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Vernacularising ‘child rights’ in Melanesian secondary schools: Implications for transitional justice

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As the linkages between education and transitional justice have become more explicit in the last decade (Cole 2007; Ramírez-Barat and Duthie 2015), attention has centred overwhelmingly on the role of the state in those linkages. Cole and Murphy (2009, 3) have framed education as a justice institution where ‘students first come into contact with official structures of their society’. Paulson (2009, 10) has argued that post-conflict investment in education could signal to citizens their government’s commitment to peace. And Cole (2007, 123) argues that for transitional justice, education can ‘potentially function as a secondary phase (after trials and truth commissions) that reflects the state’s commitment to institutionalising transitional justice’. Even at the school level, King (2014), McCully (2012) and Quaynor (2012) have argued that pedagogical reform to promote critical thinking and open dialogue among students models democratic politics far better than the rote memorisation of curricular content.

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Human rights education is one way to model democratic politics. It has itself been a recent addition to thinking about the role of education in transitional justice (Bellino 2014b; Davies 2017a, 2017b), and has been included in the recommendations of several truth commissions (Paulson and Bellino 2017, 351). It is tied closely to the topic of pedagogical reform, given that such changes, it is argued, should take place within a broader school culture of non-violence and respect for the rights of children (Davies 2017a, 339–340). In this way, teaching human rights consciousness could be the conduit through which teachers and students from all parties to a conflict learn to live together again; it will teach them to see each other as equals in rights (Davies 2017b, 11). However, non-violent school cultures can be hard to find in post-conflict societies. Davies's own evidence from Sri Lanka found that, despite government efforts at pedagogical reform, school violence was rising in areas where violence was particularly prevalent in life outside school (Davies 2017a, 343). Likewise, Bellino (2014b) showed that young Guatemalans' rights consciousness was shaped by both school and their lives outside it.

The role of civil society in scholarship on education and transitional justice has been understood within state-centric frameworks of analysis. In circumstances where transitional justice mechanisms have been disbanded but the state is unable or refuses to commit to transitional justice, civil society can step in to fill the void (Bellino 2014a, 142; Cole 2017, 16–18; Ramírez-Barat and Duthie 2015, 25–27).

In this context, I consider the 'Child Rights Network' at two Catholic secondary boarding schools, St Joseph's College, Mabiri (in Bougainville), and St Joseph's National Secondary School, Tenaru (in Solomon Islands).² The Child Rights Network was designed by the Marist Brothers District of Melanesia to introduce the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into the daily lives of teachers and students at its schools. Critically also, the Marist Brothers ran the schools themselves. Churches are highly regarded and influential throughout Melanesia (Monson 2013; Tomlinson and McDougall 2013, 2). Moreover, they have historically performed governance functions that a classical Weberian understanding of the state (as distinct from civil society) would view as state prerogatives (Eriksen 2013; McDougall 2008). They have dominated

2 This paper is based on findings from 10 months of PhD field research using semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations in Solomon Islands and Bougainville from mid-2015 to mid-2016.

in the provision of education, for example (Laracy 1976, 22; Oakeshott and Allen 2015, 6; Palmer 1980, 40). This intensified in the wake of the civil conflicts in Bougainville and Solomon Islands as policymakers and donors looked increasingly to churches to provide governance in the absence of functioning states (McDougall 2008, 1). Nevertheless, although their functions overlap with the state's, churches are still touted as the most active and persuasive components of civil society in Melanesia (Richmond 2011, 128; Dinnen 2001, 100).

