Grievances in Bougainville: Analysing the Impact of Natural Resources in Conflict

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Introduction

Under what conditions, if any, can the presence of natural resources lead to violent conflict? With the end of Cold War bipolarity this is a question that has become of significant importance, prompted by the increasingly visible self-financing nature of rebel movements within intrastate conflicts (Ballentine & Sherman, 2003). Any discussion about the internal dynamics of conflict during the Cold War tended to be limited, and, if they were being considered, the main emphasis was placed on the irrationality and unpredictable nature of their causes (Keen, 2000). This theme continued post-1989, with some turning towards the idea of primordialism as a way of explaining civil conflicts. For the adherents of primordialism, historically rooted ethnic identities and collective memories were beginning to re-emerge that had been suppressed since the Second World War. This primal desire of ethnic hatred is said to have lead to the various conflicts seen in many of the former Communist states in Europe (See Esman, 2003: 30-32). Robert Kaplan writing in 1994, for example, foresaw a 'coming anarchy',

Cold War patronage from the two superpowers disappeared for many rebel movements post-1989, forcing them to either disband or seek out new ways to finance themselves. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia was estimated to be bringing in around $10-20 million per month through timber sales (Global Witness, 1995).

Those associated with primordialism see ethnic identity as being deeply embedded in culture and practices – these become perpetuated inter-generationally, and as a result, identity is said to persist over time. Primordialism is rooted in the early 19th century conceptions of ethnic solidarity (Johann Gottfried Herder is recognised as a founder of the school of thought). Esman (2004), in emphasising primordialist beliefs, highlights how ethnic communities may convert feelings of victimhood from the past from generation to generation (and thus to the present). Thus, Americans of Armenian descent still to this day 'remember' the Turkish genocide of Armenians that occurred in the early 20th century and have lobbied the US Congress to deny military and economic assistance to Turkey as a result of this. "Historical events may be exaggerated or even invented, heroes and...Achievements mythologized...in order to buttress the collectivity's self-esteem or demonize the traditional ethnic enemy" (p. 31-32).
involving a descent into mindless violence: ‘propelled by a kind of 'witches brew' of overpopulation, tribalism, drugs and environmental decline’ (Keen 2008: 20).

By the year 2000, focus had turned to the economic dimensions of intrastate warfare, away from the concept of ethnic conflicts. An important factor in this was the development of the Collier-Hoeffler model outlined in their World Bank publication ‘Greed and Grievance in Civil War’ (2000). Their approach suggested that rather than looking at internal wars through the prism of grievance, they should be viewed in terms of the economic benefits accrued to rebel fighters through their predation of primary commodity exports. In one of Paul Collier’s (1999) earlier papers presented to the Conference on Economic Agendas in Civil War, he states that grievance-motivated rebellions3, he states, face the problem of collective action as there are no economic benefits to becoming involved, so people will be reluctant to join in. With loot-seeking (greed) of primary commodities as a driving force, the benefits are tangible, and people will be eager to join. Rebels may work under the auspices of grievances, according to Collier, as they play better with communities. He posits that 'economic agendas appear central to understanding why civil wars get going...[conflicts] are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance' (ibid: 1).

Whilst arguing against both the primordialist accounts of conflict and the Collier-Hoeffler model this study will attempt to answer the question: what role can the presence of natural resources have in driving conflict? To answer this, it will apply a social constructivist approach to the development of grievances in the Bougainville conflict that occurred between 1988 and 1997. Bougainville is a mountainous island located in the South-West Pacific4 that is geologically a part of the Solomon Island chain. After being ceded to British control in 1898, Bougainville was run from the capital of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Port Moresby. Bougainville was then governed by Australia under a United Nations trusteeship and eventually secured independence as part of PNG in 1975. Mining in the region begun in the early 1970s and at the time it was the world’s largest open-pit copper mine – being over three miles long and two

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3 Grievance rebellions are defined as those that seek justice for legitimate grievances (or rebels with causes), and greed rebellions as those that are loot-seeking, which involves large scale banditry (De Soysa 2002)

4 See Appendix 1 for a detailed map of the region.
miles wide. By its peak a decade later, the mine was producing around $500 million per year from copper, silver and gold (Klare 2001). The peak years of mining activity, however, also culminated in local opposition to mining reaching a boiling point. Conflict eventually erupted between the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), after they seized control of the mine, and the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF)\(^5\) who had been ordered to invade Bougainville to re-establish government control of the Bougainville mine. By 1996, the conflict had devastated Bougainville and there was a growing unwillingness from both sides to continue with hostilities - around 15-20,000 civilians are estimated to have died, with around 60,000 being displaced by the conflict. The cessation of most economic activities and the general sense war weariness made the BRA more receptive towards initiatives for cease fire and peace. For the government of PNG, the loss of mine revenue\(^6\) and their failure to defeat the BRA opened the way for the peace talks that commenced in 1997 (Regan 2003).

The primordialist approach fails to account for how various ethnic groups have been able to coexist peacefully for long periods, and yet certain co-religionists have experienced conflict (Keen 2000). Ethnicity certainly can play a role in internal conflicts, but it is dependent upon how ethnicity is imagined. Ethnic identity, rather than being a deeply rooted belief, is malleable and can change, develop and pass through history as new identities are born – rather than being given by nature, therefore, human identity and structures are shaped by shared ideas\(^7\): ‘social structures have three elements: shared knowledge, material resources, and practices... [They] exist, not in the actors’ heads not in material capabilities, but in practices...’ (Wendt cited in McSweeney 1999: 123). In particular, this study will attempt to emphasise that Bougainvillean did not turn to violence due to any kind of embedded hatred (that primordialism would attest to). Instead the grievances that existed were historically based, however these were relatively recent and resulted from the impact of colonial rule, the alienation of land by plantations and the experience of the Second World War, and later the

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\(^5\) By the early 1990s the PNGDF were able to strengthen local opposition to the BRA, who were led by Francis Ona, which resulted in a situation of ‘semi-anarchy’ that involved simultaneous intra-Bougainvillean conflicts (Regan 2003: 147).

\(^6\) The Bougainville conflict contributed to a fiscal crisis in PNG as the government relied heavily on the Bougainville mine. Since 1972 it had contributed around 16 percent to PNG’s internal income and 44 percent of exports (Connell 1991:56).

\(^7\) For a more detailed look at the social construction of identity see McSweeney (1999: 104-125)
environmental devastation of land caused by mining operations – in this respect, the grievances were not embedded, but changed through interaction and the shared ideas of the Bougainvillean people.

The Collier-Hoeffler model also fails to answer vital questions as to why conflicts occur. Most importantly, if the conflict was about rebel greed then it would make no sense for the rebels to force mining operations to cease, as happened in Bougainville. This suggests that in fact, the copper in Papua New Guinea (PNG) was ‘unlootable’ since the rebels did not have the capacity or skill to keep operations running (Regan 2003: 156). Furthermore, the proxies for greed that Collier and Hoeffler use can also be seen as legitimate grievances. For example, they take low literacy rates in a region as a proxy for greed. Yet surely, as David Keen⁸ points out this can also be seen as a grievance for the failure of a government to provide sufficient educational standards. Also, Collier (1999) dismisses the idea of asking rebels about what motivates them, since they would emphasise grievances even if they were motivated by greed. Dismissing the political goals of rebels, however, is not so easy. Indeed, according to David Keen (2008), it almost seemed as if Collier’s economic centred approach ‘was trying to abolish politics, sociology and anthropology, and declare: no more listening required!’ (ibid: 29). Certainly, there is an economic dimension to such conflicts – like any organisations, movements need financing. However, merely labelling an economic dimension as being one that involves ‘rebel greed’ can be misleading. Are people being greedy or are they struggling to survive? (ibid).

