

Introduction

The Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was the first truth commission in the Pacific, established under the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act 2008*¹ (TRC Act) in an effort to ‘promote national unity and reconciliation’ following the civil conflict which troubled the country between 1998 and 2003. The commission was publicly launched in 2008 by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former Chair of the South African TRC, and officially began operations in 2010 for two years. The commission presented its five-volume final report to Prime Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo in February 2012; however, the report has yet to be publicly released or presented to parliament, despite requirements in the Act to do so. The ongoing silence of the government led to the editor of the final report, long-term Solomon Islands resident Bishop Terry Brown, unofficially releasing the report electronically in early 2013.

The TRC conducted exhumations, research, closed hearings and statement taking across six of the nine provinces,² overcoming financial constraints, logistical challenges and difficult terrain. Several regional and thematic public hearings were also held and broadcast on the radio. The final report was handed over to the prime minister within the allocated two-year time frame. In light of these achievements, the Solomon Islands TRC could be considered a ‘success’ inasmuch as it fulfilled its mandated duties and produced a final report — a challenging and remarkable achievement itself. This success, however, was arguably superficial, a performance of reconciliation in the theatre of post-conflict peacebuilding. A wider perspective of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Solomon Islands shows the TRC was a minor player on a crowded stage. Many Solomon Islanders were

unaware of the TRC, and those familiar with its acronym or name were often unaware of its role or mandate.

This paper contends that although the Solomon Islands TRC replicated the structure and operation of a truth commission based on a globalised and placeless theory of best practice in transitional justice, the TRC was not adequately contextualised or integrated with local approaches to reconciliation and peacebuilding and therefore fell short of its ambitious mandate. The commission did, however, produce a final report which in and of itself may serve as a positive outcome of the commission’s work. The experience of the Solomon Islands TRC demonstrates not only the conceptual and practical challenges faced and friction experienced of implementing a truth commission, but also the potential that truth commissions offer for promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts in Melanesia.

This paper is divided into six parts. First, a brief background of the Solomon Islands conflict is outlined. Second, the recent evolution of the peacebuilding and transitional justice fields are discussed to offer a background for the Solomon Islands TRC. Third, the various conflict management and reconciliation practices in Solomon Islands are outlined, leading to the fourth part which introduces and describes the background of the Solomon Islands TRC. The challenges of and failures to adapt the TRC to the local context are illustrated in the fifth part, with a discussion focused on the mistranslation of the meaning and value of both ‘truth’ and ‘reconciliation’ in post-conflict Solomon Islands. Finally, the sixth part argues that despite being initially championed by civil society actors, rather than becoming a ‘hybridised’ institution,



the commission had a veneer of adaptation, and was ‘replicated’ according to normative transitional justice discourse.

Methodology

This paper is informed by two sets of data. First, I draw on my experiences, observations and reflections while working as a research officer at the Solomon Islands TRC for one year between 2011 and 2012. Second, I draw on interviews with TRC staff and stakeholders about their experiences and perspectives of the commission, and reconciliation and peacebuilding in the country more generally.³

Working at the TRC enabled and strengthened my academic research and efforts were made to incorporate lessons learned while working for the TRC into the research design. Of note, there was an overwhelming sense of research fatigue and suspicion among villagers when approached by TRC staff to discuss the period of conflict. Many were reluctant to talk of the past, having done so many times before to no perceivable avail. With this ‘research fatigue’ in mind, and cautious of the sensitive nature of researching peace and conflict as an outsider, I specifically limited interviewees to former colleagues and stakeholders of the TRC and trusted acquaintances — people with whom I had established trust and rapport. The potential for the research to have ongoing and applicable benefits for the Solomon Islands and the Pacific was a significant factor for the research participants. They appeared to value the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with the TRC, and peacebuilding and reconciliation in Solomon Islands generally.

1. Tensions and Transition in Solomon Islands

The conflict in the Solomon Islands, locally referred to as ‘the tensions,’ troubled the nation between 1998 and 2003.⁴ The conflict manifested primarily between militant groups from the two most populated provinces, Malaita and Guadalcanal. At times referred to as a ‘small-scale’ conflict, causing an estimated 200 conflict-related deaths,⁵ its devastating and ongoing effects extended across the entire population. An

estimated 35,000 people (Norwegian Refugee Council 2004, 5) — 10 per cent of the population — were displaced from their homes, and many suffered torture, abduction and sexual violence. The economy was bankrupted, government-run services were severely disrupted and the police force was divided (Allen 2006, 310).

Though often referred to as an ‘ethnic conflict’ or the ‘ethnic tensions,’ the roots of the conflict are embedded in socio-economic, development, political and land issues rather than in an intractable divide between the groups involved (Kabutaulaka 2002, 4; Maebuta et al. 2009, 7). While initial stages of the tensions saw conflict manifest primarily along provincial identity lines, much violence also occurred within the respective groups as old grievances were raised, inflated compensation demanded, and accusations of not supporting the local militants — or being a ‘*spear*’ — were made.

Meanwhile, Solomon Islanders worked together across provincial identities in efforts towards building peace and reconciliation during and after the conflict. Efforts included formation and operation of ‘Women for Peace’ at the height of the conflict, including subgroups from Guadalcanal and Malaita (Paina 2000; Pollard 2000); mediating and peacemaking work by local church organisations such as the Melanesian Brotherhood (see Carter 2006); ex-militants reconciling within prison (Braithwaite et al. 2010, 146); and chiefs and church leaders across the affected areas conducting reconciliations in their communities (Maebuta et al. 2009). The strength of local institutions and their ability to maintain social order meant that most Solomon Islanders were not directly affected by violence and were able to continue with their lives (McDougall and Kere 2011, 142). The late John Roughan, founder of the Solomon Islands Development Trust, recounted a conversation he had when he met two senior Australian police. He asked them to allow him to ask a question: ‘I said “how long would Sydney last if it had no police force, no security force, no army, how long?” They both looked at each other and they said, “about a week.” I said, “That’s alright. This so-called failed state lasted five years.”’⁶

The conflict officially ended with the arrival of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in July 2003. The Australian-led regional mission to ‘restore law and order’ centred on three core pillars of recovery: machinery of government, economic governance, and law and justice. The mission’s efforts involved the removal of weapons, criminal prosecutions, institutional strengthening and capacity-building.⁷ While the country now enjoys relative law and order, peace is nevertheless ‘uneasy’ (Jeffery 2013, 172), and Allen and Dinnen (2010, 323) question if RAMSI’s ‘haste to arrest, prosecute, liberalise and state-build’ allowed sufficient space for indigenous methods of peacemaking.

