CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PACIFIC

Causes and Course of the Bougainville Conflict

THE PEACE PROCESS in Bougainville has made unprecedented progress in the 12 months from mid-1997. The transformation has been remarkable, for as late as March 1997 the main protagonists appeared locked into an escalating cycle of violent conflict. Nevertheless, the future political status of Bougainville — a central issue dividing the main parties — had not been addressed by mid-1998. Deep divisions among Bougainvilleans have made it imperative for them first to build trust among themselves and strengthen their commitment to the peace process itself.

Much has been written about the origins and early stages of the conflict (1988 to 1990). Although there is considerable overlap between the main perspectives, the analyses can be grouped into three in terms of their primary emphases. One concerns ethno-nationalist demands precipitated by localised grievances about the Panguna copper and gold mine. Cultural perspectives emphasise the impact of mining projects and associated economic inequalities either on Melanesian communities in general or on the particular Bougainvillean communities involved. A third perspective emphasises the impact of class conflict.

This article re-examines these perspectives, evaluating the extent to which they explain the dynamics of the conflict from 1988 to 1997. In the process, light is shed on the complex divisions which have arisen from the conflict. The first part outlines the three main perspectives as presented by academic observers writing in the 1990–1992 period. It also considers other published material which elucidates the significance of the perspectives to our understanding of the conflict. In the absence of a detailed political history of Bougainville since 1988, the second part presents an overview of the main stages in the conflict to 1997. In order to illuminate the issues being examined, the emphasis is on its political impact within Bougainville, rather than on other important issues such as the impacts of the conflict on ordinary Bougainvilleans, the undoubtedly central role of the Papua New Guinea state, or the impact of the conflict on regional relations. A concluding section reviews the relevance of the perspectives on the origins of the conflict to the broader issue of the dynamics of the conflict.

Causes of the Conflict

It is often argued that a distinct and historically conditioned Bougainvillean ethnicity is the key to understanding the conflict. This perspective emphasises the centrality of ethno-nationalist sentiment among Bougainvilleans. Localised disputes among landowner groups suffering from the destructive impact of the massive Panguna copper mine operated by Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL) precipitated violent attacks by some group members on mine property. The attempts of the Papua New Guinea state to stop such attacks are said to have provided the catalyst for a widespread ethno-nationalist revolt.[1]

By contrast, Colin Filer[2] emphasises the destructive impact of the mining project on landowning communities, especially in the form of tensions over unequal distribution of

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[1] See, e.g., James Griffin, 'Bougainville is a special case', in R.J. May and Matthew Spriggs (eds), *The Bougainville Crisis* (Bathurst 1990), 1–15. BRA spokespersons often emphasise the ethno-nationalist perspective — see, e.g., Moses Havini, 'The long struggle for the independence of Bougainville' (Bougainville Freedom Movement, Sydney n.d.). As to landowner grievances, see John Connell, 'Compensation and conflict: the Bougainville Copper mine in Papua New Guinea', in John Connell and Richard Howitt (eds), *Mining and Indigenous Peoples in Australasia* (Sydney 1991), 55–75.

[2] Colin Filer, 'The Bougainville rebellion, the mining industry and the process of social disintegration in Papua New Guinea', in May and Spriggs (eds), *The Bougainville Crisis*, 73–112.

land rents and compensation. Filer suggests that all Melanesian societies could be expected to respond similarly to such pressures. There is evidence, however, that the impact in Bougainville was varied. While the Nasioi-speaking communities in the vicinity of the mine pit do fit Filer's model, the response of other communities was different. They include Torau-speaking Rorovana villagers of the central east coast, which lost large areas of land to port and other facilities, and Nagovisi people of the southwest affected by the disposal of tailings in the Jaba River. Eugene Ogan provides part of the answer to the differing responses of landowner groups. His focus is not only on aspects of the culture of the Nasioi people that may have influenced the genesis of the conflict, but also the diversity of cultures in Bougainville. Ogan considers aspects of the Nasioi experience of colonialism that may have precipitated attitudes particularly hostile to the imposition of a major mining enterprise.

For Herb Thompson and Scott MacWilliam, class conflict is the central issue. Six other 'causative variables' cited elsewhere (colonialism, ethno-nationalism, environmental degradation, inadequate financial compensation, poor decision-making by BCL and increasing land shortage for groups around the mine) are dismissed as subsidiary issues, either contributing to class tensions or manifestations of it.[3] Several classes are identified — the mining work-force, a small indigenous capitalist class with limited opportunities, a peasantry with rapidly declining land and few opportunities for selling their labour, and a marginalised 'lumpenproletariat' of unemployed youth. In the late 1980s all were concerned about the situation after mining. A new Panguna landowner leadership acted as a catalyst, voicing frustrations of other groups. '[R]ace, ethnicity, colonial heritage, the company, and the environment all provided a ready-made framework for class action'.[4]

Terrence Wesley-Smith and Eugene Ogan's analysis[5] of the changing relations of production from the pre-colonial situation to a Bougainville dominated by the Panguna mine raises doubts about the central importance of the capitalist mode of production assumed by Thompson and MacWilliam. Differing modes of production continued in Bougainville, with some articulation between them, as indicated by the mixed class composition of the landowners, all of whom retained ties to traditional modes of production.[6] Wesley-Smith and Ogan do not dismiss class. Rather, they ask 'to what extent might class lines coincide, or conflict, with divisions of ethnicity (within and beyond Bougainville) and age?'.[7]

Culture

Many aspects of the cultures of Bougainville help explain the divisions between and within Bougainvillean societies preceding the conflict, divisions which have had considerable impact on the course of the conflict. The varied historical experience of Bougainvillean culture groups also sheds light on differing responses to growing economic inequality in the decades preceding the conflict. Seven main points are emphasised here.

First, not only are Bougainvillean cultures far from uniform, but there are also tensions among Bougainvillean groups. Ogan has summarised key cultural differences concerning language, kinship, and rank and leadership systems.[8] Prior to colonial rule, most cultural differences were probably closely related to ecology and associated patterns of contact with other language groups or islands. Exploitation of the three main ecological niches available

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[3] Herb Thompson and Scott MacWilliam, *The Political Economy of Papua New Guinea* (Manila 1992), 32–8.

[4] Ibid., 38.

[5] Terence Wesley-Smith and Eugene Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis: changing relations of production in Bougainville', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 4:2 (1992), 245–67, 267.

[6] Ibid., 261.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Eugene Ogan, 'The cultural background to the Bougainville crisis', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 92–93 (1991), 61–7.

in Bougainville — coast, valleys and mountains — produced differing returns. Some achieved much more than subsistence, permitting 'more elaborate exchanges within the community, more differentiation of status among individuals, and exchanges with more distant communities'.[9] Those in the mountains probably produced less and 'had little opportunity for direct contact with anyone but their immediate neighbours'.[10] By contrast, coastal peoples often had a wide range of outside links including contacts north to Nissan and south into what is now the Solomon Islands.

