

*IN BETWEEN: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE 9-YEAR LONG CONFLICT ON
BOUGAINVILLE*

By James Tanis

&

HABUNA MOMORUQU (THE BLOOD OF MY ISLAND)

Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands

By George Gray

*While violent conflicts have long been the subject of academic analysis, few written accounts have been produced by those who have actually participated in violent conflict. The State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project invited James Tanis and George Gray to prepare papers reflecting upon their personal involvement in the Bougainville and Solomon Islands conflicts respectively. Both authors presented their papers at the Australian Anthropological Society Annual Conference, 2002. In recording their experiences and analyses, James Tanis and George Gray offer us a unique insight into the motivations of those who participate in conflict, the effects of conflict on participants, and the way in which participants make sense of their involvement in violent conflict. **The views expressed in these two papers are those of the authors alone and not those of the SSGM Project.***

***IN BETWEEN: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE 9-YEAR LONG CONFLICT ON
BOUGAINVILLE***

James Tanis

Introduction

My name is James Tanis. I am 36. The name of my clan is Data and our clan totem is the white cockatoo. My village is up in the hills, south west of Panguna and it is cut in half by two different languages, Sibbee of the Nagovis, and Nasioi of the Ioro Area (Panguna Area). I thank

you sincerely for inviting me to this conference to share my experiences in the Bougainville Conflict.

Before going any further I must explain that there are many political leaders and commanders of factions who are more important than me. There are women leaders, religious leaders and chiefs who have done more things than me. Another important group includes the orphans, widows and divorced people. There are many other people on Bougainville who have lots of exciting stories to tell. There are many individuals and groups, whose life provided the nucleus of the conflict. These are the groups that we must continue to involve in order to get more information. I wish they were here today to give you their accounts of their stories.

There is a strong cultural taboo that prohibits the telling of stories of the deceased or retelling stories when parties have reconciled and planted tanget trees. To break the taboo is punishable by payment of compensation to the relatives of the deceased persons. However, to participate well in this conference I have no choice but to violate some of our strongest cultural taboos as I would not be able to give out information without mentioning or describing incidents involving deceased people.

Public apology

I am bound by the spirit of peace and reconciliation, especially the ritual chewing of betel nut and planting of the tanget tree. These taboos prohibit us from talking about cases involving death. Therefore, I wish to make a public apology to the relatives of the deceased and the reconciled parties. It is not my intention to reopen closed cases. I apologize to the spirits of slain Bougainvilleans on both sides of the conflict. In this presentation I am not intending to invoke your rested spirits to haunt those that are alive.

I am aware that there will be a publication arising from this conference. In a Melanesian society feelings are passed from generation to generation. In the future when the children of the victims that I wrote about read this article, they will think this: ***James Tanis was one of the leaders that led the struggle in which our relatives were killed and when the war was over he wrote about them maybe to advance his academic knowledge and to see places. James Tanis is a glory***

seeker. This will scratch the healing scars of wounds that the conflict inflicted and this may humiliate my children. I wish it was someone else doing this presentation but where would we get someone else?

Apart from the cultural taboos that we have on Bougainville, I must also explain that we have a Peace Agreement with the Government of Papua New Guinea and that I am one of the core leaders that negotiated the agreement. During the long process of negotiations and other peace related activities, we have rebuilt good relationships with Papua New Guineans. At the same time there were Papua New Guineans who were sympathetic to the Bougainvillean struggle. I wish to take this opportunity to assure you that this is not a reflection of where I am now, but rather this is recollection of where I was some years ago. Therefore I appeal for understanding that I am going to present this paper raw, and use descriptions that may be offensive to the participants of this conference. I am sure that people will understand that this not a political rally for Bougainville but an academic discussion about issues that we must study in order to get a better understanding of the issues affecting our part of the world.

Despite the limitation of the spirit of reconciliation and the cultural taboos, I feel obliged to contribute to the academic world because this is where our future generations will come and learn our past. It is therefore my hope that this presentation will contribute to the documentation of experiences in our part of the world so as to make our future generation a bit wiser than us. I also hope that our children may choose less destructive solutions to their grievances and aspirations. I feel privileged therefore to have come here to share with you a few of my experiences in the Bougainville conflict.

When I received an email from Dr Sinclair Dinnen about this conference, asking me to talk about my experiences in Bougainville, I started to look back on the memory lane of my life. Where did all this start for me? I started to recall vivid memories of my childhood and these are my recollections.

My experience

Son of a medicine man

When I was born, I was given two names. I was called **Lenala**, meaning chosen heir by the Sibbee Speaking half of the village, and **Tanis**, meaning chosen one by the Nasioi speaking half of the village. Later when I was older my parents took me to the mission to be baptised (just to maintain good relations with others). There was an American Priest called Fr James Moore and this was the very person who became principal mentor to Damien Dameng, the leader of the Meekamui Pontoku Onoring, and who first advised the people about CRA's activities. The priest decided to call me James Moore after himself. I have never actually asked why those who welcomed me into this world gave me names that were culturally powerful.

My grandfather was a medicine man (***Nagainala***). He had two sons. The eldest son went to work on plantations and at the mission. The medicine man kept his second son in the village to teach him history, the secrets of the medicine man, the language of the spirits and to train him to have the ***magic eye*** to see the spirits.

I am the eldest son of the second son of the medicine man. I grew up listening to my grandfather's stories about the good days when his power was strong. Now the *lotu* (church) has chased away the spirits that gave him power. He would tell me that it was the Rosaries that were given by the priest that have taken away the power of growing taro. He would continue his stories until I fell asleep and even after he had finished his stories those words would continue to ring in my mind for a long time. In fact, even today those words continue to be fresh, as if he was saying them just an hour ago. I was born in the house of the medicine man. I grew up surrounded by fireflies and the strange sounds of the spirits that guarded me from illness, sorcerers and evil spirits. I am the grandson of a medicine man and I grew up deeply rooted in our culture and tradition.

Childhood heroes

I went to school in 1974 and in 1975 when I was in the second grade, Peter Moini and Luke Rovin were killed in Goroka. I heard my parents talking about ***bruklusim Papua Niu Gini*** and the ***retskin***. I still remember them talking about what they understood about the *bruklus*.