In this chapter, I critically discuss the 'vernacularisation' (Merry 2006a) of human rights at Mabiri and Tenaru, and argue that it addresses some conflict legacies without fundamentally altering the nature of everyday life at school. In the first section, I show that although Merry's concept of vernacularisation helps us move our analyses beyond simply perceived incompatibilities between rights and indigenous culture, vernacularisation in Bougainville and Solomon Islands is complicated by legacies of their respective civil conflicts, such as the further entrenchment of corporal punishment and breakdown of customary authority. In the second section, I establish that resistance from teachers to the Child Rights Network did indeed revolve around the issue of corporal punishment (as well as students' manual labour). Third, I demonstrate that even though participants vernacularised rights in different ways, little about the ideal citizen into which the schools hoped to form their students was changed. Finally, I explain how those who engaged critically with the concept and vocabulary of rights also learned how to identify and respond to justice issues at school.

Vernacularisation in Melanesia and post-conflict schooling

Pacific Island countries have been slow to incorporate human rights treaties into their domestic legal systems and regularly fail to meet the reporting requirements in those conventions (Farran 2012, 200). Papua New Guinea ratified the UNCRC in 1993 but only provided its first report in 2000, for example (*ibid.*, note 5). In Solomon Islands, where corporal punishment and physical violence against children are common (Evans 2016, 73–74), the rights discourse is not widely tolerated by large segments of the adult population either (*ibid.*, 81).

Popular resistance to human rights in Melanesia is often based on a perceived incompatibility with indigenous *kastom* (Evans 2016; Soaki 2017). However, while this resistance might suggest that *kastom* is a fixed set of traditional practices, recognising the contemporary influences on, and uses of, *kastom* shows that it and human rights need not be viewed as irreconcilable opposites. *Kastom* has always been changing and thus has become infused with elements of indigenous cultures, colonialism, Christianity and modern-day politics (Akin 2013). Contemporary *kastom* ideology among people from the island of Malaita, for example, was born in their resistance to British colonial rule (Akin 2013). Malaitan *kastom* has become a marker of contemporary island/provincial identity for Malaitans and also an ‘other’ from which Solomon Islanders from other provinces form their own provincial/island identities (Cox 2017, 81). As *kastom* is continuously reinterpreted when it is used to respond to new ideas and institutions, it is little wonder that Cox found a kindergarten principal in a conservative village of Western Province who had abandoned corporal punishment in favour of a human rights-centred approach to discipline. The principal now favours dialogue between teachers, students and parents. *Kastom* and human rights were not ‘two incompatible cultural domains’ for this principal (Cox 2017, 84).

Nevertheless, overall, human rights remains an uncomfortable fit in the Pacific, which Sally Engle Merry’s (2006a) concept of ‘vernacularisation’ helps us understand. The concept describes the ways local cultural concepts are appropriated by civil society to spread the human rights regime. In using vernacularisation to analyse gender violence in the Pacific, Biersack and Macintyre (2016, 4) have shown that human rights is itself an ideology that merely ‘alleges universality’ and one that ‘views any doctrine that deviates from it as merely “local” and aberrant’ (ibid., 5). Indeed, Taylor (2008, 166) argues that the image of the ‘human’ in the human rights regime actually originates in forms of individual personhood more common in the West, which is often contrasted with more collectivist understandings of personhood in non-Western contexts (Jolly 2016, 345). The ‘intermediaries’ (Merry 2006b, 39) who champion (vernacularise) human rights for local populations are members of civil society because, as the local elites of their societies, they can speak the international language of human rights to people in their local context (Biersack and Macintyre 2016, 13).

Although flows of cultural change brought by human rights are typically directed from the Western human rights discourse at the top, down to the recipient context below, in some instances the meaning of 'rights' changes considerably when they are rendered in ways that make sense locally (Biersack and Macintyre 2016, 11–12; Jolly 2016, 355). Hermkens's (2013) thought-provoking ethnographic research with the Mbirau people of Marau Sound, on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, is a noteworthy example. She found that when foreign organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) deliver human rights, they construe local social realities and cultures simply as problems to be overcome in the empowerment of women (see also Cox 2017, 69). But Hermkens shows that the Mbirau women with whom she worked 'translate rights as duties towards one's family, or as bringing awareness of Women's responsibility to get involved in local politics in order to improve their tribe's future' (Hermkens 2013, para. 36). Importantly, the responsibility her participants described was not a result of their claim to a universal, and individual, right as defined by the international human rights regime, but was rather understood relationally, in terms of 'the moral framework in which relationships are embedded' (*ibid.*, para. 37). Hermkens's ethnography showed how human rights can be vernacularised as responsibilities in a way that reinforces the duties women have towards the men in their lives.