Second, all cultures have changed continually, and especially in the less than 100 years since active colonial rule began in Bougainville (the first government station was established there in 1905). Patterns of development since then have tended to reinforce prior differences between culture groups. For example, coastal peoples were exposed to colonial administration, economic activity and formal education far earlier than people in the mountains. Coastal peoples in Bougainville tend to disparage 'less-developed' mountain-dwelling groups.

Third, even within communities occupying the same type of ecological niche, marked variations in wealth and prestige occurred both in the pre-colonial period and thereafter. On the other hand, social classes did not exist (classes in the sense of one group denying others access to the primary forces of production). A key reason was that land was the basic force of production, and access to it was 'guaranteed by the operation of some combination of descent, ego-oriented kinship, residence, or exchange'.[11] Leadership tended to be based strongly on prestige, something acquired by means other than personal wealth.

Stable populations and abundance of land were factors relevant to the lack of classes. Brief comments about land are required to elucidate subsequent discussion of the impacts of economic inequality arising from cash cropping. Land was held in the main by locality-based clan lineage groups. Usage was not necessarily entirely related to 'ownership'. For example, Nagovisi womens' rights to garden on particular tracts of land tended to derive from their mothers. However, almost any land could be used as long as the owner consented.[12] Land 'ownership' was transferred between both clans and matrilineages in cycles over several generations.[13] Until the Second World War there was excess land. Access to large land-holdings was not crucial for the advancement (usually through acquisition of prestige) of ambitious individuals or groups. Factors such as skills in marshalling labour and raising pigs were more significant. Holdings of land by matrilineages and clans had little to do with their ranking in terms of power. Such rankings were 'transient, in consequence of either the reputation and abilities of their big men and big women or the numeric size of the group'.[14]

Fourth, there were aspects of the relatively egalitarian (in material terms) traditional cultures in Bougainville that probably increased the tensions inevitably involved in the economic inequalities arising from participation in the modern economy. Various 'mechanisms' tended to limit the scope for accumulation of the limited forms of available wealth (mainly shell money, pigs and land) thereby limiting class formation. They included:

- complex and pervasive balanced exchange systems, which together with the preferred practice of cross-cousin marriages in many areas 'kept land and shell valuables within a limited span of kin and geography';[15]

[9] Ibid., 63.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Wesley-Smith and Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis', 248.

[12] Donald D. Mitchell, *Land and Agriculture in Nagovisi, Papua New Guinea* (Port Moresby 1976), 33–4; Donald D. Mitchell, 'Frozen assets in Nagovisi', *Oceania*, 53 (1982), 56 66 and 59 60; Jill Nash, *Matriliny and Modernisation: The Nagovisi of South Bougainville*, New Guinea Research Bulletin 55 (Canberra and Port Moresby 1974), 100–1.

[13] Mitchell, *Land and Agriculture*; Mitchell, 'Frozen assets'; Nash, *Matriliny and Modernisation*, 28–9 and 99–101.

[14] Mitchell, 'Frozen assets', 58.

[15] Ogan, 'The cultural background', 64. For the situation among the Nagovisi, see Nash, *Matriliny and Modernisation*, esp. 118–19.

- in most areas 'big man' (and in cases such as Nagovisi, 'big woman')[16] leadership based on generosity in exchange systems;[17]
- matrilineal inheritance systems which treated most property as that of the clan or lineage and prevented transfer from males — politically dominant even in most matrilineal societies — to their offspring; and
- practices of distribution or even destruction of property on death, and of destruction of property by clansmen upon a person suffering a misfortune (as in the Nasioi custom of *teekira*[18]).

Such mechanisms either persisted or were remembered in the period following the Second World War when economic change produced inequalities less susceptible to 'levelling', persistence being greatest among mountain communities.

Fifth, pre-colonial gender relations 'tended towards complementarity rather than hierarchy'.[19] However, developments associated with plantation labour, cash-crop agriculture and the mine tended to undermine the autonomy and high status of women.

Sixth, the social integration of young men seems to have been poor, at least from the onset of the colonial era.[20] Perhaps the ending of inter-group fighting deprived them of their main role[21] and ended the major means of their initiation into manhood. Together with the undermining of traditional authority from the beginning of the colonial era, such changes reduced the scope for socialisation of young men. By the 1980s their limited economic opportunities (discussed below) and lack of susceptibility to community control had contributed to alienation of young men from their communities and to growing crime problems.

Seventh, although non-violence is claimed as a characteristic of Bougainville ethnicity (as is discussed below), there is evidence that well into the colonial period Bougainvilleans were as prone to violent conflict within and between groups as the people of many other parts of Melanesia.[22] In Buka conflict between 'hill people and the coastal inhabitants' was endemic under the German administration.[23] Inter-group fighting continued into the 1920s in areas such as Siwai[24] and Nagovisi,[25] and at least until the Second World War in some remoter mountain areas. Such conflict was within living memory in many groups in the 1980s. Traditional tensions continued after inter-group fighting ceased, often manifested in new forms, as where neighbouring groups belonged to different missions (Catholicism and Methodism instead of axes and spears).[26]

Ethnic Identity

There is little doubt that Bougainvilleans share a sense of an identity distinct from other

[16] Nash, *Matriliny and Modernisation*.

[17] Ogan, 'The cultural background', 65.

[18] Eugene Ogan, *Business and Cargo: Socio-economic Change Among the Nasioi of Bougainville*, New Guinea Research Bulletin 44 (Port Moresby and Canberra 1972), 40–3 and 140–1.

[19] Wesley-Smith and Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis', 251, who cite Jill Nash, 'Sex, money and the status of women in Aboriginal south Bougainville', *American Ethnologist*, 8 (1981), 107–26.

[20] For illustrative examples, see Douglas L. Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society* (Cambridge Ma. 1955), 201–2, and Ogan, *Business and Cargo*, 105.

[21] The German New Guinea Administration Annual Report of 1907–08 indicates the nature of young men's roles before colonial 'pacification' — see Peter Sack and Dymphna Clark (eds and trans.), *German New Guinea: the Annual Reports* (Canberra 1979), 275.

[22] See Sack and Clark, *German New Guinea*, 236, 265, 275, 291, 303, 307, 322 and 355, and Peter Sack and Dymphna Clark (eds and trans.), *German New Guinea. The Draft Annual Report for 1913–14* (Canberra 1980), 71. For a different emphasis, see Wesley-Smith and Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis', 251–2.