However, they talked more about their fear that the *retskins* would kill all of us because there were many of them and we were only a small island population. I saw tears in the corner of my mother's eyes but could not understand why she was so sad because one was from Buin and the other one was from Pakia in Central Bougainville. We were in Nagovis. She only told me that they were the **save man** (men with knowledge). My father said they have killed our *het* (brain) because they do not want us to advance.

What I also remember is that in 1976 when I was doing grade 3, I found in my father's box a small prayer book. On the cover was written in ink **Peter Moini**. The feeling that I got was maybe the one that a kid would have after finding a sword with Yamamoto written on it. I do not know, but there was special feeling that I had. I removed the book without my father's knowledge and hid it under my bed. In the same year I had a new cousin. She was the second born daughter of my uncle (my mother's older brother). At her birth, she was named after Atoro, the mother of late Dr Luke Rovin. Later she was renamed **Goroka**, the place where Dr Rovin was killed. In my society, the naming of people after places and events that involved the death of immediate relatives is the most powerful means of remembering and passing on sorrow from generation to generation. I knew I possessed a prayer book with the name Moini written on it and that I had a cousin called **Goroka**. I kept the book until I lost it in High School and had a feeling of attachment to these men that I had never met. I always wondered what they looked like. They were legends and they were my heroes.

Town

I also remember that the most exciting thing in my childhood days was going to town. I liked it because I would see exciting things like bulldozers, graders, and cars and in stores I would see toys, radios, clothes, bread and biscuits. The time would be too short. What I hated most was being told that it was time to go home. I would always demand explanations. Why can't we sleep here? There were always two explanations. One was that the town was for the *masta* and second was that the *redskins* would kill us. I could not understand why we could not sleep in the town of the *masta* and why the *retskin* would kill us. Is this their home? I would also wonder why these big men and women could not stand up to the *masta* and the *retskin*. I felt like a foreigner in my own land. I hated them both. This made me wish that I were older and stronger so that I could

stand up to these outsiders who pushed us around. This experience continued up until the conflict. Four o'clock was the rush hour to go home. Women, in fear of the *retskins*, would always demand that the drivers of the vehicles go home quickly.

First week in Papua New Guinea

In 1984, when I finished grade ten I was selected to attend Sogeri National High School. My mother was nearly crying, worrying about me going to Sogeri. Almost ten years later, my parents reminded me of late Dr Luke Rovin and Peter Moini again. Your *het* (brain) is very good and it will be needed one day but you are going to Papua New Guinea where our first brains were killed. They said they would pray for me to make sure I returned back home.

When I boarded Air Niugini at Aropa Airport, I left for Port Moresby feeling insecure and lonely. During the first week of school in Sogeri there was a fight. The fight was between a student from Buka Island and a Highlander. I heard shouts of Buka, Buka everywhere. I stood there waiting for the Buka boys to be chased around. I did not know that in Port Moresby we were all called Buka, whereas back home I was Nago-nago. We were all chased around. In that encounter I heard different groups calling different names like Imi Cats and the ABI. Later I realized that they were names of different gangs that the students had in the school. Much later I also noticed that the students were in Provincial and cultural groups. Ours was the Mungkas Student's Association because we were black. That fight was my first welcome into Papua New Guinea.

The following week there was another fight with a student from Buin and a student from the Highlands. There were other fights in school that continued for the rest of my two years at the National High School. From then on, I was very careful about what I did and how I related to other students. My sense of insecurity grew bigger and bigger. In the end I had to draw the conclusion that my mother was correct in sounding the warnings that she gave before I went to Sogeri. On the other hand, I had very good friends from other places. My best friends came from the Highlands and the Sepik area. This does not mean that all school fights were against the Bougainvilleans only. No. There were fights everywhere and as for my case, maybe it was my own upbringing that made me see things the way I saw them.

Indication of a way out

After Sogeri, I continued on to the University of Technology in Lae. My first welcome in Lae came at China Town. On Sunday morning while I was on my way to visit a relative I was picked on by a group of drunkards. They held me at knifepoint in a public area and intimidated me. The conclusion that I made was that yes, they were all the same. There were other fights in which students from other provinces grouped together to fight Bougainvillean students. I wish not to count them name-by-name but this was a common experience to most Bougainvillean Students.

In 1987 while I was still at the University of Technology, two incidents formed a clear direction for me. There was a Siwai woman who was sexually abused in a market place in Arawa by a non- Bougainvillean. A Siwai man (who later became one of the founders of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army) was beaten up as he was trying defending the woman. At this time there was also a non-Bougainvillean who was terrorizing women in Arawa town by raping them. After raping them he would leave, writing his name as Arawa Phantom in the victims' houses. The squatter settlements around the townships of Arawa and Toniva were blamed for these incidents. This made me feel frustrated that we had no sense of security in Papua New Guinea, even in Bougainville. The friendships that I built with students from other Provinces were buried by a renewed sense of frustration building up in me.

On the ground, on Bougainville the provincial government was undertaking a new initiative called operation ***mekim save***. In this operation the provincial government was destroying the squatter settlements by force. This exercise did not go well with the Freedom of Movement guaranteed by the constitution. This freedom allowed Papua New Guineans to go freely anywhere in Papua New Guinea. On the other hand, the landowners of the customary land in Arawa, Panguna and Toniva, never knew their traditional land as Papua New Guinea. They knew it by the name given to it by their grandmothers. The provincial Government solution became a failure as more houses were built at the very spot that they cleared to get rid of the squatters.

I was still nursing these wounds when the Premier of the then North Solomons, Joseph Kabui, visited the University of Technology. He said something (which when I later reminded him he

said that he had not been serious) that had a lasting effect on me. This is what he said: “***There many issues affecting our homeland and I want you students to study hard, because there might come a time when Bougainville will be an Independent Nation of its own.***” He may have half joked but to my ears, yes! That was the solution to Bougainville, Independence of Bougainville. I was not too sure how the other students felt, as we did not discuss this amongst ourselves. As for me, I thought hard about it. In the same year I went home for the school holidays and warned my father not to plant cocoa anymore, but to reserve some of his land as jungle for us to seek refuge in should there be a war. My father did not believe much of it but he listened to me. I went back to school again feeling much more secure that at least one of our leaders had identified a direction.

