

## **Conflict Among Bougainvilleans 1988-1998: Implications for the Peace Process**

by

Anthony J. Regan

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### **Introduction**

At present, Bougainville is a province of Papua New Guinea. Located several hundred kilometres to the east of the mainland of Papua New Guinea, it consists of two main islands: the large island of Bougainville and the small island of Buka. Bougainville, however, is also known to the people of Buka as 'Big Buka', an indication of the way Bougainvilleans regard one another.

According to a story I was told by a Bougainvillean from the far north of Buka, traditionally people in Bougainville regard the island of Bougainville as a figure of the human body. The head, of course, is Buka and the people who live at the north of Buka, the Halia people, are the brains.

The man telling me the story described the islands in terms of anatomy. The area where the Moses\* people live is like the body's mouth—and the Moses\* people talk a lot. An area with a couple of volcanoes resembles the breasts of a woman and, hence, the land was very fertile. The plains, where all the growth of cocoa and copra is, were like a man's shoulders—hardworking but they did what the brains told them to do. The mine is like the belly button. And what happens when you get a stomach upset around the belly button? Well, there are a lot of problems and you've got to have some medicine to sort it out.

The map he was looking at included the islands of the Solomons. The man said, 'They're like the legs and we all know what the legs do—they come behind, they do what the body and the brains tell them to do. And that's just like the Solomons—backwards.'

The man has told me this story twice, both times in deadly seriousness. It is a little story about how the people of Buka tend to see the Bougainvilleans. Most groups in Bougainville, if you talk to them long enough, will tell you that their group is superior to the others. There are groups within groups, too. If, for example, the Nasioi\* that you are talking to is from the coast, he will tell you that the coastal Nasioi\* are far superior to the mountain Nasioi\*.

Of course, this isn't dramatically different from anywhere else in the world. I'm from Adelaide and we, in Adelaide, say 'pool' and 'school' and that's far superior to the Victorians who say 'skoo-ell' and 'poo-el'. Aussie Rules, for example, is far superior to rugby, and so on.

It does, however, give an indication of the difficulties of understanding Bougainville—and the conflict that's gone on in Bougainville since 1988—purely in terms of a nationalist, united uprising of Bougainvilleans against 'evil outsiders'. I suggest that the conflict is a lot more complex than that.

In this paper, I will be focusing on the conflict that has occurred amongst Bougainvilleans during the 'crisis' of the past ten or eleven years. It seems to me that this internal conflict has been least addressed in the public discussions of the Bougainville conflict. Generally, Bougainvilleans are presented as if they were a united force, holding out against overwhelming odds and the pressure from a dominant outside group. And the only Bougainvilleans seen as opposing them were fifth columnists for the national government or were cowed by the national government. Unfortunately, the truth is somewhat more complex, and it is very important to try to come to grips with that complexity if the peace process that is going on in Bougainville is to succeed.

Bougainvilleans do share a sense of a common ethnic identity. And almost all Bougainvilleans support independence for Bougainville. There's not much doubt about that.

Yet, all the peace agreements that all the Bougainvillian groups and the national government have been signing since 1997 keep stressing the need for reconciliation amongst Bougainvilleans. So the Bougainvilleans signing these agreements have acknowledged to one another that Bougainvilleans are deeply divided and that before they can deal with the political issues they need more reconciliation amongst Bougainvilleans.

An example illustrates the need for reconciliation. At present, there's a major conflict going on over the establishment of a reconciliation government in Bougainville. John Momis, the regional member of parliament for Bougainville, is challenging in court arrangements that were reached late last year to establish the reconciliation government. His major support comes from the island of Buka. A coalition of leaders from various parts of Buka are calling for a whole range of things to be done, including establishing completely different arrangements for the reconciliation government, and are insisting that if their demands are not met—and their demands are focused on John Momis's court challenge—then Buka will split from Bougainville. It would become a separate province in Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, Big Buka as they call it, would go its own way.

In the process, the leaders are mobilising support around strong feelings in Buka about events which occurred in 1990. At the time, largely highland mainland elements tended to dominate the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) in Buka and there were very considerable tensions. Villages were burnt, there were a number of murders, rapes, thefts and so on. Some of the same elements of the leadership now supporting John Momis then organised the majority of the Buka-based BRA to become the Buka Liberation Front (BLF). The BLF fought back and several mainland BRA members were killed. As tensions rose, the Buka leadership requested the national government to

come back and, in September 1990, the national troops came back—six months after they had left under a ceasefire arrangement. There is still deep resentment in Buka about what happened in 1990 and it is very easy for the leadership to mobilise support for itself, and for John Momis, along what is essentially a Buka–Bougainville ethnic divide.

