to pursue its own interest in the Solomons. “Other Pacific Island countries made it clear that Australia was behind the intervention. Other Pacific Islanders relate well to Solomon Islanders.” Julie also insisted, “The media is no longer neutral. We only hear about the good things RAMSI has done. But people are beginning to resent RAMSI’s presence. Some Solomon Islanders have changed RAMSI’s slogan from ‘Helpem Fren’ to ‘Spoilem Fren’” (interview, Sept. 2004).
**RAMSI Decisions are Made in Canberra**

Woods described Solomon Islands as an Australian protectorate since Australia has been making all of the decisions. Despite the Australian government’s rhetoric that RAMSI is a “multi-country task force,” it is, in fact, “Australian dominated and Australian-led” (Hawksley 2005). On June 25, 2003, Australia and New Zealand decided to send an intervention force to Solomon Islands “for what was described as a regional assistance mission… The remaining countries signed up their support at the August Pacific Islands Forum, well after the RAMSI intervention” (Moore 2004, 20). “Operation Helpum Fren was presented to the world as a Pacific Islands Forum project at the request of the Solomon Islands’ prime minister and the Solomon Islands Parliament. In reality, it was largely an Australian operation, with major assistance from New Zealand” (Moore 2004, 22). Although RAMSI’s web site states there are fifteen countries involved in the intervention, many Solomon Islanders equate RAMSI with Australia. All four Special Coordinators of RAMSI – Nick Warner, James Batley, Tim George, and Graeme Wilson – have been senior Australian diplomats.

More evidence that RAMSI is run by Australia emerged through Mark Thomson’s (2005, 32) ASPI Report *War and Profit: Doing business on the battlefield*, which revealed the Australian government was paying Patrick Defence Logistics, an Australian corporation, AUS$49 million a year to provide RAMSI with transportation, medical, and catering services to the intervention forces. The RAMSI intervention force arrived in the Solomons in late July 2003. By August 2003, the Australian government had invited bids from private contractors to provide logistic support and soon hired Patrick Defence
Logistics, which “began delivering services in October 2003.” These services, according to Senator Robert Hill, Minister for Defence and Leader of the Government in the Senate, include moving “personnel, equipment and supplies to and from Australia and around Solomon Islands” (2003). Thomson reported, “The Solomon Islands experience proved that contractor support could be employed in remote, poorly developed locations. So far, the contract is working to the satisfaction of the customer.” In this case, the customer is the Australian Defense Force.

In January 2005, Patrick Defence Logistics made “big cuts to the wages of its Solomon Islands workers in Honiara.” John Roughan argued that the jobs Solomon Islanders were doing were the same and “the slashed wages shows the arrogance of Patrick Logistics, which is exploiting unorganized workers who are desperate for employment” (RNZI Jan. 29, 2004). In August 2007, Manasseh Sogavare, then Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, accused Australia of seeking to recolonize Solomon Islands through RAMSI. Sogavare said, “I don’t see any genuineness in the intervention in Solomon Islands and the neat thing is, they drag the other Pacific Island countries (in) to camouflage this agenda” (De Tarczynski 2007). When elected in 2006, Sogavare was critical of the intervention force, demanding RAMSI align itself better with the government of Solomon Islands and announce an exit plan. He accused Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer “of interfering with the domestic affairs of Solomon Islands” (Solomon Star May 9, 2006). Later that year, Sogavare expelled Patrick Cole, Australian High Commissioner to Solomon Islands, and banned from the country Shane Castles, the Australian federal agent who was serving as Commissioner of the Royal
Solomon Islands Police (Hameiri 2009). Sogavare denounced the Australian government’s “continuing bullying tactics” (The Age Jan. 22, 2007). Derek Sikua, the current Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, has sought to strengthen ties between his government, the intervention force, and the Australian government (Sireheti 2007).

Alice,* an educator from Choiseul, had mixed feelings about RAMSI: “They’ve helped but I feel they are here for their own agenda” (interview, Sept. 2004). Kelly,* like many other Solomon Islanders with whom I spoke, thought RAMSI was creating and administering a parallel system rather than working within the Solomons’ already existing system. (Other examples include PFnet and the Royal Solomon Islands Police.) Kelly, a Member of Parliament, argued that RAMSI was creating a parallel system so that the Solomons would become an Australian protectorate. He has been working to keep power “here in the Solomons because too many decisions are being made by outsiders. The bilateral agreement said RAMSI must give three months notice, but they just pulled out most of their forces without warning. There was an agreement that the Solomon Islands Parliament would review RAMSI every year but RAMSI withdrew most forces before the act was reviewed by Parliament. They breached the whole agreement” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Kelly told me about Nollen Leni, who was the Solomon Islands Minister of Planning and Economic Reform. Leni had blocked the Economic Reform Unit that Australia led. He also did not want EU funding to be spent on private businesses while Kemakeza wanted the money to go to his supporters in private business. “In August 2004, Leni was terminated. RAMSI could now get its own program through. The New Minister,
Peter Boyers, is much easier to push, much more lenient to the Prime Minister. He’s a naturalized citizen but a New Zealander by birth. Most Solomon Islanders don’t know why Nollen was fired. It’s under wraps. SIBC and the *Solomon Star* are censored by the Prime Minister; they’re not free at all” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Dinnen argued that RAMSI was propping up the men who caused the problems, which chipped away at RAMSI’s legitimacy. “RAMSI is similar to a colonial justice system. The decision-making is in the hands of outsiders” (interview, Aug. 3, 2004). Anna Powles, a doctoral candidate at ANU agreed, “RAMSI decisions are made in Canberra, not on the ground in the Solomons. Only Australia is making decisions.” Powles has spent an extensive amount of time conducting research throughout the Solomons (interview, Aug. 29, 2005).

The home page for RAMSI’s web site says RAMSI is “a partnership with the people and government of Solomon Islands.” It also says, “RAMSI is helping Solomon Islanders to get their nation working and growing again. That will take years of hard work. Nothing will change unless Solomon Islanders want change and are prepared to work hard in support of a common cause.” Although RAMSI’s official rhetoric focuses on empowering Solomon Islanders, the actions of the intervention force, according to Solomon Islanders, belie the rhetoric. One of the most common responses Solomon Islanders had when I asked about RAMSI was frustration with the lack of local ownership of the intervention. Solomon Islanders in general have felt left out, ignored, powerless, and voiceless in the process.
Solomon Islands Development Trust founder John Roughan (2003) surveyed Solomon Islanders just prior to the intervention. He found that “94% of Solomon Islanders supported RAMSI. People saw their lives were worse than in the past 26 years of independence.” Roughan maintained that from the point of view of stability, peace, and order, RAMSI “has been a great success” in its first 100 days. “They have imprisoned warlords, arrested more than 25 senior police, collected 3,700 guns (the bulk of guns), and put the fear of God into young Rambos. But this is just the beginning. The hard work starts now. The real work has to be done by the Solomon Island people. RAMSI can’t do this.”

Paul Roughan (2004a) recalled, “Solomon Islanders were sick of life when RAMSI forces arrived.” Solomon Islanders handed 4,000 guns to RAMSI without a shot being fired. “That was enormous goodwill.” What began emerging in Solomon Islanders in mid-2004 was “a sense of disquiet. For Solomon Islanders, their acceptance of the intervention is shifting. It doesn’t feel right. People in the Solomons who previously would have welcomed RAMSI into villages now don’t. People are now talking about, what if the tensions come back?” Taxi drivers told Roughan things such as, “When RAMSI leaves, it will be back and worse than ever;” “The breakdown will happen in communities and families;” and “It hasn’t gotten better.” While Solomon Islanders welcomed RAMSI’s help at first, they’ve increasingly felt that it is not a solution and may be exacerbating the situation by creating dependency.

Roughan continued, “Yet, the intervention has been judged a success by a small group of people who have a vested interest in it being a success. This intervention was
constructed to solve problems of land, unemployment of youth, and migration. Our economy is resting on logging. None of these fundamentals have changed. Who is involved in gauging ‘success’ or what the problems are? We need more than a small group of elites to look at this.” Roughan stressed the importance of Solomon Islanders owning the peace process and the problems. Similarly, Hawksley (2005) argued, “The idea that through intervention the sovereignty of the Solomon Islands state can be restored is clearly problematic.” Democracy, unlike tyranny, is by “its very nature never imposed” (Rice 2005).

A number of academics with extensive experience in the South Pacific have argued domestic ownership is essential to any sort of intervention. Kabutaulaka (2004b, 2) stressed, “If Solomon Islands stability is important for global (and Australian) security, then it is vital that the intervention enhance, rather than undermine, local capacity for change.” It is easy for Solomon Islanders to fall into a dependency role especially given their colonial past. Domestic ownership is vital to addressing ‘failed states.’ “Australia needs to involve a much broader range of opinions on policy, shape of government, and strategies for reform. Ninety percent of the time, Australia doesn’t worry about local conditions. It’s the model they carry in their minds that matters” (Hegarty interview, Dec. 10, 2003).

At an October 2004 conference, Chris Seed from New Zealand’s Department of Defense was asked about the future of RAMSI, if it was possible for the intervention to have a Solomon Islands face rather than an Australian or New Zealand face in order to make it more powerful and enduring. Seed answered, “The requirement is for good
Solomon Islanders to be elected into government. Australia is there to support this.

RAMSI will change over time. I can’t see merit in setting up a parallel government to the Solomon Islands government.”

Robert* has been trying to strengthen the voice of the government of the Solomons so that Solomon Islanders know that RAMSI is not the government. “RAMSI is here to help but it’s our government.” Regarding the twenty-four Australians RAMSI has inserted into the Solomon Islands government, Robert insisted, “The onus is on our locals. We must squeeze as much as we can out of the RAMSI financial people. These are experts. We need to get everything we can from them. It’s how you treat these guys. They’re here for a purpose. You tell them what you want.” One problem I see with this approach is that RAMSI is setting the agenda. They have not shown that they care much what Solomon Islanders want, especially in financial matters. Robert identified an important change that RAMSI could make: “RAMSI needs Solomon Islanders to do their briefings” (interview, Sept. 29, 2004).

There is an inherent contradiction if you have an intervention from the outside but need domestic ownership to successfully change. Outsiders need to facilitate so that insiders can fix problems if you want to have a stable state that can control its borders, which is the stated goal. “For the mission to succeed, it must empower Solomon Islanders to take charge of their own destiny” (Kabutaulaka 2004b, 1).

According to Dinnen, “Top RAMSI officials believe they’ve played a critical role in helping Solomon Islanders but people are talking past each other. RAMSI is a smothering blanket” (interview, Aug. 3, 2004). John Hayes (2004), a New Zealand
politician and diplomat who was involved in peace negotiations between PNG and Bougainville in the 1990s, stated, “People themselves must own the process and the solutions. Otherwise you’ll never have peace.” Reilly (2000, 268) agreed, “A major process of democratic renewal is required, a process that, ultimately, can only come from the island states’ people and their governments, not from outside forces.”

**The Two Stages of RAMSI**

The RAMSI intervention was divided into two stages: The first focused on restoring law and order; the second focused on economic and political reform, at which point the Australian government inserted Australians into high financial and administrative positions. John Roughan (2003) called the second stage the most far-reaching because twenty Australian accountants have been monitoring how the Solomon Islands government is spending money. The insertion of Australians into in-line positions into the Solomons Islands government is highly unusual for an intervention force.

According to Tom Woods, “Australia had programmed RAMSI way before their May 2003 decision to intervene. They even had Stage Two written up. RAMSI Stage Two is only Australia, not the coalition. It should not be called RAMSI because that’s incorrect, but it helps Australia to have it under the RAMSI title” (interview, Sept. 12, 2004).

In March 2004, RAMSI Special Coordinator Nick Warner gave a speech to the National Security Conference in Canberra, in which he emphasized the cooperative elements of the intervention force:

RAMSI is engaged in a partnership with the Government, Parliament and the people of Solomon Islands. Decisions are taken together, after discussion. We have worked hard to keep Solomon Islanders informed
about RAMSI activities and plans, building consensus, bringing Solomon Islanders along on each step of this unique operation.

Yet, Warner also stressed in his speech,

In-line powers were vital to our ability to ensure that the justice system functions effectively in the short term, while being strengthened in the long term. A lesson from RAMSI is that these powers were crucial in achieving the fast turn-around in law and order and public finances.

In Stage Two, the agenda changed from the immediate process of stabilization to one of structural adjustment, pursuing economic agendas, and opening Solomon Islands to free trade. This approach is problematic because earlier structural adjustments contributed to conflict. “RAMSI is restoring a semblance of order without going very deep” (Dinnen interview, Aug. 3, 2004).

Kelly, a Member of Parliament told me the Solomons definitely had a law and order problem. “It was good that we had help restoring law and order but RAMSI (Australia) shouldn’t be getting involved in our political and economic functions. After sixty days of RAMSI, law and order in the Solomons was under control 100%.” Prior to the intervention, the Solomon Islands government had created an Economic Task Force to reform the Solomon Islands economy. “When RAMSI officials arrived, they created the ‘Economic Reform Unit,’ which had a very different agenda. This is the unit that’s in place now.” Kelly described this second stage of RAMSI as “neocolonialism. They want access to our resources.” He told me the RAMSI motto – “Helpem Fren” – is inaccurate. “It’s not helping a friend at all!” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Dinnen argued that inserting outsiders as police, judges, and financial people is profoundly disempowering for Solomon Islanders. “The leaders of RAMSI say they need
Solomon Islanders to kick in but there is no obvious way that they can. RAMSI is so tightly controlling everything, there’s not much scope for Solomon Islanders. Maybe this is longer-term colonization. Perhaps there is no exit strategy because we don’t believe these people can govern themselves” (interview, Aug. 3, 2004).

In 2004, Terence Wesley-Smith told me he viewed Stage One of RAMSI – restoring law and order – as good but saw RAMSI’s Stage Two as problematic because it had not been thought out. Wesley-Smith maintained that state/nation-building is difficult in the first place. The problems in the Solomons are more cultural and psychological. They are not practical things about administration. Internalizing ‘nation’ and ‘state’ as legitimate in order to organize resources has been a problem of decolonization. In Melanesia, you cannot solve problems through coercion (interview, July 21, 2004).

Dinnen told me he could not think of any example where outside state- and nation-building has worked. He could, however, think of many examples where it made things worse. Development assistance has had a long history in Pacific. He saw enormous optimism, but he did not see the basis for optimism for what essentially has not worked elsewhere. With nation-building, Dinnen argued there is a global template like a development policy. He viewed this as “a gross misunderstanding of our own history. It’s a gross misrepresentation of places we’re engaging in” (interview, Dec. 8, 2003). Hayes (2004) argued “the biggest threat to regional security is a poverty of ideas.”

A Centrist Approach: State-Building at the expense of Solomon Islanders

Kabutaulaka told me in July 2004 that a lot of Solomon Islanders are happy with the intervention but not with the process because they feel it is not a partnership or an
equal relationship. “When Australia puts Australian people into the government of the Solomons, Solomon Island public servants sit and watch.” The RAMSI intervention is focusing on law and order but hasn’t addressed the underlying causes. It has been a surface approach. The provision of services hasn’t improved. “We need to re-establish the structures. RAMSI tells us, ‘We can’t address the underlying causes. That’s for you to do.’ Yet, RAMSI is not providing the space for Solomon Islanders to do anything. They’re occupying that space. Solomon Islanders have two primary reactions to this: 1. ‘Go ahead.’ 2. ‘I want to do it but I can’t because you’re doing it. There’s no space for me.’ RAMSI officials say Solomon Islanders aren’t talking. Solomon Islanders are talking but you can’t hear them if you’re not listening. You need to go where Solomon Islanders have their meals to talk with them.” Another problem Kabutaulaka mentioned is that some Solomon Islanders “think RAMSI is there to put people in jail so people are cautious if they think you’ll throw them in jail.”