Rather than seeing the Bougainville conflict as the result of either primordial hatred or as a one resulting from rebel greed, this dissertation will argue that the Panguna Mine and the extraction of resources only gave rise to conflict when it became entangled with the process of identity formation that had developed in the region. Bougainville will be used as a case study because there is evidence to suggest that natural resource disputes

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⁸ Keen has been particularly critical of Collier, dedicating a chapter in his 2008 work Complex Emergencies to the concept of Greed in civil conflict. He was also critical of Collier in his chapter on ‘Incentives and Disincentives for Violence’ in Berdal & Malone’s (2000) Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars, stating that: 'Collier...has emphasized the importance of greed rather than grievance in driving civil wars...however, this process of falling below the law [when governments/groups allied to them take advantage of other groups in a society] underlines the continuing importance of grievances in contemporary conflicts. Indeed, we need to understand how the two interact' (p. 31)
played some role in igniting the conflict – indeed, both Paul Collier and Michael Ross list Bougainville as an example of ‘separatist conflicts linked to resource wealth’ (cited in Banks 2005: 186). Development of the Panguna mine by Conzinc Riontinto of Australia (CRA)\(^9\) began in the late 1960s and certainly helped fuel secessionist demands, with concerns in the region over the diversion of profits and the issue of under soil mineral ownership (Connell, 1991: 55). The BRA was formed in 1988 in response to the perception that they were not receiving a fair deal in revenue from the mining operations. Initially consisting of young landowners angry at the leadership of the Panguna Landowner’s Association (PLA), who they claimed were benefitting unfairly from the mine, they made a series of demands for compensation for the environmental damage caused by the mine and for a 50 per cent share of mining revenue to the landowners (Regan 2003: 144).

This study will posit that natural resources became interlinked with the processes of identity formation that developed in Bougainville, and was then reinterpreted back to the populace by ‘ethnic political entrepreneurs’, in a way which legitimised violence against mainland ‘redskins’.\(^{10}\) Although some research has been carried out into the social construction of grievances, there has not been any major application to the Bougainville conflict. The aim is to develop on the work of Aspinall (2007), and his analysis on the separatist conflict in Aceh, Indonesia. As he has stated:

> What determines rebellion is not the presence of a natural resource industry and its material effects, but rather how it is interpreted by local actors...it is important to think of grievance, not as an objective measure, but rather as a socially constructed value...that arises and may be understood only within a particular historical, cultural, political context (ibid: 953)

The Collier/Hoeffler research was based largely on statistical analysis of all civil wars since 1965, with the aim of determining the variables most salient to the potential for

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\(^9\) After successfully exploring PNG, Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) was established in 1967. It was two-thirds owned by CRA and one-third by Broken Hill Consolidated. The Panguna mine began production in 1972.

\(^{10}\) Redskin also came to be used as a term for members of the PNG Security Forces in Bougainville, which Lloyd Jones (2006) alludes to in his novel *Mister Pip*: ‘According to Port Moresby we are one country. According to use we are black as the night. The soldiers looked like people leached up out of the red earth. That’s why they were known as redskins’ (p. 8)
conflict (Ballentine & Sherman, 2003). This study, however, will mainly use secondary research and adopt a more qualitative approach – this will include looking at the written testimony of some of those involved in the conflict, journal articles and other recent research into area. The first section of this study will review the various epistemological perspectives on the causes of conflict, and will specifically look at accounts linked to the conflict in Bougainville. The second part of the study will then attempt to present a different account to those in the literature review and instead will focus on the social construction of grievances and identity. The study will posit that grievances over natural resource extraction should not be seen as the starting point in driving conflict. Instead, the study will emphasise that violence only erupted due the fact that the grievances became entwined with wider processes of identity. This wider process of identity formation emerged in part due to the emergence of a Pan-Bougainville identity. The first mechanism that gave rise to an identity and collective action framework that made Bougainville conducive to violence was the institutional relations between PNG and Bougainville (with particularly reference to the question of autonomy). This contributed to embedding the idea of Bougainvillean distinction and ‘otherness’ from the rest of PNG. Secondly, the study will look at how natural resource extraction became entwined with Bougainvillean beliefs in land rights and undermined the balance between social groups. Lastly, the study will look at how ethnic political entrepreneurs were able to manipulate this identity and reinterpret it back to groups within Bougainville to incite violence. To emphasise the importance of an identity framework, the study will then compare Bougainville to another resource-rich province in PNG that experienced similar environmental devastation caused by mining operations.

What is being posited is that the presence of the Panguna mine was viewed in terms of grievance rather than greed in Bougainville. However, these grievances were not formed in isolation from the greater historical and cultural processes of identity formation in Bougainville. We should, therefore, not view natural resource grievances as being ‘divorced from the wider systems of meaning of which they are embedded, but rather as arenas in which wider contestations over identity and belonging are played out’ (Aspinall 2007: 968-969).


**Literature Review**

The dissertation focuses on the period from 1989, when the BRA seized the Panguna Mine, to the 1997 ceasefire that was called after the failed attempt by President Julius Chan of PNG to re-establish control of Bougainville. In the period since then a Truce Monitoring Group was deployed to the region. Peace talks between the two sides resulted in the implementation of the Lincoln Agreement, which eventually resulted in withdrawal of PNG security forces and the disposal of weapons by the BRA by late 2002 (Regan 2003: 150-152). The ceasefire has held since 1998, allowing a certain amount of reconciliation between various groups to take place. Some leaders, including Francis Ona of the BRA, were opposed to the peace talks and there was some difficulty in implementing the Lincoln Agreement.

However, as of 2009, attempts at reconciliation are continuing with various programmes aimed at tackling health and education deficiencies and weapons disposal (Tapakau 2009: 16). The literature review will begin by looking at the Collier-Hoeffler in more detail, to establish whether or not it can be applied to the Bougainville conflict. The Collier thesis has undergone much in the way of criticism and revision, and it will also be necessary to outline other epistemological perspectives relating to the causes of conflict. Most of the literature itself tends to identify various strands that drove the violence in Bougainville, the most important of which include: the abundance of primary resources (gold and copper); the development of a distinct identity separate to the rest of PNG; land rights; the environmental impact of the mine.

As emphasised earlier, Paul Collier along with Anke Hoeffler, have stated that greed rather than grievance is the main motivator of conflicts. Rebellions face collective action problems, similar to any mass organisations. They suffer from problems of hierarchy, as they are often decentralised, and thus experience problems with cohesion. It is for this reason that they have to be financially viable: 'a rebellion must generate revenue in order to feed and pay its worker...the rebel organisation must generate income despite not being directly productive, and in this respect rebellion is like crime' (Collier & Hoeffler 2000: 2). With this in mind, conflict is therefore likely only to occur in regions with an abundance of natural resources and a reliance on mineral exports. These primary commodities are: 'sustainable targets for predation because their...
production is intensive...and because produce must be transported to ports... [and thus] exposed to predation at many geographical choke points' (*ibid*: 3). According to Collier's data, therefore, where commodities account for 25 percent of a national income, there is a risk of conflict four times greater than a country without such a high percentage of primary commodities (Collier 2000: 97).