2. Peacebuilding and Transitional Justice

In contemporary post-conflict contexts, particularly in the case of Solomon Islands and RAMSI, the term peacebuilding is often understood and defined within a liberal peace paradigm. This approach links the restoration of security and peace to state-building and governance, emphasising democratisation, economic reform, human rights and the rule of law, and development programming; thus conflating peacebuilding with state-building (Brown et al. 2010; Richmond 2010, 23). Following the Cold War, international actors such as the United Nations, non-government organisations and international financial institutions became increasingly involved in liberal peace projects linked to peacekeeping operations. The RAMSI intervention closely followed this model for state-building in a post-September 11 world, where ‘the fragility of the state was seen to be potentially destabilising for the region’ (Richmond 2011, 125).

Peace studies and peace researchers, however, employ a broader conception of ‘sustainable peace’ and peacebuilding than the liberal peace agenda and its focus on state-building. From this perspective, violence and conflict are not limited to physical manifestations but extend also to cultural and structural forms (Galtung 1969; Reyhler 2001, 12). So peacebuilding is concerned not only with ending armed conflict and (re)building institutions, but also with transforming relationships and promoting ‘reconciliation’ (Lambourne 2009,

34–35; Lederach 1997). For the purpose of this paper, the latter holistic and transformative definition of peacebuilding is the benchmark against which the Solomon Islands TRC will be considered, as this is the approach instigators of the TRC initially aimed for. This is evident in the TRC’s initial terms of reference and mandate, which demonstrate goals for similarly holistic and reconciliatory outcomes.⁸

Evolving as a separate field to peace and conflict studies, transitional justice is similarly concerned with post-conflict peacebuilding. Initially, the term ‘transitional justice’ was used in contexts of political change, from repressive or undemocratic regimes to ones seeking accountability or justice for past abuses (Lambourne 2009, 29; Teitel 2003, 69). Later, the term was defined by the United Nations in relation to post-conflict peace and reconciliation goals (Lambourne 2009, 29; UNSC 2004). The International Center for Transitional Justice defines transitional justice as ‘the set of judicial and non-judicial measures that have been implemented by different countries in order to redress the legacies of massive human rights abuses’.⁹ Measures may include amnesties, lustration policies, prosecutions, compensation, reparations, memorialisation, institutional reform and truth commissions.

Truth commissions became popular as an accountability mechanism in contexts where truth had been concealed or withheld by governments and was therefore highly valued. However, truth commissions have since become standardised and globalised following conflict or political repression, and an active domain of post-conflict policy practised and supported by the United Nations, regional organisations, bilateral donors and governments around the world (Shaw and Waldorf 2010, 3; Sriram 2007, 583; Teitel 2003; UNSC 2004). Truth commissions are generally officially sanctioned, temporary, non-judicial investigative bodies mandated to conduct activities such as statement taking, public hearings, exhumations, research and investigations for the production of a final report that describes the patterns of abuses and violence, its antecedents, causes and consequences (OHCHR 2006, 1). While they

do not replace the need for prosecutions and formal judicial processes, truth commissions may complement these processes, especially in situations in which prosecutions are not likely (OHCHR 2006, 1). Globally, more than 40 truth commissions have operated to date; however, they vary in name, composition and purpose. Like restorative justice measures, truth commissions focus on victims as well as perpetrators, and their affected communities, giving voice to those who may otherwise go unheard. Truth commissions are not implemented by overarching international law, nor are their form or function necessarily directed or prescribed (Millar 2011, 179). Earlier commissions, however, have served as templates for later iterations resulting in a set of globalised norms in their implementation. Truth commissions share common characteristics that ‘are included based on their theorized ability to produce certain social effects in response to particular abuses of the past’ (Millar 2011, 180). Truth commissions operate under premises such as that the process of recovering the truth will result in psychological healing; that without truth, there is no justice; and that without knowledge of the past, human rights violations will recur.

Advocates of truth-seeking claim commissions deter future crimes, assure justice, promote social and psychological healing, outline needed reforms, and promote reconciliation and respect for human rights (Freeman and Hayner 2003). Yet debates persist on whether these claims are compelling, or the relationship between truth-telling and reconciliation or peacebuilding justified (Chapman 2009b; Mendeloff 2004; Tepperman 2002). David Mendeloff systematically considers the claims made of the peace-promoting benefits of truth commissions and concludes that they ‘rest far more on faith than on sound logic or empirical evidence’ (2004, 356). Scholars also question the validity of truth commissions in the range of cultural contexts in which they are applied, inquiring how official transitional justice discourses are appropriated, negotiated, contested and transformed (Hinton 2010; Kent 2011; Millar 2011; Ross 2010; Shaw 2005; Shaw and Waldorf 2010; Sriram 2007).

Both peacebuilding and transitional justice fields are concerned with ‘reconciliation’. The term is often stipulated as a goal of truth commissions and sometimes included in their title, as in the Solomon Islands TRC. Reconciliation after conflict has increasingly become a priority as post-Cold War conflicts occur within, rather than between, states. Sharing the same geographical areas and often linked through marriage and other social and economic ties, former combatants cannot be easily separated and must learn to coexist (Assefa 2001, 339). Reconciliation is associated with a range of approaches: the psychosocial, legal, religious, socio-economic and anthropological, and is difficult to define (Millar 2011, 177). Definitions range from referring to simply the absence of violence, to also including coexistence, positive relationships, and intergroup harmony and cooperation (Bloomfield 2006; Mendeloff 2004, 365–66). Reconciliation can also be distinguished between the individual level and national and political reconciliation. Truth commissions are often associated with larger social or political processes of reconciliation.

Localising Peacebuilding

Largely subsumed by ‘the liberal peacebuilding apparatus’, transitional justice is subject to similar critiques as the liberal peace agenda, such as it may be ‘externally imposed and inappropriate for the political and legal cultures in which they are set up’ (Sriram 2007, 579 and 586). Dominant, liberal post-conflict approaches are criticised for viewing peacebuilding as a series of technocratic tasks that focus narrowly on democratisation and institutional reform. Critics argue that local dynamics, such as local sources of strength or resilience, and the affective dimensions of peacebuilding such as trust-building and reconciliation, are consequently neglected (Bleiker and Brigg 2011; Brown et al. 2010, 103; Ginty 2003, 125–26; Richmond 2011, 115). Critical scholars increasingly place emphasis on the value of grassroots, local, indigenous and hybridised models of conflict resolution, peacemaking and state-building in what are referred to as ‘hybrid’ or ‘liberal-local’ approaches (Bleiker and Brigg 2011; Boege 2007; Boege et al. 2008; Ginty 2003, 2008; Richmond 2011; Wallis

2012). Transitional justice scholars similarly emphasise the need to localise mechanisms to better adapt to or suit the local context and call for empirical research evaluating successes, limitations and impacts to inform policy decisions (Baxter 2009; Shaw and Waldorf 2010).