[23] Sack and Clark, *German New Guinea*, 251.

[24] Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society*, 411–21.

[25] Nash, *Matriliny and Modernisation*, 8–9 and 67–8; Mitchell, *Land and Agriculture in Nagovisi*, 12.

[26] See, e.g., Oliver, *A Solomon Island Society*, 313–18.

Papua New Guineans as well as a belief that Bougainville would be better off being independent. While not unusual in Papua New Guinea,[27] such sentiments have been more intense and long-lasting in Bougainville than elsewhere. Yet Bougainvilleans are not dramatically different from other Papua New Guineans in terms of either 'race' or culture. While the precise process of the development of Bougainvillean ethnicity is unclear, as with ethnicity elsewhere it is the product of historical processes rather than a factor of inherent qualities of Bougainvilleans *vis-à-vis* other Papua New Guineans.

Even well into the colonial period the horizons for most Bougainvilleans were restricted to the few neighbouring groups they were in contact with. Jill Nash and Eugene Ogan note that the Nasioi and Nagovisi 'lacked any centralised political institutions that might have provided clearer boundaries to distinguish themselves from other Bougainvilleans'.[28] There was consciousness of cultural differences with neighbouring language and cultural groups[29] but little of the full range of such groups within Bougainville let alone a consciousness of Bougainville as either a geographical or cultural entity.

Bougainvillean identity emerged in the context of Bougainville's recent integration into a world beyond the narrow limits of the pre-colonial political and economic situation. Factors involved in development of that identity cited by Nash and Ogan[30] include:

- the colonial development of 'tribal' ethnic identities among Bougainvilleans and their ranking by both missions and the colonial administration into positive and negative stereotypes ('backward' and 'progressive');
- use of Bougainvilleans as 'strong arm' assistants to plantation developers and as police in other parts of New Guinea in the early colonial period which may have contributed to a sense of superiority;
- as Bougainvilleans ceased working on plantations after the Second World War, development of negative stereotypes of people from elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, and especially from the Highlands, as 'backward' due mainly to the menial tasks undertaken by such people on plantations and later in mine-related work (thereby adopting and transforming previous categorisations of Bougainvilleans by the colonists);
- repugnance to the behaviour of many of the 10,000 men, over 6,000 from elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, who flooded into central Bougainville for the construction of mine and associated infrastructure in the 1968–1970 period,

while other writers[31] also point to:

- Bougainville's close links with the western Solomons;
- a range of impacts from Bougainville's horrific experiences in the Second World War; and
- widely-held grievances about alleged colonial neglect and about the imposition of the mine for the benefit of outsiders.

To these might be added the unique circumstance in Papua New Guinea of a group homogeneous to the extent of sharing a distinctive appearance — in terms of dark skin colour[32] — living contained in a discrete island territory relatively remote from the rest of

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[27] R.J. May (ed.), *Micronationalist Movements in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra 1982).

[28] Jill Nash and Eugene Ogan, 'The red and the black: Bougainvillean perceptions of other Papua New Guineans', *Pacific Studies*, 13:2 (1990), 3.

[29] Ibid.

[30] 'The red and the black'

[31] See, e.g., James Griffin, 'Napidakoe Navitu', in May (ed.), *Micronationalist Movements*, and Griffin, 'Bougainville is a special case'.

[32] In fact, skin colour in Bougainville is far from uniform. Many Bougainvilleans (especially those from the atolls) have quite light skin colour. Others tend to be taken as being from New Ireland or East New Britain. Similarly, some New Irelanders and Tolais with skin colour darker than average are often assumed to be from Bougainville.

the country, and where a small and highly educated élite imbued with Catholic moral teachings articulated grievances and proposals for improvement.

Ethnic consciousness and opposition to mining coalesced towards the end of the colonial period, at a time when demands for autonomy were being asserted by groups elsewhere in Papua and New Guinea. It was in the context of pre-independence politics that increasingly 'Bougainvilleans considered themselves a single ethnic group in contrast to other Papua New Guineans'.[33] Skin colour — previously something Europeans stigmatised Bougainvilleans for in contrast to other Papua New Guineans — became the 'focal symbol for ... ethnic identity'.[34] Over time, Bougainvilleans have come to see themselves as not just distinct in colour from 'red-skins'[35] but also more peaceful and progressive than other Papua New Guineans.[36] While the point is speculative, the emphasis on peacefulness may be related to the process of differentiation from the 'backward' Highlanders who are perceived as especially violent.

Economic Inequality and Class

As already noted, class divisions in Bougainville need to be evaluated in the context of continuity and articulation of varied modes of production. They produced not only class conflict, but other kinds of tensions and conflicts arising from various forms of inequality, all influenced by the particular cultural and historical context of Bougainville. Four main points are highlighted here.

First, economic change to the Second World War had differential impacts. For some groups, regular contact beyond traditional areas of trade began in the second half of the 19th century but increased rapidly from 1901 with the establishing of mission and (later) government stations. Change was fastest on the coast. Before the Second World War, however, there was limited access to modern wealth except through wage labour on plantations.

Second, after the war, rapid population growth (at times over 3% per annum)[37] associated with improved health standards, formal education and changing customary practices caused pressure on land available for subsistence gardening. Increased cash-cropping added to that pressure. As cash-crop returns did not in general substitute fully for subsistence production,[38] pressure to find wage labour increased, while the limited opportunities available caused growing frustration, especially for young males.

Third, widespread cash cropping after the Second World War accelerated economic and social change. From the 1960s cocoa was the dominant crop, with smallholders producing more than plantations by the 1980s. Distribution of, and returns from, cash-cropping were uneven, depending on soils, rainfall, and access to the transport needed to obtain inputs and market output. Opportunities for mountain people were restricted, the most suitable land for planting and best access to transport being along the coast.

Within groups, access to land was the key to inequality, as shown by Mitchell's study of the introduction of cocoa in Nagovisi.[39] An almost random inequality in access developed due to the changes that widespread cocoa planting caused in both land-use and 'ownership' patterns. The change in use from gardening to cash crops resulted in unprecedented

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[33] Nash and Ogan, 'The red and the black', 8–9.

[34] Ibid., 9.

[35] 'Red-skin' is the (normally) pejorative term used by Bougainvilleans for the generally lighter skinned Papua New Guineans from other areas of the country.

[36] Nash and Ogan, 'The red and the black'.

[37] National Statistics Office, *1980 population census: preliminary bulletin No.1* (Port Moresby 1981), cited in Eugene Ogan, '"Taim bilong sipak": Nasioi alcohol use 1962–1978', *Ethnology*, 25 (1986), 31. See also Nash, *Matriliny and Modernisation*, 15.