Vernacularisation at the Mabiri and Tenaru schools has been directed through the Child Rights Network, which the Marist Brothers District of Melanesia established at all their schools in Melanesia in the mid-2000s. Then District Leader Br Ken McDonald recalled that the district's engagement with rights began when it assisted with Vanuatu's 'universal periodic review' of the UNCRC (interview with Br Ken McDonald, 26 April 2017). The district's commitment to child protection through a rights-based framework deepened thereafter and eventually saw it employ a Child Advocacy Officer, Chris Beatus, who began implementing the Child Rights Network through biannual workshops at all Marist schools in the district (*ibid.*). The workshops I observed at Mabiri in 2016 connected the principles of the Marist charism to the rights provisions in the UNCRC and Papua New Guinea's Lukautim Pikinini Act passed in 2009.

However, conflict legacies have made the task for the Child Rights Network more difficult at Mabiri and Tenaru. One legacy has been the further legitimisation of corporal punishment. Participant A, in Bougainville,

told me how after the Bougainville ‘Crisis’, one of her close relatives could never overcome his anger when he returned to teaching. He became physically abusive towards his students, particularly to the children of the combatants who killed his father. In the end the pain was too much. He left teaching, and formal employment entirely (confidential interview, 17 September 2015). Several members of the Catholic education system also acknowledged that the Crisis further normalised physical abuse of students (confidential interview with Participant B, 7 February 2016; interview with Chris Beatus, 13 September 2015).

Another conflict legacy in Bougainville arises from the damage done to customary forms of authority during the Crisis. The Crisis started in mid-1988, and was chiefly a war between the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) until armed (Bougainvillean) opposition to the BRA formed in 1990 (Regan 1998, 279). Beneath the anti-PNG dimensions were atrocities committed within cultural, language and even family groups that broke down mechanisms of customary authority. In the end, violence gained considerable popular legitimacy as a means to solve disputes (*ibid.*). Young people now grow up in this environment (Kent and Barnett 2012), and the continued antisocial behaviour of boys in particular, which older Bougainvilleans describe as ‘acting BRA’, has become a particular challenge for educators. Ultimately, because of the Crisis, students are more likely to challenge authority figures and misbehave and teachers are less likely to show restraint in disciplining their students harshly.

Corporal punishment occurs in Solomon Islands schools too (Cox 2017), and its civil conflict, known as the ‘Tension’ or ‘Ethnic Tension’, certainly called into question Solomon Islanders’ capacity to live together peacefully. The Tension began in 1998 when local militia on Guadalcanal began violently evicting settlers (predominantly from the neighbouring island of Malaita) from the rural and peri-urban areas around the capital, Honiara.³ A rival militia then formed to protect the Malaitan evictees who had taken refuge in Honiara. The town became a Malaitan enclave and violent confrontations between the Malaitan and Guadalcanal militias intensified on the outskirts (Dinnen 2002, 287). The rest of the country was relatively free of widespread violence, but was directly affected by the near total collapse of the Solomon Islands state. Although the signing

3 The underlying causes of the Tension have been discussed in depth elsewhere (Fraenkel 2004; Moore 2004; Allen 2013).

of the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) in October 2000 effectively ended the warfare between the two groups (McDougall 2016, 18), the Tension continued until 2003. Just as localised fighting was common in Bougainville, so too was violence common not only between, but also within, Malaitan and Guadalcanal groups post-2000.