Bougainville conflict

In 1988 I was still on holidays when the landowners started their militant activities. I was not too sure of the situation because I thought that it would stop as soon as loyalty payments were increased. I came from a group of landowners who were called the **river owners**. The compensation that this group received was called **fish compensation**.

The militant landowners stepped up their activities and the mobile riot squad burnt down villages, assaulted and harassed villagers, and some even raped women during raids. I was feeling cross, frustrated, angry and soon these feelings were becoming deeper and deeper. At this time I was already thinking of not returning to school to complete my final year of University. For the institutions of the State to come and destroy our villages and burn our homes was totally unacceptable. In fact the actions were NOT that of the state but rather, they were tribalistic actions. This made me look beyond the colour of the uniform to the colour of the skin. I hated them more and more.

For landowners it may have been different because most of them, including Francis Ona and his two sisters, Perpetua Serero and Cecilia Gamel, were all married into other provinces in Papua New Guinea. However for the grassroots, they saw everything through a Melanesian eye. The Melanesian eye sees not the badge and the uniform that you wear but the clan you come from and the colour of your skin. This is based on the old tradition of **arerengpo arerengpo** (Nasioi

language). As the majority of the policemen and later the Defence Forces were non-Bougainvillean, in the eyes of the people, Bougainville was being attacked by the *retskins*, who were using the power of the State. Instead of dealing with the militant landowners, the government attacked the people.

The last fish compensation

The PNG Defence Forces were already on Bougainville when the BCL paid out the last fish compensation. After collecting payments for the fish compensation we went home on a PMV bus. On the way we were told that the army was fighting with the militants. Out of curiosity, two of the boys from the village decided to go and see the fighting because the rifle fire sounded exciting. I was also tempted to go out and have a look but decided not to.

We were totally unaware that on that day the first two PNGDF soldiers were killed. The soldiers captured two spectators and sliced them with knives in revenge for the slain soldiers. This added another complication for me. The location in which the PNGDF was operating was called Orami Community School. The village was Ututara but the school bore the name of Orami. Orami village was the home village of Francis Ona's father while his mother was from Guava village. A lot of the time the PNGDF mistook my village (Ututara) for Orami village because Orami Community School was located in my village. I made the decision not to go back to school but to stay back at home until things quietened down.

Ethnic touch to the landowner problem

While the grassroots were still eyeing the security forces through the Melanesian eye, a female nurse from the Data clan in the mountains of Kongara One in Central was murdered in Arawa. Settlers from the illegal squatter settlements in Arawa were blamed for the killing. Bougainville is a matrilineal society where women are landowners and women are sacred. To kill them is punishable by death. There are two things that are always dear to a Bougainvillean, land and women. Put three things together, land that CRA dug in Panguna, illegal squatting on land, and the killing of a mother plus the other violence that was carried out by one agency of the State, and you have the recipe for full scale retaliation.

Following this new development, the struggle that had centred on Panguna was now spilling over into other areas of Bougainville. The ethnic dimension of the conflict was cemented by the killing of the female nurse. As an immediate reaction against the murder of the nurse, the people from the Kongara area marched into the Aropa and other plantations and started pushing the workers and squatters out. Separately, in the inland areas, the immediate targets were mainlanders.

Untying the knot

The next question was, what held us together? The Independent State of Papua New Guinea was the mechanism that held us together with the *retskins*, and was not willing to re-negotiate the Bougainville Mining Agreement etc. The immediate aim was to break the institution that held us together. We had to be separate and independent. The old aspiration for Bougainville Independence was dug up out of the peoples' minds, giving it new life and strength in the hearts of the people. In one meeting in a village called Orami, in the mountains south of Panguna, the leaders of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army formally decided to fight for independence.

I also attended that meeting and at the end of the meeting I decided to join the Bougainville Revolutionary Army because the leaders decided on something that I already knew. I made that decision not for the ten billion dollar compensation but for the protection of land and environment and for the independence of Bougainville. As for me personally, this was something that I had heard since my childhood days and later in my school days from the Premier of the North Solomons at Lae Unitech. I had thought long and hard about this. I decided to join the rebels. For the purpose of this conference, I will leave the independence dimension and continue with the ethnic dimension of the conflict.

In between the ethnic tensions

The people that were most severely affected were non-Bougainvilleans married in Bougainville. I was in the village and had not yet joined the Bougainville Revolutionary Army when five families became victims. All except one family had to flee for their lives, taking their Bougainvillean wives with them. The one that stayed back, survived by joining the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. The security forces had weapons but those non-Bougainvilleans that were

either working for the local people or were married there suffered during the first part of the retaliation. This had painful impacts on both ethnic groups, Bougainvillean and non-Bougainvillean.

Later when I joined the BRA I realized that Francis Ona, the leader of the BRA was no exception. Francis Ona was married to a woman from Madang. At the start of the conflict he asked his wife to leave and go home and be safe. When Ona had already gone to the bush she decided to follow him because of her loyalty to her husband. She was the wife of the most wanted man on Bougainville but she was a *retskin*. She could not go back to where she came from because she was scared that the government's forces would arrest her, intimidate her and do everything that they did to other women in Bougainville. On the other hand, she felt rejected by the relatives of her husband because they were scared that the other Bougainvilleans would accuse them of harbouring *retskins*. With her husband now hunted by the government and two of her children separated, she took off into the jungle alone with three young children not knowing where to go. The only other person who she had was her old mother. In the bush an old man from Musinau Village helped them. Just before the signing of the ceasefire in 1990 when I was serving under the Supreme Commander, we found them in the mountains of Panguna. This is a story that she herself can tell best and I do not represent her feelings. I saw her stubbornness against all odds and her loyalty to her husband and his beliefs and this impressed me greatly. I began to compare this woman to the other landowner women leaders who surrendered into care centres. The wife of the Supreme Commander, the First Lady of the rebel side was a *retskin*.

Apart from the wife of the Supreme Commander, there were a couple of non-Bougainvilleans in the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. Some of them served with distinction and some were killed in action. In some parts of Bougainville such experiences helped to reduce the ethnic gap. The actions of the *retskins* helping us fight a war that was a war to protect our land and our skin together with our cultures and traditions started having a bit of an impact on me. This experience helped me to think that maybe there was something beyond the colour of the skin. Beyond the colour of the skin was the colour of the heart. Their skin was red but their heart was black.