Local approaches, while 'necessarily rooted in specific communities and thus may have highly localised elements' generally share a number of common traits that lend them to more sustainable peacebuilding (Ginty 2010, 349). These include engaging respected local figures with moral authority; involving a public element making them more transparent and accessible (such as being physically located in the community or between disputing communities); using oral traditions such as storytelling and publicly airing grievances; emphasising relationships rather than a definitive agreement; and lastly, relying on local resources (Ginty 2010, 349–50). Each of these elements is relevant to conflict management processes in Solomon Islands, as discussed in the following section.

Those advocating hybrid or liberal-local approaches to peace and state-building are aware of the limitations and risks involved. Caution is made against lapsing into cultural relativism or reifying the 'local' as a homogenous category and placing it in a dichotomous relationship with the 'external', 'liberal', or 'Western' (Wallis 2012, 631). References to 'customary ways' should not be interpreted as practices of the precolonial or pre-contact past, nor should 'custom' be viewed as static, 'but remarkably dynamic and adaptable' (Brown et al. 2010, 102). In this paper, the term 'local' is used to refer to the everyday social reality of Solomon Islanders, which may include a variety of customary structures or processes, spiritual and religious beliefs, state institutions and global influences (Richmond 2011, 117). Similarly, 'hybrid' is not limited to mutual accommodation between local and liberal approaches, but also refers to a combination of the multitude and diverse forms of local practices within Solomon Islands, which Solomon Islanders regularly navigate when mediating across cultural differences (McDougall

and Kere 2011). Limitations and drawbacks of hybridity are identified in the literature to warn against romanticising 'the local', and to prompt researchers and policymakers to contextualise responses and judge techniques according to their efficacy (Ginty 2010, 359–60; Peterson 2012, 12). While most post-conflict contexts already employ a mix of peacebuilding mechanisms that draw from local and external techniques, the key issue is 'who determines the mix' (Ginty 2010, 360–61).

Although policymakers and scholars recognise the value of local models of conflict management and adapting peacebuilding and transitional justice mechanisms to local contexts, in practice this view is often neglected, or superficially included as another criterion to be met. The foundation assumptions underlying truth commissions continue to be reiterated without significant modification as TRCs are replicated around the globe (Shaw and Waldorf 2010, 4). While truth commissions promote a host of seemingly universal goods such as human rights, justice, healing, peace and reconciliation, these ideas can be abstract and ambiguous and may not necessarily resonate with local sociocultural understandings (Hinton 2010, 11). When mimicked or replicated, the original intention and meaning can be easily lost or mistranslated, and the processes carried out in name only. This results in a performance which, on paper, may meet criteria for 'best practice' or 'success', but in reality falls short of a meaningful process congruent with local world views and cultures, capable of resonating with the population (Ginty 2010, 356). Sally Engle Merry (2006) uses the term 'vernacularisation' to refer to the process whereby intermediaries attempt to frame globally circulating ideas and practices, such as human rights, into local conceptual understandings — a messy process of translation between international and local actors. She depicts the process as occurring along a continuum:

At one end is replication, a process in which the imported institution remains largely unchanged from its transnational prototype. The adaptation is superficial and primarily decorative. At the other end is hybridization,

a process that merges imported institutions and symbols with local ones, sometimes uneasily. (Merry 2006, 44)

Although the Solomon Islands TRC was instigated locally, implemented through an Act of parliament, staffed mostly by Solomon Islanders, and partly funded by the Solomon Islands Government, rather than becoming a 'hybridised' institution, the commission was 'replicated' according to normative transitional justice discourse. Shifting from the civil society sphere where it began, the Solomon Islands TRC became a responsibility of the government and thus moved to a domain with less trust and traction to operate such a sensitive process regarding 'matters of the heart'. Foreign consultants and the International Center for Transitional Justice provided welcome support and guidance; two of the commissioners were foreigners; and being mostly funded by international donors, namely the European Union, United Nations Development Programme, AusAID and NZAID, the Solomon Islands TRC had to comply with standardised global models of organisation, governance and administration. While these external actors provided welcome support, guidance and funding, the TRC was simultaneously pulled closer to the globalised transitional justice model and further from a hybridised and localised approach.

3. Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands

Around 85 per cent of Solomon Islanders live in rural areas on customary-owned land and practise subsistence livelihoods in village settings (Allen and Dinnen 2010, 303). Identity is primarily centred around *wantok* or tribe loyalties rather than the state, as Kabutaulaka explains: 'For many Solomon Islanders national consciousness is often only skin deep: peel it off and you find a person with allegiances to a particular *wantok* or ethnic group; most people carry competing identities between their island and their country' (Kabutaulaka 2002, 4). While Solomon Islanders live mostly in rural or remote areas, these villages 'can be strikingly cosmopolitan places, where

residents are constantly dealing with people who speak different languages and where intercultural marriages are common' (McDougall and Kere 2011, 147).

Social norms and local-level systems for governing conflict and reconciliation are rooted in a combination of *kastom*, Christianity and introduced forms of Western governance, and Solomon Islanders are adept at mediating across cultural differences and managing conflict 'by drawing from within and beyond their traditions as circumstances require' (McDougall and Kere 2011, 145). A recent World Bank report for the Justice Delivered Locally project found that in local-level disputes, the *kastom* system was 'by far the most commonly invoked' (Allen et al. 2013, 34). The weak reach of the state into rural areas means that state institutions are peripheral to the majority of Solomon Islanders and security and justice is mostly provided by customary or local institutions and actors. Christianity, however, is a unifying force across the country and, when linked with *kastom* and indigenous practices of reconciliation, has proved useful in managing and transcending conflict (Braithwaite et al. 2010, 15; McDougall and Kere 2011, 155–56).