In these contexts, and because the formal instruction of the Child Rights Network is largely limited to biannual workshops, teachers and students at Mabiri and Tenaru largely perform the roles of intermediaries themselves. Much of the vernacularisation, therefore, happens on playgrounds, in dormitories and dining halls, and in other extracurricular activities in which students spend most of their time. In these spaces outside the classroom, 'child rights' – which is the term participants use to describe human rights discourses, practices and their Child Rights Network – pervade debates about the structures of schooling that shape their daily lives and address legacies of the Crisis and the Tension.

Rights discourse and the structures of schooling

Child rights were part of a challenge to two structures of schooling – discipline protocols and manual labour – that upset the authority of teachers over their students. This authority was based on a strict power imbalance between teachers and students, which Teacher B, at Mabiri, summarised:

I know that there are still teachers who are not very comfortable with child rights. And I know that there are teachers who still would prefer to give students a smack or two for not doing homework or something. To them they think that is the way to do it, just because [they say] 'that's the way my teachers taught me in the past' (confidential interview, 18 February 2016).

And Teacher S at Tenaru explained that students learn from this teacher–student relationship that they should follow the orders of authority figures unquestioningly rather than form opinions themselves (confidential interview, 13 August 2015). She said teachers were struggling with the notion that students should be 'saying what they think' (confidential interview, 13 August 2015).

The scale of the challenge that the rights discourse posed became clear when teachers at both schools considered their discipline protocols. Teacher V and several of his colleagues at Tenaru have observed a shift towards ‘pastoral care’ in the last five years, which is informed by child rights and the Marist charism described below. Rather than strict enforcement of the rules, the school’s pastoral care process aims to develop students’ decision-making capacities by showing them leniency when they make mistakes (confidential interview with Teacher Y, 29 November 2015). In this reformulation of discipline practices, recidivist students should be counselled long before any serious disciplinary measures are taken, and the language of ‘punishment’ has been replaced with that of ‘community service’. However, this change has left several teachers uncertain of how to react to students they catch breaking the rules. Teacher V confessed he could see no basis in the school rules for the new discipline decisions the administration was making and wondered aloud if he was supposed to follow the discipline procedures set out in the rules, or if human rights had become a hidden rule (confidential interview, 10 September 2015). Teacher U also blamed child rights specifically for the rights/rules confusion (confidential interview, 1 December 2015).

Teachers would often measure these changes to discipline and child rights against their compatibility with *kastom*, which included showing deference to authority.⁴ At Tenaru, Teacher S noted that students’ focus on the rules and on rights language only confuses them:

[B]ecause that is how the society is; authority and rules speaks [sic] for the authority. And um responsibility, when we were growing up, responsibility, you do what your mother and father tells you or what the tribe expects out of you and not so much of thinking for yourself (confidential interview, 1 December 2015).

This apparent rights/rules clash in both teachers’ and students’ images of Melanesian culture also emerged in discussions of the manual labour that both schools make students undertake. Most schools in Solomon Islands and Bougainville rely on student labour to grow food and maintain school infrastructure, although the actual time spent working varies

4 Melanesia is famed for its cultural diversity. Understandings of the role of children in society and the socialisation of young people thus vary widely and are constantly changing (Herdt and Leavitt 1998). Nevertheless, at school, and certainly in conversations with me, teachers and students would often refer to an image of a Bougainvillean, Solomon Islander or pan-Melanesian *kastom* when discussing the Child Rights Network.

from school to school. Teacher B, at Mabiri, outlined the argument the child rights sceptics often make: they emphasise that in Bougainvillean society young people must work hard to survive. Child rights discourse clashes with this articulation of social order because it limits the work students can do if too much is considered abuse (confidential interview, 16 February 2016). Another teacher at Mabiri, Teacher C, added that child rights were also a challenge to one of the tenets of Marist education, 'love of work', which could be seen as abuse even though it is intended to teach youth that diligent effort breeds success (confidential interview with Teacher C, 21 February 2016; Institute of the Marist Brothers of the Schools 1988, 36).