Many people in the Solomons are dissatisfied with their own government as well. They say their government isn’t doing enough, is not working effectively enough because of corruption. The people in charge are many of the same ones who caused the problems and now they’re being propped up by RAMSI. This hasn’t worked since independence.”

Kabutaulaka (2004a) said people come in and push Solomon Islanders to the margins or off stage. It may not be done intentionally but rather because they are so engaged in what they’re doing. It may also occur because of the assumption that the ‘experts’ need to accomplish the goals themselves. A friend of Kabutaulaka said, “These people [RAMSI] are not going to solve the problems. We need to address them...
ourselves.” Kabutaulaka (2004b) also argued RAMSI’s “emphasis on shoring up a perennially weak central government, and its inattention to other pillars of Solomons society, threaten to undermine its success and create a crippling sense of dependency.”

Wainwright said the emphasis needed to be on Honiara and the state apparatus because there can be no nation-building without first state-building (interview, Aug. 4, 2004). Yet, when RAMSI talks about nation-building, it is really state-building. There needs to be institutional change in the Solomons before its citizens can have faith in the government. “Money will not resolve these problems... Pouring money into such an institution is like putting a bandaid on a tropical ulcer” (Kabutaulaka 2002a, 18, 29). Kabutaulaka also stressed the importance of bringing to justice the people who carried out the coup, arguing that “because the present government came to power through illegitimate means, strengthening its position will create a situation where further uprisings in the future are inevitable.” The state structure in the Solomons has disintegrated and is ineffective to maintain an internal security or to prevent or regulate the abuses taking place. State-building looks at public sector reform. It puts people within public service. Yet, “the most important variables in the success or otherwise of state-building activities in the Pacific are historical and cultural rather than technical and economic” (Wesley-Smith 2006b, 123).

In June 2004, Kabutaulaka (2004a) asked Solomon Islanders who were public servants about the transfer of knowledge and skills from Australians inserted in the government to Solomon Islanders. These public servants told Kabutaulaka they question the issue of how it is done. Their main concerns are that there are two parallel public
services – Solomon Islands’ and Australia’s, rather than combining them – which makes it difficult to transfer knowledge; that Australian public servants in the Solomon Islands government are answerable to Canberra but not answerable to Solomon Islanders; and that the Australians inserted in the government are described as ‘long-term’ public servants, which has made it difficult for Solomon Islanders to plan because there is no real time frame, no exit date. Kabutaulaka stressed that the Australian government and RAMSI needed to say what their role is and when they are leaving because Solomon Islanders need a clear time frame. They also need to answer the questions, “What are you doing?” and “What kind of role are you playing?” (interview, July 2004).

There is a tension between delivering nation-building and building-capacity. The assister has to make room for risk. Otherwise when assistance groups (outsiders) have an aversion to risk, it comes at the expense of Solomon Islanders to make mistakes in a safe environment so Solomon Islanders can learn and grow from them. “The aid machine has gotten everywhere. They have to be willing to take risks” (Roughan 2004a). Roughan’s statement also hints at whose goals RAMSI is trying to accomplish. Because Howard was facing re-election in October 2004, he did not want any risks; he wanted to make sure things were a ‘success.’

Gerry Pobar is a Federal Agent with the Australian Federal Police had served as RAMSI’s Chief Superintendent of Strategic Planning. Pobar (2004) said, “RAMSI was police-led. Normally, intervention forces are military-led. The general thrust of RAMSI is, we’re out there to help a friend.” Pobar said that following internal investigations, over 400 Solomon Islanders had already been removed from the Royal Solomon Islands Police
(RSIP). Those removed included both Deputy Commissioners who then were arrested. Despite that, Pobar said, “There are a lot of good, competent police in the force. Capacity-building of RSIP has already started.”

“RSIP is an unarmed police force and is relying on Australia and New Zealand to provide law and order since they have no weapons. They’re a pen and paper police force until they’re back to what we take for granted in Western society.” Pobar’s logic seems to be backwards. The police in the Solomons are not allowed to have weapons so they have to depend on Australia and New Zealand to provide law and order. Also, the kind of police force – and justice in general – that Solomon Islanders seek may not be what we take for granted in Western society, as Pobar said. Traditionally, Solomon Islanders rely on restorative justice rather than the system of retributive justice that is prevalent in the West.

Canberra’s post-conflict approach is technical. A lot of policy is made up as they go along. Dinnen was concerned because he believed RAMSI has applied a universal framework of intervention to the Solomons (interview, Aug. 3, 2004). Ratuva (2003) asked, “Where do Solomon Islanders’ interests come in? So much of RAMSI’s focus is on state-building and institutions, not nation-building.” Von Strokirch (2004) argued, “Australia has strong priorities which may not be Solomon Islanders’ priorities.” Ian Scales also viewed RAMSI’s approach as problematic: “If we just fix the formal systems, we’re not looking at social systems.”

This strategy can strengthen forces that have contributed to the problems, including urbanization, resource-rich provinces vs. labor-

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rich provinces, an increasingly rich elite, and a rapidly growing population. These forces tend to drive things.

Kelly expressed concern that RAMSI’s work was more superficial. Many people have cited the high rate of population growth as a crucial issue in the conflict. Seventy percent of the Solomon Islands population is under 30; half of the country’s population is under the age of 15. The Solomons has one of the highest birth rates in the world. Kelly told me that raising awareness is key to lowering the birth rate. “As people become educated, the birth rate comes down a bit. The mentality of girls (the younger generation) in the Solomons concerning sex… our culture is too open” (interview, Sept. 2004).

When I asked Judith Pattison and Valerie Stanley who run AusAid’s CPRF (Community Peace and Restoration Fund) program in Honiara if RAMSI was doing any work with family planning, they replied, “No. They say, ‘Women are not our area.’ They’re trying to create an enabling environment. They say that aid programs will do that” [help with family planning] (interview, Sept. 30, 2004). Peter Noble explained to me that population and family planning are “important but RAMSI doesn’t touch that. RAMSI doesn’t get involved in family planning because that’s not our core business. Also, AIDS will come, which may control the population” (interview, Oct. 4, 2004).

Dinnen visited the Solomons just after the June 2000 coup and met with members of both the MEF and IFM. Dinnen talked with them about issues of masculinity, specifically, the relationship that these young guys had with their guns. They were constantly cleaning the guns, taking them apart and putting them back together again. “Guns provided them with power, status, and prestige. There was also almost something
sexual about it.” Dinnen told me, “The Solomons is an increasingly militarized society. It has gone from a conflict situation to criminality, like what happened in PNG. Before, there were no law and order problems in the Solomons like there were in PNG because of urbanization.”

The youth bulge in the Solomons is creating an immense social strain, especially with the lack of employment. “There has been an acute disaffection. Young men who move to the city can gain status from guns, especially in a newly militarized society” (Wainwright interview, Dec. 3, 2003). Dinnen told me that within three months of arriving in the Solomons in 2003, RAMSI forces had collected about 3,700 guns but “the loss of these guns has been hard on these young guys. Now the problem is going to the rural villages as these guys go back to their villages and no longer follow traditional rules or authority. Some NGOs are working to address this situation and the UNDP is active there as well” (interview, Nov. 11, 2003). The hardest thing about Solomon Islands men giving up their guns was going back to their village and being just a young adult without power or status (Roughan 2003).

Robert said, “The RAMSI intervention force has told Solomon Islanders, ‘Land issues are your problem. We are not getting involved in political problems because it becomes a dependency issue’” (interview, Sept. 2004). This declaration seems a bit unfair since the British and Australians helped install a British system that helped create the problems. Solomon Islanders are being told to solve the problems but they are not able to use their customary system that follows their culture.
Kabutaulaka (2005a, 308) criticized the Australian intervention force’s single-minded focus on rebuilding the Solomon Islands state. “The post-conflict nation building process must include other institutions besides the state—such as churches, community leaders, nongovernmental organizations, women’s groups—that already have an influence on society.” This rebuilding is especially crucial in Solomon Islands because, for many citizens, the state plays a minor role in their lives. “If you target the state for rebuilding but not other important parts of Solomon Islands society such as the church and NGOs, you can’t fix things. We need to ask how we can reorganize the ‘state’” (interview, July 2004).

John Roughan (2003) sees hope for the future in churches. The infrastructure of churches in the Solomons is very strong. “There are five main churches. More than ninety percent of Solomon Islanders belong to one of these. If there is no nation-building, problems will remain. The government is focused on the state apparatus so we get the perks from that but not from nation-building. Churches with NGOs, civil society networks, and women’s groups could bring about a nation of Solomon Islanders.” Kii (2006, 7) also insisted, “Church leaders, PMC monitors, police officers, NGOs and members of civil society have to stand and work together in this campaign.”

When the violence in the Solomons erupted, women of all backgrounds rapidly formed a group called Women for Peace (WFP). By relying on the long history of peacemaking in the Solomons on multiple levels – individual, family, community, and national – these women created an environment that enabled men to talk out their
problems. Yet these women have consistently been excluded from all formal peacemaking processes and they feel left out by RAMSI.

In September 2004, I attended a WFP Forum in Honiara. Then-Prime Minister Allan Kemakeza delivered the opening speech for the Forum, in which he said, “We must thank RAMSI for giving us another chance… It is important that WFP continue to work for peace. Because of RAMSI, we are living under rule of law and order. RAMSI is putting their money into development sectors of our country. Therefore, the intervention is in the interests of Solomon Islands as a whole.” Kemakeza stressed this was “just the beginning; we have a long way to go,” emphasizing the importance of peace process.

After the Prime Minister gave his speech, he left the building and the official meeting started. One of the first WFP speakers, Cathy Adifaka, recalled how during the fighting, women had the courage and compassion to go to the blockades, to speak with the soldiers, to try to end the violence. Adifaka spoke with frustration about how women in general have been left out of the formal peace processes. She said, “With RAMSI, we are forgotten.”

Many Solomon Islanders have complained that the Australian government’s policies tend to be centrist, that RAMSI’s focus is on Honiara and the state apparatus. In fact, the majority of Solomon Islanders live in rural settings and have little or no contact with the state. “Most people reside in small, widely dispersed settlements along the coasts.” Sixty percent of Solomon Islanders live in groups of 200 people or fewer. “Only 17% reside in urban areas” (U.S. State Department 2009). According to the Solomon Islands Census Office’s 1999 Population and Housing Census – the government’s most
recent census – the second largest town in the Solomons is Noro with 3,482 people. Gizo is the third largest town with 2,960. “The village is the prism through which Solomon Islanders see the world. The Solomons, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea are all nations of villages” (Roughan 2003). 90% of Solomon Islanders live subsistence lifestyles.

The work the Australia government is doing is for Honiara city but not for ninety-eight percent of the country (Woods interview, Sept. 12, 2004). Robert explained, “Our state government ignores the Weathercoast (on Guadalcanal.) The people there are farming and planting gardens on river beds. There was rain for four weeks, and the people there don’t have food. Yet our members of Parliament haven’t been there. The Weathercoast is so isolated, it’s like Temotu. Another problem is that people on the Weathercoast don’t know when ships are coming.” They have no warning to get products they can sell to the boat. “They need a track so they can use a tractor to take the copra to the boat” (interview, Sept. 29, 2004).

Figure 5.4. Map of the Weathercoast.

Australian people know about the technical side but not about the culture of the Solomons. They need to get out of Honiara and talk to others in the country. There need to be funds in other provinces (Pattison interview, Sept. 30, 2004).

Randall Biliki created PFnet, or People First Network, to provide email access to “deprived and remote areas” within the Solomons since fewer than two percent of the population in the Solomons has a telephone (Solomon Telekom 2004). Biliki told me, “It is precisely in deprived and remote areas that basic telecommunications has the most value and impact. For such locations, telecommunications is the only and vital link with the outside world.”

Biliki was disappointed in RAMSI. “In the early days, Solomon Islanders knew they needed community participation to create peace. People need to be talking with each other for peace to come about. Solomon Islanders don’t have an understanding of being part of a country (nation-state) that has so many different cultures.” Biliki thought PFnet could play a major role in facilitating communication throughout the country. He sent out an email asking people for their comments, what sorts of problems they were facing in their villages, etc. and he received a lot of replies, which are all on the PFnet website.

Biliki lamented, “But PFnet is not being recognized by RAMSI. RAMSI has kept PFnet away from their media releases. There’s no need to create a new network. Yet, that’s just what RAMSI did.” Biliki worried, “Since RAMSI has created its own network, what happens when they leave? The network goes with them.”

Biliki expressed frustration with the centrist focus of RAMSI. “It’s difficult for villagers to report information to RAMSI. It would be easy to use PFnet to help villagers
contact RAMSI with information about guns and so on but RAMSI doesn’t want to be contacted by rural villages.” One man in Choiseul emailed Biliki in 2004 that a person there still has his homemade gun despite the 2003 ban, which made possession of a gun illegal. Biliki immediately forwarded the email to RAMSI but RAMSI did not respond to the complaint.

Biliki continued, “Australia has its own agenda with RAMSI. Australia still has a colonial attitude. The assumption is that Solomon Islanders can’t govern themselves. Australia imposes its way by insisting, ‘This is the best way of doing things.’” Biliki was frustrated because, “They aren’t Solomon Islanders and yet they are basically running the country.”

The day before I conducted this interview with Biliki, James Batley, who had just started his job as Special Coordinator of RAMSI, announced on SIBC radio that RAMSI is working with PFnet to help rural people get legal advice. When I asked Biliki about this, he told me he had not been contacted by RAMSI. On SIBC, Batley continued, “There’s a need in the Solomons to have key stakeholders to deliver development services. They need better networking. This is supposed to be part of RAMSI’s intention. Solomon Islands has been unwelcoming to foreign investment and that has to change. They need to get rid of barriers, to welcome foreign investment.” And yet, Biliki was trying to set up another email station in remote Temotu province. When he asked RAMSI officials if they could help provide transportation, they said no. Other times when Biliki has shown RAMSI information or positive results, he has received no response. That undermines Batley’s claim that RAMSI is working with PFnet. Biliki does, however, feel
there is a much better chance for PFnet to be involved with RAMSI now that Batley has taken over the head position from Nick Warner. Biliki knew Batley and felt he could talk with him. Biliki was also frustrated because as a member of the UN Emergency Response Team, he volunteered to work with RAMSI in any capacity. Yet RAMSI officials did not respond to his message (interview, Sept. 1, 2004).

Like many Solomon Islanders, Powles argued, “There are critical areas that are consistently overlooked by RAMSI.” These include places that cannot be reached by car such as Gold Ridge Mine in central Guadalcanal, where the community has been displaced by the mine, and housed in aluminium tin shacks with no access to land to cultivate gardens.

Figure 5.5. Map of Gold Ridge, Guadalcanal.

Source: Australian Solomons Gold Ltd. 2008.
Powles identified communities on the outskirts of Honiara, including Whiteriver, Borderlines, and Gilbert Camp, as particularly important because it is from here that a number of militia leaders, including Malaitans such as Jimmy Rasta, spent their formative years and from where they drew their support and grievances. Now they consist of returned IDPs (Malaitans who fled Guadalcanal but were unable to resettle in Malaita for a variety of reasons including lack of acceptance back in Malaita and consequently returned to Honiara), and other disenfranchised groups, and there is a great deal of crime, violence, tensions and eroded traditional structures within these communities. RAMSI has not engaged with many of these communities at all despite the fact that if (when) tensions reemerge, it will likely be from these places (interview. Aug. 29, 2005).

