

BALANCING THE SCALE

Police officers' perspectives on plural policing in the Solomon Islands

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Introduction

The concepts of security provision and policing have undergone global transformation in both their understanding and practice. In many postcolonial countries, monopoly in the delivery and legitimacy of policing and security services is held by the state services (Jaffe & Diphorn, 2019). Recognising the pluralistic nature of policing acknowledges the presence and inclusion of a network of traditional agents and myriad of non-state actors in the policing process. Indeed, there are several developing countries, including the Solomon Islands, that exemplify the success, strength, legitimacy, and rightfulness of non-state law and order providers in the overall country and community cohesion (Dinnen & Peake, 2015). Such cases draw attention to the undisputable reality of the presence of governance outside of the traditionally understood governmental provider and challenge conventional understanding of governance. These cases also suggest that policing and security provision can be successfully carried out by non-state and indigenous agents (Loader, 2000). These models are referred to by Bayley and Shearing (2001) as the multilateralisation of policing and as the hybridisation of policing by Boege (2018).

The presence and success of these informal regulatory models have been examined in a number of Pacific countries (Dinnen & McLeod, 2009; Scamary & Wassel, 2018; Tobias, 2014). The Solomon Islands is one such country. In the Solomon Islands, like many Western countries, while the state police and law and order apparatus are acknowledged and utilised, these systems are often not the sole mechanism for treating with and managing social order and dispensing justice. In a number of instances through traditional mechanisms or customary approaches, cultural leaders' would establish and maintain peace and order (Aning et al., 2018; Dinnen & McLeod, 2009; Evans, 2014; Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007;

Watson & Dinnen, 2020). With the emergence of scholarship examining plural policing, this reality in the Solomon Islands presents an important backdrop for consideration and examination. In so doing we present a nuanced position as we explore the views of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) officers on the aptness and legitimacy of non-state policing and law and order bodies in the Solomon Islands.

Overview of existing literature

Security provision and law enforcement outside of the state apparatus is core to the Solomon Islands' cultural and historical context. In the Solomon Islands state agencies, judicial services, and formal security institutions in the form of physical structures and personnel have largely been absent from the rural parts of the state (Allen & Dinnen, 2015; Dinnen & Allen, 2013). As such, in these rural areas, everyday peace and security along with crime prevention and dispute settlement are maintained and carried out by non-state actors. These mechanisms include indigenous diplomatic processes, *kastom*, and cultural leaders (Dinnen & McLeod, 2009). This view was also supported by Allen (2011) and Peake and Studdard Brown (2005) who argued that state policing could not provide security and safety to rural citizens because of limited capacity to establish reach.

Allen (2009) added that the presence and strength of the indigenous or non-state policing structures in the Solomon Islands has existed since World War II, as the rule of law was upheld by informal institutions, and *kastom* as a form of unity, cooperation, and solidarity as such were not understood by Western legal, policing, and governance structures, because of the differing foundations and value systems. The importance of these non-state structures and the legitimacy of these informal institutions were exemplified during the period of tension in the Solomon Islands. While the central government structures in Honiara collapsed, and the capital was rendered largely ungovernable as a result of ethnic rivalry, in most of the rural areas except for some rural parts of Guadalcanal and Malaita, law and order remained intact, and life remained largely uninterrupted (Allen & Dinnen, 2015; McDougall, 2015; Moore, 2004; Watson & Dinnen, 2020). This occurrence underscored the plurality of policing in the Solomon Islands and the legitimacy, resilience, and tenacity of non-governmental agents of policing in the Solomon Islands.

The plurality of policing within the Solomon Islands does not come about by accident. Allen and Dinnen (2015), along with Coppel (2012), propounded that unlike traditional understandings of state formation, state-building in the Solomon Islands did not follow a linear process. For these scholars, the process of state-building in the Solomon Islands was characterised as a 'messy and organic' one. This was because, in the Solomon Islands, state-building meant that an alien institution was transplanted into a context where geographically fragmented, culturally, and linguistically dispersed and diverse people were placed under

one umbrella to create a state. Additionally, Kabutaulaka (2005) and Peake and Studdard Brown (2005) argued that this manifestation was problematic at the core since informal structures in the Solomon Islands existed before colonialism, and through resistance, resilience, and hybridisation remain today.