[38] Mitchell, *Land and Agriculture in Nagovisi*, 119–49.

[39] Mitchell, *Land and Agriculture in Nagovisi*, and Mitchell, 'Frozen assets'

individualising of control of large tracts of land, freezing the inter-generational cycle of distribution of land. The result was economic advantage for groups and individuals which at that point in the cycle happened to have access to more land than they needed for subsistence. Others had so little land that by the early 1980s cocoa was being chopped down to make way for subsistence gardens.[40] Unmarried men had little access to land for cocoa, and in some areas there was little land available for newly married couples to plant cocoa.[41] Hence, land shortages contributed to both inter-generational conflict[42] and increased alienation of the younger men with few other opportunities for economic advancement.

Income inequalities at least in part related to increased cash crop activity were evident as early as the 1950s, when some Bougainvilleans were becoming relatively wealthy. The 1952–53 patrol reports analysed by Scott MacWilliam[43] show that Kunka of the Buin area of south Bougainville owned three trucks, three trade stores, two bakeries and large gardens producing three tons of rice which he sold in his own stores.[44] Nikora of Bangana, near Koromira (in the southern part of the Nasioi area of central Bougainville) made his own copra and bought coconuts and copra from other 'natives', employing 27 mainly Nagovisi workers, paying them more than the overseas-owned plantations were then paying their labourers.[45]

Fourth, the Panguna mine contributed to economic inequality in several ways. In relation to employment, in the 1980s almost one third of the BCL work force of nearly 4,000 were Bougainvilleans[46] and the approximately 200 business enterprises in Bougainville dependent on BCL employed about 4,000 people of whom about 50% were Bougainvilleans.[47] Villagers from around the mine pit held few such jobs, most of them being unskilled. As for business opportunities, about 50% of those 200 businesses were owned by Bougainvilleans. In relation to BCL rent and compensation payments to the land-owning groups affected by the various leases associated with the mine (for the port, road, pit and tailings) Wesley-Smith and Ogan have pointed out that:

> the formulae for distributing such payments could not possibly take into account the traditional hierarchy of land rights that served a different mode of production. Thus, villagers who had subsidiary claims under traditional tenure systems received much less than those who were regarded, however correctly, as primary right holders.[48]

Distribution of payments was disputed in the 1980s, especially by younger adults who had been children with few rights when compensation arrangements had been established. By destroying or limiting access to land, the mine had created shortages of land for subsistence gardening and cash-crop cultivation in large parts of central Bougainville. Finally, within the

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[40] Mitchell, 'Frozen assets', 63–5.

[41] Ibid., and Mitchell, *Land and Agriculture in Nagovisi*, 93, and Ogan, '*"Taim bilong sipak"*', 29. The basic problem is that in matrilineal societies, men are expected to plant crops on land belonging to their wives' lineage. They have few rights to anything they plant on their own lineage land prior to marriage.

[42] See Wesley-Smith and Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis', 259, and Ogan, '*"Taim bilong sipak"*'

[43] 'Post-war reconstruction and resource-management in Papua New Guinea: re-building plantations on Bougainville', seminar presented on 20 Nov. 1997 in the Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Seminar Series, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra.

[44] Buin Patrol Reports, Kono Paramountcy, Patrol Report No.4, 1952–53 (notes of copies of report made by MacWilliam, North Solomons PG office, Arawa).

[45] Kieta Patrol Reports, Koromira Sub-division, Patrol Report No.3, 1952–1953 (see n44). These cases of affluence may have been in part related to war damage compensation payments. They may not have been sustained, as the returns from rice, coffee and copra were notoriously uneven, rice and coffee being largely abandoned as cash crops by the 1960s — see John Connell, *Taim bilong mani: the evolution of agriculture in a Solomon Island society* (Canberra 1978).

[46] Wesley-Smith and Ogan, 'Copper, class and crisis', 257.

[47] Thompson and MacWilliam, *The political economy of Papua New Guinea*, 22.

[48] Wesley-Smith and Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis', 256.

mine workforce there was inequality between Papua New Guinean workers and expatriates, especially in terms of representation of the latter in middle and senior management ranks.[49] Bougainvilleans resented the lack of opportunities for promotion.

By the late 1980s the developments just outlined had contributed to both major differences in regional economies in Bougainville and significant economic inequality among Bougainvilleans, thereby contributing to tensions within and between groups (for example south and north Bougainville tended to resent what they saw as the affluence of areas around the main provincial centre of Arawa). The impact of economic inequality on the previously remote Nasioi peoples of the mountainous Panguna mine area was especially powerful. Customary organisation of society — inclusive of the 'levelling' mechanisms already discussed — was stronger than among Nasioi of the coast, aggravating internal tensions caused by inequality. The other Bougainville groups that lost land for mine leases were coastal and valley people (Torau and Nagovisi), and their different cultures and history may help explain why uneven distribution of rents and compensation did not have such disintegrative impacts upon them as appears to have been the case with the Panguna landowners.

Economic inequalities had particularly devastating impacts on young males. The general availability of primary school education in Bougainville coupled with limited secondary school places and few employment opportunities in the modern economy produced a large pool of under-educated, under-employed youth not susceptible to social control. Such tensions were a factor in growing criminal activity in the 1980s and in the emergence of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). The weakening of the status of women may also have had a role here, in that in matrilineal societies the influence of women over the young unmarried men previously contributed to social control.

Impact of the Mine

As it seems certain that reaction to the Panguna mine at least contributed to the role played by other causes of the conflict, the impacts of the mine require brief comment. While there was widespread antagonism to the mine, for those not affected directly by it the main issue was hostility to the increasing number of outsiders attracted by the economic activity associated with it. The most deeply felt impacts involved the small landowner groups in the vicinity of the mining operations. As Wesley-Smith and Ogan point out, they 'were grossly disadvantaged from the beginning and no subsequent renegotiation has been able to remedy the situation'.[50] In summary, the impacts included:

• loss of land (virtually all land available for agricultural purposes in the cases of Dapera and Moroni villages);
• limited and unfairly distributed compensation;
• diversion of social inconvenience compensation into a 'business arm' which delivered little to most landowners;
• environmental degradation; and
• problems with standards of housing and other facilities in villages re-located due to the mine.

These impacts were greatest for mountain Nasioi people who had been, when mining exploration began in the 1960s, several hours walk from the coast, with few Tok Pisin speakers and almost no formal education and limited economic activity. A 1964 patrol report described the people of the area as 'among the least sophisticated in Bougainville'.[51]

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[49] Nick V. Spencer, 'Professional development at Bougainville Copper Limited', paper presented to the seminar Towards a Strategy for Higher Education in Papua New Guinea, University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, 19-21 June 1984, cited by Wesley-Smith and Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis', 258.
[50] Wesley-Smith and Ogan, 'Copper, class, and crisis', 256.
[51] Cited in Connell, 'Compensation and conflict', 56.