In late 1998, elements of the dominant BRA group in Boyan\*, in the far south of Bougainville, killed another senior BRA commander—a man by the name of Paul Bobi\*. Since then, there have been a number of clashes between groups supporting Thomas Tari\*, the leader of the people that are alleged to have killed Bobi\*, and groups that are not exactly loyal to Bobi\* but are terribly scared of what Tari\* might do to them either because they have backed the wrong people earlier on or they are seen as ‘misbehaving’ (Tari\* is supposed to have organised the death of Bobi\* because Bobi\* was misbehaving.) What we are witnessing in the south of Bougainville is a power struggle within BRA groups, which has so far led to between three and ten deaths. No-one is quite sure of the exact number of deaths and stories range back and forth.

Imagine what would happen to the peace process if, in the middle of this shooting of one another, a truce monitor or a United Nations (UN) observer got killed. At the moment, these two sets of conflicts among Bougainvilleans—one within the BRA, another between Buka and Bougainville—are the two things that are most threatening the peace process. I am not suggesting the peace process is about to collapse, but these are the two main issues threatening it. They also demonstrate how important it is to understand conflict amongst Bougainvilleans as one of the chief dynamics of what is happening on this island of nearly 200,000 people.

### Conflict in human society

It is important that, when we look at conflict amongst groups such as the Bougainvilleans, we see it in a broader context. Conflict is common in all societies, both within and between groups. We need, too, to distinguish some basic concepts, such as competition between individuals and groups, which can easily move into conflict; and we need to recognise that violence can be one of the means of pursuing conflict. We need to think about sources of conflict, parties to conflict, and the methods for pursuing conflict, which can include all sorts of things in our societies and in Bougainvillean societies—insults, courts, sorcery, physical violence and warfare, by which I mean collective armed violence.

We need to think about the social, cultural and economic contexts which can contribute to the extent of resort to violence and warfare in competition and conflict. These can include a shortage of resources, the lack of alternative means of resolving conflict, and cultural tolerance of conflict. There is a wide range of things that we can look at.

It is also worth thinking about violence, warfare and the process of state formation as smaller social units get subsumed—and as they fight back, often, even after the formation of states. When we think about the time it has taken

for state formation in Europe, for example, and for the conflict amongst groups to move forward into the formation of states, then what's going on in a place like Bougainville starts to make a bit more sense. Here, we are talking about societies that have only really been in formal contact with the outside world for less than a hundred years .

There are other obvious things we need to consider when looking at conflict within a society. These include:

- ? the importance of context—what we can regard as violence or conflict in one situation may not be in another;
- ? how conflict is resolved; and
- ? the finality of the resolution of conflict versus cycles of peace and conflict.

These issues are common to many situations around the world and, I think, they are also evident in Bougainvillean societies. Look at some of our neighbourhood disputes that we have in our societies. Are they dramatically different?

We need, too, to consider processes for resolution of conflict—different groups have their own processes. And we need to think about the fact that conflict is not necessarily all negative. Karl Marx, of course, is the one who would have developed this thesis to its highest point: that out of most conflict you do get both positive and negative outcomes. We shouldn't see conflict always in purely negative terms.

### The Culture of Bougainvillean Societies

Culture in Bougainville is tremendously complex. For example, there are 19 main language groups for a population of less than 200,000. Boyan\*, for example, is a group of about 30,000 people now but it occupies a quite small part of Bougainville. There are many very tiny groups, such as the Amwoon\* and the Thoram\*, which migrated from the Solomon Islands sometime in the nineteenth century. Amongst all of these main language groups, there is a vast range of sub-languages and dialects. And for a very small population there is great complexity in terms of language and tremendous variety of cultures.

Leadership structures vary from hierarchical leadership in the far south and in the far north to competitively achieved or age-based leadership elsewhere. There is also a quite considerable difference in material culture and in the extent to which cultures engage with the outside world, depending on whether they are mountain, valley or coastal people. The coastal people tend to be engaged in trade in the north and south, and up and down the coast. The mountain people are generally much more isolated. There are very different physical, material returns\* from the coast, valleys and mountains, producing quite significant differences in cultures. For example, the Nasioi\* people who live in the mountains are in many ways very different from the coastal Nasioi\* people, although they speak the same language.