Michael* from Guadalcanal told me that in 2003, the situation in the Solomons had gotten so bad that Solomon Islanders couldn’t handle law and order by themselves.

“The intervention was a bonus for the Solomons. RAMSI has done some good work but now they’re not going out as far as people have expected to make sure the perpetrators of the crimes – especially some of the worst perpetrators – are caught. There are some main militants still in villages and they have a lot of supporters with them. These guys still pose a threat to stability in villages.”

Michael confirmed that RAMSI has control in the centers – like Honiara – but not in many places, many villages. “The RAMSI police are saying one thing and people in villages are saying something else.” Gold Ridge on Guadalcanal is a good example. “The people there are saying there has been a lot of violence – murder, torture, rape, etc.
RAMSI says no. The villagers say, come to our village and see the evidence for yourself.”

“RAMSI is supposed to be a partnership with Solomon Islanders but it’s a case of some people with the upper hand. They are concentrating on town and centers. They should do more outside of town. To win the hearts of the people here, you need to go out and talk to the villagers, not just have a military presence. Go spend a couple of days there and just talk and listen.”

Michael argued, “RAMSI’s agenda is to stabilize the country for economic and political stability” to encourage foreign investment. “RAMSI should be engaging in churches, schools. They should get out of their offices in town. The problems that led up to the tension started outside of town, outside of the Parliament and the Central Bank. We need to solve those problems first or the conflict will erupt again. RAMSI is not addressing that” (interview, Sept. 2004). Dinnen concurred that the Australian government’s approach is state-centric, “yet most Solomon Islanders don’t have contact with the state.” Another problem is that Australia assumes Solomon Islands is a monolithic state when in fact, there are secessionist movements in the country (interview, Aug. 3, 2004).

Michael wondered how RAMSI forces are rebuilding the police force. “They say it’s a ‘partnership’ but it isn’t really. There is a police post east of town. I only see local police there. RAMSI forces may visit for an hour or so but they stay in the police stations in town.” Michael also questioned what sort of training RAMSI forces receive before arriving in the Solomons. He maintained, “They should be trained about the culture, how
things are done here, but they haven’t been. For instance, the way to arrest someone here 
is to go to village, talk to the elders, etc, but not use helicopters and machine guns.”

Michael said, “The Archbishop of the Catholic Church in Honiara has been outspoken, saying that RAMSI needs to not hang around in town but should be building roads, helping people in the villages create economic opportunities. RAMSI should leave the helicopters on the ground and use the money that would have been spent on fuel for building roads, and so on. Then you can have a lasting stability. If you concentrate on town and on normalizing government operations, it won’t be long before villages erupt again” (interview, Sept. 3, 2004).

A September 2004 article in the Solomon Star, titled “Villagers want police to patrol areas” interviewed a chief in Central Guadalcanal who stressed, “Police officers must make an effort to go and patrol the villages concerned.” The chief, concerned about a number of villagers whose properties were damaged, admonished the police, “Don’t stay in town, there is no problem in town. We want both RAMSI police officers and the local officers to come to Gold Ridge not only the locals. So you can see for yourself what we are talking about.”

Rose,* who lives on Malaita, told me, “RAMSI officers are afraid to go into the bush. RAMSI goes either by road or helicopter” (interview, Sept. 2004). A man in Auki, Malaita, said, “For the most part, the RAMSI forces stay in town. They’ll ride to the ends of the roads and then turn around but many of the problems are in the villages” (interview, Sept. 2004). Australian filmmaker Russell Hawkins told me about a murder case at Noro in the Western Province, which highlighted the inadequacies of RAMSI
policing. “There are no RAMSI police at Noro because they prefer to stay at Munda which has less crime but a nicer hotel” (interview, Nov. 1, 2005).

**Alternatives to RAMSI’s State-Focused Frame**

Nation-states are by no means the only possible way to organize the world. Shapiro (1997) argues for the need to question and resist the nation-state monopoly on organizing space politically. Thus, it is important to consider alternatives to RAMSI’s state-focused frame, which include Polanyi’s reciprocal organization of society and Wallerstein’s ‘mini-systems.’ Polanyi (2001) identified three different types of economic systems that had existed throughout history: reciprocal, redistributive, and market systems. Reciprocal societies were based on subsistence rather than exchange. Wallerstein (2004, 17) argued there have been three types of historical systems: mini-systems, world-empires, and world-economies, which are analogous to Polanyi’s three kinds of economic systems: “mini-systems utilized reciprocity, world-empires redistribution, and world-economies market exchanges.” Wallerstein (2000, 75) described a mini-system as “an entity that has within it a complete division of labor, and a single cultural framework.” So (1999, 1278) described mini-systems as preagricultural. They were, by nature, small, generally did not last more than six generations, and were “highly homogenous in terms of cultural and governing structures.” Like Polanyi, Wallerstein also argued that as the world-economy grew, it marginalized and destroyed all other alternate economic systems. Although Wallerstein stated, “Such mini-systems no longer exist in the world,” Solomon Islands, though impacted by the European World Economy, still has reciprocal societies based on subsistence.
Woods believes that the Subsidiary Principle, which is popular in the European Union as a way to deal with concurrent problems, is useful because it splits up the tension by constantly pointing power downward to the state and village level rather than centralizing power. This principle empowers the local level, and the provincial level. Another possibility is bioregionalism, a system based on ecoregions. Hawai‘i’s pre-contact ahupua’a system is an example of bioregionalism as it took into account physical features of the land and sea to divide resources fairly.

**RAMSI: a culturally sensitive public face but out-of-touch on the ground**

RAMSI officials have been extremely sensitive to their image in the Solomons. For instance, when the RAMSI intervention force came into the Solomons, t-shirt companies started making t-shirts to sell them. The owner of one such company told me his employees had created a design that said, “No Beer, No Skittles” and had a beer can with a line drawn diagonally through it. RAMSI leaders did not like this design because they thought it sounded like an indirect complaint by their own soldiers about being in the Solomons. RAMSI officials not only prohibited the sale of this t-shirt and banned the design; they also forced the owner of the t-shirt company to delete the design from his computer (interview, Sept. 21, 2004).

When I arrived in Honiara, I made a conscious choice to walk along the streets in town as many Solomon Islanders do. On one of my first walks down the main street of Honiara, I was surprised to find graffiti on a wall that said, “Fuck RAMSI.” I thought it would be interesting to pay attention to how long the graffiti stayed on the wall: over two months later, it was still there.
Figure 5.6. Anti-RAMSI Graffiti.

The graffiti’s long-term presence on the wall seemed indicative of the situation in general because RAMSI leaders were very sensitive about any sort of criticism of the intervention force. If they saw this graffiti, they would have removed it immediately. But in order to see it, one has to walk along the street, which RAMSI officials never did. Instead, they were always riding in their air-conditioned SUVs. But many Solomon Islanders walk along this path and see it daily.

Some of RAMSI’s programs and initiatives demonstrate a lack of understanding about life in the Solomons. RAMSI sent out refrigerator magnets to Solomon Islanders when most people in the Solomons do not have electricity, much less own refrigerators. RAMSI also set up a toll free number for Solomon Islanders to call with tips yet a March 2004 report from Solomon Telekom, the country’s telephone service, revealed that there were a total of 6,500 phone lines in the country, including all business, government and residence lines. That works out to 1.7% of population at best because government officials often have residence lines as well. Michael said, “Having a toll-free number for
people to call to give information to RAMSI is ridiculous here where ninety percent of rural people don’t even know what a telephone looks like.”

Michael offered another example of RAMSI being out of touch with the locals. “RAMSI officials thought soccer might be a way to help bring people together so they built a soccer field called ‘Haka Playing Field’ in Bilu.” But they didn’t talk to Solomon Islanders before they chose the site. “The goal posts are now sitting in the middle of the bush because no one has been using it. There’s a really small population there.” Michael told me he shakes his head and laughs whenever he passes it (interview, Sept. 2004).

RAMSI’s “public face” is very culturally sensitive. Its web site includes a translation of its motto – that RAMSI is “a partnership with the people and government of Solomon Islands” – into Pijin: “RAMSI kam fo helpem iumi blo Solomons.” Yet most RAMSI officials make no effort to learn Pijin, which means they miss out on a lot of important information. As New Zealand’s High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea from 1989 until 1993, John Hayes was one of the key peace negotiators in the Bougainville conflict. Hayes emphasized the need for peacemakers to speak the local languages in the Pacific and to understand the cultures. “Personal relations are everything. It was a factor in Bougainville.” Integrity is also crucial. “You must deliver what you said you would.”

Throughout my time in the Solomons, as soon as I spoke in Pijin with local people, or if foreigners heard me speak Pijin, the automatic assumption was that I must not be part of RAMSI. When I had the chance to interview Peter Noble, then Deputy Special Coordinator of RAMSI, I asked why so many RAMSI officials do not learn Pijin.
Noble explained, “RAMSI is thinking about how to pressure the government and is using local people to spread messages in the local languages. RAMSI interfaces not with people but with bureaucracy, most of whom are reasonably articulate so we don’t need to learn Pijin” (interview, Oct. 4, 2004). In other words, for Noble, ‘reasonably articulate’ means speaking English. His quote is also interesting because he speaks as if a “bureaucracy” were not made up of people.

Yet in an Aug. 31, 2004 SIBC interview, when James Batley talked about using PFNet to help rural people obtain legal advice, the interviewer asked, “Can the emails be done in Pijin since many rural villagers don’t speak much English and especially with legal matters it’s difficult for them to understand?” Batley replied, “Well, of course all of our people can use Pijin but all communication will be in English because Pijin leaves too much uncertainty.”

Two things bothered me about Batley’s comments. First, my experience in Solomon Islands told me most members of RAMSI could not, and did not want to, speak Pijin. When I asked one RAMSI official why he had not learned Pijin, he replied, “It sounds like baby talk.” Also, Batley had been discussing how the Solomons has been unwelcoming to foreign investment and needed transparency and clearer land laws. RAMSI officials are using Western law to try to change the land ownership system in the Solomons. The idea of using English to communicate complicated legal advice because Pijin is too vague is ironic. Too vague for whom? If Solomon Islanders do not understand or are not comfortable with English, how can they be informed participants in transactions? Although Batley presented these changes as being in the interest of
Solomon Islanders, his statement that English would be the language used to communicate legal matters about land ownership illustrates the imposition of capitalist notions that do not exist in the minds of many Solomon Islanders. It is not simply that Pijin is too vague; in many languages in Solomon Islands, there is no concept of owning land. Instead, people belong to or are a part of land (Nanau interview, Sept. 3, 2004).

Although many Solomon Islanders can understand when RAMSI officials speak English, they have difficulty responding in English because they speak it so rarely (interview with a man from Makira, Sept. 2004). Robert told me, “Solomon Islanders are afraid of speaking to white people. They have inferiority complexes” (interview, Sept. 2004).

At one point during my stay in the Solomons, I was setting up an interview with my friend Joan’s grandfather to talk about everything from World War II to the present. Joan* told me when she had first asked her grandfather if he would talk to me, “he said he’s afraid to talk to a white person.” Joan told him that I was an okay person and I just want to learn. He asked, “What if I say something wrong or bad?”

When Joan told him that I was there to learn about the history of the Solomons and I would not think anything bad about him, he responded, “But I only speak Pijin!” Joan had told me earlier, “When Solomon Islanders see your white skin, they are afraid to say anything because they’re afraid of speaking English. That’s one reason people change so much when you start speaking in Pijin.” I added, “even if my Pijin is horrible” and then realized maybe that’s better because it makes people laugh and puts them more at ease.
I asked Joan about her grandfather being afraid of speaking to a white person especially since he is chief of the village he lives in. She said, “For some people it’s part of the mentality that white people were always the boss here and they’ve never had white friends so they just think of white people as belonging to that category” (interview, Sept. 16, 2004). It made me realize that many Solomon Islanders have had it drummed into them that they are inferior. That is a difficult problem with the intervention because white people are coming in to ‘save the day,’ which may reinforce the inferiority complexes that some Solomon Islanders have.

In October 2004, I interviewed Paul,* a Sergeant in the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP), at the Central Police Station in Honiara. When I arrived at the Central Station, I explained who I was and asked if there was anyone available who I could talk to about RAMSI. After about ten minutes, I was introduced to Paul. At first, he was quite suspicious of me and did not want to offer any information, which I understood completely. Numerous Solomon Islanders in different professional positions had already warned me that they thought there were Australian spies working in the Solomons trying to gather information that might not normally be available to RAMSI officials. It appeared that Paul had placed me in that category. He asked me to write down all sorts of personal information before he would say a word. Even then, he was suspicious.

While this whole process was taking place, I continually spoke in Pijin while Paul spoke to me in English. I do not think the interview would have been very successful for me if I had not insisted on speaking Pijin. After I spoke in Pijin for ten or fifteen minutes, Paul looked at me differently and started speaking more freely.
At the beginning of the interview, Paul told me that RAMSI had collected all the weapons. Later in the interview when we were speaking Pijin and he seemed more trusting, Paul said he knows there are still weapons out there hidden. This incident reveals another problem that Solomon Islanders have with the intervention force. They miss out on a lot of important information by not learning Pijin.

Luke* stressed, “Solomon Islanders are quiet people. In general, if they have bad feelings, they keep them to themselves. So, people in general haven’t spoken out against RAMSI, about the approaches RAMSI is taking even though many people feel the approaches and actions could be better. RAMSI should be approaching their arrival and work in the Solomons like the people in the Peace Corps do. Peace Corps volunteers get a lot of language training so that they speak great Pijin. They also learn a lot about the cultures here” (interview, Sept. 3, 2004). One noticeable exception has been Australian James Batley, who replaced Nick Warner as the Special Coordinator of RAMSI. According to Robert, when Batley went to the Weathercoast and spoke in Pijin, the locals were shocked. They said, “We can talk to him” (interview, Sept. 2004).

I realized that there is great mistrust both on the part of many Solomon Islanders and RAMSI officials. Noble had told me Solomon Islanders are not competent to govern themselves and need guardians. My interview with Paul, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Sergeant, gave me a sense of how Noble’s beliefs had been actualized. Paul explained in Pijin that Solomon Island police are not allowed to have their own weapons. “Only RAMSI people have weapons. We just have our hands. The thing is,” Paul leaned in and whispered, “They don’t trust us.” Paul continued, “We don’t have our own
vehicles either. We have to rely on RAMSI for that. All of the communication devices –
the radios, etc – are RAMSI’s” (interview, Oct. 2004).

Because so many people within the RSIP had acted corruptly after the 2000 coup,
it was difficult for RAMSI to identify which police officers were problems. RAMSI
started training young Solomon Islanders to be new police officers. One RSIP trainee
with whom I spoke told me that he had not touched a gun and would not receive one after
his training ended two weeks later. This trainee would be assigned to work at the Central
Police Station in Honiara, the same place I spoke with Paul.

In reality, the Solomon Islands Police force is more a symbolic presence. The
approach RAMSI has taken in this case appears to be disempowering and reinforcing
dependency on outsiders. Paul said, “The scary part is if RAMSI leaves soon. They don’t
tell us when they will leave. If they were to leave today, things would go back to how
they were before” (interview, Oct. 2004). In a statement released on June 6, 2008,
RAMSI officials said their position on rearmament had not changed.