In sum, at first glance the Child Rights Network clashed with some well-established structures of schooling, including the strict power imbalance of the teacher–student relationship that, as we saw above, the Crisis and the Tension had intensified. However, resistance to change was not the position for all teachers and students by any means. The next section shows that productive engagement with rights was achieved through its incorporation into the structures of schooling, but not in a way that changed how participants understood the fundamental purpose of Catholic education.

Vernacularising rights within Marist charism

Despite the scepticism noted above, advocates typically framed the child rights approach as a complement to local cultures and Christianity to convince sceptical teachers to adopt them. In respect of discipline and pastoral care, for instance, child rights provided a vocabulary used to support the Marist charism, and that charism was itself a way to enact child rights principles. At Mabiri, Teacher B noted that the school cannot afford to employ a counsellor, nor does the administration have anywhere they can refer students in need of support. They are faced with a choice between expelling a problematic student or counselling that student themselves. Several students were in this position in the first semester of 2016, either through violent behaviour or drug offences. While most teachers were sceptical and favoured expelling students, the administration argued that Marist schools are supposed to work with young people,

in Br McDonald's terms, 'on the edge' (interview, 26 April 2017). Thus, abandoning the students would contradict their core principles. Teacher B explained it to his colleagues in precisely these terms:

[W]hat I used was this idea of this is a Marist school and it's supposed to help the young people. And if I decide to terminate the child from the beginning because the school rules say so, then I live with the fact that I sent someone who is very young home and now he is living at home [and] he hasn't completed his schooling. So to me, that's not very, I think I have failed morally or something, my moral responsibility over the child (confidential interview, 6 June 2016).

There was thus a tension between the application of the school rules, which impose the strict power imbalance between teachers and students and leave several teachers confused (as we saw above), and Teacher B's moral duties to the students in his care. In similar vein, Teacher X pointed out that the Marist charism emphasises constant 'presence' with students, just as child rights have encouraged teachers to be approachable and available to students to support their learning (confidential interview, 6 December 15).

An incident at Tenaru demonstrates that the moral obligation Teacher B described is tied directly to child rights and extends beyond immediate teacher–student relationships. A few years ago the school administration transferred to another school a teacher who was persistently drunk and physically abusive towards his family. When I asked Teacher B what he would have done, he replied:

I think with the establishment of the, what, child rights and those kind of things ... before you send them away make sure you at least you should have tried something to help the teacher before he goes to the new school. Otherwise you send [away] someone who is going to repeat the same problems and you don't want that, to send someone to a community and then he'll just become the same person again (confidential interview, 18 February 2016).

And this is exactly what the administration at Tenaru had done. The troubled teacher was counselled by the Marist Brothers and the school's headmaster (formal counselling services were not accessible) before being transferred. In this instance, the school had deployed child rights

principles and the Marist ethos to address conflict-related behaviours in exactly the way the district administration had hoped they would when it established Child Rights Network.

Interestingly also, Teacher B appeared to hold a similar opinion of human rights to the kindergarten teacher who Cox (2017) interviewed; rights were distinct from culture, but still compatible. Teacher B had observed that in resisting child rights some teachers had themselves forgotten that rights do not overrule responsibilities to society:

[O]ne of the misunderstandings that I think people get is that people got so involved with rights that they forgot the other aspect of rights, and that was the responsibilities that children have in our society. And even to the extent that students were actually [saying] 'I have a right to this, and I have a right to this' and that's because they were not being taught that they also have responsibilities to go in line with that. So to me that's probably one reason why people didn't accept it so easily (confidential interview, 18 February 2016).

In this case, Teacher B appeared to keep the concept of rights distinct from 'the moral framework in which relationships are embedded' (Hermkens 2013, para. 37) because those frameworks were located in the responsibilities of young people in society. Rights, then, were only useful in so much as they could be a tool teachers could deploy when forming students into the (relational) citizens they desire them to be.