Kastom, a Pijin term widely used across the Solomon Islands, is highly subjective and without formal definition, taking on 'specific historical, political and place-based meanings' (Allen et al. 2013, 6). Broadly defined, *kastom* encompasses indigenous ideologies, relationship to and management of land, moral frameworks, dispute management, gender relations and social organisation (White 1993, 492). It also contains a political dimension, serving to empower indigenous traditions and practices within communities and as a stance towards the state or outside actors (Akin 2004, 300; Allen 2013, 16). *Kastom* is not, however, dichotomous from either the West or 'modern'. It is dynamic, fluid and evolving, existing alongside and in interplay with Western forms of governance and Christianity (Allen et al. 2013, 34; Brown 2008, 190). Failure to enable and support conflict prevention at the village level by chiefs and churches has been a crucial weakness in the justice system: 'This was the form of justice that

the People's Surveys showed 90 per cent of citizens value most highly' (Braithwaite et al. 2010, 139).

Customary approaches to conflict management vary across Solomon Islands, yet they share important features such as the exchange of goods or compensation, speeches, and opening a space for interaction (McDougall and Kere 2011, 151). The mutual exchange of traditional items of wealth, such as shell money or feather money, pigs or taro, as well as modern goods or money, serve to 'cover' the offence or conflict, after which it is usually not appropriate to speak of again (McDougall and Kere 2011, 153). This process of reconciliation, or 'doing custom', addresses the issue through a process of restoring productive working relationships and societal equilibrium (McDougall and Kere 2011, 151; Pollard and Wale 2004, 588). As Father Arkwright explains:

Compensation is a word that comes with a vast variety of meanings and ramifications. Mainly it has something to do with restoration or recognition of injured dignity or status. It is what is due to the person, not in material possessions but to restore a relationship. (Arkwright 2003, 181)

Reconciliation in Solomon Islands is centred around this primarily interpersonal, inter-familial and intercommunal process. As one TRC research officer explained:

The understanding of people in the village, if they say reconciliation, there will be two parties, and there will be a symbolic exchange of maybe goods and money. Which symbolises that you're sorry and things like that. Not necessarily repaying everything ... It symbolises understanding that a problem has happened, and we forget it. It should be addressed. And then, don't do it again ... If there's any problem next time, it will mean it's a different problem.¹⁰

Locating post-conflict peacebuilding practices into this local contextual understanding of reconciliation is necessary to understand the potential effectiveness of a TRC in Melanesia.

4. Solomon Islands TRC: Visions and Background

Transitional justice in post-conflict Solomon Islands has not been formally planned, yet mechanisms have been adopted 'organically' and on an 'ad-hoc basis' (Jeffery 2013). The Solomon Islands TRC was first proposed at the height of the tensions in 2000 by a Peace Committee established within the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA). It was seen as a potential means to 'build national unity' through truth-telling, reconciliation and justice or amnesty processes (SICA 2002, 6). A Truth and Reconciliation Reference Group was established following a church leaders' conference. The reference group received advice from the principal legal counsel to the South African TRC, who at the time was the head of the Human Rights Unit at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, and a framework for public consultation was developed and distributed (SICA 2002, 2). The framework, published in a small pink pamphlet, noted sociopolitical factors at the time which were favourable to a truth commission process, such as the relatively short period of armed conflict, the limited number of incidents and perpetrators, that former militants continued to retain weapons and exercise influence, that prosecutions for conflict-related crimes had yet to occur, and that future peace was uncertain (SICA 2002, 5–6). The strength of *kastom*, reconciliation traditions and Christianity, as well as an impartial and independent judiciary, were also noted as local strengths conducive to a TRC process (ibid.). Truth was seen as a means to reconciliation, which would be the primary outcome of the process:

The goal of the process is to build national unity. The process should target reconciliation as its primary outcome, but we must find and know the truth in order to reconcile ... Reconciliation between victim and perpetrator, perpetrator and village and *within the nation as a whole* should be the primary goal of the truth, justice and reconciliation process in Solomon Islands. (SICA 2002, 6 and 11)

The SICA Peace Committee conducted a community-wide dialogue on the proposed TRC framework from November 2002 until August 2003. Response from the consultations was positive; however, with the arrival of RAMSI and its law and order agenda, momentum for a TRC stalled. The SICA Peace Committee morphed into SICA and lost momentum to advocate for and champion the TRC.¹¹ Neither peacebuilding nor reconciliation were included in RAMSI's mandate, nor did RAMSI work in direct partnership with the Ministry for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, a government ministry that did not come under any of RAMSI's core pillars (Braithwaite et al. 2010, 86). Without the backing of RAMSI, or a strong leader or organisation to champion the TRC, reconciliation was 'crowded' off the policy agenda (Braithwaite et al. 2010, 81).

Following a change in the Solomon Islands Government in 2006, there was a policy of support for 'reconciliation' and the TRC (Braithwaite et al. 2010, 86). After a consultative committee assessed and concluded there was public support for a truth commission, a steering committee was established to consult with relevant stakeholders in the peace and reconciliation process and to draft the TRC Bill. Parliament passed the TRC Act in 2008, and in 2009 the commission was hurriedly prepared to be officially launched by Desmond Tutu during his pending visit. The rush to launch the TRC meant it began on the back foot, working tirelessly to meet day-to-day operational challenges, to the neglect of broader conceptual considerations. A former staff member told of his attempt to delay the launch of the TRC, but:

[I] could sense that it would be really embarrassing for the government if Tutu came and there was no TRC ... We were not prepared. The logistics were not there, we didn't have the mechanisms or the processes in place when we decided to get started ... I feel that we could have done better. We didn't have the opportunity to be able to really think through how we are going to make the concept of truth and truth-seeking and reconciliation work in the Solomon Islands.¹²

Momentum generated from the highly publicised launch in April 2009 dwindled as the TRC was then delayed until the arrival of the international commissioners in October. When the TRC officially began its operations in 2010, RAMSI had been present in the country for over six years. Peace, in a limited sense, had been restored and the 'tension trials' were mostly complete. The context the TRC was eventually established in was therefore vastly different from the one in which it was conceived. Susan Harris-Rimmer suggests that from a peacebuilding perspective, the Solomon Islands TRC was unusual, geared as it was towards nation-building rather than accountability (2010, 9).

The commission comprised five commissioners: three nationals and two non-nationals, as stipulated by the Act. The foreign commissioners were chosen through a United Nations recruitment process and included a prominent leader from Fiji and a former commissioner from the TRC in Peru. The three national commissioners were chosen to represent the three provinces most affected by the conflict: Guadalcanal, Malaita and Western Province. Two of the commissioners were female.

