

'TRADITIONAL' LEADERS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN BOUGAINVILLE: REFORMING THE PRESENT BY RE-WRITING THE PAST?

by Anthony J. Regan

Armed conflict in Bougainville from 1988 to 1997 caused thousands of deaths, many more injuries and much human suffering in other forms, all on a scale unique in the post-colonial Melanesian states. The conflict was a complex civil war fought not only between Bougainvillean groups and the Papua New Guinea security forces but also within and between Bougainvillean societies (Regan 1998c). However, from mid-1997 a peace process developed that at the time of writing (April 1999) had ended the armed conflict for almost two years and offered the prospect of long-term peace (Regan 1998a; 1998b).

Nevertheless, local tensions are far from resolved. Violence in many forms is far more prevalent than before 1988, so much so that there are fears that high levels of violence may be a long-term consequence of the nine-year conflict. Accordingly there is concern about how best to sustain long-term peace and security in Bougainville.

Numerous factors have contributed to pressure for peace. They include activities of groups and individuals since the conflict began, working to resolve local disputes involved the conflict and to bring about reconciliation. In the process they contributed to public pressure for peace, thereby supporting activities of leaders committed to peace and applying pressure to others committed to violence. Such groups included churches, women's organisations and councils of 'traditional' leaders (commonly referred to as councils of chiefs).

This chapter discusses the contributions of councils of chiefs to the peace process, with particular reference to their conflict resolution and reconciliation roles. In the aftermath of the conflict most Bougainvillean leaders have agreed on expanding roles of councils of chiefs to facilitate their becoming local foundations of the peace process. There is now much in common with efforts made to strengthen traditional authority in Bougainville during the political turmoil of the mid-1970s, suggesting that similar political and economic forces may be at work.

Underlying what is being proposed is the assumption that by reverting to the ways of the past, present problems can be tackled and a better future created for Bougainville. More broadly, the turmoil of the past eleven years in Bougainville may be reinforcing concerns about both returning to customary ways and strengthening traditional leadership evident in many other parts of Melanesia and elsewhere in the Pacific. Accordingly reference to experience elsewhere (see, for example: Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Jolly and Thomas 1992; White and Lindstrom 1997; Keesing 1989; Turner 1997; May 1997) may illuminate issues in Bougainville.

The chapter identifies a number of issues and potential difficulties involved in the proposals that may be relevant elsewhere in Melanesia where achieving social control through increased chiefly power is discussed.

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

Before colonial rule, Bougainville's tiny societies were under the authority of their own leaders. In the south and far north of the main island of Bougainville as well as in Buka and the atolls to the east, leadership was mainly hereditary. In the rest of the main island, while there might be hereditary elements involved, leadership tended to be achieved competitively, based on ability and performance in war, magic, accumulation of wealth and management of exchanges etc. Such leadership was specialised and was diffused in the society. Leadership involved both men and women, especially, but not only, among matrilineal societies, and even in societies with hereditary leadership.

More than 100 years of change caused by contact with the outside world has transformed the economic and political situation within which the traditional social structures and authority systems once operated. Tradition-based societies were no longer necessarily the primary focus of peoples' lives, and so the integrating effect of custom and traditional authority reduced. New forms of authority and leadership have competed with and perhaps undermined traditional leaders. Before colonial rule traders in both goods and labour ('black-birders') were involved and under colonial and postcolonial rule numerous new institutions such as churches, co-operatives and multiple forms of government administration. It has not just been a matter of outsiders deposing traditional leaders. Bougainvilleans actively pursue new forms of power.

On the other hand, traditional leadership did not die out. It is true that some forms of traditional authority or the methods of gaining it became obsolete. An example was fighting leadership. But other forms of leadership adapted, as in Siwai (southwest Bougainville) where competitive feasting probably displaced warfare as a route to leadership (Oliver 1955). Colonial administrators often chose traditional leaders to hold local administrative positions thereby enabling coexistence of old and new systems of power.