Language and culture groups do not constitute political units. The Boyan\* people in the south, 30,000-odd of them, are divided into a multitude of small and shifting societies. This was especially the case in the pre-colonial period. Groups came together around leadership, particularly in the age and competitively achieved leadership groups from the south through to the north. Groups came together, and fell apart, around fighting leaders, feasting leaders, sorcerers and so on as disputes over land and other things brought them together and split them up. So we had small and unstable societies within language groups, limited centralised leadership, and great deal of dispersal of power.

As far as we can tell, there was relative complementarity of gender relations in the pre-colonial period. Societies were relatively egalitarian and were based, to a high degree, on reciprocity in relationship and balanced exchange. This appears to have been particularly true of the non-hierarchical groups from the north down towards Boyan\*.

Young males had important roles in warfare. As the German\* reports make clear, nobody went anywhere without a high degree of protection. If women went to garden, they went with groups of armed men. If they went to collect water, they went with groups of armed men. It was only fairly late in the German period that the Germans writing about Boyan\* were able to say the young men were no longer carrying weapons as a matter of course.

Of course, in the colonial and post-colonial periods there is dramatic change in these societies, but there is also a high degree of continuity. Much of the basic pattern still remains.

## Conflict before World War 2

To try to understand the conflict amongst Bougainvilleans during the period 1988 to 1998, we need to see whether there are any patterns.

We know, from many observers who were in Bougainville during the latter part of the nineteenth century, that there was considerable violent conflict both within and between groups. And there was also warfare—organised group violence.

We know from some of the anthropological studies in the early part of this century by such people as Turnvold\*, Blackwood\*, Oliver\*, Parkinson\* and many others in the neighbouring areas, including the Solomon Islands, that there was a wide range of reasons for violence within groups, and we know that there was common warfare among groups. Nauff\*, for example, says that warfare was common, if not intense, in island Melanesia .

Nauff\* summarises aspects of warfare in island Melanesia in the following terms:

In most coastal and insular areas of Melanesia, there was significant demarcation of allied and enemy groups. In some instances, large scale

slaughter of enemy villages occurred. While in others, ritualised battle led to few or no casualties in a political and military stand-off\*. In most cases, however, attacking forces in coastal areas of pre-colonial Melanesia mounted surprise raids, with the purpose of avenging past losses. The goal of most such raiding parties was to capture and/or kill some enemy in retribution for previous killing. It was usually of little consequence if the persons were men, women or children. Frequently, the raiders would try to surprise their target village ...

[\* quote needs to be checked and referenced]

There is a lot of debate in the literature about the functional roles of warfare. Nobody is too clear about those kinds of issues and, of course, the circumstances are very difficult to recreate. There is, however, a lot of theoretical discussion about such roles as rites of passage, routes to leadership, strengthening group solidarity, ecological functions, and the safety valve function for expressions of accumulated frustration.

We know that, in Bougainville, the kind of thing that Nauff\* was talking about was true. There was a considerable amount of shifting alliances between allies and enemy groups. We know also that there was a lot of cannibalism involved in warfare and conflict, in conflict both within and between groups in the north, and quite a lot of headhunting in the south.

Sam Miquoiti\*, the Minister for Bougainville Affairs, comes from an area known as Rokokas\*, in the northern part of Bougainville, a mountain area. Rokokas\* and Kiriarka\* on the west coast were really only 'pacified' in the period after the Second World War. Miquoiti\* recalls that, in his village, were two old men who participated in cannibalism in the 50s. He is a relatively light-skinned Bougainvillean and the old men used to stroke his arm and tell him, 'You wouldn't have lived to this age. The light-skinned ones are the sweetest meat.'—and he is serious.

We know that there was a lot of conflict between coast and mountains, both in Buka and throughout the main part of the island. We know, too, that there were traditional ceremonies and ways of resolving conflict amongst groups. Depending on the shifting of alliances, once some sort of balance had been reached in damage, or once one group had been thoroughly defeated by another, there were ways of resolving conflict, sometimes for shorter and sometimes for longer periods.

Late in the pre-colonial period, traders, missionaries and others brought considerable change, including major economic change, especially to the people on the coast. They brought new actors, new tensions and new technology, and the spread of this was quite uneven. Obviously, the impact was much greater on areas of the coast where there was easier access.