At the same time there was something beyond the skin. That was the State. The State was created for us by our Colonial masters, therefore I was beginning to accept that the *retskins* were not on Bougainville by choice. It was the coloniser's fault. I hated the colonisers. I hated Australia just as I hated the State. The actions of the *retskins* supporting us helped me to draw a line between the State and the *retskins* as people. We Bougainvilleans and the *retskins* were all the victims of colonial decisions.

At the wedding

Soon it was going to be my wedding. The day came and the local priest wed us, together with five other couples. As I was already one of the wanted men, I had no money to buy my wife a proper dress. I could not even afford meat for the feast. All I had for that wedding was a tin of fish stolen from the enemy food supply. I could not look up nor could I make my wife walk tall. We walked at the back of all of them with our heads low. To my uncle, the Paramount Chief to whom I was successor, I was a total disgrace.

How could I, a man on the run look after this woman? How long would it be before she became a widow and her children orphaned? These questions bothered me and I pained about those that were already widows and orphans as a result of the conflict. As for my wife, I also knew that she was suffering from these thoughts.

The conflict becomes Bougainvillean against Bougainvillean

In 1990 the government forces and administration withdrew. There was one painful lesson waiting for us. That is, it is one thing for a guerrilla army to win a territory but governing a territory after winning it is another thing. There was fighting amongst the leadership, not so much because of the power struggle but largely because of differing views on the next steps to take. We faced this problem because we came from all walks of life and had different backgrounds, united more by external forces than internal interaction within our selves. I decided to leave them and rejoin the fighting men.

While the leaders were still trying to grab each other's tails, those down the line had no clear direction to follow. Yet we were the new authority on Bougainville and people now depended on us. Instead of leading the people however, we went into a period of confusion. There were fights

over vehicles and houses left by the government and the BCL. When the government vehicles ran out those that were left out started stealing private vehicles. When private vehicles ran out groups and individuals started stealing from each other. Then the stealing continued on to small things like solar panels. There were a lot of divorces and polygamous activities during this time.

At the village level the line of authority was confused because there was a new kind of leadership armed with weapons. There was no formal take over but the chiefs could not provide a strong alternative to the new type of leadership. Therefore, even the chiefs started depending on the BRA for leadership and conflict resolution in the community. There were many situations where BRA killed BRA over land disputes involving their clans. This absorbed the BRA into community problems and in most cases we messed things up. In that way we started losing the respect and trust of the people. One of the most difficult issues was cases involving sorcery.

The killing of sorcerers

Not long after I left the leaders I learnt that I was not immune to the problems of the soldiers. While I was a section commander we were given a man accused of sorcery. We had no training to deal with conflicts arising from sorcery because we were a guerrilla army. We did not know what to do with him so we kept him in our camp. We could not kill him or release him. Those that handed him to us began to think that I was weak and they started coming to the camp. At that time there were many killings of those accused of sorcery. The more we kept him because of our inability to deal with him the more he became insecure and scared.

One night without warning he disappeared and the next morning he was found next to his village hanging on his own belt, dead in a tree. He committed suicide. He chose to die in his own land rather than ending up in some unknown camp. We never had any plans to kill him but because others were doing it he thought we were going to do the same to him. The man had engaged in a very old practice called *oke*. It was a way of saying, ***if you are going to kill me then why fool me, I will do it for you and you will eat me***. This was a cultural practice aimed at punishing others.

I went to see his dead body. I broke down and cried for him. This meant nothing to his families. They suspected that we had murdered him and that I was pretending to cry. This made things

complicated. In Bougainville there are situations where you are condemned even before you are proven guilty and there is no need to prove it because the society has already judged you. This man had been judged by the society and he tried to transfer this judgement on to me through the practice of *oke*. We have long reconciled over this case but the scars of this experience will stay for a long time.

The impact of the blockade was becoming heavier and heavier and people were feeling the pains of the blockade. The PNGDF was now advancing into new areas after returning back to Bougainville. In my district they came in two hours. There was confusion. People started going into both sides. It was difficult to tell who your enemy was. Brothers turned against brothers and uncles against nephews. Every one suspected everyone. This was the most difficult period. There was no mercy. Each one fought for his/her survival. We hated peace. If you talked about peace you were a traitor and must die. If you refused to kill then you must be a traitor too. We had to kill to survive. Bougainville was divided. The war that started against CRA then against the *retskins* and against the State became a war within Bougainville families, a war within clans and villages.

Pain in-between factional affiliation and blood ties

A young man whom I grew up with in Panam Village of Nagovis District was taken while he was looking for crayfish in a small creek. He was taken to the nearest army base and killed without trial. Patrick Nogo was never a BRA member and I am not sure what he thought about Bougainville independence. This killing reminded me of my earlier feelings about ethnicity, however it was confusing because it was Bougainvilleans on the other side of the conflict that captured him and gave him to the PNGDF. This young man's brothers were at the care centre when he was killed. They could not save him nor cry for him.

The BRA had similar experiences. One afternoon a patrol of our own men came back happy that they had ambushed the enemy and left three dead. There was celebration on our side. I asked them if they identified those that they killed. They did not give full details and I felt that something was wrong. Yes, within a few days our intelligence gathered the information that one of them was my wife's elder brother. My men had killed my brother in law. As I was one of

leaders of the struggle, he was my enemy but in the family he was one of my closest friends. In front of the people I had to shake the men's hands but within my heart I cried bitterly. I was destroyed.

Now there was no one from the CRA dying and while *retskins* in the security forces suffered casualties, they weren't dying either. It was Bougainvilleans and it was our own relatives. This war has missed its purpose. Leaders said that this war was to protect the future. Our question was this. When the future is derived from the present, how can you hope for the future when you are killing the present? This war must end.

A knife that said goodbye

There is one woman in my village from the same clan that I come from. One day she and her husband went to the garden. A PNGDF/Resistance patrol found them. They captured the wife and ordered her to the nearest army camp. As the woman was pushed on by her captors she planted her bush knife where she had been digging *kaukau* as a way of saying goodbye to her husband.