Course of the Conflict

1988 to 1990 — From Landowner Dispute to Ethnic Uprising

The initial spark for the conflict was an inter-generational dispute within landowner groups around the mine over the distribution of compensation and rents. Resentment about other impacts of the mine heightened the tensions involved. Frustrated in their efforts to gain control of landowner organisations from the older leadership and to extract concessions from BCL and the national government, in April 1988 a younger leadership group claimed compensation of 10 billion kina (then approximately $US10 billion).

Francis Ona, the key leader of the wider rebellion, was a former BCL employee. A resident of Guava village in the mine lease area, his immediate family had little entitlement to land there and so received scant rent and compensation. Informants from the area suggest he was embittered about both the environmental impact of the mine and the economic inequality it caused. It seems likely that the K10 billion compensation claim was intended not only to signal the depth of landowner concerns but also to eradicate the galling inequalities among landowners (with K10 billion all could have been rich). In November 1988, dissatisfied with the results of a government-appointed study of the environmental and other impacts of the mine,[52] Ona's supporters destroyed BCL property with explosives and demanded closure of the mine.

Initially Ona's primary concern was the mine rather than secession. However, the conflict quickly developed an ethno-nationalist character due mainly to the poorly judged and ill-disciplined responses by mainly 'red-skin' police and (from mid-1989) the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF). There were appalling and often random human rights abuses (assaults, rapes, extra-judicial killings and burning of villages). The March 1989 murder of a Bougainvillean woman on the coast near Kieta, allegedly by a Highlander, added to the intensity of ethnic feeling and the public support for Ona. It was about February 1989 that, at the urging of leaders of neighbouring groups offering support, Ona added secession as a goal. His rapidly expanding followers became known as the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. The strongest support came from frustrated young men with few economic opportunities for whom membership of the BRA gave power and status. There was considerable continuity between criminal activity by *raskols* and BRA activity. Public support was far from uniform, however, for many village leaders were unsure about the BRA.

Ona and a small group of advisers (the 'founders') developed a BRA ideology. Bougainville's problems were caused by outsiders — BCL, the national government, and non-Bougainvilleans generally — together with wealthy Bougainvilleans and the 'white mafia' who controlled the PNG economy. Their influence had to be removed to pave the way for a return to customary authority and ways. The appeal to custom served several purposes. First, it met anxieties of Bougainvilleans concerned about rapid change. Second, it legitimated Ona's leadership by reference to the virtues of the past. Third, prominent among those virtues was egalitarianism, and so equality could be achieved by returning to customary roots.

The mine was forced to close in May 1989. The disorganised PNG state had little capacity to respond creatively to the escalating conflict. Efforts by Prime Minister Namaliu to negotiate a settlement based on offers of a major compensation and development package were rejected by the BRA, in large part because the savage behaviour of the security forces (which were not responsive to executive direction) undermined all conciliation efforts. Despite the imposition of curfews and the declaration of a state of emergency and the July 1989 provision by Australia of four unarmed military helicopters, the PNGDF and the police were incapable of controlling the situation. A cease-fire and withdrawal of

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[52] Applied Geology Associates, *Environmental, socio-economic and public health review of Bougainville Copper mine, Panguna* (Wellington 1989).

the PNGDF and police riot squads was negotiated in March 1990. Contrary to the agreement, the general duties police were also withdrawn, and all government authority collapsed quickly.

March 1990 to mid-1992 — BRA Support Wavers

While the BRA had agreed to disarm and negotiate, the temptation to take control was too much. Ona made a unilateral declaration of independence in May 1990, soon after the national government had imposed an air and sea blockade. There were efforts to negotiate a settlement in August 1990 and January 1991, producing the Endeavour Accord and the Honiara Declaration respectively. Although mainly restricted to programmes for restoration of government services, both agreements foundered in the hostility and suspicion between the parties, which focused on disagreements over implementation and the role of the PNGDF (which was distrusted deeply by the BRA).

By early 1990, although support for the BRA was not uniform, it was widespread. Independence would probably have been achieved if the BRA had been disciplined and organised. It was neither. More of a philosopher or mystic than warrior, administrator or policy-maker, Ona lacked the experience or ability to impose organisational unity. He and the 'founders' continued to develop the BRA ideology, which became increasingly suspicious of the modern world, including aspects of formal education, medicine and major economic activities.

While Ona remained supreme commander of the BRA, its loose command structure was directed by former PNGDF lieutenant Sam Kauona. Owing to concern about acceptability of a military government in international *fora*, an appointed 'civilian' government was established — the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG). It included former provincial government figures, notably the premier, Joseph Kabui, who became Vice-President under self-proclaimed President Ona.

The BIG had little control over the BRA high command and limited influence on Ona. More importantly, neither the BIG nor the BRA 'high command' had much control over the BRA fighters. These were mainly young men in locality-based and largely independent groups most of which were only loosely linked to the high command. They had vastly differing perceptions of what was involved in the conflict. While some were disciplined and highly motivated, others were little more than criminal gangs.

Without the PNG security forces as a common enemy, the ethno-nationalist nature of the conflict tended to dissipate. Instead, many BRA groups focused on perceived enemies within Bougainville. Non-Bougainvilleans and various categories of Bougainvilleans — the wealthy, the well-educated, senior government officers and anyone suspected of co-operating with the national government — were harassed, imprisoned, tortured or murdered. There was a clear perception that a new leadership was asserting itself at all levels, and that the old leadership should make way.

Some BRA groups became embroiled in local conflict within or between communities. Groups from relatively undeveloped areas attacked 'wealthy' villages in neighbouring areas (as in the May 1990 burning of Ieta village, adjoining Buka Town, by young men from mountain areas of Inus and Tinputz in northern Bougainville). People believed to have breached BRA 'Standing Orders' were punished, with many alleged sorcerers being executed, most of them older people. In the face of such developments, BRA support reduced rapidly in many areas.

Leaders with claims to traditional authority (hereditary 'chiefs' in Buka, far north Bougainville, and Buin, and 'big men' in other areas) often filled the gap left by the withdrawal of government authority. In late 1990, at the urging of mainly educated advisers concerned to bring BRA groups under local control, the BIG/BRA leadership agreed to establish formal councils of 'chiefs'. They became part of the BIG/BRA policy of re-establishing traditional authority. In many areas, however, 'chiefs' were in conflict with

young BRA members who saw little reason to accept any limits on their new-found status and power.