The TRC was established as an independent statutory authority with an initial time frame of one year, which was later extended to two years. Its mandate was to 'promote national unity and reconciliation' through examining the nature, antecedents, root causes, and accountability or responsibility for and the extent of the human rights violations or abuses that occurred between 1 January 1998 and RAMSI's arrival on 23 July 2003. It was also mandated to consider the impacts on the health, education, and legal and other sectors, and to devise policy options that may prevent repetitions or similar situations in the future (TRC Act, 5[1]). The commission's functions included investigation and reporting on the causes, nature and extent of the violations and abuses that occurred during the tensions (TRC Act, 5[2a]). The commission was also mandated to 'work to restore the human dignity of victims and promote reconciliation' by providing an opportunity for

victims and perpetrators to give personal accounts of their experiences, 'creating a climate which fosters constructive interchange between victims and perpetrators' (TRC Act, 5[2c]). The mandate stipulated that special attention be given to the subject of sexual abuses and the experiences of children within the conflict. The commission was not able to provide amnesties or compensation.

To achieve its mandate, the commission conducted statement taking across the country and compiled these data into a central database. It also conducted regional and thematic public hearings, which were televised and relayed on the radio; research and investigations; closed hearings; and exhumations. The findings of the commission were produced in a final report which offered a narrative of the conflict and its antecedents, and documented excerpts of the statements, testimony and transcripts of the public hearings. The report also presented an analysis of human rights violations during the conflict and provided recommendations to the Solomon Islands Government on 'policy options or measures that may prevent similar situations or a repetition of such events in the future' (TRC Act, 5[1d]). Upon completion, the commission was mandated to hand the final report to the prime minister who, upon receiving the report, was to 'cause it to be laid before Parliament and the report be made available to the public' and 'as far as practicable implement the recommendations of the report' (TRC Act, 17[1-4]).

In February 2012, the commission presented its five-volume final report to Solomon Islands Prime Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo at an official ceremony in Honiara. The prime minister accepted the report, saying that 'it marks the closure of an important chapter to a long process of reconciliation and truth-seeking' (Island Sun 2012). Dozens of copies of the hefty report were hurriedly printed to meet the deadline and provided to the government; however, it was not released or tabled in parliament. Public calls for its official release have been, and continue to be, made in the national newspapers and on prominent Solomon Islands social media websites such as Forum Solomon Islands International.

In April 2013, the final report was unofficially released electronically by its editor, Bishop Terry Brown, who was critical of the government's silence and inaction. In a public release Brown stated that since the handover of the final report:

the Prime Minister has refused to pass on the Report to Parliament, citing at different times its large size and 'sensitivity'. The Report has not even been shared with the Ministry of National Reconciliation, Unity and Peace, who would have the primary responsibility for implementing it. (Brown 2013)

Brown disagreed with the government's claim that the report's release will reignite conflict in the country:

I do not believe this. The Report is very accurate and comprehensive and gives proper recognition to the victims of the conflict whose stories should be heard. It is not good enough to forgive the perpetrators and forget the victims, which seems to be the approach of the Government. (Brown 2013)

More than a year after being unofficially released, the report has been accessed by Solomon Islanders and foreigners worldwide. At the time of writing, Prime Minister Lilo has yet to publicly release the report, table it in parliament or address its recommendations.

5. (Mis)translating Truth and Reconciliation in Solomon Islands

As TRCs proliferate in post-conflict situations, earlier commissions serve as templates for later iterations, resulting in a set of international, globalised norms. While some adjustments are made to the structure and function of TRCs to better suit local demands, the normative discourse underlying transitional justice — that truth-telling is cathartic and leads to reconciliation, justice and peace — continues relatively unchanged (Millar 2011, 178). Meanwhile, the meaning and value of both 'truth' and 'reconciliation' are translated, or vernacularised, into the local contexts in which they are implemented, resulting in different expectations and experiences in each circumstance.

In practice, the Solomon Islands TRC suffered from a lack of definition or clarity of how ‘truth’ and ‘reconciliation’ are translated, defined and valued locally. Conflating both terms into the one process and title, without a clear definition relevant to the Solomon Islands context, served to set unrealistic and ambitious expectations of what the TRC would do or achieve.

Truth

Truth-seeking was a valued goal for earlier truth commissions in contexts where truth had been strategically concealed or withheld by governments, dictators or ruling parties. In these cases, providing a public account of violations was believed to be a form of justice itself, as it offered a means to acknowledgement and accountability, which had previously been denied (Millar 2011, 180). Following the widely publicised South African TRC and its emphasis on public hearings and ‘reconciliation’, the process of truth-seeking in earlier commissions was largely replaced by truth-telling (ibid.). Yet debates persist over the universal applicability of the purported benefits of truth, and whether the consequences of truth-seeking are indeed positive, inconsequential, or dangerous (Brahm 2007; Mendeloff 2004). Arguments for truth-telling draw on Western models of psychotherapy to suggest the process is cathartic, and assume that participants are ‘autonomous individuals with the capacity to choose freely how to engage in institutional processes’ (Ross 2010, 75). As Priscilla Hayner notes, it is often asserted that ‘simply giving victims and witnesses a chance to tell their stories to an official commission ... can help them regain their dignity and begin to recover’ (2011, 146).

Many statement takers in the Solomon Islands TRC spoke of encountering resistance to truth-telling for its own, cathartic sake; as one explained: ‘This idea that people can tell their stories and then they feel free ... I think in Melanesian culture, that doesn’t really work. Unless there is some kind of compensation. Most people did not want to give their statement.’¹³ The act of asking about the conflict was considered largely incongruent with local *kastom*, as another statement taker explained:

Actually, statement taking contradicts some of our culture in Solomon Islands. Here, what you find, is that anything in the past from a long time ago, people like to forget and don’t want to talk about it. They’ll say, ‘oh, it’s finished’. In the area I worked in, I found that the statement takers always came across a challenge where the people say ‘what are you doing with what we tell you?’ Because it’s part of their tradition and culture, so you should put in place something. Traditionally you would use pigs or money, we call it a *chupu* [form of compensation in Guadalcanal]. You must do that before you ask questions from a long time ago. So it’s really contradicting our people, to go and dig back and talk about something that’s already past.¹⁴

Fiona Ross highlights the limitations of the cathartic model for women’s involvement in the South African TRC, arguing that ‘it is not necessarily a universal or transhistorical model and does not take account of the diversity of ways in which experience is articulated or otherwise made known and addressed’ (2010, 82). Ross’s explanation of how this impacted women’s testimony at the South African TRC — with many choosing silence — resonates with women’s experience of the Solomon Islands TRC:

In contexts in which women are often blamed for the harm they experience, especially when that harm is sexual, it ought not be surprising that many would prefer not to speak, or find themselves unable to do so, particularly when doing so incriminates not just another individual, but a set of cultural assumptions and the social forms that they shape. It takes courage both to speak of harms done and to be silent in their face and aftermath. (Ross 2010, 81)

Female statement takers at the Solomon Islands TRC echoed this sentiment, explaining that their local cultures and *kastoms* prohibited disclosure about personal and sensitive topics, making their job difficult. A women’s submission to the TRC noted the value and meaning of women’s silence:

‘For women, sometimes their silence is louder, stronger and safer than anything they say out loud because of the risks involved in telling their stories’ (Fangalasu et al. 2011, 13).