Despite RAMSI’s rhetoric about being culturally attuned, Solomon Islanders
were not included in RAMSI trainings until two years after the intervention started. In
2005, members of the Solomon Islands Police Force began to help train new members of
RAMSI’s Participating Police Force (PPF). PPF Commander Denis McDermott
acknowledged “the importance of properly training police deploying to Solomon Islands
in local culture, customs and practice… as an effective way of giving our people a good
grounding in Solomon Islands culture before they arrive” in the Solomons (Tuhanuku
2007).
Just as most RAMSI officials don’t make an effort to learn Pijin, so do many of them, especially Australians, assume that Solomon Islanders don’t understand English. One Solomon Islander with whom I spoke had lived in Australia for several years and spoke perfect English. He would go to nightclubs and bars in Honiara and stand next to Australians from RAMSI. The Aussies assumed he didn’t speak English and said derogatory things about him and about the Solomons. He told me they said, “It’s a waste of our time to be here” in Solomon Islands.

Of course, RAMSI is not monolithic. Many Solomon Islanders with whom I spoke talked positively about members of RAMSI who came from Vanuatu, Fiji, and PNG, but were turned off by the arrogance of RAMSI members from Australia especially. Kabutaulaka said Solomon Islanders with whom he has spoken have told him that it is easier to work with RAMSI forces from New Zealand than from Australia. Others, from Fiji and Papua New Guinea, blend in and seem like Solomon Islanders (interview, July 2004).

I interviewed a member of the Solomon Island National Soccer Team who told me, “Australians here don’t mix with Solomon Islanders” (Sept. 2004). RAMSI forces who do make an effort to interact with the locals are often reprimanded by the Australian leadership. Kabutaulaka recalled speaking with a New Zealand police officer at a police post on the Weathercoast of Guadalacanal. This police officer said he had worked with a Fijian man who drank kava with the locals. The Fijian man was trying to understand the problems and get to know the people. His Australian superior told the Fijian man to stop because “it’s bad to mix with the locals.” Part of the difficulty stems from the different
cultures of justice in the countries participating in RAMSI. The Australian legal system focuses on retributive justice “where the police catch people and put them in jail” (interview, July 2004). In contrast, the cultures of Vanuatu and Fiji, like the Solomons, focus on restorative justice processes, which they find to be cheaper and more effective in the long-run than punitive justice. The primary values of the restorative justice process are on “the wellbeing of the community and its restoration to peace and harmony” (Consedine 1999, 9).

RAMSI Deputy Special Coordinator Peter Noble told me, “Solomon Islanders are trying to have a punitive justice system along with restorative justice. But the thing is, Solomon Islanders still have to live in the 20th century. To exist in the modern world, you have to have a modern justice system” (interview, Oct. 4, 2004). Noble’s statements are illustrative of the pressures on Solomon Islanders to conform to the ‘modern’ world. Yet it is not Solomon Islanders who are “trying to have a punitive justice system along with restorative justice.” They are being told by outsiders to implement a punitive justice system.

Vince McBride, who works for Pacific Cooperation Foundation, also disagreed with Noble. “Westerners need to be willing to think outside our Western norms.” Regarding RAMSI in the Solomons, McBride said in late 2004, “the violence is now gone but nothing has changed in terms of people’s relationships. More important than prison, we need to have reconciliation processes to rebuild relationships, to pour out emotions. The governments of Australia and New Zealand may think this sort of
reconciliation is a waste of time, especially versus prison. The English word ‘compensation’ does not encompass the spirit of the idea.”

Dinnen also found problematic RAMSI’s focus on prisons, “which are symbols that we understand. Old tensions haven’t dissipated. There needs to be reconciliation” (interview, Aug. 3, 2004). In A Kind of Mending: Restorative Justice in the Pacific Islands, Dinnen (2003, 8) wrote,

(Whereas Western law treats the individual as a homogenous and isolated unit, a person’s status, gender, kinship affiliations and relationships, were integral to the determination of his or her rights of obligations in respect to others in Pacific Island societies. Disputes were defined and addressed within an elaborate complex of kinship, status, and social relations… Notions of reciprocity and equivalence were crucial to the redress of wrongs, as they were to other aspects of social and economic life. Such approaches typically entailed a strong element of bargaining and compromise, in contrast to ‘win-or-lose’ adjudication under Western common law. Resolutions of inter-group conflict were the outcome of protracted negotiations and were subject to re-negotiation when circumstances changed.

An essential part of the process of restorative justice is to get to know people and gain their trust. Kabutaulaka stressed that RAMSI officials “need to go where Solomon Islanders have their meals in order to talk with them.” Yet most Australian soldiers in RAMSI refuse to interact in meaningful ways with Solomon Islanders. The locals are often looked at with suspicion and fear. In the summer of 2004 when Kabutaulaka returned to the Weathercoast for a visit, he went to the RAMSI police post to talk story. As he was walking up to the building, an Australian federal policeman came running out and asked what he wanted. Kabutaulaka said he just wanted to talk story. The soldier said, “Get out. Go sit under that tree until I tell you to come in.” Kabutaulaka told me that this Australian policeman’s perception of the Weathercoast is that Solomon Islanders
from the area couldn’t go to college, or make it anywhere. Kabutaulaka explained that many Australians in RAMSI have stereotypes about the Weathercoast, that people from the Weathercoast are bad, that the Weathercoast is backward, undeveloped, and full of savages who started all of the problems.

Finally, after half an hour, the Australian soldier came out and motioned Kabutaulaka closer. The soldier asked, “What can I do for you?” Kabutaulaka replied, “There’s nothing you can do for me” while thinking, ‘How dare you? This is my country.’ At first, Kabutaulaka acted like a “regular guy” from Weathercoast. He slowly let it slip that he had a college degree and a Ph.D. from ANU and had taught at USP in Fiji and was working at the University of Hawai’i and Honolulu’s East-West Center. The soldier kept changing the way he was talking to Kabutaulaka as he learned more. Kabutaulaka told me the soldier seemed stunned that Kabutaulaka could actually have a decent brain (interview, July 2004).

I interviewed a man from Malaita whose brother works for the Solomon Islands police at Rove Central Prison. I asked if his brother was afraid when the riot broke out at the prison a month earlier, in August 2004. The man told me that his brother was not afraid because the prisoners did not try to harm any of the Solomon Islands police force. The prisoners were angry with the RAMSI police because they were treating the prisoners poorly, unlike the Solomon Islands police (interview, Sept. 2004).

**RAMSI: Fighting Corruption while Supporting a Corrupt Leader**

Kabutaulaka (2003) warned the intervention “could consolidate the positions of corrupt politicians and police. The Australians must make sure the intervention does not
do that.” Wainwright agreed that Solomon Islanders in general “expect corruption to be addressed” (interview, Dec. 3, 2003). Yet, Solomon Islanders have questioned the sincerity of RAMSI to root out corruption because RAMSI has backed Kemakeza, widely seen as one of the most corrupt leaders the Solomons has had.

In August 2003, Howard said, “The Solomon Islands is an independent, sovereign country. I work with the elected Prime Minister. The elected Prime Minister is Sir Allan [Kemakeza]. I have found him a straightforward, good man to deal with… I will certainly not get involved in the domestic politics of the Solomon Islands. I’ll stand aside” (McLeod 2003). Howard’s comment is interesting because he was already deeply involved in the domestic politics of Solomon Islands as the driving force behind the intervention.

According to news reports, “Many locals shook their heads this week at Howard’s endorsement of Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza.” The first Prime Minister of the Solomons, Sir Peter Kenilorea, responded, “The fish rots from the head.” A member of the National Peace Council called Kemakeza “very corrupt” (Forbes 2003a). When it was announced in December 2001 that Kemakeza would be the next Prime Minister of the Solomons, many Solomon Islanders greeted the news with dismay. Just six months earlier, Kemakeza had been dismissed from his post as Deputy Prime Minister for allegedly taking money from the government. Kemakeza also had close ties to MEF (Dinnen 2003).

Solomon Islanders have also expressed frustration that the Australian-led RAMSI intervention force supported Kemakeza but did nothing when Ulufa’alu asked Australia
for help. A Malaitan man living in Honiara noted, “Ulufa’alu had changed the economy for the better. He’s an economist so he knows what he’s doing” (interview, Oct. 2004).

Mary* from Guadalcanal told me, “Kemakeza just hands out money. People demand it and he does whatever others tell him. Ulufa’alu would never do that. He balanced the economy. But many people in the government did not like Ulufa’alu because he wasn’t corrupt. After the coup in 2000, everything went bad. The economy tanked. The Solomons now owes more money to foreign governments” (interview, Sept. 2004).

Gabriel,* who lives on Malaita, told me, “Ulufa’alu was the best Prime Minister that Solomon Islands has had. He’s an economist and he made the Solomon Islands economy better. Former Prime Minister Mamaloni took so much money (for himself) and the Solomon Islands economy deteriorated rapidly” (interview, Sept. 2004). An Australian businessman who has lived in Solomon Islands for almost a decade said, “Ulufa’alu would have been a good Prime Minister if he could have stayed in power. He had all the right ideas” (interview, Sept. 2004). John Roughan (2003) said, “The real culprits are also top politicians. RAMSI is caught because they want airtight cases but corrupt leaders have been careful. Ulufa’alu asked people to come forward to testify but people are reticent because what if RAMSI leaves?”

I asked Wainwright if Kemakeza was a legitimate leader of the Solomons since he had earned a reputation for being quite corrupt. She said her organization, ASPI, had advised differently than what the Australian government did [ASPI had advised a short term takeover]. Wainwright continued, “People in the Solomons were thrilled when
[warlords] Keke and Rasta were arrested but when you start pointing fingers at politicians in the Solomons, it’s not okay. The political elite show how ingrained corruption is there. Plus, it’s complicated because RAMSI is there because of Kemakeza’s request.” Wainwright told me, “The people who invited RAMSI to Solomon Islands are some of the ones who are most corrupt.”

“Part of the problem is that this government is embroiled in scandal, corruption. RAMSI, and more specifically the Australian government, has a problem because it used Prime Minister Kemakeza as a legitimizing tool. The Australian government created the contradiction of RAMSI arresting militants but not Kemakeza.” Prime Minister Kemakeza ‘asked’ them to come and if they remove him, their reason to be here legitimately is gone (interview, Dec. 3, 2003).

A news program from ABC Australia that was shown in the Solomons said that Kemakeza went to Canberra to ask for help; however, there is compelling evidence that in 2003, the Australian government summoned the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands to ask for help (Woods interview; Kabutaulaka 2004c). Although Special Coordinator Batley (Nov. 17, 2004) insisted RAMSI came to Solomon Islands “with the unanimous endorsement of the national Parliament,” Kelly* and Tom Woods fiercely disagree. Kelly, a Member of Parliament, argued, “It is unconstitutional what RAMSI did because Members of the Solomon Islands’ Parliament discovered that the bilateral agreement between Solomon Islands and Australia had been signed by Kemakeza before the bill went through our Parliament!” (interview, Sept. 2004).
Woods, a New Zealander who specializes in constitutional law, concurred with Kelly. After serving as Legal Advisor to the Temotu Provincial Government, Woods was hired by the Solomon Islands government to write the drafts of the Solomon Islands constitution. Although his title is Constitutional Draftsperson for the National Constitution, Woods has acted more as facilitator than creator as he works on constitutional reform. Woods, who has worked closely with the Solomons’ Parliament, questions RAMSI’s legitimacy. He told me, “In May 2003, Kemakeza couldn’t be found anywhere. People started talking, saying that there had been a coup and that Kemakeza had fled. The Solomon Islands government got together and created a new government. It wasn’t until a while later that people discovered that Australia had sent a plane for Kemakeza to get his ass to Canberra. When Kemakeza came back and told the government that he had agreed to an intervention, the government said no way. It really was a coup” (interview, Aug. 21, 2004).

Like Woods, Kabutaulaka (2004c) also stated that Kemakeza was summoned to Canberra to meet with Australian Prime Minister Howard. Kemakeza accepted Howard’s offer of Australian assistance although the Solomon Islands National Parliament did not formally consent until July 17, 2003, almost one month after Howard had announced the intervention. Field (2003a) argued, “The landing date was set and forces put into motion three weeks before the paperwork was done.” On July 24, 2003, over 2,000 foreign troops landed in Solomon Islands.

Kemakeza’s chances to stay in power were lessening when he went to Canberra in May 2003 to ask Australia for help (Paul Roughan 2004a). Woods argued, “Australia
used the Prime Minister as a legitimizing tool. But RAMSI has a problem because Prime Minister Kemakeza ‘asked’ them to come and if they remove him, their reason to be here legitimately is gone. Yet, Kemakeza’s government has been embroiled in scandal and corruption” (interview, Aug. 21, 2004). This support for Kemakeza has made many Solomon Islanders suspicious of RAMSI’s intent to create transparency and good governance.

Kelly explained, “Parliament chooses the Prime Minister. It is not done by the Solomon Islands public. People knew Kemakeza was corrupt before he got to be Prime Minister. In fact, Kemakeza wasn’t supposed to become Prime Minister but it had to be someone from the Opposition. The Opposition had numbers to form the government. They all want to be Prime Minister, so they lost all votes, and deflected to present government. This government was formed by duress and brought down under duress. The Governor General called Parliament when Ulufa’alu was forced to resign, and Parliament elected Manasseh Sogavare, which was forced and illegitimate. Ulufa’alu Cabinet Members were forced to join Sosagave. In the new election in 2001, Kemakeza got power legitimately” (interview, Sept. 2004).

John Roughan conducted nation-wide surveys to assess approval ratings for RAMSI and for Solomon Island leaders. Roughan reported that Solomon Islanders are upset that some of the real culprits – the top Solomon Island politicians who contributed to the corruption – are still in power, backed by RAMSI (interview, Sept. 2, 2004). Roughan’s survey in July 2003, the month the RAMSI intervention force arrived in the Solomons, showed that 94% of Solomon Islanders were hopeful about RAMSI. The same
survey of Solomon Islanders showed that Prime Minister Kemakeza received a 40% approval rating, the lowest mark of the last six Solomon Islands leaders. Roughan’s survey to assess Kemakeza’s approval rating was based on four criteria: education, medical/health, resource management, and availability of money. Roughan said of a prior widely-suspected official, “Even former Prime Minister Mamaloni got a 47%.” After receiving the survey results, Roughan called for Kemakeza’s resignation, yet RAMSI forces continued to back Kemakeza. In November 2003, Roughan revealed, “There is a gap between RAMSI and the expectations of Solomon Islanders. People here aren’t fooled by RAMSI.”

A taxi driver from central Malaita who was living in Honiara told me, “Malaitans are very angry with RAMSI. They swear at their SUVs when they pass. Why haven’t they arrested Kemakeza?” (interview, Oct. 2004).

In 2004, Kelly alleged, “Prime Minister Kemakeza is being blackmailed by Canberra. There are 32 counts of fraud and corruption against Kemakeza, and he knows that if he doesn’t do exactly what Canberra tells him to do, he’ll go to jail. We need a strong leader, someone who can say no to outsiders” (interview, Sept. 2004).