Some aspects of traditional authority retained importance even while adapting and changing as economic and political systems changed. Much social organisation has continued to be largely customary, because land, shell-money heirlooms and important knowledge (e.g. of land and magic) have continued to be held by lineages within clans. As a result, lineage leaders – both male and female – have continued to be important sources of information, power to allocate resources and authority to resolve disputes. It seems likely that power of 'traditional' leaders over land was a source of competition with aspiring younger, better-educated and entrepreneurial leaders interested in changing patterns of land use, especially as cash-cropping and other new economic activities developed after World War II. There was no clear pattern, however, the importance of 'traditional' leadership varying between areas.

In much of rural Bougainville 'traditional' leaders continued to deal with most local conflicts even in the 1980s, including acts which the Papua New Guinea legal system classified as criminal offences (see also Connell 1977b:133). Disputes tended to be regarded in much the same way as they had been for thousands of years – as disturbing community balance. The response of 'traditional' leadership was directed largely to restoring balance.

In Bougainville no individual stands alone in relationship to the community. The individual is connected through the land-holding clan lineages (in most of Bougainville matrilineages). Relations within and between communities are based on principles of reciprocity. So a 'wrong' committed against another person disturbs the balance between the lineages of the wrongdoer and the person wronged. Consequently, responsibility for the wrong often extends to the wrongdoer's lineage. To restore balance, the wrongdoer might be ordered to pay compensation to the wronged person (or even the wronged person's lineage). The amount of compensation involved is usually beyond the means of the individual wrongdoer, his or her lineage being expected to contribute. Outcomes include both strengthening of lineage solidarity and the integration of individual members. A lineage contributing to compensation for the conduct of one of its members is not only likely to attempt to exercise control over that member, but also to seek to set limits on the conduct of other members. There may also be a 'demonstration effect' on other lineages.

The existence of authorities and fora alternative to traditional leaders (patrol officers, police, village courts etc.) expanded the opportunities for 'forum shopping'. However, on their own, such actions would not necessarily weaken traditional authority severely. The diffusion of leadership in traditional society in pre-colonial times probably offered its own form of 'forum shopping', perhaps enabling both Bougainvilleans and their 'traditional' leaders to adapt relatively easily to an expansion of the possibilities offered by the new fora brought by colonial and post-colonial change.

ORIGINS OF COUNCILS OF CHIEFS SYSTEM

Lindstrom and White note that where a community is 'entangled in larger national entities', the traditional leader as a political figurehead 'often comes to represent the common identity and aspirations of that community' (1997:16). 1972 to 1977 was a tumultuous period for Bougainville, secession being a major issue throughout. Efforts made to develop autonomous Bougainvillean government institutions (Conyers 1976; Ballard 1981; Griffin and Togolo 1997) included moves to base local government on 'traditional' authority.

There was a history of opposition to the colonial imposition of local government councils in some areas. Declining support was also associated with limited achievements and with complaints that councils undermined 'traditional' leaders and organisations. The situation also provided an opportunity for 'traditional' leaders to assert themselves against the younger and better-educated leadership that had dominated the councils (Connell 1977b:133-6). The breakdown in other forms of administration associated with

the secession movement also offered opportunities to 'traditional' leaders to fill the gap. From 1974 to 1977 about 70 village governments comprising mainly traditional leaders replaced the nine local government councils. While also interested in modernisation village governments sought to strengthen custom, and established village-level courts (with no statutory basis) dealing with cases by custom. Some even began to codify local custom (Connell 1977b:162-4).

In 1978 the North Solomons Provincial Government saw itself as building upon the village government system when it passed the Community Government Act 1978. The people of a proposed community government area were consulted by the provincial government about both formation of the community government and its structures. Community government constitutions enabled communities to choose either an elected body or one comprising 'traditional' leaders. By the early 1980s amalgamations saw the number of community governments reduce to 40. At the same time, village courts were established under national legislation, and generally community governments did not act as unofficial village courts.