The abundance of resources is only one factor highlighted by Collier and Hoeffler. The ability of a rebellion to recruit soldiers also plays a key role in making a conflict a feasible undertaking: 'other things equal, we might expect that the proportion of young men in a society...aged between 15-24 would be a factor influencing the feasibility of rebellion: the greater the proportion of young men, the easier it would be to recruit rebels' (Collier 1999: 3). Collier's later work also emphasised the feasibility or 'opportunity' argument over rebel motivations (or grievances), 'insofar that insurgent movements can only emerge and be sustained when resources are available to finance them' (Aspinall 2007). Critics of Collier have argued that his position goes some way to reinforcing the World Bank's mandate (Collier was employed by the World Bank at the time). As Mark Duffield (2001: 132-134) emphasises, usefully the only grievance of any relevance is rapid economic decline: 'in other words, poor economic management. Economic inequality or political repression were not significant a significant variable. Neither were high levels of social fractionalisation within a society.' (*ibid*: 133). Others have attempted to highlight the inter-relationship between greed and grievances (Keen 2008; Yannis 2003). By focusing on ‘rebel greed’ alone little insight is gained to understand how governments and their forces may actually do as much as rebels in causing violence through inciting ethnic conflicts (Keen 2008: 31; Klopp 2001). Furthermore, to understand why conflicts happen scholars need to understand how certain segments of society are able to ‘fall outside the physical and economic protection of the state,’ which results in their exploitation and expropriation by those who have better access to the state (Keen 2008: 31). Economic exploitation such as this leads to a sense of grievance on behalf of those marginalised groups, which can escalate to violent conflicts: ‘Greed generates grievances and rebellion, legitimising further greed’ (*ibid*: 32). This idea of interrelated greed and grievance in echoed by Karen Ballentine:
Economic incentives and opportunities have not been the only or even the primary cause of these armed conflicts; rather to varying degrees, they interacted with socio-economic and political grievances, inter-ethnic disputes, and security dilemmas in triggering the outbreak of warfare. (Ballentine 2002, p. 260)

Modernists also make this link between conflict and the processes of traumatic economic change. Deutsch (Cited in Shoup 2008), argues that traumatic economic change can lead to the emergence of social cleavages. As a result, economic modernity can have an important effect on the mobilisation of differing ethnic groups – due to the fractious nature of economic modernity, conflict can accompany the transformation that occurs. Thus, rather than being driven by greed, conflicts can occur ‘when some groups are resistant to the process of assimilation’ into the modern economy and dominant national level culture (Shoup 2008: 8). The Bougainville conflict is often held up as an example of a greed-driven conflict, and it fits some of the criteria laid out by Collier (2000: 94) – with a significant number of young men between the ages of 15-24 and an abundance of a primary commodity, however, according to Regan (2003) the case of Bougainville does not fully support Collier's findings: 'this was a conflict in which economic, political, and other agendas were mutually reinforcing...local grievances about the impact of mining operations and the way that its revenues were allocated fed into a long-standing sense of cultural and political exclusion felt by many Bougainvilleans, precipitating armed rebellion' (p. 134). Indeed, the Collier-Hoeffler model has been developed on a global level. Adopting a one-size fits all model, however, risks conflating conflicts which may have markedly different causes. Collier’s argument about natural resources may fit certain African conflicts, but as Banks (2005) posits, processes may be at work in the Melanesian conflicts that are mapped around notions of identity and land, rather than greed and self-interest.

Others have also gone along with this more constructivist approach, emphasising the interaction of the differing societal norms that exist and the impact that the Panguna mine had on the issue of land rights and Bougainvillean social structures. For Mary O’Callaghan (2002), the mine struck at the heart of the matriarchal land structure, in which the women were custodians of the land, that had developed throughout

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11 Melanesia is a term that refers to a sub-region of Oceania that includes the islands of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.
Bougainville's history: 'With their villages relocated and their lands despoiled by the wastes from the mine, by the time Francis Ona took up their cause, there were many women in Central Bougainville who felt completely disempowered in their role as landowners.' This was also acknowledged by Connell and Howitt (1991: 8): 'the advent of transnational corporations seeking to purchase or lease land has tended to transform indigenous labour and land into commodities, and to increase...disputes over land tenure and the allocation of compensation payments and royalties.' The conflict over land rights is exacerbated in situations where the indigenous population, transnational corporations and governments have been 'unequal protagonists', and where it seems economic exploitation has taken place: 'In the changing relationships between states and transnational corporations, indigenous people have been only of marginal consideration until they have elevated their concerns to the national and international agenda, usually though their own actions' (ibid: 6).

This is also emphasised to an extent by Regan (2003: 137), but he also indicates that the environmental impact of the mine also played a key role: 'Mining operations had massive impacts on both the local communities...and also the wider communities, including the forced relocation of villages...the destruction of gardens and cash crops; the destruction of land through huge open pit extraction...Mining at its impact were part of wider social and economic changes that significantly affected Bougainville, placing great stresses on the previously small-scale and highly egalitarian social structures of Bougainville.' Indeed, accounts within the media seemed to focus extensively on the environmental impact of the mine. Writing in Melbourne's The Age newspaper, O'Callaghan (1992: 6) states that Francis Ona and the BRA leadership were 'unhappy with the mine, its impact on the environment and with his elders...Ona took to the bush, was joined by other disgruntled Bougainvillian youths and began a campaign of sabotage against the mine'. For Bob Burton (2000), a journalist for the IPS-Inter Press Service, the environmental damage, combined with social dislocation caused by mining operations 'catalysed a civil war from 1988 to 1997 between independence-minded Bougainvilleans and the government of Papua New Guinea that was determined to maintain national unity at all costs'.

For other journalists though, the environment narrative seems to be a cover for the long-
term belief in the need for Bougainvillean independence. Jim Beatson (1989) in *The Guardian* wrote that behind the calls for compensation by the Panguna Landowners Association (PLA) and the dissatisfaction of Francis Ona 'lies the deeper issue of secession; Bougainville is geographically and culturally a part of the Solomon Islands'. Furthermore, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1989) stated that the island's violent uprising was 'based upon a campaign for higher compensation from the proceeds of the Bougainville Copper Mine' (p. 13), rather than any legitimate grievances arising from the environmental damage caused to the island.

Papua New Guinea is certainly an ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse country with over 800 languages spoken in a country of approximately six million. For Yash Ghai and Anthony Regan (2000), the politicisation of Bougainville's distinct ethnic identity fed into separatist demands, and eventually conflict. However, although ethnicity became important, they state that: 'it was largely a surrogate for other tensions and forces that contributed to the conflict' (p. 256). Anna Tsing (2005) highlights this point in her work *Friction* which provides an ethnography of global connection and charts how social connections shape the world. For Tsing, cultural diversity in Indonesia brought with it a friction in its connections between people. Even those cultures that were largely isolated, as Bougainville is to some extent, are shaped by transnational and national dialogues. Natural resource extraction and unequal encounters can lead to 'diverse and conflicting social interactions... [That can result in] new arrangements of culture and power' (p. 4-7). Such encounters and arrangements can lead to cultures being reproduced, and even politicised. Despite downplaying the role of ethnicity in his earlier work with Yash Ghai, Regan (2003) does, however, recognise the development of a pan-Bougainvillean identity, which he says emerged in the colonial era as a result of contact between differing ethnic groups: 'Except that Bougainvilleans are darker, few characteristics distinguish them from other Papua New Guineans. But during the colonial period this minor distinction became a focus for...ethnic consciousness.' (p. 134). This was further shaped by the distance of Bougainville from Port Moresby, the capital of PNG, 1000 kilometres away and its proximity to the neighbouring Solomon Islanders, with whom Bougainvilleans share similar cultural and linguistic traits.