Bougainville's experience is not dramatically different from that of the rest of insular, island Melanesia, through the Solomons, through other parts of Papua New Guinea, through Vanuatu. However, Nauff\* and others believe that warfare in island Melanesia and much of coastal Melanesia was probably of

lower intensity than in much of mainland Papua New Guinea. I say 'probably' because we do not really know. The detailed studies that were done in the early part of this century—in Sepik\*, in the Gulf, and later in the highlands of Papua New Guinea—mean that we know more about patterns in those areas than we do about what was happening in island Melanesia late last century and before.

'Pacification' occurred quite rapidly in Bougainville during the colonial period, and was generally effective. There was very limited inter-group conflict in particular in Bougainville. But we need to remember that this is fairly recent. The first mission station was established in Kieta\* in 1901 and the first government station in 1905. And, of course, the colonial state was seeking to neutralise the existing Bougainvillean authorities, in part by the use of violence. The German reports are full of punitive expeditions. There were no less than six in and around Kieta\* to get the mission and the government stations established securely. There were many down in Dobouyen\* and other areas. Violence was used to stop violence. If the Boyans\* killed a missionary or a catechist, then the Germans came in and killed ten or 20 Boyans\*. One wonders about the kinds of patterns that were established by this. Nevertheless, Bougainvilleans seemed to welcome the end of local warfare and participated actively in pacification.

Pacification, however, occurred unevenly: Kieta\* first; Boyan\* not long before the First World War; Siwai\* in 1920–21; Rokokas\* and Kiriarka\* in 1922. The people of Amwoon\*, near Torakina\*, still fear the Kiriarka\*. There are a lot of coastal fears, about wild mountain men who used to come down and raid. Stories still loom large in people's minds.

Pacification, however, undermined the roles of traditional leaders and of young males. The young men had much less to do and seemed to have been much less under social control than they probably were before.

We know that intra-group and inter-group conflict did not die after pacification. Conflict continued. It took different forms. It took new methods, and it was fought out in new arenas. So competitive feasting and sorcery, the churches, and the courts were all arenas in which conflict was fought out in a less violent way than it had been before. When you talk to people, however, it is very clear what they feel about the groups around them that they might have had traditional enmities with. The feelings might be much less intense but it is common to hear such comments as 'We still don't trust these bastards because of the kind of things which we know went on' or 'They're basically all sorcerers and that's why they've joined the Uniting Church and we're all in the Catholic Church'.

In addition, there were new sources of conflict. Whereas people had been very much isolated—it seems that most people did not move more than a few kilometres from their villages in the pre-colonial period, except on well established trading voyages and journeys—people were now able to move and come into contact with entirely new groups.

All sorts of new economic forces were at work, too, which brought new kinds of conflict. In the process, women's roles seemed to change. The work of Terence Wesley-Smith\* and Eugene Ogens\* suggests that, as the modes of production in Bougainville changed from the traditional into the modern economy, the complementarity of male and female roles was undermined. Consequently, women have tended to be sidelined in a whole range of ways, economically and politically. This is of some importance when it comes to conflict resolution, and there is some evidence that, in the last few years in Bougainville, women have been coming into their own again in a different way.

There were also new parties to conflicts. People were in contact with a much wider range of Bougainvillean groups—with redskins, people from other parts of Papua New Guinea; with plantations; with the state, including the police; with the churches, the courts, and so on.

The result is a complex interaction of traditional societies with new actors in new arenas. Not only were there changes to the traditional societies themselves, but also the new actors, including the state, were incorporated into traditional conflict. People were using the state and the churches, for example, for their own purposes, often without the church or the state or the kiap\* having a clue about what was going on. This situation was not dramatically different from what was occurring in other parts of Melanesia.

#### World War 2 and beyond

During World War 2, there was quite a bit of conflict amongst Bougainvillean groups. Those people supporting the Japanese fought people who were supporting the coastwatchers, the Australians and the Americans. The most intense conflict of this kind happened amongst the Nasioi\*, with coastal people, in particular, tending to support the Japanese. A fairly large group of Nasioi\* coastal people, and some Thoraus\* as well, were known as the 'Black Dogs'. They chased the coastwatchers and the villagers who supported the coastwatchers. There were murders, rapes, pillaging and burning of villages over an extended period.

Conflicts arising from the World War 2 have only recently been resolved. Mel Tollovau\*, my brother-in-law and one of the Thoraus\* from Roromanuvu\*, recalls that the last big feast to sort out the conflicts that his people were involved in, in the mid-1940s, was held in 1974. Joe Kabui\*, who comes from a village up past the Panguna mine, tells a similar story. In his village, the last feast was held in 1984. So, 40 years on, the last feasts sorted out this conflict which occurred in the Second World War.