This was also borne out in the debate noted above about manual labour. Learning to love work – one of the pillars of the Marist charism – was essential if students were to become good members of their society. Indeed, Teacher B became uncharacteristically intolerant of anyone who did not love working:

But if you feel that it is not satisfying to you then probably you stop doing it and look for somewhere else where you just sit down ... and just wait for something to come to you ... So our place is better for people who really work hard in order to survive. So for you to stop someone from really working then I don't think it's probably right (confidential interview, 18 February 2016).

For Teacher B, students must learn to love work because somebody who does not love work does not fit in. And Teacher B told his colleagues that students would learn to love work through the satisfaction they will feel from meeting their responsibilities to the school community.

Child rights could be applied to prevent teachers from working students too hard, but they were not a justification for halting all manual labour. There remained a conceptual distinction between a productive (relational) citizen cognisant of their responsibilities to others, on the one hand, and a rights-holding individual, on the other.

For other teachers and students, however, rights were vernacularised in relational terms in the way Hermkens (2013) described above. Teacher Y argued child rights were a vehicle to teach about obligations to the school community. Rather than scolding a child for doing the wrong thing, she said teachers could talk about how students have the right to make decisions, but are personally responsible for their actions (confidential interview, 4 December 2015). Similarly, despite admitting it confused some students, Teacher S at Tenaru noted how the rights discourse has changed the language she uses when disciplining students: ‘when you talk the language you use, not so much as rule, but saying it’s your responsibility to attend classes, to be on time, to be in the dining hall’ (confidential interview, 1 December 2015).

Occasionally also, teachers would say they had seen evidence of students who understood child rights properly, meaning relationally. For example, Teacher Z remembered asking a male senior student why he never chewed betelnut at school. The boy replied that he had considered it, and ultimately concluded that although he had the right to chew betelnut he respected the school rules (that ban it) first of all (confidential interview, 4 December 2016). To Teacher Z, this response meant that the boy understood ‘what is called respect in the village. Because that respect in the village, in our society here, that is the foundation of child rights. He might think he [could] do something, but he has to think [about the consequences of] the action’ (ibid.). Thus, Teacher Z argued the boy had understood rights properly because he had fitted them into the ‘moral framework in which relationships are embedded’ (Hermkens 2013, para. 37).

It is noteworthy here that students and teachers at Tenaru had far more opportunity to adopt the discourse and practice of child rights than those at Mabiri. Mabiri is an all-boys boarding school that only offers two years of schooling (grades 9 and 10 or two years of vocational education), whereas Tenaru, a coeducational boarding school, offers grades 7 to 12. Additionally, Tenaru’s workshops themselves better facilitate engagement with child rights. The students’ child rights workshops I observed at Mabiri in 2016 were conducted at night with groups of at least 80 students and

were condensed to fit the limited time that the school had electricity in the evenings. By contrast, at Tenaru the 24-hour power supply allowed Chris Beatus to teach more creatively to smaller groups of students (interview with Chris Beatus, 13 September 2015). Moreover, Tenaru's teachers had been at the school several years and were familiar with child rights concepts, whereas most of Mabiri's teaching staff had transferred from other non-Marist schools that year and had little prior experience with child rights.

Nevertheless, following sustained critical engagement with child rights and the Marist ethos, some participants described profound changes to their daily lives. Teacher Y, at Tenaru, who had hospitalised a student with his violence during the Tension, told me child rights had helped him temper his disciplinary actions dramatically and embrace pastoral care (confidential interview, 4 December 2015). Teachers S and R were even changing their own parenting, preferring to reason and persuade rather than scold their children (confidential interviews, 14 November and 1 December 2015).

We have seen that this vernacularisation of child rights framed them as either distinct from or part of 'the moral framework in which relationships are embedded' (Hermkens 2013, para. 37). Either way, however, rights language was useful only insofar as it reinforced the image of the citizen into whom the schools aimed to form their students: a Christian and relational person willing to respect authority by showing deference to it. The success of this vernacularisation notwithstanding, the process itself would seem significant for transitional justice because it directly addressed the breakdown of customary authority the Crisis and the Tension brought about.