Upon realizing what had happened the husband ran straight to where he left his wife only to see his wife's bush knife standing there. He cried Oh my wife! He then fainted and after an hour he was dead. The wife stayed at the care centre missing her husband. She missed him so much that she laid out an escape plan from the care centre. One night she and her daughter escaped. She was happily anticipating her dear husband running to her and hugging her. She came home and this is the message that welcomed her upon her arrival: **"Your husband fell dead where you left him"**. The woman succeeded in escaping one prison only to go into one more prison, that of suffering as a widow.

The State: In between the CRA and the landowners, the ethnic groups and in between Bougainville people

When the landowners asked for more equity the government of Papua New Guinea was slow to review the Bougainville Copper Agreement. When the militants blew up pylons the police attacked people. When Bougainvilleans were divided, the state equipped one side with money

and the ties that states have with other states. In between almost every group was the state. I hated the state for this and more than that I hated the Australian government that stitched us together and that had opened the Panguna Mine.

Impact of the conflict on society

The conflict changed a lot of things. Friends became enemies and some enemies became friends. Where we had chiefs, there were alternative leaders. While some Christians took up arms to kill others, some who had never been to church became devout Christians for protection. Those who had wives and husbands before the conflict became single while some who had one wife took more wives. Where there were no villages we had villages and where we had villages there were trees growing. Those who could not speak the Nasioi language became experts after hiding in the Kongara mountains of Central Bougainville. For those that were wounded, the conflict changed their faces and the way they walked. Deeper than that, their feelings and how they related themselves to the community and what the society would do for them had changed.

Relationships between groups and clans have changed. For example, in my village there was one person suspected of being a spy by the BRA. They executed him and then dumped him in a toilet. He had relatives on both sides of the conflict. The deceased person's relatives did not want to reconcile with those that killed him. They avoided the peace committees. Those that did the killing started feeling uneasy and nervous. Fear and uncertainty was holding them. Before long, people in their village started dying from normal illnesses. However, because of the outstanding reconciliation, they were accusing the relatives of the killed spy of sorcery. It may have actually been malaria that took peoples lives. However, what is clear is that the relationship between these villages and clans has changed.

As for me personally I am not too sure how much I have changed. The most obvious change in me is the leadership position that I now hold. When I was in school, I never wanted to do anything in public. I hated politics so much that I didn't take any social sciences in school. I studied to be an accountant, hoping that I would work in an office balancing the books or become a businessman. At the end of the day I would quietly count the day's earnings by bedside under a lamp. Where am I now? From the classroom I went to the bush and from the bush I

ended up where I am now. I walk and talk but I go home hungry. I have become a penniless freedom fighter.

For those that lost their loved ones it will never be the same again. Bougainville society is not where it used to be. I don't think it is where most of us wanted it to be as yet. The war has ended and there is a peace process now. We have the peace agreement and now the leaders are working on the new constitution of Bougainville. However, there are many issues that will remain outside the reach of those initiatives. For example, the lives lost will never be replaced by an agreement. The wounds will heal but there will always be a scar.

Concluding Remarks

One of the difficulties in making presentations on Bougainville is that the conflict lasted nine years. Therefore, stories of the conflict cannot be measured and told within the timeframe of one conference, nor by any one person. In addition, events, impacts and residues, overlap and intertwine, becoming confusing. So confusing that even for me to present a step-by-step picture is very difficult.

I have no nice and rosy stories to tell. In fact nice rosy stories paint pictures that are sometimes romantic. There is one thing that I can assure you with certainty. That is, the Bougainville conflict was no romance for dying men on the field, for those children who will never know their fathers, for those mothers who while giving birth knew they were dying and for those who died slowly and painfully. I have seen men pee in their trousers and women wet their lap laps. Supporting a cause by reading papers is one thing but actually giving your total life, as most of us have done, is another thing.

In this presentation I shared my experiences, starting from the house that I was born in, through my childhood and school days. Then I continued to speak of the days of the conflict and then of the peace processes. I did not go into detail in order to paint a heroic picture of myself because I am not a hero (I have heroes above me), but rather, I attempted to provide some snapshots of different stages of personal growth. After providing these brief snapshots, I am beginning to feel that there is relationship between the way in which our society (while in its transition) shapes our

character and the way in which that character influences the way leaders and public servants use the institutions of the State to govern their people, and also how people perceive that governance.

JAMES TANIS

Co-vice president

Bougainville People's Congress

HABUNA MOMORUQU (THE BLOOD OF MY ISLAND)

Violence and the Guadalcanal Uprising in Solomon Islands

George Gray

Introduction

I would like to begin by thanking the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project, especially Dr. Sinclair Dinnen for making it possible for me to come here. I am encouraged by the confidence you have in me. It is not very often that people like me have the opportunity to rub shoulders with academics of your calibre and sound our voices in the rooms of academic power. Since starting my undergraduate studies in the middle of last year at the University of the South Pacific, one thing that I learned very quickly was that there are spaces of intellectual engagement that academics claim ownership over and guide with their soul. I hope that I am not intruding. Anyway, thank you for making it possible for me to at least peep into these spaces and corridors of academia.

Let me begin my reflections on violence in the Solomon Islands by saying that I find it interesting that you have brought me all the way here to talk about violence. This is an amusing academic exercise. I am sure however, that you know I will tell you only what I know and what I want to tell you. I will not tell you anything more than that. It is not a secret that I was involved in the Guadalcanal uprising. The degree and nature of my involvement is another issue, which I assume, is not the subject of interest at this conference and one that I am reluctant to talk about. However, the questions that people often ask me were: Why, when and how were you involved? I am willing to talk openly about the "why" and "when", but not so much the "how".

To begin to answer these questions, let me recount a story written by Tarcisius Kabutaulaka about an experience he had on Guadalcanal in September 2001. I quote:

I looked down at his blood as it dripped down my palms and onto the ground below. Tears rolled down my cheeks. On a stretcher, wrapped in a blood-soaked cloth, was the body of a wantok, friend, and fellow Isatabu Freedom Movement leader. I stared at the motionless bundle. My emotions overtook me. I embraced the bundle and wept. This was the body of Selwyn Saki, another casualty of Solomon Islands' social unrest.