In the Solomon Islands, much like in Papua New Guinea, postcolonial institutions have always been weak and have never really had a monopoly in service provision (Dinnen, 2007; Dinnen et al., 2010). While there has been the emergence of a common or shared popular culture, localism prevails over nationalism in social, political, and economic activities, and it is this that gives legitimacy and place to local systems. These positions have been further explored in the work of Dinnen and McLeod (2009), who noted that in the broader Melanesian context, the idea of nationalism and citizenship were juxtaposed by kin obligation. Dinnen and McLeod (2009), similarly Allen and Dinnen (2015) and Coppel (2012), have described state formation efforts in the Solomon Islands as both 'patchy and superimposed', one in which the concepts of the state and governance were overlaid on top of indigenous forms of governance, and this created a dual system of legitimacy and authority between the state and indigenous agents. A further point of convergence in these works was the belief that Western laws had a limited impact on community life and conflict resolution, and even in the presence of these laws, *kastom* and traditional systems prevailed. Even in the present-day Solomon Islands, a matter or grievance is first addressed through *kastom* and tradition; however, if a solution cannot be found, the matter is moved to the formal or modern police and court system.

Moreover, Allen (2011) and Dinnen et al. (2006) have also argued that, since colonialism, *kastom* had remained as equally important and legitimate as state rule, as often government laws were juxtaposed against *kastom* laws; thus, in the Solomon Islands, any attempts to engage in policing efforts without the inclusion of community resources and mechanisms in the form of informal, traditional organisations, which provided security and safety in villages, would be ineffective (Dinnen, 2007; Goldsmith & Dinnen, 2007). The legitimacy of non-state actors highlights the need for greater engagement and collaboration with the varied security actors on the islands; through an extensive and formalised process of hybridity in security provision – a concept that refers to cooperation between informal actors and state entities for the co-production and provision of justice and security (Aning et al., 2018; Dinnen & McLeod, 2009; Evans, 2014).

The inappropriateness of state-centric policing and the importance of state and non-state cooperation for the provision of security is not limited to the Solomon Islands. Cases exemplifying the importance and legitimacy of non-state actors in justice and security provision were documented in numerous countries by several authors. In the Pacific contexts, for instance in the case of East Timor, Kent (2018) called attention to the need for greater incorporation and promotion of hybrid transitional justice in East Timor through the inclusion of traditional practices and tactics; similarly, the works of Scambary and Wassel (2018), which

presented an assessment of the use of hybridity in peacebuilding initiatives in East Timor, and Tobias (2014), who studied the implications of the inclusion of traditional cultural practices in the maintenance of peace in the post-conflict Aileu district in East Timor; additionally, in Bougainville, as explored in the study carried out by Boege (2018), which built an argument for the increased understanding of and focus on the hybridisation of peace, governance, security, and socio-political order through an assessment of its success in the Bougainville peace process.

Similar studies which examined the importance of hybridisation in security provision were also carried out further afield: in the Philippines where Deinla (2018) investigated the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and mapped the development and success of hybrid justice mechanisms in coping with insecurity and injustices within the community; in Nepal, as examined by Acharya (2014), who pointed to the successful role that community governance bodies played in achieving and sustaining community governance and facilitating the process of peacebuilding at the grassroots level; in South Africa as detailed by Dupont et al. (2003), who discussed the Zwelethemba model of peacemaking and peacebuilding and highlighted the resources and possibilities of non-state actors in quelling disorder and bringing about stability and recovery in weak and failing states; and in Mozambique, as was highlighted in scholarship presented by Igreja (2018), which put forward prospective opportunities for Mozambique if a system of hybridity was pursued that established principles for coexistence and overlap between different actors.

The wealth of literature on plural policing and hybrid justice systems provides ready examples and testimonies that highlight the importance, legitimacy, and usefulness of non-state actors in policing and law and order maintenance. While the literature provides diverse perspectives on the existence of plural regulatory systems and its legitimacy as attested to by state and non-state actors, there is a gap in the literature as it relates to the perspectives of state security service providers on the importance, legitimacy, and usefulness of non-state actors. Here, we make a modest contribution to existing scholarship by adding another perspective, that of police officers, to discourses on plural policing in Solomon Islands.