Traditional taboos, *kastom* and culture may inhibit what ‘truth’ Solomon Islanders feel comfortable to discuss and public truth-telling is not necessarily the most appropriate means in which to gather information: ‘Finding a voice in which to speak and a linguistic form that might do justice to experience is thus not simple’ (Ross 2010, 83). During research in the villages of the Weathercoast, south Guadalcanal, for example, women would readily recount the loss of their gardens, the pillage of their pigs and crops, and the destruction of their kitchen and utensils as major abuses they endured during the conflict. Stories of personal or sexual violence were much less forthcoming. Speaking in their roles as mothers and providers for their families was an accessible and acceptable standpoint for their narratives of trauma. Sexual violence, or other human rights violations such as killings, torture and ill-treatment, however, were not topics that could be discussed easily, if at all.

On a positive note, it was generally agreed among interviewees that documenting ‘truth’ — as in the narrative and events of the conflict and the people and parties involved — was a positive outcome of the commission. Although there was no formal policy of secrecy, many Solomon Islanders were unaware of — and curious about — the events and details of the conflict, for reasons such as the isolation of the most affected communities, fear instilled in many victims, the continuing presence of ex-combatants in some communities, and the cultural practices of shame and silence which may prohibit disclosure after an issue has been reconciled. One staff member said that for her, attending a public hearing was:

A unique experience, because as a Solomon Islander, and I stay in Honiara, I hear rumours only, about what happened. I didn’t experience the ethnic tensions first hand ... I just heard about it only and I saw it on the news and heard about it on the radio, like

that. But for me to actually come face to face with the victims, no. This public hearing, it changed how I see the crisis that happened.¹⁵

Another interviewee noted that while people talked among themselves about what was happening during the conflict, that ‘cultural reconciliation doesn’t deal with truth’. In this regard, the TRC had potential to create a legitimate space to have a directed discussion and ‘a chance to deal with what happened and why’.¹⁶

While globally ‘the truth business, in short, is booming’, critics question whether it is feasible to even ‘establish anything that should actually be called, with a straight face, “truth”’ (Tepperman 2002, 129–39). The nature of truth is a ‘complex and elusive concept’, especially in post-conflict, divided societies, and defining truth a contentious task (Chapman 2009a, 96). The final report of a TRC and the ‘truth’ it documents must be understood in the context in which it was produced. With a mandate guiding the topics, themes and time periods to be examined, the Solomon Islands TRC was limited to hearing a certain truth, framed by particular questions centred on human rights as defined in international law but not yet frequently adopted or accepted by Solomon Islands communities. One statement taker explained how she translated the questions on the statement taking forms so they would be culturally acceptable to discuss:

We turn the questions around, make it inside a story or so forth, so that they can tell their story. Because I think some of the questions about the human rights violations, they are really very direct questions ... Some other statement takers I worked with, in the workshop, we talked about that too. We talked about how even though we have these direct questions, we must not directly ask them. You must talk around the question, or put it in a story, then at the end you can ask it.¹⁷

While the statement takers worked hard to navigate these frictions, translating not just the form’s questions into vernacular but asking them in a culturally acceptable way, the overall methodology

of the TRC was not in accord with the context and could have been better adapted to fit the nature of research and reconciliation in Solomon Islands. Approaching villages and asking for ‘victims of the conflict’ to come forward and document a statement was perceived by many statement takers to be incongruent with local *kastoms* and protocols for conflict resolution. The lack of anonymity in villages also precluded the ability to conduct the process in a safe and secure environment. Many Solomon Islanders were hesitant to participate, so staff explained that the TRC would compile a final report, including recommendations for future policy, reforms and reparations, based on the information it gathered. Without this opportunity to lobby for future benefits, many would not have provided statements (Vella 2014, 7).

The subsequent data analysis, which was framed primarily around human rights, was also ill-fitting for the context and a strain on the TRC’s limited resources and staff capacity. The statements received by the TRC were translated and analysed into this human rights framework; boxes were ticked according to which of the human rights violations were identified in the statement giver’s story.¹⁸ While standard to global discourses of transitional justice and a worthwhile task itself, documenting narratives of the conflict in human rights language and frameworks, which do not resonate in Solomon Islands communities, risks isolating the very people the TRC aims to reach. Hayner acknowledges that the standard methodology of TRCs in the form of taking detailed testimony to be fed into a database requires so much energy that ‘this approach tends to define the very nature of a truth commission process, and through its coding and data entry sheets, the truth that the commission will collect’ (2011, 82). Instead, she asks if it would be worthwhile for future truth commissions to reconsider their methodology and not simply follow the path of previous commissions. Indeed, if ‘reconciliation’ or peacebuilding are the goals or intended outcomes of the TRC process, then for a Melanesian context, the methodology of a truth commission would need to be seriously reworked.

In a country where storytelling is a familiar and valued component of local reconciliation practices, government-sanctioned national truth-telling has potential as a means of reconciliation in Solomon Islands. Documenting the ‘truth’ and producing a final report, however, cannot be the end goal: the potential of a TRC for peacebuilding in Melanesia depends on the process in which the stories are told and received, and how that information is used for future action and justice, such as through the adoption and implementation of the recommendations (Vella 2014, 10). Reflecting on previous truth commissions, this was recognised by advocates of the Solomon Islands TRC at the outset: ‘From the experiences of other transitional societies, it is critical to the long-term success of the peace process that the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission be mandatory on the government for implementation’ (SICA 2002, 4).