After World War 2, Bougainville underwent a period of rapid population growth and experienced the beginning of land pressure. As population pressure rose—and at times after the Second World War, Bougainville experienced 3 and 4 per cent per annum increases—cash cropping was being introduced, particularly around 1960 with cocoa and, to a lesser extent, copra. Small holder cocoa and copra became terribly important on Bougainville, more

important than anywhere else in Papua New Guinea. And as people shifted from subsistence gardening to cocoa and copra, the land available for subsistence gardening was reduced. More importantly, there were complex arrangements in most societies for transferring land, based on matrilineages. All of the societies basically from the south, except Boyan\*, were matrilineal. Land transferred between matrilineages over a cycle of several generations and so the clans, or the matrilineages, that were relatively land rich in the 1960s and 1970s did very well. Those that were relatively land-poor did very poorly and, by the 1970s, were starting to chop down cocoa for subsistence gardens for newly-married couples. So, during this period, tensions were slowly building up as a result of growing inequality and competition for resources.

In the late 1960s/early 1970s, the Panguna\* Mine brought new sources of inequality in terms of employment, businesses, loss of land, the uneven distribution of rents and compensation, and tensions with outsiders.

In the post-colonial period the reliance on cash cropping increased rapidly. At various times, for example, Bougainville was producing more than 50 per cent of Papua New Guinea's cocoa and about 70 to 80 per cent of that was being produced by small holders. Vast numbers of people were involved.

Cocoa prices collapsed on several occasions. A minor collapse occurred in 1975. There was another short collapse in 1982 and a very major collapse in 1987–1988. In 1986, the average price, delivered in store in Rabaul\* and Kieta\*, was 1600\* kina per tonne. In 1987, it was 1400. In 1988, it was 1000. Cocoa prices dropped by a third. By late 1988, prices were down to 813 kina per tonne—a drop of well over a third on a monthly basis. With the large numbers of people involved in small-holder production, one can imagine the tensions produced as income dropped dramatically.

Around the mine, there were growing inter-generational disputes among the landowners about distribution of rents and benefits, as well as growing economic inequality. Quite a range of economic nationalism issues were being raised. Bougainville mineworkers, for example, were furious that they weren't getting senior- and middle-level management positions. Bougainvilleans generally resented all the money from the mine going to the mainland while just a few Bougainvilleans were getting very wealthy through cash cropping, rents and compensation. Outsiders were seen as causing all sorts of law and order problems.

So, throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, Bougainville experienced significant increases in tensions.

### Conflict amongst Bougainvilleans

Continuities and discontinuities are something we need to look at when we think about contributing factors to conflict. What place culture? What place history? I would say that the culture, the long history of conflict amongst groups, the rising tensions amongst people that had occurred over a long

period must have all played their part in the recent conflicts among Bougainvilleans.

There was significant inequality amongst Bougainvilleans. There was also the appalling violence of police riot squads and the Papua New Guinea defence force, who were brought in from November 1988 to try to prevent people blowing up mine facilities in their resentment at not being able to get the mine to give more compensation and to deal with environmental damage. This started cycles of violence which had not been seen in Bougainville since pacification was actively embraced by Bougainvilleans. And in the process, the legitimacy of state institutions was very rapidly destroyed.

Collapsed state institutions didn't help. Local government, provincial government, village courts, all the apparatus of the state which had been working in various parts of Bougainville, ceased to work. District officers, kiaps\* and so on, were unable to operate. Buildings were burnt and the introduced law and order ceased to operate in a very, very short time.

As the BRA became established, all of this was creating a place for alienated young males. Since the loss of their warfare role, the young men not only had no major role in society but also, in matrilineal societies, they had very little chance of getting access to land until they married. Although they had some rights to their sisters' and mothers' land, they were not expected to be planting cash crops and long-term investments. It was expected that they would get that opportunity when they married and moved to their wife's land. There was, however, tremendous competition for the wife's land because of the growing cash cropping and demands for subsistence gardening. So there were large numbers of relatively well educated young males, who were generally alienated and had no economic activity. The BRA offered them status, power, a role.

Another factor was Bougainvillean ethnicity which was being asserted against the outsiders. This was something which justified violence against both the outsiders and the Bougainvilleans seen as supporting them. To this was added the BRA and, later, very fragmented resistance forces, armed groups based in their local, small, semi-independent societies. The discipline of these forces depended on the particular individuals who emerged to lead them at a particular time. Given the tensions amongst Bougainvilleans, conflict spread quickly.