Educated and entrepreneurial leadership now re-asserted itself, and in the process of developing of community government constitutions, all community governments became elected bodies, although in some cases there was room for active participation of 'traditional' leaders at the village level (Peasah 1994:183-188).

By the late 1980s, however, widespread discussion of the need to strengthen 'traditional' authority again indicated both renewed concern about Bougainvillean identity and increasing competition between 'traditional' leaders and the alternate leadership dominating the community governments. By this time it was widely asserted that all 'traditional' leaders had always been hereditary (e.g. NSPG 1988a:5). In the process the term 'chief' came to be used widely in reference to any form of male traditional leader in Bougainville and I will use the term in the same sense.

I have discussed the closely related issues of culture, ethnicity and increasing economic inequality as causes of the Bougainville conflict elsewhere (Regan 1988c). Further, resentment of outsiders was increasingly linked to perceptions of undermining of Bougainville culture and custom. Growing law and order problems contributed to concern about integration of young people into local communities (NSPG 1986; 1988b). As members of community governments and village courts were not normally 'traditional' leaders, these structures were seen as undermining 'traditional' authority, thereby destroying Bougainvillean society and culture (NSPG 1988a; see also Nyamekye 1983:6). Reflecting such widespread concerns, a March 1988 report commissioned by the North Solomons Provincial Government recommended establishing councils of chiefs to both replace village courts and merge into community governments. (NSPG 1988a).

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS SYSTEM, 1990 TO 1999

After sixteen months of escalating armed conflict with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) national government security forces withdrew from Bougainville in March 1990 (Regan 1998c: 277-8). Almost all forms of governmental authority had by then collapsed, including government authority at the local level. The BRA had not expected to get effective control of Bougainville at that point and was not organised to offer administration at any level. BRA ideology was also initially very much directed against the educated and the wealthy (Regan 1998a). In many areas chiefs and local BRA commanders now became the main sources of authority. Where the mainly young BRA commanders respected chiefs their authority could be immense. However, many BRA leaders were enjoying status and power for the first time and were not willing to accept chiefly or any other form of authority. Armed criminal elements active in many parts of Bougainville were even less open to control.

The emphasis in BRA ideology on the need to strengthen custom and traditional authority helped to legitimate the BRA leadership taking power. Within both the BRA senior command and the BRA civilian government – the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG) - there was strong interest in supporting the chiefs. In the chaotic situation of mid-1990 the potential of the chiefs to restore wider stability at the local level was recognised. It was decided to base all local administration on a system of councils of chiefs. From late 1990 former provincial government officers and a few other educated people conducted awareness campaigns about the proposed councils and assisted in establishing them.

There was general support for establishing the councils. In some areas, however, the undermining of the roles of 'traditional' leaders had been so great that there was uncertainty about the identity of the leaders who should serve on such councils. In one area of southwest Bougainville, consultation produced agreement that the 'real' leaders were those at the end of the 'rivers of pigs' distributed at certain kinds of customary ceremonies. Once identified such leaders had to learn how to use 'traditional' authority that had long since vanished.

In most areas a three-tiered system was established. Based on early experience in central Bougainville, they were usually called clan-councils-of-chiefs (CCCs), village-councils-of-chiefs (VCCs) and area-councils-of-chiefs (ACCs). The CCC dealt with matters within the clan at village level. VCCs handled administrative issues at the village level and disputes involving people from different clans. The ACC handled administrative issues for several neighbouring villages, and dealt with 'appeals' from decisions of the VCC. Councils were established in most mainland areas during 1991. Because they had not been established in Buka by the time the PNG forces returned there in September 1990, pre-existing groupings of chiefs continued to operate.