Learning about justice

The Child Rights Network also gave students and teachers a framework they could use to articulate and address justice issues at school. For example, Teacher R at Tenaru remembered an occasion in which the students of one Grade 9 class confronted one of their teachers about that teacher's ongoing absence from class and failure to hold tests at scheduled times. After the incident the teacher in question felt disrespected and even less committed to teaching, effectively making the situation worse. Although Teacher R admitted that this newfound assertiveness from

students made most teachers uncomfortable, he had decided the students had the right to complain if their right to education had been violated (confidential interview, 14 November 2015). Teacher R and this Grade 9 class recognised an injustice in their school and rights discourse gave them a framework in which to respond to it.

Although the students in the example above appeared to make their situation worse, such an outcome was not inevitable, which an episode during my interview with Teacher X at Tenaru demonstrates. It was just before lunchtime on a school day, and we were interrupted by a knock on the door of his house. Two girls in Grade 8, who had just finished their physical education lesson, asked for a drink of water. Teacher X was happy to oblige, and we joined them on the veranda. Technically, the students were out of bounds, but nobody cared. Shortly after, two of their classmates appeared. One was carrying a plastic bag full of vegetables and, once she saw Teacher X, made a false show of hiding it. Everyone laughed, and in doing so we all tacitly acknowledged that their rule-breaking would have no consequences. The girls let us in on their plan for the afternoon. They had left campus to collect the vegetables from a relative of one of the girls living in a nearby village. They would take rice from the dining hall at lunch, then take everything to the kitchen of another staff member to cook there, effectively abstaining from the school's afternoon program. In an effort to dissuade them, Teacher X led a discussion about the decisions they were making, but when they left he was sure they would proceed with their plan. Far from making their situation worse, rights discourse was the framework through which the students were allowed to introduce some diversity into their diet.

Indeed, Teacher X understood this episode in the broader context of child rights and pastoral care. He talked to them about the decisions they were making but did not ultimately enforce the school rules. Moreover, Teacher X was a member of the school's pastoral care committee, which evaluates physical, spiritual and academic life at the school (confidential interview with Teacher S, 13 August 2015). In 2015, the committee had been particularly worried about deficiencies in the students' diet. Teacher X reasoned that if teachers were eating well in their own homes, he had no right to deprive students of variation in their own diet (confidential interview, 15 October 2016). Therefore Teacher X's reaction to the girls' plan was not seen through an authoritarian lens, but through child rights and the Marist charism, which led him to frame the episode as one about the justice of the students' (dietary) situation.

In fact, the teacher–student relationship was rendered largely informal for the hungry students – they knew they could break some rules with impunity. Informal teacher–student relationships were typical of the schools I visited, and this was widely attributed to the hospitality of Melanesian cultures generally. But Teacher Z also explained that:

They have the right to come and ask me for something that [would] help them ... if somebody has missed out in dining hall, for the dinner, and comes to one of the teachers to help him or her with the cooking pot [because] she or he is quite hungry then though the school rule is there – it's late, don't move or do anything after late bell – but we have to make [the exception] because of the situation (confidential interview, 4 December 2016).

Teacher Z used rights language in support of the informality that led to a just outcome consistent with the hospitality of Melanesian sociality and the school's view of its duty of care.

However, Teacher B also identified new risks to the teachers that could arise from the combination of students' awareness of child rights and the informality of teacher–student relationships that allow students to visit teachers in their homes (confidential interview, 24 February 2016). In these circumstances, he worried that students armed with knowledge of rights might allege inappropriate behaviour from a teacher. As a compromise he encouraged teachers to only meet with students in public outside their houses. In this way, Teacher B found a level of formality in the teacher–student relationship that reconciled the rights of students, teachers and his image of Melanesian sociality.