Selo – as he was known by wantoks and friends – did not simply die; he was brutally murdered. He was kidnapped from his home east of Honiara on the afternoon of Saturday, 22 September 2001. His body was found the next day lying across the front seat of his truck...His throat was cut, his neck and spinal cord broken, and his body filled with bullet holes. He had been shot ten times. From the wounds, it was obvious that he had been tortured before being killed.

What saddens and angers me is that months after this incident, his killers have not been apprehended, even though many people have a fair idea of who they were. The investigation into his killing has stalled because those in positions of power have refused to let justice prevail.

It was partly because of this situation that my Guadalcanal wantoks took up arms in the first place. They no longer had faith in the state. If the Solomon Islands state is to survive, we must give people reasons to believe in it.

(Kabutaulaka 2002: 1)

This story describes one person's emotions and reactions to an incident of violence. Here, he is not a perpetrator of violence, but one who has had the unfortunate experience of seeing a friend and wantok murdered. I suppose the experiences of victims and perpetrators of violence at a time of crisis and war are often different from one another. While the victim feels a sense of loss and powerlessness, the perpetrator feels a sense of power in being able to take someone else's life. The justification for doing this however, is usually explained in political terms; another human life is taken because there is a political justification. That makes violence sound rational although it might be the consequence of very irrational thoughts and actions.

In the last couple of weeks for example, the US President, George Bush, has been trying to drum up support for his intention to "kill Iraqi people." He and his government have gone on a global public relations campaign to get support for the murder he plans to commit. If you think about it carefully, that is what war is all about: murder! Of course, states and those who declare wars do not often say it in such crude language. They use diplomatic terms such as "declare war" and try

to look for justifications to kill. President Bush and British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, are doing that by trying to compile a checklist of reasons to justify attacking Iraq.

In a similar way, those who initiated acts of violence in the Solomon Islands have political motives. Those who initiated the Guadalcanal uprising, for instance, did so because they believed in a political rationale. In fact, I still think there was a political motive that has still not been addressed.

Why it started and why I got involved

Let me explore that political justification by looking at my own story of why, when and how I joined the Guadalcanal militancy. The Guadalcanal uprising started in late 1998. I do not know how it started. That to me is not an important issue. Two issues were more important: *why it started and why I joined*. It is important that we know why it started because that can help us understand the reason for the emergence of the Guadalcanal militancy. Secondly, there is the question of why I left a formal job and got involved in something that, to many outsiders, was an irrational act of violence.

In December 1997 I finished my studies for a Diploma in Banking at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE). At the graduation ceremony I was awarded the prize for the best student in that diploma program that year. For me, it was a big achievement. The following year, 1998, I was employed by the National Bank of Solomon Islands (NBSI) and worked as a junior staff member in the International Department. My employment with the Bank did not last long, because I left the Bank in October 1998 and joined the R&R Engineering Group of Companies.

I was still working for R&R Engineering when the Yandina Police Station in the Russell Islands was raided and some arms were stolen from its armoury. Following the raid, rumours circulated in Honiara that a Guadalcanal militant group called the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) was formed, and that the group was responsible for the raid at the Police station. At the height of the crisis this same group called themselves the Isatabu Freedom Fighters (IFF), and later became known as the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM).

For people outside of the core group that started the Guadalcanal militancy, the reason for the uprising was not very clear. People were uncertain about the agendas of the group. For those who were involved however, the objective of starting a militant uprising was clearly defined:

- (i) To chase settlers out of Guadalcanal, especially Malaitans;
- (ii) To payback for the Guadalcanal people murdered since the establishment of Honiara;
- (iii) To ensure that Guadalcanal Province and people benefit equitably from the income that they contribute to the state;
- (iv) To ensure that settlers respect the local people and their cultures.

These and other issues were raised in the list of “Bona Fide Demands” submitted to the Central Government.

In Honiara some people, especially those in the government and the Police, did not even want to believe that Guadalcanal people (who were often stereotyped as being passive) could actually start a violent uprising, especially against the Malaitans who were stereotyped as being more dominant. In terms of population, Guadalcanal boasts merely half of Malaita's 120,000 or so population. Malaitans also dominate the Royal Solomon Islands Police and hence it was likely that they would be sympathetic towards their *wantoks*.

However, by late 1998 it became obvious that a Guadalcanal militant group really existed and was causing chaos for settlers in rural areas around the capital, Honiara. This was demonstrated by the arrival in Honiara of truckloads of Malaitan settlers evacuated from the plantations and settlements outside of Honiara. Through the media these people related stories of horrific killings in settlements around Honiara. It was only then that the national government and the country came to realize the seriousness of what was brewing in rural Guadalcanal.

I joined the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) in 1999. Like other Guadalcanal militants, I went to the camp with no knowledge about how to fight a guerrilla war, let alone how to fire a rifle. I had a Diploma in Banking, not guerrilla warfare, and had never fired a rifle before. When I joined I did not seek the permission of my parents nor inform them about what I was doing.

Furthermore, I wasn't sure whether joining a militant group would involve violence and, if so, what degree of violence?

I had some political reasons for joining. It was not as though I joined the group entirely for the sake of having fun or some teenage excitement. I joined because I believed that Guadalcanal and her people had, for a long time, been unfairly treated in the name of constructing this nation-state called Solomon Islands. This was evident in the way in which revenues were distributed, development projects were planned, and the control that people from other islands impose upon us and our island. However, the most important issue that inspired me to join the Guadalcanal militancy was what I perceived as the disrespect that settlers (especially Malaitans) had towards our people and our land. Since independence our people have been murdered, our cultural sites desecrated, our land settled without permission and our people have been treated as second-class citizens in the capital city, which is located on our island. I had seen these things since I was a kid and they offended me. It is true that some people did acquire land legally or through customary means. But, there were also many who never did this and still settled and have over the years wanted to become dominant on our island.

It was because of this that I was prepared to join and maybe even die for my island. I used to tell my fellow militant comrades that "Somebody has to die for the land and the people, and who is that somebody? It is you and I". At that time I saw the task as a responsibility for which I lived and if need be, one which I was prepared to die for. I know that this might sound like irrational rhetoric to some of you here. But then, I suppose it would be correct to assume that you never felt the way I felt and maybe never identified with a "place" or land in the way that I do.