The PNG security forces returned to many parts of Bougainville from 1991, often at the invitation of alliances of the educated and wealthy with chiefs leading groups losing in localised conflict (Regan 1998c:279). Former BRA

and other armed groups opposing the BRA supported the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (becoming known as Resistance Forces). Councils of chiefs continued to operate in areas under PNGDF 'control'. While the PNGDF and Resistance Forces were directed to work with the chiefs, in practice they were a competing source of authority with which there were increasing tensions. By the mid-1990s many chiefs had little freedom of action. There was also competition of other kinds. In Buka and parts of north Bougainville, village courts began to operate from the early 1990s, and the PNGDF and police riot squads performed some normal police functions. In Buka, normal police functions were restored from about 1992, and the District Court and National Court began sitting there. From 1992 local government bodies, called interim authorities, were established by the national government in areas where some government presence had been re-established. Such developments undermined the more central role and authority chiefs often occupied in BRA controlled areas.

Councils of chiefs in all areas dealt with a wide range of matters, including most local disputes. But in contrast to chiefs who had dealt with such matters prior to the conflict, in the BRA controlled areas and more remote areas where a degree of national government control had been restored, they did so with little competition from other sources of authority, other than the armed groups. There were two important outcomes. First, where BRA and Resistance Forces respected chiefs their power could be far greater than prior to the conflict. Second, chiefs in such areas had great scope for applying custom without reference to constitutional and legal constraints.

However, while councils of chiefs sought to apply custom, in many ways they were new institutions, operating under the influence of 'introduced' ideas. For example, the three tiered structure and appeals from one level of council to another were not customary. Further, when dealing with major disputes or problems, councils would usually request chiefs from neighbouring areas to join them in order to ensure that decisions were perceived as impartial. It appears that most people accepted the integration of customary and introduced institutions and methods of dispute resolution.

There was continuity with the approach 'traditional' leaders had often taken prior to the conflict, the emphasis being on restoration of balance. Examples provided by informants involved in setting up councils of chiefs give a general indication of the approaches taken. In relation to rape, it was common for the matter to be resolved by arranging for the male wrongdoer to marry the victim. Where the male was already married compensation was payable. In cases involving assault or theft, compensation was payable by the wrongdoer (often effectively the wrongdoer's lineage) to the person wronged.

The death of an old person in central Bougainville resulted in relatives accusing another lineage of causing the death by poison. The alleged poisoners made counter-allegations of slander. After a full day of discussion before chiefs from neighbouring areas each side agreed to pay the other 50 kina. Each thereby acknowledged that their conflict had caused a problem in the community and in accepting payment agreed that the conflict was

resolved. In another central Bougainville case, an adult male made a report to the local PNGDF contingent about young men causing problems in the village. The men were subsequently 'bashed up' by PNGDF personnel. Public complaints by the mother of one of the young men about the man who had made the report to the PNGDF led to bitter public arguments. The chiefs blamed the woman for her public attacks that brought shame on the man and ordered payment of a pig to him. Members of the woman's lineage contributed funds to buy the pig.

In many areas the dispute settlement role of the chiefs was of great importance to the peace process. It reduced the tensions that were often the driving force in violent localised conflict, including that between BRA and Resistance Forces. In some cases the roles of chiefs in promoting peace went much further. Some exerted control over local BRA or Resistance Forces, limiting them to defensive roles. Some played major parts in initiating reconciliation between groups in conflict, a role now increasing as the peace process gathers momentum.

Effectiveness of councils in such roles has varied greatly. Many factors were involved. They included the personal abilities of the chiefs, their prior experience of chiefly roles, the extent and attitudes of competing sources of authority (inclusive of the discipline of the members of the local BRA, Resistance Forces and Papua New Guinea security forces). However, the councils were in the main restricted to dealing with problems within their own or closely related communities. Where there was conflict between communities with few links or with a history of conflict, chiefs usually had little capacity to influence events.

THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS SYSTEM

A new provincial government - the Bougainville Transitional Government (BTG) - was established in April 1995, the first since the North Solomons Provincial Government was suspended in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the Papua New Guinea security forces. As envisaged by its first premier, Theodore Miriung, the BTG's primary role was to act as a bridge between the warring factions in Bougainville, and between the Papua New Guinea government and the BIG/BRA leadership (Regan 1998c:281). Miriung had been both an architect of the Community Government system in 1978 and actively involved in the council of chiefs system since 1990, and he also saw the chiefs as the foundations of the peace process.