Armed opposition to the BRA began to emerge from about mid-1990, usually based on alliances between chiefs and educated or wealthy people who felt threatened by the BRA. Local ethnic loyalties resulted in some former BRA groups supporting such new leadership. The process started in Buka in about August 1990, when violent clashes occurred between BRA elements from Buka Island and BRA groups from north Bougainville whose efforts to dominate Buka had been widely resented. In September 1990, at the request of local leaders, the PNGDF landed and took control of Buka. Again at local invitation and meeting little opposition, government forces returned to the north and southwest of the main island in 1991–1992. Many abuses of rights by the PNGDF also occurred in this period. In general, however, the security forces were more disciplined than they had been previously, making it more difficult for the BIG/BRA to win back waning support.

Armed opponents of the BRA and also surrendering BRA elements formed 'Resistance Forces'. They were armed by and gave active assistance to the PNGDF. Bougainville became an increasingly violent place as BRA, resistance groups and semi-criminal groups became vehicles for localised conflict, often within the same culture group. Many were localised struggles for status and power between both groups and individuals with leadership aspirations. Traditional tensions had a role in some such conflicts, as in the Hahon area of north Bougainville and incidents between Torau and Nasioi villages near Arawa. Some involved mountain versus coast tensions overlaid with economic inequality, as in parts of east-coast Bougainville. Others involved both economic inequality and struggles for power within the BRA as in the bitter conflict in the Siwai area of southwest Bougainville which ran from 1992 to 1997.[53] Still others simply involved cycles of revenge begun by attacks on or killings of prominent people, as in the Wisai area of south Bougainville and the conflict in inland Rotokas (north of Panguna) between BRA from Toisiko (inland Red River) and Resistance groups from southern parts of the area. Of these conflicts, those in Hahon, Siwai and Wisai mainly involved communities from within the same language group.

The outcomes included widespread human rights abuses on all sides. A culture developed where violence became the main means of resolving disputes. Divisions in all parts of Bougainville multiplied and deepened. Many people fled to neighbouring Solomon Islands. Many thousands moved to local refugee camps — called 'care centres' — where security was provided by PNGDF and resistance elements. Conditions were often grim, and poor discipline on the part of the PNGDF resulted in many human rights abuses and other problems for residents. Afraid of the BRA and increasingly resentful of the PNGDF, many care-centre residents were true victims of the conflict.

In general, community support for the BIG/BRA remained strong in central and south Bougainville. The impact of the mine had been greatest there, and dissemination of the founders' ideology was effective. As a result, relations between armed BRA elements and the 'chiefs' in these areas were often mutually respectful. In much of the rest of Bougainville, as violence, divisions and social disintegration increased, Bougainvillean ethno-nationalism and the vision of a new and equal society based on tradition lost much of their potency as rallying calls for BIG/BRA support. This was so despite deep resentment of the national government for the lack of health and education services caused mainly by its ongoing blockade of Bougainville.

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[53] Bougainvilleans distinguish the bitter conflict of the internecine 'Siwai crisis' from the 'Bougainville crisis' as a whole.

Late 1992 to September 1994 — Stalemate and Increasing Conflict

Following national elections in mid-1992 a new government, formed under Prime Minister Wingti, was impatient with the slow restoration of government control, and sought to speed up the process through military initiatives, most notably efforts to re-take the provincial capital and the Panguna mine. PNGDF attempts to expand areas under government control and consequential fighting from late 1992 resulted in numerous casualties on both sides, and much suffering for the local civilian population. Many fled into the jungle, and others to Solomon Islands refugee camps. 'Care centre' populations soared, to about 50,000 (one-third of the population) by mid-1994.

Violence elsewhere escalated as the BRA challenged the returning PNGDF and Resistance groups. Under increasing military pressure, with poor command and control systems and often idiosyncratic officers, PNGDF discipline suffered and human rights abuses increased markedly. The impact was greatest in central and parts of south Bougainville, where bitterness against the PNGDF, opposition to the national government, and support for the BRA and secession all intensified. At the same time the localised violence and divisions already discussed deepened.

Leadership opposed to the conflict developed in many areas. Localised peace initiatives were developed by women's organisations, churches and NGOs which conducted reconciliation ceremonies and training courses in dispute resolution. There was increasing discussion of the need to bridge the divisions among Bougainvilleans if there was to be progress towards the peace most people longed for. Several efforts were made to hold pan-Bougainville peace talks. At the same time there was mounting foreign pressure on the PNG government and increasing awareness in the BIG/BRA leadership that international recognition of secession was not going to be easily obtained.

On becoming Minister for Foreign Affairs in January 1994, Papua New Guinea's deputy Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan committed himself to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. He pursued that goal through exploratory contacts with BIG/BRA leaders. Meanwhile Wingti's efforts to achieve military domination in central Bougainville continued, with an unsuccessful attempt made to re-take the Panguna mine site from June 1994.

September 1994 to January 1996 — Tentative Moves Towards Peace

Chan replaced Wingti as Prime Minister in August 1994 and at September meetings in Honiara with the BRA's Sam Kauona reached agreement on a cease-fire and a peace conference. Security at the conference was to be provided by a South Pacific regional peace-keeping force. The national government blockade was to be lifted.

The reasons why the most senior BIG/BRA leaders did not attend the peace conference at Arawa in October 1994 are still unclear. However, the cease-fire was probably among the first steps of a moderate BIG/BRA leadership group around Kabui and Kauona in moves towards a negotiated peace. Ona disagreed with the cease-fire, and relations within the secessionist leadership became tense. The rapid pace at which Chan moved to organise the peace conference strengthened Ona's hand by raising suspicions of a possible trap for the BIG/BRA leadership. At the same time the prospects of an imminent change of government in Solomon Islands had raised the possibility that if a new government was formed there, it might give formal recognition to Bougainville's independence.[54]

The Arawa peace conference was attended by well over 1,000 people from all over Bougainville, who made it clear that ordinary people were desperate for peace. The strong

[54] Failure of the peace conference could have been expected to embarrass the incumbent Solomon Islands government which had played a major role in the negotiations that led to the conference and was providing a chairperson for the conference proceedings, and that embarrassment could have contributed to the fall of the government.

stand taken by women's group leaders had a major impact on many attending the conference. High expectations before the conference that it would facilitate substantial progress to peace, and anger about the lost opportunity presented by the excellent security arrangements provided by the peace-keeping force (from Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, New Zealand and Australia), contributed to intense frustration about the lack of attendance of the BIG/BRA leadership. This atmosphere contributed to the emergence in the days immediately following the conference of former judge Theodore Miriung as a leader for the war-weary people of the north Nasioi area of central Bougainville.