Interestingly, none of the accounts above attribute grievances over resources as being
the sole causes of conflict. Demands for secession in Bougainville pre-dated the arrival of the Panguna mine, as both Regan (2003: 158) and Aspinall (2007) attest to. Since the mobilisation of ethno-nationalist sentiment were to be seen prior to the mine’s opening it could suggest that: ‘much of the debate about...(mine) revenue might in fact have been a way of enhancing the legitimacy of Bougainvillean...separatist demands’ (Aspinall, 2007: 968). Rather than seeing natural resources as being a root cause of violent conflict, they should be viewed as ‘arenas in which wider contestations over identity are belonging and played out’ (ibid: 969).

The Construction of Grievances in Bougainville

The literature reviewed above tends to view the conflict as a result of a number of triggering factors – such as environmental damage, the greed of landowners or disputes over compensation – this part of study, however, will attempt to argue that it was how the presence of mining in the region was interpreted by local actors that determined whether or not violent conflict occurred. The evolving framework of Bougainvillean identity acted as a ‘prism’ through which the Panguna mine was interpreted in terms of grievance and justice seeking, rather than greed.

In Aspinall’s (2007) case study of Aceh, the natural gas fields there helped to reinforce the ‘discourse of deprivation’ that was a common feature of discussions in Acehnese circles during the 1970s. This discourse of deprivation was the belief that the Suharto government\footnote{Suharto was the President of Indonesia from 1967-1998. Backed by the military, Suharto’s ‘New Order’ regime had authoritarian tendencies which placed restrictive political conditions on Aceh (Aspinall 2007).} were draining the natural riches of the region. Through this, Aspinall (2007: 957) argues that the exploitation of natural resources in Aceh would have been viewed as unfair and irritating, but without an identity framework in place the grievances of the Acehnese would not have been politically salient. However, within the evolving framework of identity that \textit{did} exist, violence became a legitimate means to achieve the goal of Acehnese independence. Thus, similarly to Bougainville, the presence of natural resource exploitation became a conduit through which grievances became channelled and focused. The particular mechanisms that gave rise to an identity framework conducive to violence in Aceh were: the legacy of previous violence; the
institutional relations between Aceh and the Indonesian state; the role of ‘ethnic political entrepreneurs’, who along with active counter-elites were able to ‘extend the official discourse on ethnicity to justify revolt’ (*ibid*: 952-957).

Although some of these proxies certainly resonate in the Bougainvillean context, the mechanisms laid out by Aspinall vary from conflict to conflict. For example, although a history of violent conflict was somewhat important, it does not seem to have resonated as much as in Aceh. Furthermore, Aspinall (2007) states that without an identity framework in place, there would have been no politically salient grievances. Whilst this may have been the case in Indonesia, it would be inadequate to apply this to Bougainville, which suffered significant environmental damage and the forced relocation of villagers, many of whom were moved to areas overlooking the huge mining pit, which according to Douglas Oliver (1991: 138) exposed them to round-the-clock mining noises and involved both physical and psychological hardship. One factor that mirrors the case of Aceh to some extent is the institutional relations between PNG and Bougainville, as both of the regions were granted autonomy but without an adequate amount of devolved power. This proved to be an important tool in solidifying calls for secession and re-affirmed Bougainvillean ‘otherness’ within PNG, whilst strengthening the Pan-Bougainvillean identity that was developing. Unlike Aceh though, land was of crucial importance in shaping networks of kinship. Throughout many Melanesian cultures, including Bougainville, resources are central to the formation of the self and of identity. The process of mining development infringes upon this, redefining the sense of group and individual identity (Banks 2005: 188). To a certain degree, large scale resource exploitation can be seen as the antithesis to the traditional ways of working the land. By turning such a large area into an open cast mine, the exploitation of resources became entwined with the greater development of Bougainvillean identity in which using the resources of an area and clearing of land was central to social relations and the maintenance of identity (*ibid*: 189). In part this still exists due to the failure of governments to alienate the land, and as a result land is not just a commodity for many and land remains a ‘central component of what makes that

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13 There was a history of violence in Bougainville. For example, opposition against ‘red skins’ was inflamed after the pay back killings of two Bougainvillean by New Guinean villagers in 1972. There were also sporadic outbreaks of localised violence after Bougainville declared independence in September 1975 (Regan 2003).
person’ (Banks 2004: 6). In an oft quoted statement from three Bougainvillean students in 1974, this idea of land being central to identity becomes quite clear:

Land is our life. And is our physical life - food and sustenance. Land is our social life; it is marriage; it is status; it is security; it is politics; in fact it is our only world. (Dove et al. 1974, cited in Connell 1997: 137).

Bearing this in mind, this section will argue that there were certain factors that contributed to a change in the perception of identity that made violence a more legitimate option. The factors that will be addressed in the rest of this chapter are: the issue of autonomy which was first brought up after PNG’s independence from Australia and the broader institutional relations between Bougainville and PNG; the changing nature of Bougainvillean society and land rights; the role of ‘ethnic political entrepreneurs’ in spurring on the conflict.

Before proceeding, however, there is one caveat. It is easy to generalise in discussions about what drives violent conflict. Clearly, not all Bougainvilleans were against the mining in the area – BCL employed local staff and many BRA leaders were people who at one time worked in and around the mine and had at some point benefited economically from it. Furthermore, between a third and a half of the four thousand employees at the mine were local staff, with two hundred other local businesses dependent on the BCL mine (Regan 2007: 94). Opposition to the mine, therefore, varied from area to area with support less seen in the North of Bougainville where colonial contact had been earliest and access to education and economic opportunities had been particularly prevalent (Regan 2003). Many were negatively affected by the presence of the Panguna mine, however, and it had a significant impact upon vast swathes of the population, their status, way of life and thus their identity (Banks 2005). Over the course of the last century, it has become widely accepted that a Pan-Bougainvillean identity has emerged, whereas previously identity was more related to kinship and clans (Regan 2005). Douglas Oliver’s (1955: 79) study into the Siuai14 in South-western Bougainville, for example, highlights the acute differences that members of the Siuai tribe felt even to their ethnically and culturally similar neighbours. Yet even Oliver

14 The Siuai are a tribe from Southern Bougainville, occupying territory on the Greater Buin Plain (Oliver 1955).
recognised how increasingly these various groups had begun to adopt the traits of their neighbours. This, according to Regan (2005) culminated in a more homogenous Bougainville identity, which was the result of plantation colonialism in Bougainville and ‘industrialised neo-colonialism as represented by the copper mine’ (Ogan cited in Regan 2005: 418).

The first factor that will be looked at is the issue of autonomy in Bougainville and the impact of institutional arrangements between the region and PNG. This was of particular importance in shaping Bougainvillean grievances. PNG has experience extreme fragmentation in society, both politically and culturally, since attaining independence from Australia in 1975. This is in part due to the massive cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. As Don Vernon (2005), the managing director of BCL from 1975 to 1977, makes clear this was the case at both national and provincial levels: ‘Rarely did one feel that those who spoke on behalf of the authorities had the wholehearted support of the populace.’ (p. 266). As a device, autonomy allows ethnic or other groups to exercise control over their own concerns, affairs and issues that may be of particular concern to them (Ghai 2000: 8). Indeed, the devolving of power and granting of autonomy in multi-ethnic states is often seen as a way of counterbalancing ethno-nationalist sentiments, and is seen as a useful tool in uniting various different groups. The devolution of power to the Scottish Parliament from the United Kingdom, for example, was viewed as a means to ‘shoot the nationalist fox’ and kill any calls for independence ‘stone dead’ (Massie 2009). It is argued that by allowing certain groups to be involved in the decision making process, grievances may be assuaged as these groups will be able to have their own say in how state resources are used and deployed. Power sharing arrangements are also in a way designed to provide an ‘atmosphere of tolerance’ so that inter-ethnic disputes do not stand in the way of democratic governance (Shoup 2008: 27). This sentiment is echoed by Yash Ghai (2000:1), who posits that granting autonomy can result in ‘breathing space’ whilst longer term plans for dealing with ethnic conflict is formulated. The de-centralisation of power to the peripheries, he argues, can also: ‘provide the path to maintaining unity of a kind while conceding claims to self-government’ (ibid: 1).