In Time, Dusevic (2006) stated, “One of the welcome consequences of... RAMSI—three years on the ground and counting—is how the presence of foreigners has opened local eyes to the shameful inadequacy of Honiara’s politicians.” It is not, as Dusevic has stated, that the presence of foreigners has opened local eyes to the shameful inadequacy of Honiara’s politicians. For one thing, it was RAMSI keeping Kemakeza in power. Also, many Solomon Islanders had been frustrated for decades about corrupt leaders who were
supported by foreign corporations. To me, their eyes were entirely open to the shameful inadequacies of an intervention that propped up a corrupt leader.

**Wantokism: Corruption or welfare state?**

There are different forms of corruption in Solomon Islands. Some people view wantokism as corruption while others view it more as a source of identity or safety net. The word wantok is used “loosely to refer to non-kin with whom one has shared social origins and obligations” (Moore 2004, 27). People in the Solomons have said that the political system exists in law but not in fact and that the traditional system exists in fact but not in law. “Concepts of ‘politicians’ and ‘elections’ are new to Solomon Islands.” Previously, leaders were singled out because of their special abilities, not because of heredity. The politician has become the legal leader while traditional leaders have been disenfranchised, a change that has brought corruption. In order to get elected, politicians promise things to people (Woods interview, Sept. 12, 2004). “Village-level politics is a refined art, played out within extended families and across linguistic groups. It involved generations of knowledge of power relationships and is very different from the Westminster system that has evolved in the Islands in the 1960s and 1970s. Modern politicians utilize both the Bigman and chiefly systems” (Moore 2004, 33-34).

Dinnen argued that where RAMSI officials see wantokism as corruption, others view it as relationships that provide a critical source of identity. “It’s the equivalent of a welfare state. In the language of ‘corruption,’ there is simplification and intolerance. Social dislocation in the Solomons would be worse if wantokism were removed. There would be more serious social problems. What Westerners view as corruption may be
better understood as tension between public service and the obligations of kinship. From the outside, it looks crazy, like nepotism, but it’s taking care of your wantoks” (interview, Aug. 3, 2004).

McLeod (2008) stressed, “It is well known that the wantok system plays an important social support function in the absence of functioning state welfare systems. What is less well known, however, is the existence of very real sanctions that people experience upon failing their social obligations.” Dinnen told me that more and more, Solomon Islanders are disengaged from the social spaces they grew up in. People move from one space to another with ease but inevitably there is entanglement. Wantokism is a kind of shock absorber in a way that is invisible to outsiders (interview, Aug. 3, 2004).

**Malaitan Sense of Persecution by RAMSI**

A number of Malaitans with whom I spoke expressed a sense of persecution. While in the Solomons, I found different examples that both supported and contradicted this belief. Matthew,* a RAMSI police officer from Vanuatu, was stationed on Malaita. When Matthew was briefed by RAMSI forces after he arrived in the Solomons, he was told “Malaitans are ‘bad people.’” Matthew disagreed with RAMSI’s assessment (interview, Sept. 2004).

Whether or not the sense of persecution is justified, many Malaitans feel it strongly. Julie* told me, “RAMSI is anti-Malaitan. Malaitans are being fired from their jobs and being replaced by others (non-Malaitans) who aren’t nearly as qualified.” This is similar to what Matthew had told me. Henry* also described a sense of Malaitan
persecution. He said RAMSI is treating Malaitan prisoners differently. “They’re rougher with them, for example” (interview, Sept. 2004).

The taxi driver from central Malaita, mentioned above, said, “RAMSI treats Malaitans terribly. RAMSI puts Malaitans in jail but not Gwale people.” He told me that he got arrested for drunk driving when he was cleaning out his cab because there were half-empty bottles of alcohol from passengers. He asked the RAMSI people, “Do you see me drinking? Do you smell alcohol on my breath?” He told me, “The answer was no, but it didn’t matter.” He was arrested anyway (interview, Oct. 2004).

Julie saw the arrest of Alexander Bartlett as an example of Malaitan persecution (interview, Sept. 2004). Bartlett, a Malaitan, was the Minister of Agriculture when I arrived in the Solomons in the summer of 2004. Kelly, a Member of Parliament, told me a different story. He said Bartlett was arrested because “he possessed a weapon; he was responsible for burning down twenty houses belonging to people from Temotu; he used false pretense to get money from the government; he demanded $20,000 from a Chinese man; and he was importing ammunition” (interview, Sept. 2004). So although there may be two sides to some cases of apprehension, RAMSI is perceived by Malaitans as targeting Malaitans unfairly.

**The Elusive Edmund Sae: A RAMSI Mistake**

RAMSI’s inability to capture Edmund Sae, the most wanted fugitive in Solomon Islands, led many people to lack respect for RAMSI. Sae was a police sergeant from Malaita who served on the PNG border during the conflict in Bougainville. When Sae and other police from Malaita returned from the Western Province, they thought they
deserved promotions but Malaita’s Police Commissioner, Sir Frederick Soaki, refused them. In February 2003, Soaki demobilized Sae and the others because the top militants from MEF had already taken the money allocated for compensation so there was no more money to pay these men. The same day that the Police Commissioner demobilized Sae and the others, Sae got a gun. That evening Sae shot and killed Soaki because he felt he had been wronged twice by him (interview with Gabriel, Sept. 2004).

Sae was arrested in mid-March 2003 and taken to Rove Prison on Guadalcanal. One month later, he escaped from prison (Moore 2004). His escape was only possible because he had help both inside and outside of prison. People from MEF “helped Sae escape from Guadalcanal and come to Malaita where he’s now hiding in the bush and training militants” (interview with Gabriel, Sept. 9, 2004). Sae has been eluding arrest by hiding in Malaita’s rugged interior (U.S. Dept. of State 2007). As of 2010, Sae remained at large (Palmer 2010).

Kelly told me, “Not capturing Edmund Sae has been a big failure on Australia’s part. It diminishes the RAMSI capability within Solomon Islands” (interview, Sept. 7, 2004). Luke maintained, “When Edmund Sae escaped RAMSI forces on Malaita and another man who had been arrested simply walked out of the Magistrates Court in Honiara, Solomon Islanders started feeling like they could screw around with RAMSI, that they wouldn’t be caught” (interview, Sept. 3, 2004). By eluding RAMSI forces for years, Sae has gained almost mythical status. “Rumor has it that Sae has magical powers and transforms himself at night into a dog in order to enter Honiara regularly” (Powles
interview, Aug. 29, 2005). Terry Brown, the Bishop of Malaita, wrote in April 2006, “I am afraid [Sae] has acquired a Jon Frum-like persona in these kinds of events.”

Dinnen, who has extensive on-the-ground experience in the Solomons and PNG, explained that the situation with Edmund Sae is “an example of RAMSI messing up.” RAMSI officials came into Malaita, wanting Sae to surrender. Two groups – Edmund Sae’s group and the relatives of the man whom Sae had killed – were working on reconciliation, the traditional way of dealing with crimes in the Solomons. “By coming in without knowing about the informal process that was going on, RAMSI officials alienated the community that could get Sae. RAMSI police haven’t tried to learn or speak Pijin or any of the local languages. They believe that police work is about investigating and getting information.” Dinnen asked rhetorically, “How do you do that without knowing the language?” (interview, Aug. 3, 2004). The case, so sensational at the time I was in Solomon Islands, revealed that RAMSI stymied justice in both systems.

**Conflict Resolution: a job for RAMSI or the community?**

Matthew, the RAMSI police officer who had been stationed on Malaita, is from Vanuatu, a country with a similar Pijin language and culture as the Solomons. He insisted the responsibility for conflict resolution lies within the community rather than with RAMSI. Thinking of Solomon Islanders, he said, “You already have your own way. We don’t have to teach you.”

Matthew was one of the few RAMSI members I met who treated the locals as equals. Matthew noted that the local people do not easily accept new ways. He found that “the best approach is to mix with people. Everything they do, I do. If we learn their
language, their culture, and try to build good relationships with the locals, then they will cooperate with us and give us information so that we can find criminals hiding in the bush, as Edmund Sae is doing.” Matthew was more familiar with the local customs on Malaita since they are quite similar to customs in Vanuatu where there the chief system remains strong. Matthew noted that in Vanuatu, “The police do not do as much. The chiefs and church leaders take care of problems” (interview, Sept. 2004).

During the tensions in the Solomons, “relationships were interrupted, and now people are contacting each other again. This has nothing to do with RAMSI. It’s a common misperception that it is because of peacemaking efforts by Australia. The reality is that it is all going on underneath the intervention” (Dinnen interview, Dec. 8, 2003).

Mark, a man in his twenties living in Auki, Malaita explained that in part because of the parallel system RAMSI has set up, “The Auki police are kicking back and not doing anything since the RAMSI police are here. People in Auki see that and have less respect for the Solomon Island police. They don’t take the Solomon Island police seriously anymore. Some of the police are corrupt. Since RAMSI forces diminished in numbers last month [August 2004], eight stores in Auki have been robbed and a lot of windows have been broken. Most of the stores here in Auki have closed.”

While Mark and I were standing at the harbor talking, a man walked by with a plastic bottle (a small soda bottle) that had a hole in the side. Mark told me the man was making a bong and was going to smoke pot and that no one will say anything even though it is illegal. “A few years ago, people would have gone to the police to tell them but in the past few years, they’ve gotten so used to stuff like this, they don’t bother
reporting it” (interview, Sept. 2004). Community passivity had grown in response to local control being co-opted.

**RAMSI’s lack of an exit date**

A number of Solomon Islanders from different provinces spoke of their fear of what will happen when RAMSI leaves the country, especially since there has been no information about an exit date. A man from Makira told me, “If RAMSI leaves any time soon, things will go right back to the way they were” (interview, Sept. 2004). A Polynesian Solomon Islander from Rennel said, “The hatred continues through today. When RAMSI leaves, there will still be tension between Renbel and Malaitan people” (interview, Sept. 2004).

I asked Henry, whose mother is from Bellona and whose father is from Malaita, “Are you worried at all when you think about what’s going to happen when RAMSI leaves?” He replied, “We don’t usually talk about this but yes, I’m scared to think about what’s going to happen when the prisoners (Malaitans) get out of jail because it’s likely that they’ll gather arms again and try to take over.” Even though his father is from Malaita, he is more afraid of Malaitans and MEF than he is of the IFM by far (interview, Sept. 2004).

Mark, mentioned above, told me he is afraid of “what will happen when RAMSI leaves because the underlying problems aren’t being addressed” (interview, Sept. 2004). Mary, in Honiara, told me, “There are still a lot of bad feelings. People are scared if RAMSI leaves because they are sure the fighting will begin again. RAMSI isn’t addressing any of the underlying problems” (interview, Oct. 2004).
In August 2005, two years after the RAMSI intervention started, Anna Powles found “a great deal of anti-RAMSI feeling” in the Solomons, but argued that “it is more of a release valve for the tensions underlying the conflict that have not been dealt with.” She found noticeable differences from a year before: “more poverty and overcrowding in Honiara, especially a greater number of young guys on the streets, hanging off the back of trucks, not doing much at all. Disturbingly, there is also increased prostitution, including stories of women selling themselves at the wharves in exchange for fish off the boats, and to RAMSI soldiers resulting in a rise in HIV/AIDS, and men pimping young boys to foreigners. While there is relief that the tensions are over and a general sense of appreciation towards RAMSI, as one elderly Malaitan said to me of the tensions, ‘We were running like dogs,’ economic disparities are growing and there is certainly a sense of mounting anger and dissatisfaction which is being directed, in the immediate, towards RAMSI and Australia” (interview, Aug. 29, 2005). Yet, in Time, Dusevic (2006) wrote, “RAMSI is popular with locals because it’s brought better security, some services, and new infrastructure.”

**RAMSI’s neoliberal demands for Solomon Islands…**

At a 2004 conference on securing a peaceful Pacific, Marian Hobbs, New Zealand’s Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control, Minister of Environment, Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Associate Minister for Bio-security, and Associate Minister of Education, stated, “No Pacific island faces invasion, yet Pacific conflicts have occurred.” The global trend is conflict within states, and there are multiple causes for these conflicts including poverty, economic stagnation, land disputes, and a
poor fit between Western forms of government and tradition. Hobbs argued that of the areas of the Pacific, “Melanesia seems most vulnerable.” She also talked about new threats that have emerged such as the proliferation of small arms, HIV/AIDS, and transnational crime (what she called the underside of globalization). Interestingly, Hobbs did not view globalization itself as potentially part of any threat to the island states.

Hobbs, who was also responsible for New Zealand’s Official Development Assistance, described New Zealand’s responses to threats in the Pacific: “The policy goal of New Zealand Aid is to prevent conflict and build peace, and to address the root causes of conflict. Poverty and conflict are linked and interrelated. We ask, how can we make ourselves more secure?” Hobbs spoke several times about being part of a “Pacific family,” for instance, she said, “We have a long-term engagement in our Pacific family.” Pacific problems haven’t been large in world terms but the impact of conflict is huge in small Pacific societies. Hobbs continued, “A sense of security in each Pacific country will increase security in all Pacific countries. We’ll do all we can to keep our region an ocean of peace. It’s the responsibility of every government to increase security through diplomacy and aid, both short-term and long-term. Poverty elimination is about being a good neighbor. It’s a key security goal for Pacific. Security is also about stability, openness.”

When Hobbs spoke about RAMSI as a regional response, she said, “Security is collective and interdependent.” She explained, “Australia has the most resources so they are leading RAMSI.” The intervention in the Solomons “set a new standard for regional solidarity. Now Solomon Islanders can focus on rebuilding their lives. RAMSI is
rebuilding institutions – including police and courts – and is building peace. We need post-conflict reconstruction. We need military and police for peace-building.”

Hobbs stated, “The Pacific has ‘underperformed economically.’ We need to reduce economic inequality. When a family member has a job, the whole family has a buffer. We need to create new jobs. We have to find a way to grow Pacific economies.”

Hobbs described the remoteness of Pacific countries as contributing to their problems. Thus, “we need to minimize the cost of doing business, increase communication within countries, review land tenure so people can cooperate rather than having vanilla growing in each backyard. We need more infrastructure such as planes and boats. We need to stop the exploitation of forests and fisheries. These countries need safe, clean, reliable water or tourism will go out the window.”

Hobbs’s view, based on a neoliberal economic approach, overlooks important factors. Creating more infrastructure is a way to extract resources, often for the benefit of outsiders and elite local leaders. Also, her assumption is that tourism is good for these island countries, yet tourism in poorer countries often “perpetuates already existing inequalities, economic problems, and social tensions” (Britton 2004, 29). Because most of the Pacific Island States lack sufficient capital to undertake tourism projects, they are forced to depend on foreign powers for their investment capital. Although tourism development may appear to bring money into an underdeveloped nation, the profits from tourism often return to corporations in the tourists’ country of origin. Regarding her comment about Pacific island countries needing safe water or else “tourism will go out
the window,” it was telling that her focus was on tourists rather than the local people’s need for clean water.

Hobbs had described HIV/AIDS as “economic and security issues because teenagers end up as head of families. Then gangs, crime, and civil wars flourish. It could be the next biggest threat to Pacific security.” When I spoke with people in the Solomons about HIV/AIDS, they weren’t particularly worried because the disease takes years to kill. They worried much more about malaria or other threats that could kill them right now. In Hobbs’ approach to aid, security equaled export-oriented marketization. RAMSI was the key to bringing Solomon Islands and the global economy to each other.

Noble argued the root causes of conflict and instability are development and lack thereof. Similarly, James Batley (Nov. 2004) maintained, “Security, in its broadest sense, is inseparable from development.” Kemakeza stressed in his speech to the Women for Peace conference, “RAMSI is putting their money into development sectors of our country. Therefore, the intervention is in the interests of Solomon Islands as a whole.”