Methods

This chapter draws on a data collected from a doctoral study of stakeholder perceptions of police reform. Data collection was carried out in RSIPF bases in Honiara, Solomon Islands in October 2019 (Harry, 2021). A research permit was granted from the Ministry of Education & Human Resource Development (MERHD) in the Solomon Islands to conduct research on the island, and written permission was granted from the RSIPF's commissioner to conduct research in the RSIPF. Ethics approval was also received from the University of the South Pacific to conduct the study as part of the requirement for a doctoral studies

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project. This study employed a phenomenological approach to examine, interpret, and present the officers' experiences of plural policing in the Solomon Islands.

Face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with 18 active RSIPF police officers from various police posts in Honiara, Solomon Islands. Out of the total number of participants interviewed in the study, 4 were female while 14 were male. This sample is reflective of the male to female officer ratio within the RSIPF. Respondents possessed service lengths in the RSIPF ranging from 15 to 35 years and occupied ranks ranging from Inspector to Deputy Commissioner of Police. The participants who agreed and availed themselves to participate in the study originated from eight of the nine provinces in the Solomon Islands.

During the interview, participants were provided with the option of responding to questions in Pidgin, however all 18 officers expressed their competence to communicate effectively in English, and all interviews were conducted in English. The interview asked questions related to officers' perceptions of organisational transformation, the impact of institutional reform on their personal and cultural values, the appropriateness of state policing practices and mandates, and their level of engagement with the public before and after reform. For the purpose of this chapter, the responses to these questions were analysed for themes related to perceptions of plural policing.

To ensure anonymity, respondents' names were replaced with code names, for example RSIPF officer#1. Respondents were required to sign a consent form allowing for the use of their responses in disseminated documents. Data was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as prescribed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The following section examines the officers' positions on the importance and usefulness of plural policing in the Solomon Islands. Additionally, as is common in the IPA approach, this section also reflects the double hermeneutic, as it reveals objective understandings of the research participants' interpretations of their experiences and perceptions of plural policing in the Solomon Islands.

Findings and analysis

The findings of the study are discussed under two headings: (1) RSIPF officers' perspectives on plural policing, and (2) officers' views on the cultural aptness of compensation and the importance of hybridity – policing and the place of compensation and reconciliation.

RSIPF officers' perspectives on plural policing

All the interviewed RSIPF officers expressed positions that welcomed policing through non-state actors. They acknowledged the legitimacy of non-state actors and attested to their validity and effectiveness in maintaining order and

peaceful community relations. The following officer views are offered for consideration:

RSIPF officer#7:

For – like for us Melanesians if anything happens, we don't straight away reactively responded we will talk with the Chiefs, [to] negotiate for the suspects to surrender yeah so that's how we operate.

RSIPF officer#7 provided an interesting and informative position. In this offering, the importance of plural policing was reflected. The statement acknowledged the plurality of policing and recognised the role, capacity, respect, and power of local policing agents in the Solomon Islands, and their ability to support the work of state police.

Further, RSIPF officer#2 averred that:

In this context of us [Solomon Islanders], we [locals or civilians] are able to solve the problem. We know where when it comes to the community, the chiefs or the elder deal with it when it come, when they said oh, we cannot handle it, now you can handle this, that's when the police comes in. We know where the line is drawn.

In this officer's account, the ability of the traditional agents to effectively police and solve problems outside of the involvement of state law and state police was also identified. The officer pointed to the role of the chiefs or elders in effectively addressing incidents and situations that arose within the community. In this regard the work of Allen (2009) is insightful as it identifies the use of retaliatory actions by members of the community or clan as a result of a conflict. This reality strengthens the importance of the role and use of chiefs and elders to solve conflict and bring about reconciliation at the communal level and preserve peace. The officer also highlighted that the presence of diverse policing and law enforcement agencies also underscored the legitimacy of these agencies and challenged positions that advance the monopoly, authority, and validity of state policing.

Additionally, RSIPF officer #1 stated that:

In the Solomon Islands there is a boundary of the law, and the *kastom*, it is quite different. Basic crimes like swearing, drunk, and disorderly in the community level, damaging other properties, which you see that is minor. We allow the traditional leader to solve it. It is effective, I sometimes advise, depending on the incident that things be dealt with at the local level.

Similar to RSIPF officer#2, this officer made known the clear boundary between the law and *kastom*. This officer also identified that unlike most Western

countries, which see the state police force intervening in minor infractions or violations as well as serious violations, in the context of the Solomon Islands, minor incidences were left up to non-state authorities. Officers acknowledged the ability and effectiveness of the traditional mechanisms to deal with minor incidents. Moreover, the interviewee's position that "I sometimes advise, depending on the incident that things be dealt with at the local level" was particularly insightful because the officer's willingness to refer matters to be dealt with at the traditional level exemplified a significant level of trust in the effectiveness of the traditional system, and further reinforced the legitimacy and aptness of traditional systems.