Conversely, however, by allowing autonomy, and granting special status to a region, a
government may actually contribute to exacerbating conflict based on ethnic lines rather than actually institutionalising identities. By emphasising the unique properties of a particular region, the ‘otherness’ of the people there becomes increasingly recognised and developed. Furthermore, if autonomy does not go far enough, and restrictive political conditions are put in place, it becomes extremely difficult for provincial governments to deviate from central government lines (Aspinall 2007: 960). If the amount of autonomy granted to a region is deemed as insufficient, then the risk of conflict between groups may actually be heightened. Whilst a government may be reinforcing the idea that the population of a special region is different, they also prevent the realisation of this difference. This can result in deepening disillusionment rather than ameliorating it (ibid: 960).

In PNG, the plans for de-centralising power and creating provincial governments helped to solidify Bougainvillian defiance against PNG. Natural resource development had begun in PNG after a World Bank Report in 1965 advocated a selective and intensive development programme, designed to replace the uniform development. This was embraced by the Australian government at the time, despite them having little knowledge or experience in PNG. However, as James Griffin (2005) asserts, it was ‘ardently believed that what was good for Australians would in the long-term benefit Melanesians’ (p. 291). At the time, there was only one member in the House of Assembly that represented Bougainville. This, combined with the ongoing development on PNG advocated by the Australian government, highlighted the powerlessness of Bougainvilleans and the fact that their destiny for eventual integration with Papua New Guinea (after independence) had seemingly already been decided for them (ibid: 291-92). By the early 1970s, the question turned to what degree of autonomy the provinces of PNG should have, although this was mostly aimed at Bougainville.

Between 1973 and 1977, the movement towards autonomy was particularly remarkable, especially when one considers how heavily centralised the Australian colonial government had been (Ghai and Regan 2000). Secession remained very much on the agenda for many Bougainvilleans, and their hope that it would be achieved was heightened by the Constitutional Planning Committee (CPC), which had appointed John Lawrence Momis, a native of Bougainville from Buin, as their deputy chairman (Griffin
2005: 297). During the 1972 House of Assembly elections, secession acted as a rallying cry for the campaign. Although the reasons for secession had become broadened, with some opposed to the Administration, whilst others approved of secession due to a dislike of redskins and the idea of land alienation. When the Australian Prime Minister visited Kieta, on the East coast of Bougainville, he was petitioned by Paul Lapun to grant a referendum on secession. He stated that:

> We earnestly entreat you to grant our wish as this is most important to us. At this stage we do not wish to remain with Papua New Guinea...we have no common links with Papua New Guinea, and we have no desire to remain with them. To us they are alien. We have absolutely nothing in common with them. (Cited in Oliver 1991: 186)

The CPC, however, were charged with developing a workable proposal for an independence constitution for PNG that would protect the population of the fledgling democracy against unscrupulous leaders, whilst encouraging participation and contributing to ‘creating a national vision of an egalitarian, intelligent and democratic society’ (Momis 2005: 311). At the same time, and perhaps more importantly for Bougainville, the aim was to design a system that guaranteed decentralisation of power from government. The hope was that this would provide autonomy to the provinces, and find a way to integrate these provinces in a way acceptable all groups (Ghai and Regan 2000: 247). Indeed, Momis himself posits that the CPC presented a great opportunity for bypassing any potential differences:

> It seemed to be that they offered the opportunity for developing a workable framework within which my people’s desire for self-determination could be fostered in a way that would not threaten the unity of Papua New Guinea. (2005: 312)

The government of Michael Somare, in power from 1975-1980, had different ideas, and as the deadline for PNG’s independence drew near they outlined their own proposals for constitutional development in a White Paper. By the time a draft constitution was put forward, in July 1975, the chapter on a provincial government system had been completely removed. Whereas the CPC had started with almost every future arrangement being ‘on the table’, the new government and ministers had become increasingly conservative towards the prospect of decentralisation, since many of them
now had stakes in the existing arrangement of power (Ghai and Regan 2000: 248). Bougainvillean leaders were not particularly pleased by this development, and John Momis resigned from the House of Assembly as a result (Momis 2005: 313). In September of 1975, independence was unilaterally declared by the leaders of Bougainville, in advance of PNG’s own independence from Australia (Oliver 1991: 194). With little international support however, this would have proved particularly difficult. Instead, negotiations between Bougainville and PNG were instigated by Momis and Somare, culminating in the Bougainville Agreement of 1976 (Momis 2005: 314).

The main part of the Bougainville Agreement allowed for the establishment of a provincial government, with limited autonomy, with provisions for further devolved powers. The agreement also resulted in the payment of royalties to the provisional government from BCL (which had previously been paid) to the PNG government (Regan 2007; Momis 2005: 314). According to Regan (2005: 100), this seemed to resolve problem until the 1980s, however, this seems overly simplistic reading of the situation at the time. The creation of the North Solomons Provincial Government (NSPG) and the other provincial governments in PNG paid only lip-service to the desire for centralised government, however it did go some way to accommodating the Bougainvillean elites as it offered them economic opportunities (Ghai and Regan 2000). At the same time it celebrated the distinctiveness of Bougainville, whilst reflecting the relative powerlessness of Bougainvillean to decide their own policy. The agreement negotiations for autonomy were primarily between representatives from Bougainville and PNG, however many within parliament were aware that the bill would struggle to pass unless arrangements for devolution were given to all regions of PNG (Bougainville’s leaders had argued that it should only be entitled to them due to their ‘distinctiveness’ (Ghai 2000: 13). Whilst the Bougainville Agreement should have helped in giving Bougainville control over its own affairs, the national government failed to honour the promise of further devolution. Furthermore, by favouring devolution to all provinces with asymmetrical autonomy meant that the original plans for devolution were watered down to a certain degree. However, many of the decentralisation plans were implemented, resulting in an increased awareness of provincial consciousness and identity. In Bougainville, due to the presence of the BCL
mine, there was also a payment of $5 million per year in royalties (allowing the NSPG to spend more than any other provincial government). However the arrangements for decentralisation did not result in large changes since power in the central government remained relatively unchallenged. Although the elites in Bougainville were somewhat placated by the granting of autonomy to the region, it left them rather toothless (Ghai and Regan 2000). As a result:

In the 1970s the central priorities of the Bougainvillean leadership had been to achieve autonomy and a share of the mining revenue...However, the provincial government had limited power to respond to either the ongoing tensions associated with the unresolved grievances of ordinary people concerning the mine. (ibid: 256).

Although ethnicity was not particularly pertinent in Bougainville’s arrangements for devolved power, aside from the naming of the NSPG which reflected the ethnic links with the Solomon Islands, the failure of autonomy to provide self-governance helped solidify Bougainvillean identity, and contribute to a provincial consciousness. It helped to define the differences between Bougainville and the mainland, and recognised their ‘otherness’ yet did not allow Bougainville to express this difference through legislation and governance. As Momis (2005: 315) asserts, they were not satisfied with being ‘passive recipients of goods and services, but preferred to be active agents of change and development’. By reneging on the promise for further devolution, however, the central government did not allow this to occur. The initiatives that the NSPG did put in place were to have little effect in dealing with the problems faced in Bougainville, such as the selling of land to outsiders:

The general direction of economic change – especially the growing economic inequality...was of itself undermining traditional society, and the concerns of the people in this regard were merely symptomatic of the much deeper tensions involved (Ghai and Regan 2000: 256).