So armed with this conviction to "help my province and people" I joined and soon found myself in one of the camps where there were many other Guadalcanal boys and men. The age of militants ranged from very young teenagers to elderly men in their 60s and 70s. I joined one of the largest Isatabu Freedom Movement camps that was code-named "00 Base" and was manned by the "Bravo Brigade". At the time I joined, there were about 1,000 men and boys stationed at the 00 Base. The front line in the war against the police and disgruntled Malaitan settlers was just a few kilometers away.

The men were initially dressed in either *kabilato* (bark loin), or old torn camouflage collected from other people. They were armed mostly with homemade guns and a few commercial weapons (shotguns, .22s, etc). Many of the men simply carried spears, bush knives, hatchets, slings and bows and arrows. There were no machine guns or other sophisticated military weapons. The only military weapon we had at the beginning was a Singapore-made SR88A Assault rifle that was captured from the Police Field Force in an ambush. That weapon became the focus of our strength and we often made sure that only the brave and trusted militants carried it during battle. Even to touch the weapon was strictly forbidden and one could be severely punished for holding the rifle without the commander's authorization. The objective then was to try and capture more weapons like that.

Apart from our belief in our responsibility to help Guadalcanal, the only other thing that motivated us to fight harder was the desire to capture more weapons from the Police Field Force. We knew that if we could acquire more military-type weapons we could do much better because of our local knowledge of the jungle and the terrain.

Because we were not a formal military and none of us had any formal military training, it was often difficult to organize people and expect orders to be carried out. The command structure was also fluid. Our only weapon in the early days of the crisis was the terrain. The police were also uncertain about who was a militant and who was not, making it easy for us to move around. Furthermore, we had a lot of support from the communities. They were our lifeline; providing us with information, food and shelter.

My first experience of combat was in June 1999 when the then Solomon Islands government declared a State of Emergency in early June. Right after that, the Police Field Force launched a full-scale operation against IFM positions around Honiara. It was on a Sunday morning around 10:00 am when the attack on our camp occurred. The operation involved ground troops supported by troops in the air. The commercial chopper was hired by the police and armed to become a gun-ship. They showered us with bullets from the machine guns hooked onto the sides of the chopper as the ground troops attacked us.

From my position I could see the police officers. I knew they couldn't see me and I knew it would be crazy to engage them. So, I observed and tried to learn from them while withdrawing. In the weeks that followed, we quickly learned about the guns, the behaviour of the enemy (at that time it was still the police). We learned through experience and that was sometimes fatal. That first experience in June was also the first time I fired a rifle and the first time that I heard the sound of machine guns. It was terribly frightening at first. It was different from the Hollywood movies that I used to watch. But, after a few weeks you got used to it.

Despite all the dangers and difficulties I decided to fight on because I believed that the reason for which I was fighting was a just one. It was the political motive that pressed me on. I believed that I was fighting for a legitimate cause. I believed that if we wanted to ensure a better future for our women and children this crisis must occur before we could rebuild and make it into a better place. Here, "better future" refers to one in which our future generations will enjoy and live in peace in a community and nation-state where they will no longer be harassed, murdered and suppressed by "outside settlers." I wanted a country where my people's resources are used for their benefit and not that of "strangers." I wanted a society where people showed mutual respect for one another and no one island group tries to be dominant.

In search of a better society

The question then is: How can we create a better society where people are treated fairly and benefit from their resources? In trying to answer this question many Guadalcanal people turned first to their Members of Parliament (MPs) and the Guadalcanal Provincial Government to act on their behalf by calling on the national government to recognize the rights and interests of the indigenous people of Guadalcanal. This resulted in the Guadalcanal people's petition to the national government in 1978.

Some of the major issues highlighted were:

- Respect for the people, culture and customs of Guadalcanal;
- Discrepancies over the acquisition of land for Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd (SIPL);
- The murder of indigenous Guadalcanal people;
- Demands for the establishment of a "state" system of government;

- The need to halt the creation and expansion of squatter settlements in Honiara.

The letter was signed by prominent Guadalcanal leaders on 27th September 1978 and sent to the then Prime Minister, Sir Peter Kenilorea. The Prime Minister and his cabinet ignored the demands. They put it on the shelf and failed to even acknowledge its receipt. Perhaps the then PM thought that the Guadalcanal demands would disappear if left over a period of time.

Ten years later in 1988, Guadalcanal's second petition was submitted to the national government. At that time the Prime Minister was the Rt. Hon. Ezekiel Alebua, the current Premier for Guadalcanal. This petition was sent following the murder of a Guadalcanal family by a group of Malaitan men at Mount Austin behind Honiara. There was nothing new in that petition. It was predominantly a repetition of the issues that were raised in the 1978 petition:

- The issue of state government;
- Return of all alienated lands;
- The murder of Guadalcanal people; and
- Respect for the people, culture and customs of Guadalcanal.

By 1988 many Guadalcanal people were beginning to question the government about the distribution of wealth and services such as medical, health, transportation, education and other infrastructure development for the provinces. Many Guadalcanal people had the view that the national government was unfair to them because despite the island's significant contribution to the national income, they get very little in return. They argued that as it was Guadalcanal's resources that had been exploited to sustain the national economy since independence they must get an equitable share of the wealth.

But, after the 1988 petition, the then government again did not do anything to try and resolve the problems. The frustrations of the people of Guadalcanal were beginning to accumulate. The third submission by the Guadalcanal people was the Bona Fide Demands of the Indigenous People of Guadalcanal (sometimes referred to as the Guadalcanal People's Demands), which was submitted to the national government in February 1999. Again, similar issues were raised. But, in

addition to the issues raised previously, there was a demand for 50 per cent of all revenue generated from investments on Guadalcanal - eg., the SIPL palm oil plantation and Goldridge Gold mine - to be paid to Guadalcanal Province. There were feelings that investments on the island have had little positive impact on the Province. This was the cause for major resentment by the people.

Many people saw the government as only interested in exploiting the gold, timber, palm oil and logs from the island. This was perceived as conning the indigenous people with 20 cents then taking off with \$100.00 to build schools, clinics, roads and bridges for people who do not contribute to the economy in terms of natural resource allocation. I shared these sentiments with fellow indigenous people. There have been many times when I sit and reflect on the crisis and realize that I was not born to carry guns and fight. But, involvement was a way of sharing with others my frustrations and concerns about the unjust ways in which the Guadalcanal people had been treated over the years.