While RSIPF officers are custodians of a Western and state-centric policing model that espouses the predominance and the pre-eminence of the said model, officers through kin and *kastom* also identify with local laws and traditions. It is this reality that positions them to be able to critically reflect upon the legitimacy and aptness of traditional law and order maintenance.

Officers' views on the cultural aptness of compensation and the importance of hybridity- Policing and the place of compensation and reconciliation

Officers rendered the following positions on compensation and reconciliation.

RSIPF officer#16 stated that:

When it comes to tradition, our culture recognises reconciliation and compensation. We can solve things outside of court, but at the same time, this would be a police case.

In this presentation RSIPF officer#16 established reconciliation and compensation as recognised parts of the Solomon Islands' culture. This respondent also divulged that "we can solve things outside of court, but at the same time, this would be a police case", a revelation that highlighted the pluralistic nature of policing in the country, as well as underscored the legitimacy of multiple policing actors on the Islands.

RSIPF officer#14 provided the following perspective:

For example, if there are two conflict parties that submit a case, we [the police] mediate them, get both parties together and the suspect side gives some form of compensation, just to calm down the situation so that no revenge could take place. We involve a cultural way of doing things just to calm and whatever ways of resolving things, we the police take notes, put it in the report and also put it in the file. But the benefit of involving the traditional way is because we can calm down the situation. If we just go in and arrest the suspect sometime still the situation or the relationship between both parties is not really calm, things are not really over.

These statements exemplified the officer's positive view of these traditional practices and showed the legitimacy of the traditional system, as even the officers felt confident in its competency. However, it also highlighted the important role played by non-state policing entities in the Solomon Islands in bringing peace and resolve to a situation.

RSIPF officer#2 noted that:

In our culture compensation is accepted. For example, if we had an argument, right, we had an argument in a community, we have some, you know, punch up [physical fight], so back in the culture even though we have punch up what we'll do is that we will go back to the elders and sort out the problem. So, what they will say is like – Peter because you're the one who actually did this to John you're going to give something – just out from your heart, you give something to him. So, it can be flexible, it can be sort of like monetary, it can be something where you[re] giving the customary shell money. It's like, you know, like [its] sort of [shows] remorse, I'm giving this to say that I'm so sorry to you.

RSIPF officer#2 also gave credence to that fact that compensation through traditional system had an integral place in conflict resolution in the Solomon Islands through the provision of an example of the compensation process, and the affirmative statement that "in our culture compensation is accepted". The respondent's account provided an important description of the role of compensation within the cultural system as essential to the resolution process. Moreover, RSIPF officer #1 made known that:

If there is something that happens, we involve the traditional system. That means that in the process of *kastom*, you have to settle it. Here is not like in the Western world where you [simply] bring this man, and [he] face[s] the justice. In Solomon Island no, you bring the person to the court, to the police, [the] police deal with him, but you have to fill the vacuum. You fill the vacuum in the context in the relationship between the two parties. You have to [re]build the relationship between the victim and the subject. That is the context of Melanesia, yes, there is the law, but you have to settle the thing in *kastom*.

Here, RSIPF officer #1 also revealed the usefulness and relevance of tradition customs in policing and dispute resolution. The officer distinguished between the Western system, which is seen as punitive, and the role of traditional system in restoring relationships. Regarding this matter, Goodenough (2009) noted that local system of compensation helped to repair damaged relationships not only between the individuals directly involved, but also between their families, communities, and clans. The final offering of this officer attests to the importance of

the role of traditional mechanisms and customs in dispute resolution and reconciliation in Melanesia.

RSIPF officer#6 made known that:

For example, in the Melanesian, when we settle any problem, we settle any problem in compensation. Money can compensate like that. In our Melanesian culture, our communities, our chiefs know how to solve a problem, in the cultural way they have in place how to solve problems, how to bring peace. Our law, respect[s] that. If someone kills another man, a person kills another person, then in our culture there should be a compensation, but that compensation will not stop that person to go to court. He must go to court. There must be a compensation to put peace on the other side.