With the eruption of violent conflict in late 1988, the NSPG attempted to work towards a compromise – including favouring increased compensation payments and funding for landowners and the provincial government, whilst calling for proposals for further autonomy in Bougainville. Upon the withdrawal of the PNG security forces in March 1990, however, the BRA took power and declared independence. The NSPG was
suspended by the national government in August 1990 and the demise of the decentralisation plans as a result of this led to the 1995 abolishment of all provincial autonomy arrangements. This was replaced with a new Organic Law on Provincial Governments, aimed at improving participation and ameliorating grievances over the distribution of revenue and funding (Edmiston 2000). This new law was designed to provide increased powers to the periphery, but had in effect strengthened power of government, with finances, staff and the legislative process remaining with central agencies (Pokawin 1999). As Edmiston (2000) concludes, the reformed structures were designed in a way that ensured the National Parliament had a strong hand in every facet of regional government\(^\text{15}\)\(^\text{15}\). Despite this, peace still seemed to be on the agenda. Jared Keil (2005) highlights the fact that former and present supporters of the BRA (and members of the breakaway BRA faction called the Republic of Me’ekamui) were ‘sitting easy’ alongside the Bougainville autonomous government:

Their argument seems to be as follows: ‘the two sides are presently working out exactly what “autonomy” will mean for Bougainville. If the result is okay, fine. But, if the result is not, then we will have nothing unless we keep our weapons (p. 413).

By 2007, Bougainville had a fully autonomous provincial government with its own judiciary, legislative and executive that was independent from the PNG national civil service (Pok 2007). A referendum on Bougainvillean independence from PNG will be held sometime between 2011 and 2015 (Pok 2007; Dixon 2001). The future of mining in Bougainville post-2001 (the mine has been closed since 1989) was not specifically on the agenda. However, according to Regan (2003: 151), it seems to have been tacitly implied that it would be a matter for Bougainville to decide – with PNG reserving the right for its share of revenue.

\(^{15}\) For example, MPs from the National Parliament were assigned membership in Provincial Assembly. The Chairman of the Assembly is the MP representing the provincial electorate: ‘Thus, a substantial portion of money available for development projects in the district is used at the MP’s discretion, and not surprisingly, much of this money has not been used for its intended purpose. In many cases these funds have been used as political “slush funds” by the MPs’ (Edmiston 2000: 9)
Land, identity and grievances

The second factor through which the Panguna mine was interpreted as a ‘grievance’ was the issue of land rights in Bougainville. Furthermore, the presence of mining in the region became entangled with the traditional Bougainvillian social structures that emphasised fairness and equality, based upon principles of ‘reciprocity and balance...tending to encourage egalitarian distribution of goods’ (Regan 2003: 137). The mining of the region had the effect of increasing inequality, and undermined the balance between social groups. This in turn exacerbated local tensions and conflict (ibid: 137).

There are a variety of case studies on large scale mining operations, carried out by transnational mining companies (TNC’s) that emphasise the negative consequences that they can have on local populations. As Gill Burke (1994: 106), acknowledges, open cast mining can often result in: the dispossession and disempowerment of indigenous communities; the transformation of economic and social relations in communities; the importing of skilled foreign labour, rather than hiring local staff. Indeed, it is almost seen as inevitable that the local population will be significantly affected by changes to their physical and social environments. Most indigenous populations, however, will be able to come to some kind of accommodation between themselves and the mining companies, with the nature of such accommodation ‘(reflecting) specific successes and failures in addressing social and environmental impacts and compensating for their negative impact’ (Connell 1991: 9).

In Bougainville, however, the impact of mining had an extra dimension to it, originating in the complex relationship between land and identity (as highlighted earlier in this chapter). Since the mid-1960s Bougainville had experienced substantial societal changes, not all of which had been due to the mine. Population growth, for example was rapid and had reached 129,000 by 1980. As a result of the BCL operations, urbanisation became an increasing feature of Bougainville, with new towns being created - Arawa, with a population of 15,000 (by far the largest on the Island) and Panguna with a population of 3,000. Income levels in these new towns were significantly larger than those before the mine had begun operating, and saw the arrival of new types of income generation and a growing commercial system. More negatively, however, was the surge in criminal activity associated with mining, including prostitution, rape and assault.
Despite these new developments, however, tradition and continuity with the past were still important, although this was increasingly under pressure. According to Connell (1991), the way in which BCL was becoming increasingly pervasive influence on Bougainvillean life was likened by some locals to an octopus’s tentacles reaching out, and there was undoubtedly friction between the extraction of natural resources, and the socially constructed Bougainvillean identity that propagated economic equality and egalitarianism. As one prominent resident, Leo Hannett, remarked:

> Our once peaceful, non-violent living is now forever shattered: we are constantly harried by day and haunted by night with continual acts of violence in our midst...we move around with our heads hanging low from these outsiders, heartless outsiders with their heartless machines slowly eating out like a cancerous growth the soul of our community; degenerating, humiliating, and dehumanising us with their ‘development’ at our expense.

We are now made strangers in our own land (Cited in Connell 1991: 60).

From the outset, mining in the region clashed with the traditional values espoused by many in Bougainville. In particular was the issue of property holding, land rights and revenue sharing. After PNG independence from Australia, the new constitution put in place limited the ownership of land to just below the soil. In turn this meant that subsurface mineral rights were awarded to the state (O’Callaghan 2002; Screen Australia 2000). This challenged the Bougainvillean understanding that property and land rights extended to minerals in the ground and not just the land itself - therefore by its very nature, mining in Bougainville was in conflict with the cultural environment within which it was operating (Burke 1994: 106). This, according to O’Callaghan (2002) contributed to the unravelling of a system of governance that had existed for a number of years. Traditionally, land in Bougainville had belonged to numerous clan lineages based upon a matrilineal system. The right to exploit the land was shared by the members of these clans (Regan 2003: 137; O’Callaghan 2002). The idea that land would be leased to outsiders for extended periods of times was not a part of this tradition. The matrilineal system was undermined and challenged by the compensation deals that were offered to Bougainville’s landowners in the areas affected by the mine, as payments were not offered to Bougainvillean women, but male representatives of the clan (Regan 2003: 137).
As Momis (2005: 316) emphasises, there did not seem to be much of a realisation from Port Moresby as to the extent to which they were systematically marginalising and disempowering many Bougainvilleans through the pursuit of economic growth and mining revenue. The importance of maintaining balance and reciprocity is a key feature common to all Bougainvillean societies (Ogan 1996) and the way in which compensation was paid lead to ‘intra-generational disputes about fairness, as younger landowners, who had not been adults when the original land survey was undertaken...tended to receive smaller shares...in the late 1980s, these secondary disputes in turn provided the spark for a wider ethno-nationalist rebellion against PNG’ (Regan 2003: 138). For many women in Central Bougainville, in particular, the whole process of compensation, land rights and mining in the region was particularly disempowering. For them, losing land to the mining company was not just about the personal loss involved, but a generational one. Speaking in 1988 at the beginning of hostilities, one former landowner stated that:

I can't pass the land on now because most of it has been covered up by the mine...The traditional system will never work again. The company has only paid the parents for this. What Ona is fighting for is that everybody, right down to the last born, should get compensation because our traditions have been broken and we will not be able to pass anything down to them. (O’Callaghan 2002).