Whether market growth-oriented development would lead to security is debatable in light of the critical analyses of development. Wesley-Smith (2004) maintained, “Commentators often assume a direct and positive relationship between state strength and economic development—or perhaps more accurately, economic growth.” Yet, in the Pacific, a number of modern economic activities, especially logging and mining, have weakened rather than strengthened state capacity because of their negative impacts on local communities (Wesley-Smith 2007b).
Any approach to conflict resolution in the Pacific will only be palliative unless it includes a deep rethinking of forms of Pacific government and development.

“‘Democracy,’ ‘adversarial law,’ and ‘free trade’ all contribute to conflict. These promote the same legitimization of violence” (Crocombe 2004). ‘Democratization’ launders all kinds of violence. Free trade is not so free but rather increases dependency (Casimira 2003). Preventing conflict is redundant, especially in the Pacific, within the dominant neoliberal discourse. Pacific peoples’ abilities to prevent conflict is lessened because of outsider influence. There is a role for outsiders as honest brokers, not re-colonizers (Teaiwa 2004).

…yet RAMSI itself lacks transparency

The intervention is based on neoliberalism, which demands government transparency. Yet the Australian government has on numerous occasions acted with a disturbing lack of transparency. Woods told me Australia does not do the very things it tells Solomon Islands to do and that RAMSI needs transparency, which they are not providing. Solomon Islanders have talked about the need to know RAMSI’s plans, including when they expect to leave the country but they are not given information. Australia controls the airwaves and sends out propaganda.

Woods felt Australia had misjudged the pulse of Solomon Islands to their own peril: “RAMSI needs to work with the Cabinet and within the Constitution but they’re not doing it. Nick Warner, then-head of RAMSI, said in a 2004 speech to the Pacific Forum that RAMSI had set up an Economic Council with the Solomon Islands Parliament.
Members of the Solomon Islands Parliament read about it in the newspaper because it had never been through their Parliament” (interview, Sept. 12, 2004).

Woods confided that at a workshop convened by Kabutaulaka, Nick Warner gave a speech in which he said a little criticism is all right but if anyone attacks or criticizes RAMSI too much, that person is a traitor. RAMSI told John Roughan to cut back on his remarks, to shut up. Both these instructions run counter to the Solomon Islands constitution, which provides freedom of speech (interview, Aug. 21, 2004). A selective set of freedoms for ‘the market’ were being promulgated while freedoms of conscience were proscribed.

**Drafting a New Constitution: a Solomon Island-style Federal System**

As Constitutional Draftsperson for the National Constitution, Woods was consulting with Solomon Islanders from all walks of life, writing down what they want their constitution to look like. He insisted to Solomon Islanders that the constitution “needs to articulate what they want. It has to be flexible.” He described the new constitution “as a federal system but a Solomon Island-style federal system. A unitary system won’t work here; it hasn’t worked here.” Through this constitution, human rights and custom rights were becoming constitutional. People could validate their own systems as law, which had not been done before. “Solomon Islanders are conscious that their custom system isn’t law so they have a tendency to believe that it must be inferior. It is necessary to restore confidence in their own system. Legal systems will now be their traditional ways.”
Woods insisted the constitution must look at tribes’ interests and must address all elements of social systems. He and others had meetings with Solomon Islanders from all over the country – sixty different groups. They had separate groups for men and women and for leaders. People in general were excited that someone was asking them what they wanted. Woods said they are very clear about the things they want. The women were thrilled because this was the first time they were allowed to have a voice, to speak. Woods used what the Solomon Islanders told him and wrote a draft of the constitution. He then passed that around the Solomons and made some changes according to what the people said. Woods was “basically listening to what people at the ground are saying and then articulating that.” Within the draft he put together, the separate regions would get self-determination. Each region would have its own type of government.

The question Woods focused on was how to build national unity out of different state or provincial governments. He argued that Solomon Islands needs a mechanism for political decisions to get made at the most appropriate level. There is tension between state and federal government everywhere in world with this system. There is almost a natural force to centralize power. Woods believes that the Subsidiary Principle is useful because it empowers the local level and the provincial level.

This constitution draft repeals the 2002 amendment to the constitution and the amnesty. It also gets rid of revenue grants, something Woods views as essential. Woods explained there are two types of revenues in the Solomons – tax and resource revenues. In the new constitution, tax revenues would be split 50/50 between the state (province) and the federal governments. Resource revenues would be split 40/60. When I asked
Woods how leaders in the Solomons have responded to these changes, he said he has received tremendous support.

Woods maintained, “If you don’t have an understanding of politics in Solomon Islands, you can’t get legislation passed. Australia tried to push through a forestry bill and it didn’t work because they lacked the understanding. The Speaker of the House is actually the most important politician, not the Prime Minister. People in Parliament elect the Speaker and then the Prime Minister. One difficulty with the Solomon Islands government is that you never know who the government is because it is constantly shifting. The Prime Minister has to constantly change. The Prime Minister appoints the Cabinet, which is like a congress of leaders. Having one dominant political party and federalism doesn’t work.” The constitutional draft that Woods was writing would create committees for Cabinet, something that hadn’t existed.

Woods maintained the conflict erupted because brick walls popped up whenever people tried to settle things. “No one was listening or understanding the issues people were bringing up; people got more and more frustrated. The new constitution has avenues for conflict resolution built into it.” The decentralizing effects of the new constitution will make the provinces happy but has made Australia nervous. There were four secessionist movements active in Solomon Islands until 2003 in Temotu, Choiseul, Western Province, and Rennell and Bellona (Guadalcanal also had secessionist movements in the past). According to Woods, all four of these provinces are completely behind the new constitutional draft, yet “Australia has said that Solomon Islands can’t afford to do it this way. These four provinces have said if this constitutional reform
doesn’t go through, we’re leaving the country. The people of the Solomons support this reform so much that if Australia tries to stop it, people are going to go nuts.”

Kelly told me there was a lot of support in Parliament for the constitutional reform that Woods is working on. Despite that, “Australia is trying to stop this federal constitutional reform. RAMSI head Nick Warner sent messages in 2004 making it clear (though not stating in so many words) Australia doesn’t approve. They are trying to make the argument that it costs too much money but Solomon Islanders want state governments. Members of Parliament were advised by Australia not to get the federal constitution into Parliament. They want to block constitutional change that would make it harder for Australia and other countries to have investments, having to deal with provincial governments as well as the central government” (interview, Sept. 5, 2004).

The Solomon Islands National Peace Council (NPC) is what Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer called “an indigenous organization in Solomon Islands playing a critical role in peace, reconciliation and nation building” (Aug. 1, 2003). Yet, according to Woods, the National Peace Council has been taken over as an AusAid NGO. RAMSI has used the NPC as their council as well. There is tension between the Solomon Islands Governor General and Australia because there has been no agreement made between the Solomon Islands government and Australia. “The work the Australia government is doing is for Honiara, not for most of the country. They think that constitutional reform is an impediment.” Yet, Woods said this Governor General was chosen specifically because he supports the constitutional reform.
When I met Woods, he had recently delivered a PowerPoint presentation at RAMSI headquarters about the constitutional reform he has been working on. He explained to me that RAMSI has been averse to constitutional reform because of foreign policy concerns, i.e. how will it affect RAMSI’s work. Once the people at RAMSI headquarters realized what Woods was talking about in his presentation, “they ran and got James Batley, the new guy in charge of RAMSI.” As Woods continued his presentation, he mentioned that he had been working on Cabinet Committees. A RAMSI woman from Australia said, “You have?? I’ve been working on Cabinet Committees for two months now. I want to know how your changes will affect my agenda.” Woods thought to himself, I’ve been working on this for a year now… and shouldn’t it be the other way? Shouldn’t she ask how her agenda might affect the Cabinet Committees?

In September 2004, Kelly told me the Australian government wanted to insert Australians into crucial roles in the Solomon Islands government, including the positions of Attorney General, Auditor General, Ombudsman, and the Chairman of Leadership Commission. The Solomon Island Cabinet said no and deferred it. Kelly continued, “If it were to happen, the Solomons would be in deep trouble because Canberra would be ruling everything. If there is any blockage or resistance, the Australian government removes people from that position.”

For many of the reasons listed above, Woods believed it was dangerous that Solomon Islanders were thinking of RAMSI rather than their own people as the legitimate power. “Solomon Islanders assume their way isn’t as good as foreign ways because they’ve had that drummed into their heads for so long.” Woods has spoken to
people working for RAMSI who are stunned by the constitution he is drafting. Woods says, “They sputter, ‘These people can’t govern themselves!’” (interview, Sept. 12, 2004).

The Council for International Development (CID), a New Zealand NGO, created a series of steps on how conflict transformation must happen, “especially when external intervention is introduced.” The process must be “locally owned… based on a partnership model… and recognize the gender components of conflict,” “work through traditional systems as far as possible without undermining the status and mana of the traditional systems.” The CID insisted that any external intervention must “be based on a thorough understanding of the causes of the conflict and the cultural, social, political, and environmental setting in which local NGOs operate” (Julian 2004).

If RAMSI cannot trust the Royal Solomon Islands Police to have radios, much less guns, how can the intervention force ever trust the country to govern itself? As Ron May (2004) said, “If we justify the intervention on our own security interests, it will be a different intervention – we’ll send in soldiers and police – than if we were looking out for the interests of Solomon Islanders, in which case the focus would more likely be on health and education.” From all appearances, the intervention is very much for the security interests of Australia and New Zealand.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored why Australia is occupying Solomon Islands with RAMSI and how its motivations translate from discursive frames to administration. My findings show that many residents of Solomon Islands find the intervention to be spurious and hypocritical. Despite RAMSI’s rhetoric of empowerment, many Solomon Islanders
expressed frustration with the intervention. They view the intervention as serving Australia’s own interest at the expense of most Solomon Islanders, especially its centrist approach. The intervention’s neoliberal agenda is imposing on Solomon Islands institutions and values based on western, capitalist ideas of how to organize a society and an economy and yet the intervention itself lacks transparency. Many Solomon Islanders view Australia as an imperial power because the Australian government has been dictating the terms all along. Australia’s imaginary of resource market access is promulgated with less democracy. Crisis discourse has become a template for action that takes martial forms and is likely to produce further crises.
Chapter 6: Conclusion: Dehegemonizing Geographies

In order to answer my question concerning how geographical discourse constitutes crises, I have examined the conflict in Solomon Islands through two different theoretical lenses: conventional geopolitics and critical geopolitics. Using the works of Woods (1998) and Shapiro (2002a) as a guide, my research has focused on the lived experiences of Solomon Islanders in an attempt to make visible what has been erased by dominant discourse and representations. I used a multiple-scale approach to juxtapose crisis discourse with on-the-ground lived experiences in order to expose the subjectivity inherent in such discourse. Because my goal in this dissertation is not to destroy meaning claims but to multiply them, I have deliberately sought to avoid making truth claims. I argue that other views that have been silenced and erased are every bit as valid.

Although discourse might seem abstract and unconnected to people’s daily lives, my research has shown that such discourse has a concrete effect on people. Discourse sets up what is natural and desirable but discourse does not drive people in a deterministic way. Frames are not simply competing for legitimacy; they are also strategies of power to preserve itself. Powerful countries including Australia manipulate and use certain frames to legitimize their actions and interventions.

In many ways, crisis discourse fulfills itself, triggering further cascades of dispossession. The crisis discourse I have examined implies violence is contagious, a ‘natural’ result of differences between peoples, and often requires intervention. Because crisis discourse is state-centric, it erases the violence inherent in state- and nation-building. Crisis discourse takes situations out of historical and political context. It erases
the consequences that modernization, development, and globalization have had on less powerful countries. Anything that does not fit into the dominant, neoliberal narrative is marginalized and silenced. Through my research, I have attempted to recover that which has been erased.

Conventional geopolitical theory asserts that where we are – in terms of a state-centric world based on tropes of civilization and modernity – is inevitable given the historical causes. I have attempted to resist this explanatory monopoly by showing, as Foucault (1990, 1994, 1995) suggests, the historical contingencies of linear narratives of progress, civilization, development, and modernity overall. There is nothing inevitable about where we are; rather, it is the result of exercises of power. As Fuentes (1982, 64) argues, “What we call ‘modernity’ is more often than not this process whereby the rising industrial and mercantile classes of Europe gave unto themselves the role of universal protagonists of history.” My research has also identified subordinating assumptions that are embedded in conventional geopolitical theory and how such assumptions underpin crisis discourse.

**Summary of Findings**

Chapter 2 has provided an historical overview of regionalism in Oceania. I began with an examination of the production and ordering of space and place in Oceania in order to illuminate the origins of many commonly accepted regional borders and areas. As soon as they made contact in the Pacific, European powers began to create borders to divide and classify peoples and lands. Using maps from the past few centuries, I highlighted the shifting borders of these arbitrary delineations since they have varied.
dramatically over time. Imperial powers used evolutionary criteria to rank different peoples hierarchically and to justify their treatment of these people: the darker the skin, the higher degree of savagery.

Melanesia, which stems from the root meaning Black Islands, a category referring to the ‘negroid’ race, was not simply a description of people with black skin but was also a categorization that placed people they called Melanesians near the bottom of a racial hierarchy. Inherent in this endeavor was the idea that Europeans were a superior race biologically and that natives were savages who needed to be led to a better place (Thomas 1994). “The project of ‘civilizing’ and ‘othering’ went hand in hand in this colonial enterprise” (Kumar 2002, 86).

I also examined the ordering of space into political units such as nation-states – a framework that is deeply embedded with values of modernity – as well as the repercussions of such ordering. Within this framework, for instance, the state can never commit what is defined as “violence,” because state violence is laundered as “policing.” I also asked, in what ways do colonial frames underlie current international relations in Oceania? The paternalistic attitude of the Australian government towards the countries of Melanesia continues today as the peoples, societies, and economies of Melanesia are not only placed at the most primitive end of a linear evolutionary scale but also serve as an Other to Australia’s neocolonial Self.

In Chapter 3, I looked at Solomon Islands, first through the lens of conventional geopolitics and then through the lens of critical geopolitics to determine what the causes of distress were in the Solomons. Solomon Islands has been viewed as a failure in the
sights/sites of British, American, and Australian expectations. Yet the ‘failure’ of Solomon Islanders to govern themselves means a ‘failure’ based on western, capitalist definitions and models of the world from which the majority of Solomon Islanders do not benefit; instead, through this system, their resources are up for grabs.

I have applied the framework of critical theory to this case study of Solomon Islands because such analysis is crucial for understanding the implications of globalization and its effects on localities. The idea that Solomon Islanders are unable to govern themselves unravels when put in historical and political context. When given the chance, Solomon Islanders have frequently chosen good leaders who are not corrupt and who want to use the country’s resources for the benefit of the people; yet these leaders – including Prime Ministers Francis Billy Hilly and Bartholomew Ulufa’alu – have been pushed out of office with the support of foreign corporations and governments. Looking further into the past, the system of Big Men in Solomon Islands was egalitarian (although as the name indicates women were not allowed to lead in this way); leaders were chosen not through heredity but because of their abilities.

I also identified how development as a project of the World Bank and other powerful organizations has left disappointments in Solomon Islands because of the gap existing between intentions stated and outcomes. Colonialism changed the lives of the colonized by “establishing a polity of dependence” (Armstrong 1994, 360); development has forced a similar dependency. Development is “a modernist project”; rather than helping countries that are ‘behind’ to catch up, development policies create dependence and underdevelopment (Watts 1995, 50). There are processes that create poverty and
processes that generate wealth. They do not just happen. Poverty is an attribute of a relationship, not an attribute of an individual.