The fundamental aim was to foster social development based on Bougainvillean culture. Chiefs would take the lead in building communities into which all age groups were integrated, with special concern for young male combatants. Their dispute-settlement and reconciliation roles would be enhanced. They would also be responsible for local security through dispute resolution and control of community policing. They would also re-integrate combatants into the community, helping them to find useful roles – among other things, in community policing.

Miriung believed that to achieve this, 'traditional' authority needed to be strengthened. The enhanced standing achieved by many chiefs during the conflict could be increased further by vesting them with formal government authority. This could be provided by recognising councils of chiefs as local government bodies with not only normal legislative (rule-making) and executive powers, but also vesting them with formal court powers. They would continue to follow customary ways when dealing with disputes.

Associated but fundamental changes to the criminal law were discussed, especially proposals to modify notions of criminal responsibility in the introduced law to better enable the restoration of balance underpinning much dispute-resolution work of chiefs. In particular there would be a need to recognise group rights and responsibilities in ways not possible under the PNG Constitution and Criminal Code. There was also recognition of the need to modify the constitutional principle of separation of powers if councils of chiefs were to be vested formally with both judicial and other powers. It was accepted that the major political and constitutional issues involved would need to be dealt with as part of a later political settlement between Bougainville and Papua New Guinea. The BTG envisaged negotiating for at least a high level of autonomy where Bougainville would control police, courts and criminal law and so could define chiefs' roles in relation to such matters.

Months of discussion resulted in draft legislation by mid-1996 that was passed by the provincial legislature in December 1996. Although it used the Community Government Act 1978 as a starting point the Act contained many innovations. It provided for a two-tiered system. Each of the nearly six hundred or so census villages in Bougainville was to have a village assembly comprising all residents belonging to customary land-owning groups in the village area. Village assemblies were to be responsible for local security, dispute resolution and reconciliation. A number of villages would combine to form a council, it being expected there would be about 70 councils. They were to be called councils of elders (COEs) rather than councils of chiefs because although it was expected they would mainly comprise traditional leaders there was to be room for other leaders. First, each village was to be free to choose either to elect their council members, or to select them by custom. Second, leaders of women, church and youth groups could also be members. As a first step towards the COEs having formal court powers, they were to become the village courts for Bougainville.

For a number of reasons which cannot be dealt with here, the COE Act was passed and implemented before all necessary administrative arrangements had been made, contributing to numerous problems experienced in establishing the COEs. Nevertheless, by the end of 1998, over thirty had been established. Constitutional, legal and administrative problems have so far prevented COEs becoming village courts. Nevertheless, many of them are carrying out major dispute settlement roles on an informal basis.

While most comprise chiefs, three COEs in the north of Bougainville and Buka are fully or partially elected, rejecting leadership solely by chiefs. These were areas where national government control and some degree of 'normalcy' had

been restored in the early 1990s. It may be speculated that once again the educated and entrepreneurial leadership is asserting itself.

COMBINING THE SYSTEMS

From January 1999 the BTG ceased to operate, and instead interim governmental arrangements have applied in Bougainville on the understanding that they will be replaced once political negotiations resolve questions of its longer-term political status. In the meantime, the Bougainville Administration has begun work on combining the council of chiefs and COE systems, and on policies for further strengthening the capacity of chiefs in both the peace process and future development plans. Experience in developing the COE system is likely to be a guide to developing a combined system.

BOUGAINVILLE CHIEFS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Bougainvillean leaders face complex tasks as they explore ways of resolving the multiple conflicts of the past eleven years, preventing new conflicts and dealing with increasing law and order problems exacerbated by the violence of civil war. To complicate matters, there is almost no administrative or police capacity or normal courts outside a few urban centres. The main source of authority in many areas is the chiefs. Most leaders agree that chiefs generally played a constructive role in contributing to peace and security at the local level over the past eleven years. In all the circumstances, it is reasonable to rely on what is working and to seek to build upon that experience.