We know a great deal now about the kind of conflict that occurred. There was conflict and violence within groups. There is little doubt that Matthew Kovae\*, Francis Ona's\* uncle, was killed by Ona's brothers. He was killed by his own nephews. Amongst the Nasioi\*, a nephew killing an uncle is acceptable. That's handled within the group. It does not lead to major problems. But Matthew Kovae\* was killed because he was one of the people of the older generation holding out against the distribution of mine rents and compensation to the younger generation.

John Beaker\*—a Bougainville provincial government minister who was advocating settling the secession claims by transferring massive amounts of money and powers to the provincial government—was assassinated allegedly by Nasioi\* BRA because he was opposing secession.

We know, too, of instances of wider conflict and violence amongst Bougainvilleans. Provincial government and national government officers were rounded up, and made to fight and assault each other. Some were shot and some were killed because they were supporting 'this evil national government, these evil outsiders'. We know that the Amwoon\* group, one of the groups that came up from the Solomons in the nineteenth century, fled to islands off the coast because of harassment by Kiriarka\* and Nasioi\* BRA because one Bougainvillean senior public servant was a member of that group.

Yeta\* village, on Buka Passage\*, was burnt, allegedly by the BRA but really by rascal gang elements in May 1990. Every permanent material building in the village was burnt and all the bush material buildings were left standing. It was a message: 'You bastards are too rich, and you've cooperated with the national government. We're mountain people, we have nothing. You're coming back down to our level'. And they left, written on a water tank, 'cold fish'\*. 'Cold fish' is a name for fish that swim in freshwater streams, which tend to be cold. They are a bit slow moving and not very aggressive. The Bukas\* were not very aggressive. They weren't supporting the BRA and they didn't stay. The Yetas\* didn't fight the men that came across the Passage to burn the village so they were 'cold fish'. Now, there are 'cold fish' basketball teams in Yeta\* village, which is an indication of what they think .

Once the BRA had been essentially moved from Buka, groups on Buka—Halia\* and Mahtu\*—fought over land and dobed one another in to the military as BRA, getting one another killed. In Harphon\*, groups split, some joining the resistance, some staying with the BRA, mainly because of traditional divisions between them. The Methodists essentially went with the BRA and the Catholics went with the resistance. There was no ideological basis for it.

I am not trying to say that the main violence going on in Bougainville was by Bougainvillean against Bougainvillean. There's no doubt that overall, over the ten years, the worst violence was by the army and the police against Bougainvilleans. To a large extent, that violence is easier for Bougainvilleans to deal with than the violence among Bougainvilleans. And that is the point that these peace agreements are talking about: that is why reconciliation is needed amongst Bougainvilleans.

Conflict since 1988

(\*beginning unclear) there was theft, there was insults, there was ideology involved. Because, of course, ideology was important. Sorcery was important.

After the national government troops returned to Buka in 1990, there were several attacks by massed groups of BRA against army positions. In one instance, there were scores of casualties. There were sorcerers in the Kerai\* Valley, near Aroa\*, who were alleged to have not provided sufficient protection to some of the young men from that area who were killed. Those sorcerers were murdered. And there's no doubt about this. In the Kerai\* Valley, there are very few of the older men left. Large numbers were killed. I have never been able to sort out the numbers. The same thing happened on the resistance forces side later on.

At the time, there was problems within the organisation of the BRA. There were problems with the cross-over between rascalism and the BRA, between rascalism and the resistance. For example, the people that attacked Yeta\* village in May 1990, although they claimed to be BRA, were actually a group called the 'Night Hawks'\* , a well known rascal gang that had operated in the area before the conflict.

The Buka Liberation Front, which emerged in 1990, and the resistance forces which emerged in other areas tended to be armed groups opposing the BRA. They were built around elite elements and the leaders of groups that tended to be losing out in local conflict. In some cases, groups that had opposed or not been sufficiently supportive of the BRA would be targeted by local BRA groups. They would then arm and defend themselves. In other instances, there would be power struggles within the BRA, as occurred in Siwai\* in 1991–1992. The group that was losing out, a group around a man called Nick Piniai\* and some others, called in the troops. And Siwai\* divided, as from April 1992, down the middle: the south under resistance and the army, and the north under the BRA. But what was the resistance in the south of Siwai\* had, a couple of months before, been the BRA. They were the BRA elements that had been supporting the southern leadership. So there was a whole series of shifts in allegiance and armed support.