Chapter 4 has examined crisis discourse in Oceania in five sections – doomsdayism, ethnic violence, arc of instability, Africanization, and failed states – and asked, through what frames has Australia understood Solomon Islands? I have argued Australian framings of Oceania continue to rely on assumptions from racist, gendered colonial discourses as well as from “development and security discourses of the cold war era” (Fry 1997, 337,327), and more recently neoliberal discourse. One reason Oceania is viewed as a region in trouble is because these frames continue earlier “depictions of Pacific Islanders as inferior in Australian official discourse, media imagery, or strategic studies.” Crisis discourse displaces “concern away from the hegemonic agendas of outsiders and toward the presumed incompetence of indigenous others in the modern world” (Chappell 2005, 301).

Crisis terms such as ethnic violence, arc of instability, and Africanization have assumptions of contagion and intractability embedded within them. Ethnic violence, in particular, is framed in ways that make the ethnic groups involved “appear not only extraneous to the narratives of progress and civilization, but also as infectious, anarchic, ancient or fragmentary threats to peace and stability” (Mount 2003, 272-73). The concept of a failed state severs the connections a place has had with powerful global forces. Rather than placing blame on the people within a failed state, a critical view enables us to see how conditions imposed from outside – including the instabilities of the market – may precipitate a failed state. Barnett (2004) contends that the countries that pose a
danger are those that have underperformed economically, that are not globally integrated. I argue increased integration into the world economy will not create more stability in what Barnett calls the Non-Integrating Gap; rather, it is this integration that will create more instability. To ‘underperform economically’ implies, once again, that the fault is internal. But if the developed require the underdeveloped, it is an inevitable consequence of global integration. Through the lens of critical geopolitical theory, we can see that the state is an effect of a contingent set of relations, something that is produced, and we can recover that which has been erased through state-centric narratives. In addition to the structural understandings of state vulnerabilities under development, a poststructural view sees state power inscribed in the bodies of subjects.

Chapter 5 has investigated the Australian-led intervention in Solomon Islands in order to understand how the Australian government has been framing the legitimation of their exercise, to determine what the nature and effects of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) are, and to understand how Solomon Islanders view RAMSI. Australian leaders continue to assume a paternalistic role over Melanesia as Australian Prime Minister John Howard illustrated when announcing the intervention as Australia’s special responsibility in “our patch.” Like the British before them, Australians have long viewed Melanesians as unable to govern themselves and have frequently intervened in Melanesian affairs (Connell 2006). Crisis discourse is a way to legitimize intervention, and failed states is one of the newest rationales.

Since World War II, Australia has feared the threat of danger from the north. What is different now is the security focus for Australia has shifted to the danger involved in
not intervening in ‘dangerous’ places (Mitchell 2010). Where traditional forms of regionalism have focused more on changing “the terrain between states” through trade and defense alliances, the new regionalism led by Australia in the Southwest Pacific and developed in response to the attacks of 9/11 and the 2002 Bali bombings, has sought to transform the state itself (Hameiri 2009, 349).

Although the Australian-led intervention force has described their mission as “empowering” Solomon Islanders, almost all of the Solomon Islanders I interviewed during my time in their country said they do not feel empowered. A number of Australian academics are also critical of RAMSI. Sinclair Dinnen argues Australia is readopting a pacifying role within a civilizing mission (interview, Dec. 8, 2003). James Batley, who became the second head of RAMSI after Nick Warner, said in November 2004, RAMSI is “promoting an agenda for change: but we do so not to implant foreign models or ways of doing things, but in order to empower those in Solomon Islands who are themselves working to bring about change for the better.” Yet my investigation shows that RAMSI is implanting foreign models and ways of doing things based on Western assumptions about how a society and an economy should be and based on Western definitions of security, order, instability, systems of land ownership, and corruption.

RAMSI is focused on rebuilding state apparatuses in Solomon Islands even though since its inception, the Solomon Islands state was and is irrelevant in villages and remote places. Although Honiara, the capital city, has about 90,000 people, the second biggest town in the country has only 4,500 people. Most Solomon Islanders live in villages of 200 people or fewer and feel little to no allegiance to the state.
The Australian-led intervention force’s notions of what constitutes stability and security rest on neoliberal assumptions including a view of peace as “neoliberal forms of governance” (Richmond 2006). Peace is defined through frames of security, stability, and good governance since these facilitate capitalism and the global market. State-building is the focus of the intervention because a certain kind of state is necessary for the market to work. When military solutions are used to solve problems of instability, they frequently exacerbate conflict because they deal with instability’s effects rather than causes. Long-term solutions to regional instability must address the causes instead of the effects (Rumley et al. 2006).

Is the state the answer for instability in Solomon Islands? It depends on whose definition of ‘instability’ you use. A neoliberal answer would be yes. Is the neoliberal version of instability the same as the majority of Solomon Islanders’ version of instability? No. A stable Solomon Islands in a neoliberal sense encourages development and ensures foreign access to resources, a process from which most locals do not benefit. Instead, many locals are forced to deal with the deleterious effects of development, resource removal, and decreased human security. Neoliberal advocates argue that the answer to conflict and instability is development yet it was particular kinds of development that created situations leading to violence in Solomon Islands. The modern day nation-state actually produces inequality (Mitchell 1995), which often fuels instability.

I have been asked what sort of state I think Solomon Islands should have. My answer is two-fold: first, if Solomon Islanders have a state, I believe it is not my place to
say what sort of state it should be because Solomon Islands is an independent country and
the people of the country should determine their own future. They have the right to
choose what works best for them. Of course, there are problems in such a system, as we
have seen with elite Solomon Islanders lining their own pockets instead of looking out for
the benefit of the citizens in general, but the idea that Solomon Islanders are incapable of
governing themselves is born of racism and imperialism.

The second part of my answer is that we need to think beyond the dominant
narratives of modernity and a state-centric world because the state itself is problematic.
We need to recognize “the radical contingencies of space and identity” and alternatives to
the nation-state system because “contemporary neoimperialism resides in part in the
dominance of a spatial story that inhibits the recognition of alternatives” (Shapiro 1997,
175, 202). Rather than viewing the state as a source of power, we can see that the state
does not exist on its own. It is a constant project and process. We need to investigate
concrete historical examples in order “to resist the metaphysical hypostatization of the
nation-state...” (Shapiro 2004, 49).

The data I collected in Solomon Islands show that the Australian-led intervention
is disempowering Solomon Islanders and increasing their dependency. Solomon Islanders
have a long history of being controlled and governed by the British and Australians.
Many Solomon Islanders view the Australian-led intervention as another exercise in
outside intervention that is more in the interest of those intervening than in the interest of
Solomon Islanders. In this process, Solomon Islanders have been and continue to be
viewed by Australian leaders not as partners but more as people to be governed. Many
Solomon Islanders have different values and world-views than what is ‘normal’ in a state-centric, ‘modern’ world.

As a precondition from its past, Solomon Islands has limited power. The intervention’s neoliberal agenda continues earlier subordinating, paternalistic assumptions. Renda (2000, 15) identifies race, class, age, gender, and sexuality as the “building blocks of paternalism.” British and French colonizers used racializing, bestializing, infantilizing language to portray people living in the area delineated as Melanesia. RAMSI leaders continue to place these societies in the developmental stage of primitive/childhood. RAMSI Deputy Coordinator Peter Noble described the Solomons as “a playground with no monitor” and said, “We have to make decisions for them now until they can stand on their own” (interview, Oct. 4, 2004). Noble assumes the linear, teleological development model in which Solomon Islanders, with enough outside help, can “move forward rather than backward.” For Noble, Solomon Islands society is built on everything that is not as good as western models.

My investigation of the Australian-led intervention in Solomon Islands finds that the official rhetoric of the intervention force frequently conflicts with its actions and policies. A number of RAMSI officials have said Solomon Islanders are not capable of governing themselves. Although RAMSI officials speak of the importance of domestic ownership of the intervention, RAMSI decisions are made primarily in Canberra, not on the ground in Solomon Islands. Also, although RAMSI is officially a regional intervention force comprised of 15 countries, “only Australia is making decisions”
The Australian government has been dictating the terms all along. As a result, many Solomon Islanders see Australia as an imperial power. The intervention is an asymmetrical exercise of power led by the Australian government.

I argue that the point of such an intervention is to dictate the terms of success: to create a state that works for the global economy. It is not that the Australian government does not know, for example, that retributive justice does not fit into Solomon Islands society as well as restorative justice; rather, the Australian government wants to create a specific kind of state and system of law that works in a neoliberal system. Such a state, for instance, will have a strong centralized government to help with resource marketization.

Three types of state power operate in space to discipline and govern bodies: “sovereignty is exercised within the borders of a territory, discipline is exercised on the bodies of individuals, and security is exercised over a whole population” (Foucault 2007, 11). The exercise of power is thus disguised in ‘sovereignty,’ ‘discipline,’ and ‘security.’ Governance is about managing the social order and the people in it as well as managing people in relation to the economy.

RAMSI officials have argued that security and development are inseparable (Batley Nov. 2004). Noble told me the problem with Solomon Islands is their inability to develop economically and that “you can’t invest in Solomon Islands while it’s a traditional society.” My research shows that RAMSI’s neoliberal approach is not the answer to problems in Solomon Islands but rather that neoliberalism has set Solomon
Islands up for this sort of violence. “Certain kinds of global flows… are central to neoliberal state formations but are also deeply disruptive to national liberal, social, and political narratives” (Mitchell 2004, 3). Globalization tends to benefit local and foreign elite and powerful countries while making the poor and less powerful countries more dependent. Uneven development is an inherent characteristic of capitalism that is actively produced. Core countries must find and recreate difference in order to hold on to their historical advantages. In other words, growth in the world-economy has not resulted in differentiation; it has created differentiation.

Fanon (1963) argued that colonizers often convinced the colonized that they were there for the benefit of the colonized and that if the colonizers were to leave, the colonized would revert to their original barbaric state. The RAMSI intervention appears to have convinced many Solomon Islanders that this is true. Most Solomon Islanders with whom I spoke were afraid of what would happen when RAMSI leaves. Perhaps there is no exit strategy “because we don’t believe these people can govern themselves” (Dinnen interview, Aug. 3, 2004). Noble told me, “Solomon Islanders are either rotten to the core or naïve to think they can do it themselves. Solomon Islanders aren’t competent to be partners” much less lead their own country. The failed state label provides justification to override national sovereignty if that state poses a threat to other states; yet who is able to determine what and when is a threat? Powerful countries are, through conventional crisis discourse.

I have focused on Solomon Islands in this dissertation to illuminate that the problems are not simply internal although conventional crisis discourse portrays it that
way. Similar cases circle the world. The discourses of neoliberalism and the war on terror have justified intervention in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Solomon Islands.

**Significance of this Research**

Scholarship has been used as a powerful arm of colonialism, both in the sense of ‘educating’ the native through the creation of western school systems in the colonial territories, and as a tool to create the identities of the colonized as another form of control over the Other. Orientalism is essentially the production of knowledge. Academic pursuits for knowledge were not so much scholarly pursuits, but rather instruments of policy towards the colonized.

Orientalism is not simply something that existed in the past; the processes of Orientalism continue today. Inequalities are embedded in such practices of representation, and then these differences, organized in hierarchical categories, justify and legitimize imperialism. The process of Othering essentializes difference; the group is assumed to be homogenous and unchanging. Othering has often relied on scripts of danger (Campbell 1998b).

Using the Cold War as an example, Said (2004) maintained a hostile Other was quite useful. In his poem, “Waiting for the Barbarians,” Cavafy (1992) states ‘they’ – the barbarians – are a kind of solution. Another way that barbarism functions is by offering “a challenge to the Enlightenment construction of European modernity, threatening to reverse or disrupt its central tenets of rationality, progress and universality” (Neilson 1999, 81). After 9/11, President Bush famously asked, “why do they hate us?” When people are divided into ‘us’ and ‘them,’ it is easier to blame any problems on ‘them.’
Gregory (2004, 22) pointed out this division obscures any wrongdoing by ‘us’ and instead blames “the chronic failure” of certain societies – ‘them’ – “to come to terms with the modern.” I have shown how conventional crisis discourse such as ethnic violence and failed states is another incarnation of Orientalism, separating ‘us’ from ‘them,’ ‘civilization’ from ‘barbarism,’ and ‘Good’ from ‘Evil’ (Gregory 2004).

This sort of critical scholarship is essential for ethical reasons because of the enormous “power involved in the continued dominance of western ways of knowing…” This power influenced not only how ‘they’ were known by ‘us,’ but also how ‘they’ were persuaded to know themselves” (Sharp 2008, 110). The dominance of western epistemology has, in turn, marginalized other ways of knowing; they are no longer considered legitimate and instead are called superstition, folklore or mythology. We need to ground knowledge “in local histories and experiences” in order to avoid logocentric reasoning (Manzo 1991, 28).

Imperialism and colonialism continue today. We cannot be complacent about our past and present imperial record; we need to make visible the violence that has been sanitized by terms such as nation-building (Gregory 2004). Misra (2002) reminds us that the problem with sanitizing our colonial past is that we may support “imperialism as a viable option in contemporary international relations.” No matter how benevolent the intentions, “overwhelming power, combined with a sense of boundless superiority, will produce atrocities.” Misra’s concern has played out through the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 as well as the ideas of British strategist Robert Cooper (2000, 2002b), who maintains that since the end of the Cold War, the world has had a choice “between empire
or chaos,” and that the world needs “a new kind of imperialism.” In a similar vein, after visiting many islands in Oceania, Pockel (1995) concluded the French “are probably the best colonialists around. (They) do seem to be better and more intelligent colonialists than we Anglo-Saxons.” Gonzalez (2004, 257-258) has argued, “Many neoconservatives wholeheartedly agree that such hegemony exists, yet consider it to be not only justifiable but desirable on grounds that such a system is essentially benevolent, moral, and progressive… Every imperial project has its ideological justifications.” Discourses of white man’s burden, economic development, and neoliberalism “have rationalized civilizing missions in different historical periods.”

It was ordinary people who committed extraordinary acts of violence in the process of colonization. If we forget this, we lose sight of the possibility that we might have acted in a similar way if put in similar circumstances. “To acknowledge this… is to recall the part we are called to play… in the performance of the colonial present… If we do not successfully contest these amnesiac histories” of colonialism then there is a good chance we will continue with our colonial present. And we will likely suffer retribution like the attacks of 9/11 (Gregory 2004, 10, 13). The war on terror is “one of the central modalities through which the colonial present is articulated.” The value structure of modernity is “hidden within the official rubric of a ‘war on terrorism’” (U.S. Defense Science Board 2004, 36).

The imaginative geographies that Edward Said described “are constructions that fold distance into difference through a series of spatializations” (Gregory 2004, 17) and have real-life consequences, as Lawrence (2003) writes about the Iraq War: “And we hold
close the dark secret that we could not feel as we do if the bodies being mangled were more like us; that our distance would be impossible if these were white, Christian, English-speaking Westerners.” We need to recognize that “imperialism drapes itself in the legitimacy of international bodies” such as the World Bank, the IMF, and multinational corporations (Bourdieu 2004, 72) and in disciplines of social science including geography.