First, since independence successive governments have ignored Guadalcanal peoples' demands. Not addressing the issues raised in the three petitions was a sign of disrespect. We voted leaders into parliament to form governments in order that our voices be heard and addressed, but what seemed to have happened was that our voices were suppressed by the very government that we voted into power.

Second, the social interactions between the Malaitan settlers and indigenous Guadalcanal people, even prior to independence in 1978, were characterized by the aggressiveness and manipulative attitudes towards the Guadalcanal people. I have always resented situations where the settlers, mostly living in plantations, claim ownership of the plantation land and then ban indigenous people from using the plantation to produce copra, harvest cocoa or even just get coconuts for their meals.

Where to from here? Given the issues raised above, the question that arises is what can we do to change the situation? At the time when the crisis started, it seemed to many of us that the only

way forward was to take up arms and fight. When the formal institutions and their officers ignore you, the choices then become very limited.

War, violence and traditional rituals

During the crisis, traditional rituals and practices became important in the search for a common Guadalcanal identity. They were both the weapons as well as the justification for committing violence. This was when those who possessed (or at least claimed to possess) knowledge about traditional rituals were seen as important in rallying the moral and community support needed to fight the war. It was the elderly men who provided this kind of support. These traditional warriors wore kabilato and were not armed with guns. They were perceived as "powerful" and helped boost the moral of the younger militants.

Before any man joined the war, he was required to sign in at a base and spend several weeks at the camp. This was like an initiation period, when various traditional rituals and ceremonies were carried out to prepare the men for war. It was also at this time that sacrifices of pigs were offered to ancestral spirits who were believed to take care and defend the *malaghai* (warriors). Furthermore, special betel nut limes and clubs (ghai tabu) were blessed and used as weapons to weaken and confuse enemy soldiers.

Not all the warriors at the camps were sent to the frontline. It was only those who passed the tests and conformed to the rules prescribed by the elders that were sent. They were believed to possess a certain degree of ancestral power and discipline that would boost them and enable them to fight fearlessly and overcome the enemy.

Impacts of the violence

Let us now discuss the impacts of violence on the communities on Guadalcanal. During the crisis all sides committed many violent atrocities. I am reluctant to talk in detail about many of these things. So, let me concentrate on the consequences. The first notable consequence is that violence has become accepted as the way to settle disputes and deal with issues. Guadalcanal, like the rest of the Solomons, has become very violent now. Violence was seen as tolerable. After the crisis some young men refused to return to their communities. Instead, they formed

gangs that roamed the island harassing people, stealing vehicles and even murdering. Along with actual acts of violence was the general acceptance of the language of violence. Many people talk about violence and use languages that reflect violence as though it wasn't a big deal.

The crisis has also caused an increase in the incidents and seriousness of crimes committed. In the last couple of months, for instance, fighting between the different factional groups on Guadalcanal alone has resulted in more than 15 people dead and numerous others wounded. These casualties included women and children.

The crisis has also affected my relationship with my friends, especially those from Malaita. I spent most part of my life in Honiara rather than at my remote Weather Coast village of Sughu. As a child I grew up with Malaitan kids and went to school with them right up to high school and even to university. In fact, most of my friends were from Malaita. I remember once during the height of the crisis one of my best Malaitan friends manning the enemy bunker on the other side passed his greetings, good luck and best wishes across to me. The Melanesian Brotherhood (Tasiu) who brought me the message told me that my “enemy friend” really wanted to see me and cautioned me to take extra care during the firing. The next I heard about him was that he had died during one of the shootouts.

So, how do I feel and relate towards my Malaitan friends now? To me they are still my friends and I respect them for that. I see a number of them after the crisis. Some still smile, while others do not. I have to be cautious nowadays because of the distrust that now exists between us. I know many of them do not trust me, and I do not trust them. There is still a great deal of suspicion and distrust between all of us and we will have to find ways of overcoming that. As a result of my distrust, since the signing of the TPA I have never at anytime walked freely into Honiara. I just cannot do it because I suspect that there is still danger out there. Likewise, many of my Malaitan friends have not yet ventured out of Honiara.

Is there a future?

Yes, I am optimistic that we do have a future. The challenge for Guadalcanal people is to be proactive in the resolution of community and individual conflicts. I know this is more easily said

than done, but I believe it could be done. There is also a need for trauma counselling for former militants. The peace process must involve not only communities, but individuals as well. The individuals must be made to be at peace with themselves and the society they live in. Many former militants were traumatized by the violence and the horrible things they experienced during the war. Some have witnessed or participated in horrific killings. I find myself in similar situations after the war. There were nights when I found myself jumping out of the bed shouting and I was frequently confronted with nightmares of the events that took place during the war. Even my relationship with my family was not as good as it used to be. I remember a couple of times when I got angry, took a rifle and threatened to shoot my mother.

In relation to this I want to raise my personal experiences. After the signing of the TPA I went back to my village to try and rebuild a new life. But since I did not go through proper counselling or stress management I found settling down into my community difficult. This was especially so because I had to surrender my weapons, which were my source of power. Giving them up meant that I would become powerless, a nobody. It was then that I realized that I needed to find status and power through means that were not violent. I decided that the best option for me was education. I had to educate myself. Hence, I applied to the University of the South Pacific (USP) and was admitted.

It was there at USP that I had my first session of formal counselling. This was last year. It was only after going through a series of sessions that I began to gain the confidence to redefine my life. Going to university has also been helpful because it took me away from the Solomons, the area of the crisis. I wish that many more former militants could have the kind of opportunity that I had. It would have been a valuable rehabilitation program. I have proven that this is possible and have done pretty well in my studies.

If I were given the opportunity to make recommendations I would recommend the establishment of counselling centres in Guadalcanal and the rest of the Solomons. Former militants should also be encouraged to take on educational programs. Furthermore, there should be a concerted effort to engage former militants in productive economic activities so that they can begin to build a positive self-image.

Lastly, having said all of the above, I would like to conclude by saying that I will always stand to defend my land and people against injustice either by the state or any other communities or individuals. I will fight to protect a habuna momoruqu (the blood of my island). Nation-states should be built on fairness, not injustice.

George Gray

October 2002

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