Reconciliation

The Solomon Islands TRC used the term ‘reconciliation’ in its title and as a key objective in its mandate, yet did not define the term. In the peacebuilding literature, reconciliation suffers from a lack of definitional clarity: its ‘basic problem is that no-one agrees how to define it or do it’ (Bloomfield 2006, 4). In the transitional justice discourse, ‘the strength of a truth commission process is in advancing reconciliation on a national or political level’ (Hayner 2011, 183). As already mentioned, the term ‘reconciliation’ is widely used in Pijin and Solomon Islanders have a strong understanding of how to ‘do’ reconciliation, usually through Christian and customary processes on personal, familial or communal levels. Rather than pursue large-scale ‘national’ reconciliation, Joy Kere, then permanent secretary of the Ministry for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace noted:

reconciliation has to happen within the provinces, not just between them — it has to happen within communities and families ... Much of the killing, atrocities, and violence occurred within extended families. We have to rebuild, ward by ward, community by

community, tribe by tribe, family by family.
(Kere in McDougall and Kere 2011, 144)

At its conception, a reconciliation program was a priority of the commission's work. Reconciliation was seen at the time by SICA to be comparable to restorative justice processes that would occur alongside the truth process: 'It does not await the end of the issuing or publication of the truth report' (SICA 2002, 11). The reconciliation process was to involve a combination of custom law and chiefs as well as churches (ibid.). Later, the Steering Committee's background and terms of reference of the TRC also reflected a holistic understanding of reconciliation, proposing it aims to 'transform and rebuild public confidence in the state institutions'; resides in 'the substantial redress of past inequities in social and economic justice'; integrates rather than suppresses victims' feelings such as 'anger, sorrow and trauma'; and 'tackle[s] the deep rooted social imbalances which at the most fundamental structural level, underpins the culture of violence' (TRCSC 2008, 27). The TRC Act, however, did not stipulate *how* reconciliation would be conducted or promoted, but implied that it would manifest as a result of the TRC's truth-seeking activities.

Including the term 'reconciliation' in the title of the TRC gestured towards a process of reconciliation, as understood locally, which was ultimately misleading, as one interviewee explained:

Initially I found it hard to understand what the concept behind [the TRC] was. But the thing that stood out was the word 'reconciliation'. I mean, that word comes out any time the country goes through some turmoil. So when I looked at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that word 'reconciliation' stood out in my mind. I thought it would be something to make everyone reconcile ... When I look around, people around the country and surrounding me, they had the same impression which I initially had. That this would be about reconciliation. But as I later realised when I went through my work, I saw that ok, it's just *promoting* reconciliation, but it's not *doing* reconciliation.¹⁹

The purpose of seeking truth was generally assumed to be in relation to a process of facilitating reconciliation, and not for the documentation of the conflict or the purported cathartic effect of truth-telling alone. In the minds of many workers at the TRC there was to be a distinct reconciliation program, which just never eventuated. A reconciliation program conducted alongside the truth-seeking program would have encouraged greater ownership over the whole process:

For example, with the TRC now, what we are doing now is that we have written a report and submitted it to government, and then after reconciliation will happen. That is how I understand the process now. But I think if we want people involved in it, and at the same time to give people ownership, I think sometimes it's good for us to spend some money to bring together people from the villages.²⁰

When it became clearer to TRC staff that the commission was not going to initiate or facilitate reconciliation as practised locally, hopes were, and arguably still are, pinned on the recommendations in the final report. As a statement taker explained, without the 'exchange' of government-lead reconciliation in return for their stories, those who gave their statements feel short-changed, and contrary to the ideal goal of reconciliation are further angered by the government's inaction: 'What the TRC did, most people are not really satisfied with. They said, "what's the outcome where you come and take our stories only?" So that's people inside the communities, they are stuck now.'²¹

While reconciliation processes and ceremonies vary across Solomon Islands, the TRC had potential to facilitate 'reconciliation' as understood locally. As Braithwaite et al. (2010, 148) noted in their study, the TRC had potential to 'reconnect citizens to thinking about reconciliation as something people do between one another, and communities do with each other'. For the TRC to have fulfilled this role, however, it needed a thoughtful and dedicated reconciliation program and, arguably, a longer time period in which to operate.²²

6. Veneer of Adaptation: Leaving Localised Peacebuilding Behind

The Solomon Islands TRC began with potential to be ‘hybridised’ — operated and contextualised for the Solomon Islands setting. Initial planning documents by the Steering Committee noted the importance of the TRC reflecting the ‘unique situation of a country’ (TRCSC 2008, 13) and ‘looking into developing sensitivities to traditional and grassroots practices and build these to achieve meaningful post-conflict reconstruction that is sustainable’ (TRCSC 2008, 14). These initial aspirations displayed promising ideals but were not realised. In practice there was a veneer of adaptation — ceremony and theatre which presented an image of congruence with local culture but with little more than a token commitment to *kastom* and indigenous reconciliation practices. From its conception, the TRC was driven by two mutually reinforcing influences, both navigating the TRC away from the civil society and church network initiatives which saw the TRC introduced, and leading it away from the people whom it was intended to benefit.

The first influence was that of globalised and standardised discourses on post-conflict peacebuilding. While introducing a TRC was itself a result of looking to external ideas for solutions or inspiration, there was potential for the Solomon Islands effort to hybridise the imported TRC with local symbols and understanding. Instead, the TRC moved towards the other end of the continuum, ‘replicating’ a model TRC by adopting its organisation, mission and ideology (Merry 2006, 44). Introducing institutions into Solomon Islands follows a long history of what Larmour (2005, 1) terms ‘institutional transfer’ into the Pacific. The transfer, or replication, is not just from one country to another, but:

the Pacific Islands have also suffered from the partial application of idealized and standardized models with no particular national origins. Colonization, decolonization, fiscal crises, and membership in international organizations have made the islands open to prevailing ideas of ‘best practice’. (Larmour 2005, 1)

The notion of ‘best practice’ adds further to a sense of placelessness, as ‘best practice’ is advised by international organisations (Larmour 2005, 3), such as the International Center for Transitional Justice in the case of the TRC. Rather than relying so heavily on external support and previous conceptions of truth commissions, the Solomon Islands TRC would have benefited from interpreting the mandate in a manner unique to the local context. The TRC needed more research to ‘not just be implemented the usual way that TRCs have been applied before. [It needed] more research of TRCs and the practices that we already have in the country, and try to make it appropriate to the way of Solomon Islands.’²³