Ironically, an unintended outcome of the articulation of justice issues at school within the frameworks established by child rights and Marist charism may be that it turns teachers away from the formal justice mechanisms of the state. In Bougainville in 2013 teachers at a non-Marist secondary school caught a student dealing drugs on campus. They turned him over to police but the student was murdered while in custody. Chris Beatus argued that if the teachers had respected the rights of the child and adhered to the 'Marist way' they would never have called the police (interview, 13 September 2015). Compare the decision to call the police to the attitude of Teacher B to his students:

When students do something that's a little bit, ah, naughty. I'd rather talk to them about something that they are good at rather than talk to them about their negative behaviour ... And I think to me, it will really save the child because all of a sudden he's going to realise that 'oh someone is noticing my goodness and not noticing my weaknesses all the time'. So to me that's probably the whole change of my outlook on the child too (confidential interview, 18 February 2016).

This change to his 'outlook on the child' came from the application of the Marist ethos which child rights reinforced. He was loath to ever call the police to follow up incidents in the school because he thought it would be too dangerous to leave a child in their care.

Conclusion

The Child Rights Network met with resistance from some teachers, in particular at Mabiri and Tenaru, for reasons entirely consistent with resistance to human rights in Bougainville and Solomon Islands more broadly. Protests that child rights fitted awkwardly with some central aspects of how Mabiri and Tenaru functioned, such as aspirations for strict discipline and the necessity of manual labour, were justified with their perceived incompatibilities with *kastom*. Combined with the more rebellious behaviour of young people (particularly in Bougainville) and the enhanced popular legitimacy of corporal punishment following the Crisis and the Tension, we might have expected that adopting child rights would lead to some fundamental changes to teacher–student relationships at school. This was true to an extent. Thus, although there was no single form of vernacularisation among teachers and students, the initiative brought child rights discourse and began a new regime of practice to the two schools. Child rights offered a vocabulary through which students could see themselves as equals in rights and therefore object to instances of everyday violence and abuse without 'acting BRA'.

Ultimately, however, the vernacularisations of rights at Tenaru and Mabiri changed little about the image of the person into whom teachers hoped to form students. This image was of a person able to fit comfortably within the existing moral frameworks of relationships in society, which implied a reassertion of frameworks of authority (requiring deference from young

people) that broke down during the Crisis and Tension. Thus, while in their daily lives at school people interacted creatively with rights, they did so within the established structures of schooling.

Notably, the reassertion of deference to authority through the integration of child rights with the Marist charism is quite different from the role of human rights education envisioned in transitional justice. Human rights education encourages students to model democracy by questioning authority figures critically, but the data presented here suggests the application of transitional justice to education in Melanesia needs an understanding of what modelling democracy looks like locally.

We have also seen that learning to view rights relationally or to use them to identify justice issues is a long-term project because the learning happens in unplanned moments when incidents occur. We saw that teachers and senior students were much more experienced with child rights at Tenaru where the teaching staff was stable and students had up to six years to learn them. By contrast, Mabiri's teachers were mostly new to child rights and the students would have only two years at most to adopt them. Such structural limitations would no doubt limit any transitional justice initiative that other church or government schools would employ.

Finally, it is worth noting an inherent limitation of civil society's involvement in transitional justice through education in Melanesia. An important goal of transitional justice is the rebuilding of trust in democratic institutions. In Solomon Islands, for example, Dinnen (2012, 71) has noted that 'longer-term peace-building and nation-building agendas will require a much closer focus on strengthening the contract between the Solomon Islands state and its citizens'. In transitional justice, because education is considered a state institution, and one with which it is assumed almost all children and parents have contact, improvements in the delivery of education are seen as a way for the state to rebuild its reputation. But when in reality the church schools analysed here performed the education function widely considered a state responsibility, and vernacularisation of rights within their charism encouraged teachers to withdraw from the formal justice system in the name of child protection, civil society would appear to be at odds with the aim of transitional justice to build trust in the state over the longer term.

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