Colonialism is fundamentally destructive for both the colonizer and the colonized (Memmi 1965). Colonization of the mind happens in addition to the body, which works to change the colonized societies’ “cultural priorities once and for all” (Nandy 1983, vii). The problem is the colonizing way of thinking. Rather than decolonization, Solomon Islander David Gegeo (2001, 493) argues, “True independence comes from dehegemonization, that is, undoing the already established hegemony.”

**How can geographers contribute to the process of dehegemonization?**

Given geography’s imperial roots, how can the discipline be used in an emancipatory way? Roy insists on the need for students to “rethink their pre-conceived atlases” and to “question the geopolitical hierarchies, such as First World and Third World, through which we have ordered the world.” We need to challenge the hegemonic ordering of space into political units such as ‘nation-states’ delineated by ‘borders’ that produce narratives of identity/difference, who is inside/outside, and so on. We need to call “into question the spatial locations of civilization” (Goldberg-Hiller 2005, 265). Categorizations such as ‘the West’ allow us to talk about ‘the Rest.’ It is essential to destabilize geopolitical discourses that function to legitimize and justify systems of
exploitation and dominance in order to facilitate our abilities to think and act differently regarding contemporary problematizations.

One way to dehegemonize our state- and Euro-centric political discourse is to examine our ways of ordering space. We can apply critical theory to enable a rethinking of rigid spatial frameworks that limit our imaginations. When our world maps, for instance, consistently show North on top, people are often surprised to see maps from other orientations. This rigidity can limit our abilities to visualize the world in different ways (Lewis and Wigen 1997) and, perhaps more insidiously, lead people to unconsciously assume that northern countries and peoples are at the top of a cultural hierarchy as well as a cartographic one (Henrikson 1999).

Geographers need to oppose geopolitical language that brings harm to populations both foreign and domestic (Mitchell 2010). The process of Othering is a process of dehumanizing. Gregory (2004, 27) reminds us, “The distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ has consistently overshadowed any distinction between ‘just’ and ‘unjust.’” The way to counteract either/or polarization “is to adopt an attitude of both-and” (Ciaramicoli and Ketcham 1997, 103).

It is essential to critique “academic discourses that reproduce many of the same imbalances of power and agency associated with colonial history” (White 2008, xi). Kabutaulaka told me about his primary education in the Solomons. The first picture that appeared in one of his textbooks showed a boy from Solomon Islands watching the ocean as a ship was about to reach land. The caption for this picture was “Michael is looking to sea at Mendaña’s ship.” The Spanish explorer Mendaña was the first European to land on
the Solomons. Kabutaulaka said that it never occurred to him until he was an adult to wonder how this boy from Solomon Islands had the name ‘Michael’ or where the trousers Michael was wearing came from since neither of these existed in Solomon Islands pre-contact. Likewise, Kabutaulaka and his fellow classmates were taught to sing the Australian Kookaburra song. They knew the melody and all of the words but they did not know that the kookaburra was a bird (interview, July 2004). Such curricula were designed with theories used to colonize. We need to dehegemonize curricula that continue colonial agendas. In Oceania, such dehegemonization can be accomplished by undoing and rejecting the three-way cultural divisions of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia; by conducting “more studies that deconstruct our colonial history and experience;” and by conducting this deconstruction through the lenses of Pacific Islanders’ epistemologies” (Gegeo 2001, 503). Indigenous understandings of the world need to be decolonized. In Hawaiian cosmologies, for instance, Hawaiians understand their home “as center, not periphery” (Kawaharada 2005, 22).

Indigenous scholars including Hau‘ofa (1994, 1998), Wendt (1973, 1974, 1979, 1996), Hereniko (1999, 2000), and Winduo (2000) have been negotiating identity and directions for the future through literature and scholarship. They have offered alternate ways of finding hope and resistance by identifying colonial assumptions that continue to affect Pacific Islanders and by promoting concepts such as the importance of the sea in the lives of Pacific Islanders. These indigenous scholars point out that even though the system of colonialism has formally ended, “Pacific societies are still subjected to Western influence so that even in contemporary times the indigenous mind is still colonized by
Western ways and modes of thinking” (Winduo 2000, 607). Wendt (1996, 648) emphasized the problems inherent in colonial institutions including churches and schools, which “undermined our confidence and self-respect, and made many of us ashamed of our cultures,…inducing in us the feeling that only the foreign is right or proper or worthwhile.”

Colonialism continues in places like Hawai`i but “colonialism is not easily accessible within the dominant neoliberal discourse on the rights and privileges of individuals” (Shapiro 2004, 1). There presently exist numerous critical teaching materials “that puncture the faux realism of neoliberalism with de facto political geographies of neoliberal ideas as a locatable and hence also dislocatable idealism” (Sparke 2006, 361). Films such as No Logo and Life and Debt offer powerful critiques of neoliberal ‘common sense.’

Colonialism also continues in the form of neocolonialism, which is about making people believe that they have no choice about their dependency on imperial powers. Hau`ofa (1994, 151) recognized his own role in “actively participating in our own belittlement” by previously “propagating a view of hopelessness” and came to reject the predominant view of the Pacific: that the inhabitants cannot survive without outside help. Instead, he offered a more positive, empowering alternative in terms of what can be done to reclaim what was stripped away by colonialism. Hau`ofa (1994) viewed water as something that connects islanders rather than acts as a barrier. In keeping with this idea, Hau`ofa used the term ‘Oceania’ to describe the region.
‘Oceania’ projects an image which “recognizes the sea’s preeminence, its capacity to connect individuals and islands… ocean as home, resource and vehicle” (Mishra 1993, 21). Hau‘ofa (1994) delivered an empowering message in the idea that if you allow others to define the region, you allow them to take your power and destiny away from you. He provided concrete examples of how Islanders can and are reclaiming their identities and their autonomy. Returning to the indigenous view that water (the ocean) is usable and livable space, we begin to see the area as a vast ‘sea of islands’ – abundant, resourceful, potentially independent, and self-sustaining – and not as small ‘islands in a far sea,’ or isolated, resource-less, dependent, and hopeless. Hau‘ofa (1994, 152, 155) identified the “historical basis of the view” that Pacific Island States are poor, isolated, and small: “Nineteenth century imperialism erected boundaries that led to the contraction of Oceania, transforming a once boundless world into” the countries and territories that exist today. People were no longer able to move about freely and “were cut off from their relatives abroad, from their far-flung sources of wealth and cultural enrichment.” This view of Pacific Island States as small, poor, and isolated “is true only insofar as people are still fenced in and quarantined… Smallness is a state of mind.”

Jolly (2007, 529) emphasized Hau‘ofa’s success in challenging ‘foreign experts’ including economists at the Australian National University “who constantly typify the Pacific in terms of what it lacks: not only the palpable absence of development or growth, but the deficiencies of scale, isolation, and dependency.” Neemia-Mackenzie (1995) argued ‘islandness’ matters more than ‘smallness’ in terms of how Pacific Island States have interacted with each other and the rest of the world. Wickham (1997) contended
Pacific Islanders find commonalities in their relationships “with the ocean, and (with) traditions that grew out of that relationship over many thousands of years.” Tevi (1997) asserted the ocean “has for centuries formed part of everyday life, and island people are inheritors of a voyaging tradition.” The Pacific waters “don’t separate us, they bind us” (Crocombe 2004). Similarly, Ihimaera (1987) referred to “the huge seamless marine continent” and Oshen (2002), a popular singer from Papua New Guinea, sang about “the liquid continent.”

We need to reclaim alternative models and stories that have been muted or erased by dominant narratives. Since western models of imagining the world have become global models, it is essential to think creatively about alternate ways of imagining the Pacific and Solomon Islands. Geographer Joanne Sharp (2008, 115) argues, “The key is in the infrastructure which produces knowledge about the world” – universities, the media, and the use of English, French and Spanish – because it dominates “the ways in which we understand the world” and because it is through this infrastructure that the West represents the Rest. We need to ask, “How can these global structural conditions be opened up to other voices? Perhaps there is the need for ‘us’ to speak to ‘them’ in their language? What responsibility if any do First World geographers have for using these channels to represent those who are not yet able to represent themselves?”

In my quest to understand how geographical discourse constitutes crises, I chose to focus on Solomon Islands as my case study because it offered a present-day example of the shifting use of such discourse. I gave this choice a lot of thought before proceeding
because of the long history of white outsiders writing about Solomon Islands; I did not want to inadvertently reinforce existing paradigms that sustain hierarchies of inequality.

**Who has the right to write about whom?**

When I first began my fieldwork in Australia in 2003, I attended a lecture at ANU’s Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research entitled “Lost in Space: Building an Indigenous Atlas.” The two speakers talked about their new publication, *The Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia*, which was to be used as a textbook by Australian high school students. The speakers explained they had devised a new geography of Australia, in which they had constructed new regions and consolidated some aboriginal areas. The purpose of this atlas, they said, was to stimulate new questions and to take stereotypes and try to demystify them.

Because both speakers were Caucasian, I asked if they had any indigenous people working on their atlas. The authors answered no, explaining they needed experts for such a textbook. They said, “Indigenous authors with a high degree of education and advanced degrees are few and are in high demand. It is very difficult to get them.” They missed the point that an ‘expert’ Aborigine for an indigenous atlas would have very different qualifications from the western definition of ‘expert.’ Although the authors’ purpose was to “problematize certain ‘truths’ about Aboriginal people,” instead they reinforced the dominant way of seeing the world of Aborigines. A better way to define an expert in this situation might be a person who has an aboriginal worldview since indigenous concepts of space and place are different from Western concepts; for many Aborigines, the sky, for example, is *part* of the world rather than separate from it.
Before this encounter, I had already been thinking about my responsibility as a researcher in terms of writing about Solomon Islands as an outsider. This exchange only strengthened my resolve to do so as ethically as possible. I certainly did not want to reinforce subordinating discourse. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Tuhiwai Smith (1999, 1, 4) explored the ways that scientific research has been a tool of colonialism and imperialism, how “knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized.” Smith articulated the important role that deconstruction plays in decolonizing frameworks and, at the same time, recognized that such decolonizing cannot ameliorate people’s current situations. Yet Smith understood that this sort of work must be done because it *does* make a difference overall in people’s lives. She acknowledged that many people in indigenous communities suffer from poverty, addiction, and abuse and went on to explain why it is crucial to decolonize imperialist frameworks.

Within these sorts of social realities, questions of imperialism and the effects of colonization may seem to be merely academic; sheer physical survival is far more pressing. The problem is that constant efforts by governments, states, societies, and institutions to deny the historical formations of such conditions have simultaneously denied our claims to humanity, to having a history, and to all sense of hope.

Is it possible, as Tuhiwai Smith asks, to use ‘research’ – a tool that has been part of imperial and colonial practices – without reproducing the uneven power relations? Using strategies and words in an attempt to emancipate can bring with it the same oppressive effects if I conduct my research and analysis within a discourse that
reproduces oppression. I understand that if I reproduce certain discourses, I unintentionally reproduce the exercise of power.

As I spoke with Solomon Islanders and realized the extent of the gap between the Australian government’s rhetoric and the experiences of Solomon Islanders, I realized I wanted to use my dissertation in part to give voice to the people of Solomon Islands because their voices are so rarely heard. It is essential to make space for the voices of Pacific Islanders since most of the writings about the Pacific have been penned by outsiders who did not include voices or views of indigenous peoples. Yet, this can be a difficult maneuver for an outsider such as myself. As Hoggart et al. (2002, 263) ask in *Researching Human Geography,* “Who has the right to write about whom?”

In her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak (1988, 271) explores “how the third-world subject is represented within Western discourse,” and how the subaltern is marginalized and excluded. For Spivak, people who are oppressed are not necessarily subaltern; she uses the term to mean people who are outside the hegemonic discourse. Spivak identifies “the problem of speaking for cultural others, for those whose cultural background is considered profoundly unlike one’s own…” (Sharp 2008, 111).

Spivak (1990) does not think privileged people/scholars should remain silent in an attempt *not* to speak for the subaltern. Instead she counsels:

Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced? Then you begin to investigate what it is that silences you, rather than take this very deterministic position – since my skin color is this, since my sex is this, I cannot speak… make it your task not only to learn what is going on there through language, through specific programs of study, but also at the same time through an historical critique of your own position as the
investigating person, then you will see that you have earned the right to criticize, and you will be heard.

Spivak reminds us that the marginalized and excluded are not the only people bound by this system. My study is not simply about whether I should speak for Solomon Islanders; it is also about forces of imperialism and how those forces impact Solomon Islanders. It is about questioning the processes and practices that create and reinforce Western domination, about relationships that encourage exploitation by foreign companies and local elite. It also has to do with my privileged position in the world and my responsibility to work for a more equitable world.

When investigating systems of oppression and domination, it is all too common for people to assume this work needs to be done by those being oppressed, just as many people assume gender studies is about women and colonial studies is about those who have been colonized (Thomas 1994). Yet it is power/knowledge as a symbiotic relationship – the relationship of the dyads men/women and colonizer/colonized – that is important. People who reside figuratively or literally in the ‘center,’ who hold positions of power, who live lives of privilege also need to rethink the existing order. We need to understand and question the discursive practices that reinforce and perpetuate systems of inequality and oppression. The need to decolonize the mind is a challenge for all people, not just for indigenous people (Ngugi 1986, Hau’ofa 1994).

We also need to remember that everyone, even the least powerful, has the power to resist through the creative possibilities of performance (Butler 1999), subversion (Roy 2006), withdrawal (Brown 1999), or refusing “to believe in what is presented” (Sharp 2008, 111). Foucault (1980) sees possibilities in the struggles of the marginalized while
hooks (1990, 341) views the margins as a site of “radical possibility.” Subaltern social
groups are located in such a way that they can “subvert the authority of those who had
hegemonic power” because they are necessary for the majority group’s self-definition
(Bhabha 1996, 204). Roy (2005) emphasizes the importance of “identifying nodes of
power and spaces of resistance and negotiability.”

This dissertation has modeled an approach to knowledge about conflict and peace
which starts with a clear mapping of spatial and racial hierarchies, evaluates the fears of
the powerful, and examines unilateral military intervention for “peace” from the
perspectives of the occupiers and the occupied. The dissertation has found that crisis
discourse precipitates policies resulting in further distress and subordination for islanders.
Oceania is less ‘pacific’ under the parallel governance regime imposed in Solomon
Islands in 2003 and continuing today.
## Appendix 1: Interviews in Australia

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<td>Oct. 6, 2004</td>
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<td>Dobell, Graeme.</td>
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<td>Radio Australia’s Foreign Affairs Correspondent</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Director of Strategy and International Program, Australian Strategic Policy Institute</td>
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## Appendix 2: Interviews in Solomon Islands

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Founder, People First Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawkins, Russell.</td>
<td>Sept. 21, 2004</td>
<td>Tanaghai, Guadalcanal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian filmmaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of Research and Planning, SICHE</td>
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<td>Deputy Special Coordinator, RAMSI</td>
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<td>Pattison, Judith.</td>
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<td>Team Leader, AusAid’s CPRF</td>
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<td>Scales, Ian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANU Ph.D. student</td>
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<td>Constitutional Draftsperson for the National Constitution of Solomon Islands</td>
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I also interviewed individuals in Solomon Islands who are quoted in the text under pseudonyms to protect their identities. These individuals are listed below. Others I interviewed in Solomon Islands appear in the text only identified by where they are from.

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**Abbreviations**

CPRF = Community Peace and Restoration Fund

RSPAS = Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies

SSGM = State, Society & Governance in Melanesia Program

SICHE = Solomon Islands College of Higher Education

SIDT = Solomon Islands Development Trust

UQ = University of Queensland
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