However, analysis of the roles of chiefs in Bougainville over the past 25 years together with experience in other parts of Melanesia and the broader Pacific offers insights on the expanded roles for chiefs now proposed for Bougainville.

May suggests that discourse on chiefs is part of a broader tendency in Papua New Guinea politics 'towards authoritarian forms of social control' (1997:24). This perspective resonates in Bougainville where the desire for strong traditional leadership is often couched in terms of the need for greater social integration, and especially the need to bring young 'big-heads' under control. It should be no surprise that there should be an especially strong interest in such issues after nine years of civil war and in a situation where law and order problems are increasing. However, there are more complex issues involved.

The point made by Lindstrom and White about the tendency to rely on chiefs where local identity is 'entangled in larger national identities' (1997:16) is supported by May who talks of the discourse on chiefs being similar to the micro-nationalist withdrawal which occurred in many parts of Papua New Guinea (and elsewhere in Melanesia) in the first half of the 1970s (1997:25). Of course, in the lead up to 1988 and for the whole period since, Bougainville's identity vis a vis national identity has been a central issue, to a far greater extent than in the 1970s, another time of intense interest in restoring traditional authority.

The struggle for power between conservative chiefs and more educated or entrepreneurial leaders may also be important. Both struggles over identity and the weakening or collapse of alternative forms of local authority occurring in both the 1970s and the 1990s presented chiefs with opportunities to assert themselves.

There may perhaps be evidence that popular perceptions of particular kinds of leadership may vary depending on political and economic circumstances. There is perhaps continuity here in the 'forum shopping' about which I have speculated elsewhere in this chapter. Diffused leadership in pre-colonial societies invited shifting allegiances on the part of followers. From the colonial period on, there has been a much greater range of authority available to choose from. In most areas traditional leaders have continued to retain considerable authority - despite the alternatives available people often chose to rely on chiefs.

In the mid-1970s, and again from the late 1980s, political conflict may have made chiefs more important in terms of representing the aspirations and identity of Bougainvillean communities. At the same time of course, there was a struggle for power with the educated leadership, and a breakdown in alternative sources of authority. From the late 1970s, there was movement away from chiefs, most community governments being elected rather than chiefly bodies. It seems arguable that as the political conflict with Port Moresby was temporarily resolved issues of identity became less central. Further, political stability saw the re-establishing or initiation of alternative sources of authority (village courts, provincial government, police etc.) and presented greater opportunities for educated and entrepreneurial leadership. The same trend may be evident with the elected COEs established in northern Bougainville and Buka during 1998. The offer of the choice of elected or chiefly bodies in the COE legislation invited 'forum shopping'.

Of more immediate concern are questions about whether the expansive proposals for the future roles of councils of chiefs are the most appropriate ways of reducing conflict and violence in post-civil war Bougainville. In particular, there are questions about the potential impacts of the policies involved and their sustainability.

As to impact, policies that give extensive powers to chiefs will not be neutral politically. More authority for chiefs will almost certainly mean less power for potentially competing forms of authority. Such a concentration of power may be inconsistent with broader economic and political change. If so, it is possible that inflexible schemes for strengthening chiefly authority could ultimately increase local tensions. There is no space to explore the issues involved in any detail, and so two speculative examples will suffice.

First, there is a history of competition between chiefs and educated/entrepreneurial leadership. Such tensions are likely to increase as normal conditions develop in central and south Bougainville. Second, women leaders have emerged from the past eleven years with enhanced status, but with little formal political power. There is evidence of concern on the part of

some chiefs about the increased public roles of women, and danger that a concentration of local power in the hands of normally conservative male chiefs may be used to try to return women to less public roles. John Connell provides a salutary warning of what could occur in comments about a mid-1970s village government court in Siwai which '.... fined two women who went to the Republic of North Solomons Independence Day celebrations K10 each since the court judges considered that political events, like traditional warfare, were for men only' (1977b:166).