This idea of disempowerment also echoes with the experiences of the young landowners in Bougainville, and this only increased as the years went on. The Panguna Landowners Association (PLA), formed in 1979, was designed to push for further compensation for these landowners. However, with BCL slow to respond, roadblocks were set up by the PLA and the looting of supermarkets followed. Eventually a new agreement was found that benefited PLA members. By the 1980s, however, the social changes that were associated with mining in the region were being felt strongly. The grievances of the young landowners, however, began to resurface which resulted in many challenging the PLA. For the leaders of the young landowners, like Francis Ona, the PLA were benefitting unfairly from mining revenue whilst not representing the interests of all landowners. By early 1988, he had the support of many semi-skilled Panguna mine workers, and also of Damien Dameng’s Me-ekamui Pontoku Onoring16, who were

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16 Me-ekamui Pontoku Onoring was an ‘indigenous religious and political movement’ that emerged in
opposed to the mine on the grounds of tradition. This loose coalition of partners became known as the ‘New PLA’, however, the interests of the various groups that formed the coalition were diverse and at times contradictory (Ghai and Regan 2000: 257).

Dameng’s egalitarian traditionalists, for example were dedicated to closing the mine down for good and returning to a Bougainvillean society based on traditional social structures and ‘an economy relying largely on subsistence and small-scale cash crop agriculture’ (Regan 2003: 157). For what Ghai and Regan describe as ‘economic nationalists’, however, the new PLA was about continuing mining operations but with a greater revenue return for Bougainville (Ghai and Regan 2000: 257). This challenges the notion that greed is the major factor driving rebel movements – if the young landowners were aggrieved by the unequal distribution of revenues, closing the mine down would not solve their problem as they would receive even less if the mine ceased operations. This suggests that for Bougainvilleans like Demang and his followers, benefitting economically from the conflict was not their agenda. Instead, the aim of the new PLA was not to harness the potential of the mine for a separate Bougainville, but to have a region free from mining altogether. However, it also draws attention to the polarising affect of the whole ‘greed-grievance’ dichotomy, as both political grievances, identity and economic factors became closely interwoven. Some of the grievances in Bougainville were economic in nature, however, as Regan (2003: 159) stated they cannot be understood without looking at the greater Bougainville identity that emerged in opposition to their being a part of PNG. Thus, the move for separatism can be viewed as: ‘part of a longer and larger ethno-national struggle to redress Bougainville’s historically marginalised political status’ (ibid: 159-160).

Role of ethnic entrepreneurs

Identity may be malleable and flexible, but it can also be open to manipulation. Milton Esman (2004: 195) states that while communities may be able to coexist for a certain period of time, certain events can trigger a difference in perception that is then ‘magnified by ethnic entrepreneurs, causing these communities to mobilise and move apart’. This was a development of his earlier idea that ethnic entrepreneurs contribute to

reaction to post-colonial economic development. They were based in South-Central Bougainville and sought a ‘resurgence of [Bougainvillean] culture and...change’ (Regan 2005: 439).
highlighting real or imaginary threats to a community’s status as a means of securing their own short term political goals (Esman cited in Shoup 2008: 9). However, suggesting that the machination of elites can contribute to violent conflict accepts somewhat the ‘instrumentalist assumptions about the utility of ethnic appeals’ (ibid: 9). As Shoup (ibid: 9-10) emphasises though, theories based upon the idea of ethnic manipulations by elites have been seen in various epistemological perspectives, which includes the social constructivist accounts of conflict: ‘the key to these theories is their common belief that elites can use ethnic symbols and appeals to garner...support.’ The literature focusing on social constructivism and conflict often tries to emphasise why people are lead to violence. In the case of Yugoslavia, for example, Franke Wilmer argues that the propaganda machine was of key importance in the social construction that resulted in rape, murder and pillage: ‘it was this elite propagandising...that caused ordinary citizens to set aside traditions of ethnic pluralism and opt for war’ (Gibbs 2003: 937). Aspinall (2007) also posits that ethnic political entrepreneurs were crucial in reinterpreting grievances back to the population of Aceh. These counter-elites helped to:

- provide the framework within which Acehnese identity and grievance were constructed...each layer of grievance built on top of that which preceded it, such that...identity became one founded in suffering...it was an identity of victimhood, but one that stressed Acehnese resistance and heroism (Aspinall 2007: 960-61)

As a result of the grievances mentioned above, there was a general increase in the expression of Bougainvilllean identity in the 1980s, which was also coupled with demands for secession. In part this was attributable to Bougainville’s representatives playing secession to its limits as a way to create their own space in the PNG politics (MacWilliam 2005). However, the grievances that did exist in Bougainville were certainly important, and left a sense of resentment and disenchantment.

By 1988, as James Tanis (2005: 470) suggests, all that was needed ‘was a fuse and an ignition’. When the New PLA attacked BCL buildings in November 1988, prompted by the grievances of young landowners and the perceived failure of the ‘old’ PLA, the

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17 The key figure in shaping Aceh’s opposition to Indonesia was Hasan Tiro. He was of the belief that ‘the Acehnese were an ancient and noble people, who had been degraded by ‘Javanese masquerading as ‘Indonesians’’ (Aspinall 2007: 961)
central authority of PNG responded by sending in security forces to quell the unrest. However, the PNG security forces sent in were primarily used to operating in the Highland region and indiscriminately targeted communities around the mining lease area. This had little impact on Francis Ona (leader of the BRA) and his followers who had carried out the attack on the BCL property, but provoked others into viewing their role as further proof of Bougainvilleans being marginalised. These reprisals by the security forces enabled Ona to mobilise even more groups to support him. Initially, Ona had merely wanted a fairer distribution of mining revenues however with wider support for the goal of secession this forced him to change his mind. According to Regan (2003), he soon began to pay lip service to his allies committed to closing the mine. What Ona was able to do was use the simmering tensions to his own advantage and turn the clashes and subsequent reprisals into a ‘catalyst for mobilisation of a wider ethno-nationalist rebellion, in which secession came to be seen as a panacea for a wide range of accumulated social and economic ills’ (ibid: 145).

As the rebellion turned into a more widespread conflict, Ona and others were able to create a more nationalist vision. They emphasised and celebrated the idea of the specialness of Bougainvillean identity to further the goals of secession – for example, they claimed to be ‘seeking to restore the egalitarian fairness by trying to suppress developmental change’ that was caused by the mine and the expansion of cash crop production in the area (Lummani 2005: 252). This would go some way to replacing the economic base of the country that was put in place by what Ona referred to as the ‘white mafia’ (Connell 1991: 72). At the same time, the BRA and others favouring secession were able to employ what Aspinall describes as a narrative of suffering, that emphasised not who Bougainvilleans were but what they had suffered. For the people of Bougainville, there was a strong belief that it was a ‘forgotten district’ that had been ignored by Australia when it was still a colony and later by the independent PNG where it was seen as a tropical backwater of no importance. Thus, when the riches begun to come out of the BCL mine in Panguna, ‘there was a sense that the bounty was long overdue – and, among Bougainvilleans, no enthusiasm for sharing that bounty’ (Vernon 2005). This discourse of deprivation was also further shaped by many who were still

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18 Eventually the coalition of the New PLA and these other groups adopted the name Bougainville Liberation Army (BRA).
aggrieved over the treatment handed out by the Australian colonial government, which had failed to improve conditions after the Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Bougainville\(^{19}\) (Oliver 1991: 77). This discourse of deprivation was further added to by the grievances of the young landowners, as well as the significant environmental damage caused by the mine.