Miriung's move to prominence marked a significant shift in Bougainville politics. He provided the focus needed for development of an alliance between leadership of groups either opposed to the BRA or prepared to negotiate an end to the conflict. He opened middle ground among the divided Bougainvillean leaders by supporting openly the general BRA aims while at the same time opposing their methods as causing too much suffering. Negotiating a high degree of autonomy was his preferred alternative. The north Nasioi move also involved the first major erosion of support for the BIG/BRA leadership among the Nasioi. The BIG/BRA claim to be the legitimate voice of a united Bougainville was seen to be undermined in its heartland. Mountain versus coast tensions were an issue here, in that the relatively well-educated north Nasioi from coast and valley areas resented the problems they saw as caused by the senior BIG/BRA leaders who were mainly from the mountains.

Within weeks of the Arawa meeting, Chan agreed to new proposals developed by Miriung and the eight 'interim authorities' (local government bodies operating in government-controlled areas of Bougainville) to establish an interim provincial government to act as a bridge to the BIG/BRA and to negotiate a new political status for Bougainville. The new government — the Bougainville Transitional Government, or BTG — was established in April 1995. It comprised mainly chairmen of the interim authorities and representatives of each of the 18 provincial electorates selected by electoral colleges of councils of chiefs. Miriung was elected premier.

Many in the national government were suspicious of the BTG, afraid it was a 'Trojan horse' for the BRA. At the same time, the BIG/BRA leadership was suspicious of the BTG. In these circumstances, progress towards building understandings between the BTG and the BIG/BRA leaders was slow and was not helped by obstruction of BTG efforts by the PNGDF. Nevertheless, Chan agreed to meetings between the BIG/BRA and the BTG held at Cairns in Australia in September and December 1995, but he became increasingly suspicious that the two groups were becoming too close. In January 1996, as BIG/BRA leaders returned to Bougainville from the talks in Australia, they were attacked by PNGDF troops. It is still unclear whether this was initiated by the national government.

January 1996 to March 1997 — Impasse and Escalating Conflict

The BRA retaliated with a series of attacks on PNGDF and police elements in February and March. The national government lifted the cease-fire in March 1996 and launched major military operations. Their failure and the subsequent massacre of 12 PNGDF and police personnel at Kangu Beach near Buin, and the taking of five security force personnel as hostages, underlined the inability of the security forces to defeat the BRA. The depths to which the PNGDF had sunk were further illuminated by the murder a few weeks after the Kangu Beach massacre of Premier Miriung. A coroner later found that identifiable PNGDF and resistance personnel were responsible.[55]

In January 1997, desperate for progress prior to national elections due in June, Chan agreed to engage mercenaries and purchase high-tech equipment to assist the PNGDF in

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[55] 'Report and findings regarding the death of Theodore Miriung. Report of coroner, T. Suntheralingam', mimeo., Port Moresby, Dec. 1996.

its struggle. By February, mercenaries supplied by London-based Sandline International and its South African associated company Executive Outcomes were training with the PNGDF Special Forces Unit, intending to crush the BRA through the capture or killing of key leaders and capturing the Panguna mine site. There was opposition to Chan's moves, especially from the Minister for Provincial Affairs, Peter Barter, who developed an alternative strategy — the Bougainville Peace Strategy — and from the BTG which continued to advocate negotiation with the BRA.

In a surprise move in mid-March 1997 the PNGDF commander forced the mercenaries to leave the country.[56] Following mass protests outside the parliament, Chan and two key ministers involved in engaging the mercenaries were pressured to stand down during a judicial inquiry. The acting Prime Minister (John Giheno) supported a negotiated end to the conflict. These dramatic events helped create conditions conducive to the emergence in July 1997 of a new government led by Bill Skate and to the real progress towards conflict resolution which occurred in the latter part of 1997 and in 1998.

April 1997 to Present — Sustained Progress Towards Peace?

It is not possible in this article to discuss the ongoing peace process that began with meetings of Bougainvillean leaders of almost all main groups in Burnham, New Zealand, in July 1997, and has continued (with subsequent meetings also involving the national government held in New Zealand, Australia and Bougainville). Suffice it to say that a key to the progress has been the beginning of efforts to bridge the divisions among Bougainvilleans.

As the peace process developed from mid-1997, conflict decreased until a truce began in December 1997. Deaths and injuries did occur, however, even after the peace negotiations had begun, including the assassination by still unknown persons of a BTG member for a Nasioi area electorate which occurred after the first Burnham peace talks in July 1997.

The main opposition to the peace process has come from Francis Ona. He maintains that as independence was an event which occurred with his unilateral declaration of independence in May 1990, there is nothing to negotiate save the recognition of that fact and the withdrawal of the PNGDF. That the process has made progress despite his strong opposition points to a significant reduction in Ona's influence. The moderate BIG/BRA leadership associated with Kabui and Kauona distanced itself from Ona in the preparations for the peace talks in New Zealand in July 1997. They were able to do so in part because Ona's refusal to negotiate peace was alienating a war-weary populace and in part because Ona's radical vision of an egalitarian subsistence-based Bougainville had lost support. But without Ona the peace process has proceeded at the cost of yet another potentially destabilising set of divisions among Bougainvilleans. There are still pockets of strong support for Ona, especially in isolated mountain areas. He also retains considerable respect from most Bougainvilleans — even those who oppose him strongly — for what are seen as the significant achievements of removing the 'red-skins' from Bougainville and closing the mine. If the peace process should falter, the possibility of Ona emerging again with wider support remains strong.

THE LIMITED INFORMATION available about not only the emergence of Ona and the BRA but also the unfolding of the conflict with its local manifestations means it is still too early to give a definitive analysis of the dynamics of the conflict. Nevertheless, it is clear that ethnicity, culture and economic inequality all played roles in both its origins and course. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that any single factor can be regarded as going very far towards explaining the complex dynamics of the conflict.

[56] For analysis of the impact of the Sandline affair on the Bougainville conflict see Anthony J. Regan, 'Preparations for war and progress towards peace: Bougainville dimensions of the Sandline affair', in S. Dinnen, R.J. May and A.J. Regan, *Challenging the State: the Sandline affair in Papua New Guinea* (Canberra 1997), 49–72.

As for ethno-nationalism, such factors as its relatively recent emergence, the lack of clarity about its precise origins, and its role as a force in unifying an increasingly divided people — mainly by reference to denigration of outsiders — combine to suggest the need for caution in analysing the conflict as primarily an ethno-nationalist phenomenon. The role of pan-Bougainville ethno-nationalism in the origins of the conflict is obscure, the evidence suggesting it was not a major factor initially. It certainly became crucial in mobilising support for Ona and the BRA in 1989. Its significance reduced dramatically, however, once the unifying threat of force from the Papua New Guinea security forces was withdrawn in March 1990. From that point localised ethnicities within Bougainville became important. Of course, ethnicity remained a significant motivating force for the BIG/BRA and continued to be vital in mobilising support for them (especially in central and parts of south Bougainville).