As to sustainability, there are several points. First, it seems likely that as normalcy returns and the identity issue becomes less central, there will be increased competition for power, and probably resulting in pressure to restrict the roles chiefs. Second, the limited resources, both in finance and personnel, of any Bougainville government (whether highly autonomous or independent) are going to make it very difficult to allocate enough support to councils of chiefs to enable them to meet popular expectations. It has been failure to meet expectations which has been a major part of the explanation for loss of support for successive forms of local government in Bougainville – as elsewhere in Papua New Guinea - prior to 1988 (Connell 1977b; Nyamekye1983).

Third, there are likely to be major constitutional and legal difficulties in developing the arrangements of the kind envisaged which the BTG envisaged for the COEs (control of local policing, exercise of court powers, administration of criminal law recognising group wrongs and so on). Outcomes are likely to include considerable limitations on powers of councils of chiefs to take on roles of the kinds envisaged.

Fourth, an important assumption underlying the COE system, namely that state authority is needed to build upon the existing status of chiefs may be questionable. One outcome of reliance on state authority would be that to some degree chiefs would become state middlemen. The evidence suggests that authority of chiefs tends to be strongest when there are limited alternative sources of authority, as in the BRA areas in the 1990s. Reliance on state authority will probably be possible only in situations with multiple alternative sources of authority, in the sense that bureaucrats, lawyers and courts are all likely to be concerned to ensure that chiefs act within the limits of state-defined jurisdiction. Inevitably, some forms of forum shopping (including appeals) will be possible. Lindstrom and White warn that chiefs who become state middlemen '.. may find themselves abandoned by their communities and ill rewarded by their governments' (1997:15).

Finally, questions about authenticity are often raised in reference to debate about resurgent custom and chiefs (e.g. Keesing 1989; Jolly 1992). Such issues could be raised in Bougainville in relation to a range of issues, including the common assertion that all 'traditional' leaders are hereditary chiefs. However, in the context of debate about reducing conflict and violence in Bougainville, such issues seem of little relevance. There is space for only two points here. First, there seems little doubt that all persons claiming to be chiefs are accepted by their communities as having legitimate authority of some sort by way of tradition, and if so, there seems little point in arguing

about whether or not any hereditary aspect to such authority is authentic. Second, and more importantly, the issue is not so much one of authenticity as legitimacy – that people seeking to find ways of improving the present are to a significant degree seeking to legitimate what they propose to do in the future by reference to the past. This is not an unusual phenomenon, nor one restricted to the Pacific. Writing about Bougainville's village governments in the mid-1970s, John Connell noted the close parallels with the situation discussed by Paul Johnson, a scholar dealing with English legal reforms in the early Middle Ages (Connell 1977b:167-8). Johnson noted the English conviction of the existence 'of an ancient and perfect legal framework' which had major implications for reform.

It must be introduced under the guise of putting the clock back to an imaginary period in which the law flourished in all its majesty.... The present is reformed by rewriting the past in such a way that it becomes the future.... A forward motion is achieved under the appearance of regression. (1972:85-86).

In post-conflict Bougainville there is a need for legitimate local institutions that can contribute to the peace process. Concern about legitimacy can be expected to reduce as the political and economic situations become more 'normal' and other forms of local administration develop, in which case a move away from reliance on chiefs can be expected. As in the past, such a move can be expected to occur without significant trauma, and should ideally be facilitated by flexible arrangements as in the Community Government Act 1978 and the Council of Elders Act 1996 giving communities the right to have either chiefly or elected local-level government. If people at the local level are happy with such flexibility, then even the concerns about sustainability (above) will be of limited importance. The fact that chiefs have contributed to the peace process so far and offer the likelihood of further contributions for the time being should be sufficient basis for experimenting further with strengthening chiefly power.

Anthony J. Regan
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