In one way, it is not just grievances around natural resources that spurs on violence, but also the ability to frame the injustice in a way which suggests that a ‘collective remedy’ if necessary – this was certainly aided by the operations of the PNG security forces, but more so by the notion of a pan-Bougainvillean identity constructed around the perception of their own national suffering, exploitation and disempowerment. At the same time, we can see the importance of such an ‘identity framework’ if we compare Bougainville to other resource-rich areas of PNG, as Bougainville is not the only region that has experienced disputes over the impact of natural resource extraction. Despite this, however, it has only been Bougainville that has experienced a prolonged violent conflict. Around the same time as the Panguna mine was in development, plans were already underway to open another mine in the Fly River region of PNG – the Ok Tedi mining project, however was abandoned shortly before independence in 1975. Upon the rise in gold prices in 1981 though, the project was soon resurrected and the Ok Tedi Mining Limited (OTML) was created (Hyndman 1991). The mine in Ok Tedi had a similar impact socially, environmentally and economically to the BCL mine in Bougainville. There was an influx of foreign workers, and according to Kirsch (1997: 121), such a catastrophic impact on the land that ‘much of what they once took for granted about their natural environment no longer holds true’. This included significant amounts of tailings and a variety of other waste material (including cyanide and heavy metals) being pumped into the local river – this waste adversely impacted the region, killing plants, and heavily disrupted local ecosystems (Hyndmann 1991:79; Kirsch 1997: 122).

\(^{19}\) During the post-Second World War period, many Bougainvilleans were particularly resentful over the racist treatment that they received, and over the lack of change that they desired. This was especially the case for those who had supported Australia against the Japanese: ‘the war also suggested to many that possession of dark skin does not necessarily and inevitably require one to be treated, at worst as sub-human, and at best as a well-meaning but ignorant child... (This) began to exert a dominant influence over Bougainvillean’s post-war lives’ (Oliver 1991: 77).
This raises the question as to why conflict existed in Bougainville, but was avoided in Ok Tedi, since they both experienced wide social and environmental change on a similar scale. What distinguished Bougainville from Ok Tedi was the lack of any historical and cultural context that gave rise to an identity and framework for action that legitimised the use of violence to further their goals. In particular, this may suggest that natural resource extraction leading to violent conflict is dependent upon its surroundings and the ideological and identity related resources that exist to those ethnic entrepreneurs and other actors involved. As a result ‘the severity...consequences, or other intrinsic qualities of the resource exploitation itself are less important’ than the concurrent narrative of identity and suffering (Aspinall 2007).

Although much of what occurred in colonial Bougainville was similar to the other regions of PNG, there were certain features that distinguished them – including, the blatant racism of the Australian government; the violence used to quell unrest in the region and the alienation of plantations from traditional land (Regan 2003: 135). One way of resisting the colonial government for the people of Bougainville was through protests. These protests often led to the Australian colonial government handing over more resources for local development. As James Griffin (1995: 13) notes, the moral of this for Bougainvilleans was that ‘Port Moresby would only respond when its authority was challenged’. Ok Tedi, meanwhile had remained very much an isolated region, and when mining arrived in the early 1980s, the grievances there were mainly shaped by the environmental damage rather than any identity framework or underlying grievances over past events. As a result, while the grievances in Bougainville were multi-faceted and entangled with the wider processes of identity, in Ok Tedi ‘there was no social crisis...no conflict within landowning groups, no challenge of local political authority and no intergenerational strife’ (Kirsch 1997: 121). There was little that could either be exploited by ethnic entrepreneurs, or any other way that violence could be legitimised since the framework of identity that could have led to violence did not exist. The grievances were thus framed around the environmental impact of mining in Ok Tedi, rather in Bougainville where Ona talked about a ‘white mafia’, or when James Tanis (2005) discusses the fact that he never felt they were part of PNG:

‘They [the people of Ok Tedi] want [the mine] to stop releasing mine wastes directly
into the river system and they want compensation for the damage to the environment. If this does not take place, they think that the mine should be closed...they prefer a political rather than a violent solution to the problems caused by the mine’ (Kirsch 1997: 122).

This solution was echoed by others from another village, Yogi, also in the Ok Tedi region:

‘If [the mine] does not stop dumping its...waste directly into the river then the mine should close. They will not resort to violence in order to close the mine, but will enlist the support of the newly-formed ‘pressure groups’...and the Ok Tedi Landowners Association, in order to bring this about’ (ibid: 122).

**Conclusion**

This study has attempted to apply a social constructivist approach to the concept of grievances in conflict, emphasising in particular that grievances over the BCL mine in Bougainville can only be understood by looking at the processes of identity formation that contributed to a discourse of deprivation in the region. Clearly, as has been emphasised above, the majority of the actors in the Bougainville conflict were not motivated by the potential for economic gain. There was no hidden agenda for economic self-interest and the mine was closed by 1989, and yet the conflict still continued for a considerable time after. The three mechanisms highlighted in this study that gave rise to identity capable of violence were the issue of autonomy that celebrated Bougainvillean identity whilst denying them self-governance; land rights which infringed upon self-identity; the role of ethnic political entrepreneurs who were able to legitimise violence against the PNG security forces by reinterpreting the idea of Bougainvillean suffering back to the populace. These were not part of a ‘primordial’ hatred of PNG, but were more recent grievances brought about by colonialism, and later by experiences in the Second World War. As such, the mining in Bougainville became entangled with the deeper antipathy to being a part of PNG – indeed, the fact that ethno-nationalist mobilisation for separatism began before the BCL mine had even began operations could suggest that the disputes of the young landowners over revenue distribution were simply a way of furthering these demands.
Bearing this in mind, it is difficult to predict where such conflicts may occur and what processes will lead to them. As a result, the approach that has been outlined here may only be useful in situations and conflicts where the issue of identity is particularly important. Furthermore, the ideas and mechanisms emphasised in this study, may not apply in every case study on intra-state conflicts linked to natural resource extraction. In Bougainville, for example, land rights were a particularly salient issue as land was intrinsically linked to the processes of identity construction, as it is in most parts of Melanesia. Such attachment to the land may not apply to other grievance-driven conflicts. There is a need, however, to move away from sweeping statements about the motivations of rebel movements. Clearly this will vary from conflict to conflict, however, just because it is easier to diagnose looting and rebel greed as being the main drivers in conflict does not mean we should ignore the historical and cultural construction of grievance. Instead it is important we look at this and understand that natural resource industries are not the starting point conflict, but part of the larger system of identity. We should not, therefore, view natural resource in isolation from the wider processes at work in a given society. In Bougainville, the presence of the mine infringed upon and became enmeshed with conceptions of identity and the ways in which people perceived themselves collectively. As for the future of Bougainville, the BCL (2009) website states that 2009 represents ‘the most promising year in two decades...for...a possible re-commencement of operations at the Panguna minesite.’ Although the peace process has been relatively successful and peaceful, the re-opening is likely to be opposed until Bougainville is no longer a part of PNG. Furthermore, BCL’s c-owner, the mining company Rio Tinto, is currently being taken to court by residents of Bougainville after being accused of war crimes due to their support in blockading the island (Feller 2009). The plans for re-opening the mine will undoubtedly bring up memories of the conflict, however, Bougainvilleans still have a sense of war-weariness that makes large scale violence unlikely – for some Bougainvilleans though, re-opening the mine seems to be crucial for the future of Bougainville (whether it remains a part of PNG or becomes an independent state) (Regan 2003). The conflict devastated economic opportunities in Bougainville. By resuming operations in a way that is more inclusive towards landowners, with revenue distribution done fairly and better environmental management, it is hoped that any potential grievances will be
assuaged. To summarise, the presence of mining and of a natural resource extraction may not be a salient factor that leads to violence unless there is a framework of identity and grievances in place. It may be unwise, therefore, view the presence of natural resource industries as being divorced from the society within which it operates, but instead it is possible to see it as part of the wider contest through which natural resource extractions interplays with ideas of social identity and belonging.
References


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