For the time being, however, the irony may be that by not only strengthening existing divisions within Bougainville — including those based on local ethnicities — but also creating new divisions, the conflict may have actually reduced the likelihood that ethno-nationalist goals can be achieved, at least for some time to come. On the other hand, the suffering of so many Bougainvilleans at the hands of the security forces, even when living in 'care centres' to escape the conflict, has undoubtedly resulted in not only deep bitterness and resentment against Papua New Guinea, but also a deeper shared antipathy to 'red-skins' generally, even among people who oppose the BRA and secession. It is not too difficult to imagine circumstances where ethno-nationalism could again play a role in uniting Bougainvilleans (for example, if large numbers of outsiders return to the province).

Turning to culture, Filer's analysis of the impact of the mine on the local Nasioi landowner groups helps to explain the beginnings of the conflict. Other aspects of cultures, and the varied impact of their histories during and since colonial rule, shed light on both the rapid spread of support for the BRA and the subsequent development of conflict among Bougainvilleans. Differences among Bougainville culture groups pre-dating colonial rule, including those between mountain and coastal peoples, have been reinforced by patterns of change this century and have been a factor at many points in the conflict. The tensions arising when previously largely egalitarian societies have had to deal with economic inequalities may be relevant not only to the disputes among the Panguna landowner groups which precipitated the conflict, but also to the 'levelling' that occurred at the hands of BRA elements after the security forces withdrew in 1990. The frustration caused by lack of roles for young men was important in the rapid spread of active support for the BRA in 1989 and 1990 and in the subsequent conflicts among Bougainvilleans. The undermining of gender complementarity may have reduced countervailing social mechanisms against violence. Well-remembered traditions of violent inter-group conflict may help to explain the intensity of the internal conflict once the security forces withdrew.

Another aspect of culture concerns its use and development in the conflict. Ona and the BRA have sought legitimacy through a return to traditional ways, and Ona in particular has pursued a radical egalitarian programme on the same basis. Others have sought to impose control on the young men with the guns by strengthening long undermined traditional leadership at the local level, in the process creating a largely new system of power claiming legitimacy through appeals to tradition.

As for economic inequality, it took many forms, including some class divisions, and contributed to tensions and divisions both prior to and during the conflict. The broad range of economic inequalities that developed so quickly after the Second World War must have resulted in grave tensions for largely egalitarian societies, especially those with limited access to the outside world until very late in the colonial period. It seems possible that the differing impacts of such inequality within and between groups, in part due to cultural differences that are substantially ecologically rather than class-based, may be an important factor in the dynamics of the conflict.

While class divisions probably contributed to development of the conflict and some of the 'levelling' activities of BRA elements after the security forces withdrew may well be understood in part in class terms, the evidence suggests class has not been the key dynamic. There are questions about the dominance of the capitalist mode of production in Bougainville. Class analysis suggests a degree of cohesion in economic interests cutting across culture groups, there being little evidence of such trends in Bougainville. Rather, class is better seen as one of a complex mix of factors, one that at times may have reinforced the role of other factors. For example, class differences probably contributed to generational conflict, and together they reinforced social tensions in societies where prestige was so important. Class differences may have reinforced cultural tendencies and localised ethnic divisions in the 'levelling' activities of BRA groups.

Two main points emerge from this preliminary analysis of the dynamics of the conflict. First, while none of the three perspectives examined stands alone as an explanation, not only is each important, but each reinforces the significance of the others.[57] On this view, the stresses in Bougainville societies caused by the interaction of evolving cultures with growing economic inequality both within and between societies may be central to understanding the conflict. Nowhere were those stresses greater than among the landowner groups around the Panguna mine. The violent response, especially by mainly young members of those groups, late in 1988 seems to have set in train a series of events which unleashed accumulated tensions in other parts of Bougainville. While appeals to pan-Bougainville ethno-nationalist sentiment initially mobilised widespread support for BRA claims to provide new directions and new leadership for Bougainville, the withdrawal of the unifying threat of the PNGDF resulted in development of localised arenas within which tensions could unfold and struggles for power occur with no legal constraints. While stresses similar to those of Bougainville in the late 1980s occur elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, local reaction to the mine and ethno-nationalism were significant factors that resulted in those stresses manifesting themselves in ways unique to Bougainville in some respects.

Second, it needs to be remembered that most Bougainvilleans made their decisions regarding the conflict in the context of the very localised arenas of their own and neighbouring societies. Much conflict developed as a result of rational decisions made on the basis of the information and understanding available to the decision-makers (inclusive of their assessments of the local balance of forces). The basis for such decisions may be easily misunderstood. Thus decisions to either support Ona and the BRA or to oppose the security forces in 1988 and 1989 might well be different decisions, and yet could both be readily ascribed to ethno-nationalism. In fact, both may well have as much or more to do with quite different factors, such as the search for status and power on the part of semi-educated young men (and others associated with the BRA and the BIG). Similarly, once violence was unleashed in so much of Bougainville, decisions about entering the conflict at the local level probably had little to do with the agendas or ideologies of the BRA, the BIG, the national government or the BTG, and much to do with settling old scores or winning power and status in localised arenas. If this analysis is correct, then it may well be that even when more complete evidence is available it may still be difficult to dissect the origins and subsequent dynamics of the conflict. Rather, the initial focus may need to be on the dynamics of the many localised conflicts.

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[57] I am grateful to Bill Standish for assisting me to highlight this point.

Stanley, Mary Cath Togolo, Mel Togolo, Marie Tyler, Ted Wolfers and Gary Young. Part of this article elaborates upon a section of a Bougainville case study included in a Manual on the Management of Deep-rooted Conflict to be published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Sweden.

ABSTRACT

In its very early stages, the Bougainville conflict was analysed by academic observers in terms of three main perspectives: ethno-nationalist demands precipitated by grievances about the Panguna copper and gold mine; cultural perspectives which emphasise the impact of a large mining project on either Melanesian communities generally or particular Bougainvillean communities; and class conflict and other forms of economic inequality. To assess the extent to which these perspectives illuminate the dynamics of almost 10 years of conflict, they are re-considered in the light of both other published material about Bougainville and an overview of the main stages of development of the conflict. While each perspective illuminates aspects of the conflict, none of them stands alone as an explanation. Rather each tends to reinforce the significance of the others. Stresses in Bougainvillean societies caused by interaction of evolving cultures with growing economic inequality within and between societies are central, with local grievances about the mine and ethno-nationalism crucial to the way those stresses manifested themselves.

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