Whereas Bougainville ethnicity had been the basis for attacking outsiders—the redskinned, police and the army, and the Bougainvilleans that had supported them—now, to some extent, the distinct ethnicities within Bougainville also became important. Conflicts emerged, for example, between the Thoraus\* and the Nasioi\*, the Amwoon\* and the Kiriarka\*, and Buka and 'Big Buka'. Ethnicity became one of the numerous faultlines along which people conflicted.

Of course, the Papua New Guinea defence force, the national intelligence organisation and the police played a role in all of this. They took advantage of the divisions where they could. Once they were asked to return to Buka in 1990, they were quick to accept the challenge. When other groups asked them to return, they were quick to do so. And once back, they exploited the divisions. They supported the resistance forces irrespective of whether they were good, bad or indifferent, as long as they were supporting the national government. So there was an element of 'divide and rule' but, in most cases, it was an exploitation of divisions that were already there. Certainly, they were

made worse and some new ones did emerge but the basic pattern was one of exploiting existing divisions amongst Bougainvilleans.

Out of this, over many years, emerged two sets of governmental structures:

- the BIG as the civilian government, is supported by the BRA as its armed wing and councils of chiefs; and
- from 1995, the BTG, supported by the resistance forces and councils of elders.

These twin structures became the vehicles for conflict and, in many cases, for localised conflict. People would support one set of elements merely because they were opposing the local group that were in the other set. It was a way of avenging whatever wrong they were believed to have committed. Or, if they themselves had committed some wrong, it was a way of being protected from the vengeance of the group that remained with the other side.

There was a lot of work throughout this period to resolve conflict. Chiefs and councils of chiefs emerged in many areas but their power was limited. They could only deal with disputes within their own group. It was very hard to deal with conflicts between groups. Women, churches and NGOs played incredible roles at the local level and created a great deal of the popular pressure that, together with general war-weariness, eventually led to people being pushed into the peace process.

Reconciliation ceremonies went on all over the place; there is a great deal of shaking of hands. However, most people will tell you: 'Maskee forgiveness'—there is a long way to go for forgiveness. And when you think about the importance of reciprocity and a balanced exchange in these still semi-traditional societies, one can understand why. It is not enough to just shake hands and exchange beetlenut. More is required.

It took 30 or 40 years for the Second World War conflicts to be resolved because ways had to be found to get the exchange right, to work out what is needed to resolve the problem. During the present peace process, a great deal is going on. The TMG\* and the PNG\* have provided a great deal of the space for reconciliation discussions and processes to continue.

#### Implications for the peace process

Outsiders—the national government, the PNG\*, the UN, the NGOs, the donors—need to understand the complexity of the situation. There is a tendency to analyse Bougainville in very stark terms and not to recognise that there is a great deal more going on than simply rejection of the mine or a fight for the environment or a fight for independence. There is more happening.

There are some possible problems for the peace process as a result. There will be difficulties disarming combatants and integrating them into society. Unless you've forgiven and really resolved the conflict, are you going to give up your gun if that bugger down the road's still got a gun, or if you think he's

got a gun? There was ideological struggle: there were people who believed firmly in independence and firmly opposed independence. But the majority of fighting was about much more localised issues.

The fighting for control that is going on within the BRA in Boyan\* indicates the difficulty. Why would you give up your gun if you think there is a danger of any other group hitting you? The resistance does not trust the BRA. Amongst the group supporting John Momis\* in opposing the Bougainville reconciliation government are two key resistance leaders. Their support, I suspect, arises partly from fear of what happens if a Bougainville reconciliation government dominated by the BRA gets established.

Bringing combatants back into society is going to be difficult. These young men have had power and status in their societies which they have not experienced for, perhaps, a hundred years. They know, too, that they are going to go back to virtually nothing. There will not be a great deal of economic opportunity; there will be less than there was before.

There are problems, too, in differentiating between crisis and non-crisis related violence and conflict. People still talk about the Bougainville 'crisis', although the crisis is now 12 years old. And there is a great deal of difficulty in addressing this in the reconciliation ceremonies. Do you treat somebody who killed your brother in an ambush on a PNGDF patrol in the same way as somebody who raped your sister or stole your land or whatever?

The peace process creates great uncertainty for both old leadership—people such as John Momis, earlier community government leaders, and even Sam Kaouna\*—and aspiring new leadership. One of the main people in the struggle that is going on in Buka is an aspiring young leader of the local council who, I suspect, sees this as the opportunity for building a big political career based on a solid Buka support base. If you can divide Buka and Bougainville along an ethnic line, you have a very solid basis for every future national election. There is a danger of major ethnic divides of various kinds emerging in Bougainville through the peace process.