The second influence was the shift in responsibility of the TRC, from its conception by civil society and church networks to implementation by the government with assistance from international actors. Following the passage of the TRC Act, the TRC clearly became a responsibility of the government and largely left, or was left by, civil society actors. With more than 90 per cent of Solomon Islanders holding allegiance to one of the five Christian denominations which form SICA, apart from structures of traditional society, the churches ‘are the most significant institution, with broad networks that reach to the grassroots’ (Pollard and Wale 2004, 591). Those who initially advocated for a TRC did not foresee the commission operating independently from the churches as it eventually did, as one interviewee said:

In the early days, it was never perceived as the TRC operating really without operating hand in glove with the community-level churches. And I don’t think that ever happened. Once the TRC set off on its own path, the churches rightly or wrongly, in a sense, they abandoned the TRC, or the TRC abandoned them.²⁴

Rather than being located in civil society, as it operated, the TRC was often seen as an arm of the government by communities:

If you go to the meetings or the hearings, [the communities] always refer to this TRC as part of the government. No matter how many

awareness we do. That I definitely noticed. And sometimes people talk about, and ask, is it independent?²⁵

Churches, local leaders and civil society networks led much of the meaningful reconciliation prior to RAMSI, illustrating the trust accorded them as mediators and peacemakers. Meanwhile, many Solomon Islanders affected by the tensions lay blame for the conflict and its consequences at the hands of the government. In the absence of a continuing champion or advocate for the TRC, this shift from the civil society to the government had a marked impact on its eventual operation. Initial ideals for the TRC fell to the wayside as the TRC Act became the mandate by which the institution was to be established. While the government's endorsement provided necessary authority and legitimacy to the commission and demonstrated an overall commitment to peacebuilding in the country, it did not have the leadership or the conviction to promote its work and garner community support.

Conclusion

Being a popular transnational and globalised post-conflict mechanism does not necessarily exclude truth commissions from potentially meaningful work in Solomon Islands, or Melanesia. As one interviewee argued: 'It's an excuse for us — to say it's a foreign idea, and it's a bad idea. The only thing we [should] do, I think it's a good idea to *adapt* the TRC. It's a good idea.'²⁶ When it was introduced in 2000, the Solomon Islands TRC showed a potential path forward to encourage reconciliation during a time of crisis. Its eventual implementation, however, suffered a number of challenges — both conceptual and practical. The TRC was constantly occupied managing its day-to-day operations in a difficult working environment typical of the context. Submitting the final report was indeed a tremendous achievement, even despite the unwillingness, to date, of the government to release it publicly. The conceptual challenges of a TRC, however, seem to have been given little attention in its implementation. The meaning and value of truth and reconciliation in the Solomon

Islands context were not adequately localised and, as a result, the TRC did not benefit from the local ownership necessary for genuine reconciliation processes in the Solomon Islands.

Coming under the banner of 'restorative justice', the values underlying TRCs are potentially congruent with conflict resolution processes in Solomon Islands (Dinnen 2003) — with an emphasis on restoring relationships, promoting reconciliation, and storytelling. If appropriately and sensitively adapted to a Melanesian context with more than a token commitment to cultural understandings of truth, reconciliation and justice, the TRC could potentially have served three distinct and separate functions. First, truth-seeking and documentation of a narrative of the conflict and events which occurred; second, officially sanctioning a space for which the process of reconciliation could begin, or continue to occur; and third, to provide recommendations for policy reform and reparations, thus linking the collection of truth to future action. While truth-telling is problematic in Solomon Islands, producing a narrative of the conflict was largely agreed to be a beneficial outcome. For reconciliation, however, what is more important is what then happens with the stories, or the 'truth' which is found.

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Endnotes

- 1 Access to full text of the TRC Act is available at http://www.paclii.org/sb/legis/num_act/tarca2008371/.
- 2 Statement taking was conducted in Guadalcanal, Malaita, Western, Choiseul, Makira and Temotu provinces. Plans to also visit Isabel, Central and Renbel provinces were not realised due to time and monetary constraints.
- 3 Interviews were conducted in a combination of English and Pijin. All translations are my own. Interviews were open-ended and in depth, resembling a conversation or 'storying'. Interview participants included statement takers, data entry staff, researchers, exhumation officers, officer managers, administrative officers and commissioners, as well as personnel employed with non-government organisations or the United Nations Development Programme who worked closely with the TRC, and those involved with its establishment. Many of the interviewees worked on the ground, implementing TRC activities at the village, community and government level and acted as 'translators' of global ideas about human rights for local sociocultural understandings (see Merry 2006). For further details of the research methodology see Vella (2011).
- 4 For detailed overviews of the conflict see Allen (2013), Fraenkel (2004) or Moore (2004).
- 5 The TRC final report lists the names of 200 people whose violent deaths were attributed to the conflict.
- 6 Interview with John Roughan, Honiara, 2012.
- 7 For more on RAMSI see Coppel (2012). For discussion and analysis of the intervention see Barbara (2008) and Allen and Dinnen (2010).
- 8 See TRC Act (Endnote 1) and TRCSC (2008).
- 9 See the International Center for Transitional Justice website, <http://ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>, viewed 20/12/2013.
- 10 Interview with TRC research officer, Honiara, 2012.
- 11 Interview with former SICA Peace Committee member, Honiara, 2012.
- 12 Interview with former TRC manager, Honiara, 2012.
- 13 Interview with TRC statement taker, Honiara, 2012.
- 14 Interview with TRC statement taker, Honiara, 2012.
- 15 Interview with TRC staff member, Honiara, 2012.
- 16 Interview with former SICA Peace Committee member, Honiara, 2012.
- 17 Interview with TRC statement taker, Honiara, 2012.
- 18 The commission identified six human rights violations that were considered common to the conflict and included on the statement taker forms: killings, abduction and illegal detention, torture and ill-treatment, sexual violence, property violation and forced displacement.
- 19 Interview with TRC stakeholder staff, Honiara, 2012. Emphasis added.
- 20 Interview with TRC statement taker, Honiara, 2012.
- 21 Interview with TRC statement taker, Honiara, 2012.
- 22 Many interviewees noted towards the end of the TRC's operation that the public was beginning to understand and trust the commission and its work, and expressed desire for the commission to continue.
- 23 Interview with TRC stakeholder staff, Honiara, 2012.
- 24 Interview with former SICA Peace Commission member, Honiara, 2012.
- 25 Interview with TRC stakeholder staff, Honiara, 2012.
- 26 Interview with TRC researcher, Honiara, 2012.

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