Similar to the views expressed by other previously mentioned RSIPF officers, this officer's narrative identified the place, recognition, and importance of compensation in settling problems and re-establishing peace in the Solomon Islands society. The plurality of policing in the Solomon Islands is again revealed in the statement that "compensation will not stop that person to go to court. He must go to court", which further identified that the state and traditional systems of law and order and adjudication are at work concomitantly. In this respondent's example it was also noted that "if someone kills another man, a person kills another person, then in our culture there should be a compensation". The use of the word "should" in addition to the position that "there must be a compensation to put peace on the other side" conveyed a sense of obligation, duty, or correctness in the utilisation of such a cultural practice.

Conclusion

The study revealed police perceptions about plural policing, which aligned with community and other stakeholder positions about the necessity of such parallel security systems and acknowledged the benefit of partnership agreements between state and non-state service providers. Consistent with arguments about the limited resource availability of state service providers and the long-standing existence and operation of non-state actors in remote and rural areas, police officers acknowledged the vital role community stakeholders play in assisting with the maintenance of law and order. They acknowledged that the geographic dispersions of the islands mean that most of the population of the Solomon Islands live in rural villages, a distance away from the urban centres and available state security services such as police posts. This reality makes it difficult for predominantly centralised government agents, including the police, to establish and maintain a presence on many rural islands (Dinnen & Allen, 2013). Police officers acknowledged that conflict resolution and community cohesion were moderated primarily by traditional and cultural systems

is the village, church, and kinship-based social systems were primarily positioned to provide most of the security, conflict resolution, recreation, and basic needs of the citizens (Allen, 2011; Braithwaite et al., 2010). RSIPF officers identified that these non-state entities play an integral role in not only sustaining law and order but also assisting officers in their provision of security. The principles and procedures set out and executed by these indigenous agents were respected and viewed as legitimate by all locals, including the police officers.

It is argued that the prevention of crime underscores the implementation of initiatives and strategies aimed at reducing the risk and occurrence of damage caused by acts defined as criminal by the state (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010; Van Dijk & De Waard, 1991). While in many contexts this facet of policing is seen primarily as an attribute of state policing, these officers' shared perspectives highlighted that in the Solomon Islands crime prevention and conflict resolution mechanisms exist outside of the purview of the state police. In the study, the utilisation of indigenous mechanisms was highlighted and in keeping with positions put forward in scholarly arguments, police acknowledged that compensation forms an integral part of crime prevention and conflict resolution in indigenous and customary system. The legitimacy of such a system is put forward by Brown (1986), who affirmed that long before the declaration of the Solomon Islands as a protectorate, the islands had systems and structures in place for law and order and dispute settlement. The validity of the local system is revealed in the reality that while customs differ from island to island, it is locally understood that, under customary law, in order for an issue to be brought to a solution, through discussion and mediation by the village elders, a payment of compensation should be paid (Brown, 1986; Nanau, 2011). Officers expressed acknowledgement and acceptance of the presence and legitimacy of indigenous groups as policing agents and attest to their legitimacy as partners in crime prevention and order maintenance across the Solomon Islands.

While no personal views on the adjudication of issues within the community by non-state actors and the payment of compensation in the form of money or customary shell money to the aggrieved were explicitly expressed, officers acknowledged compensation as an important part of restoring peace and harmony in the community. They further acknowledged that in many instances, it is only when compensation is paid that a conflict is deemed to be over (Jeffery, 2013). For Solomon Islanders, the receipt of compensation through the local system is seen as a sign of remorse and goodwill along with reconciliation, and it even served as a safety net to rebuild trust and prevent reprisals. This position highlights the legitimacy of traditional law and order maintenance systems and exemplifies the pluralist nature of policing in the Solomon Islands.

Despite the relatively small sample size of participants interviewed for the study, the positions presented provide valid information about how non-state policing actors are perceived by state policing actors. It is also useful to further discourses on strategies for improved policing partnerships in the Solomon Islands. The study builds on the work of plural policing scholars and provides a

relevant foundation from which Solomon Islands can be pursue

Note

- 1 In the Solomon Islands these nity leaders, kinship-based so.

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relevant foundation from which further studies of policing partnerships in the Solomon Islands can be pursued.

Note

- 1 In the Solomon Islands these cultural leaders include chiefs, village elders, community leaders, kinship-based social systems, and women, youths, and church groups.

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