There are also potential difficulties in managing political structures. Imagine the competition there will be at the local level if elections are held. Groups that were fighting one another, killing one another, only a couple of years ago will now be competing through the ballot box, running election campaigns and trying to work together.

There is an intensity of feeling against outsiders throughout Bougainville—against both redskins, who are seen as having caused a great deal of the conflict, and Bougainvilleans from other areas. There is a great deal of talk around Arowa\*, for example, about how 'We're not going to let anybody from the north or the south in Arowa\*; we're going to run things for ourselves'. There have been problems with some construction projects, involving resentment not only of redskins but of Bougainvilleans from other areas.

Generally, I think will be a great deal of difficulty re-establishing the rule of law in Bougainville. How are we going to get acceptance of courts, of police, from groups that have essentially been the law unto themselves for so long?

### Consequences for planning the peace process

Firstly, the reconciliation government itself is of tremendous importance. There is a great need to remove the twin structures of the BIG\* and the BTG\*, these vehicles for conflict. The roles of councils of chiefs, councils of elders, women's organisations, churches, Bougainvillean NGOs, especially at the local level, have been extremely valuable up to now, and this can be increased only if the sources of conflict and the guns can gradually be removed.

Time is needed, too, to move beyond 'shake-hand' reconciliation to real forgiveness, to find ways of getting reciprocal arrangements developed. All of this has important consequences for the continuing involvement of the PNG\* and the UN. We are in here for the long haul; it will not happen quickly.

There are important issues for the PNG\* and the UN. The complexity of the whole situation means that they must be there merely as monitors—observing the process, stepping between the combatants—rather than actively facilitating the peace process. If you try to actively facilitate, you are likely to be backing somebody against somebody else without realising it. You start to think that someone is really committed to the peace process—until you discover, a few weeks later, that he's actively involved in conflict with some group or other in the area and your support for him has destroyed your chances of being a credible group with a whole range of others.

Donors and NGOs need to be aware of the potential for aid to be divisive in a variety of ways. The uneven spread of aid, the involvement of non-Bougainvilleans and/or Bougainvilleans from other areas have the potential to contribute to a resurgence of conflict in one way or another.

There is also the need to think about truth and reconciliation commissions. Recently, there has been a lot of talk about this, and one Australian NGO has been actively promoting a truth and reconciliation commission. I am rather concerned about it because there is a tendency for NGOs to have their own agendas in situations such as that in Bougainville. I do not think it is necessarily a good thing for Australian NGOs to be running in there with a human rights agenda and pushing it down people's throats.

There are many Bougainvilleans who think they do need a truth and reconciliation commission. They want the full truth, the whole picture to come out. There are many others who say, 'No. That's not the way we do things. We take time, then we find ways of moving behind and away from shake-hands to something real'. People talk about the distinction between merely shaking hands and doing something real. What they mean is resolving conflict between the groups, restoring balance between the groups. That takes time to

sort out and they say that it will not necessarily be helped by a truth and reconciliation commission.

## Conclusion

It is clear that Bougainville is not dramatically different from other parts of Melanesia, in terms of culture, patterns of conflict and so on. We are dealing, however, with a lot of contributing factors to the conflict which are different: the mine, Bougainvillean ethnicity against other outsiders for example.

In thinking about the conflict amongst Bougainvilleans, we need to ask whether single explanations are of much use? I don't think we can say there is a culture of violence in Bougainville. I don't think we can put it down to class. I don't think we can put it down purely to the mine or purely to the abuse, the appalling violence started by the Papua New Guinean forces. Combinations of factors and serendipity seem to be more important than any single factor.

For Papua New Guinea, there are some lessons to be learned about the speed of the collapse of state institutions. It happened within months in Bougainville and the consequences of that for Bougainville and for the rest of Papua New Guinea need to be considered. What happens once those institutions do collapse? Was that part of what contributed to the conflict? Given all the other pressures, once the framework of institutions within which people had worked to some degree collapsed, it was open slather.

Lastly, we need to think about the future. When we are planning the future economic development of Bougainville, are we running the risk of creating the same kinds of divisions amongst Bougainvilleans that were created before? Or will the very strong revulsion against the conflict and violence, the desire for peace amongst Bougainvilleans and the work of the women's groups, NGOs and churches be enough to change the way people think and act?

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