



Islands, extraction and violence: Mining and the politics of scale in Island Melanesia



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ABSTRACT

Set against the backdrop of past, contemporary and possible future mining-related violence on islands in the western Pacific, this article explores how scholarship on the politics of scale, as well as strands of the burgeoning island studies literature, might sharpen our understanding of the political economic and violent effects of extractive resource enclaves in Island Melanesia. Drawing upon field research in Bougainville and Solomon Islands, I argue that just as Melanesian islands were produced as a scale of struggle in the context of the introduction of capitalist social relations under colonialism, so too have they emerged as a critical, albeit problematic, scale of struggle in contemporary contestations around extractive resource capitalism under the current round of globalisation and accumulation by dispossession. I suggest that this politics of scale lens enriches our understanding of how “islandness” can be an important variable in social and political economic processes. When the politics of scale is imbricated with the well-established idea of the island as the paradigmatic setting for territorialising projects, including the nation-state and sub-national jurisdictions, islandness emerges as a *potentially* powerful variable in the political economic struggles that attend extractive resource enclaves. I also highlight, in the cases considered here, how islands can become containers for internal socio-spatial contradictions that can be animated by extractive enclaves and can contribute to the island scale becoming violent and “ungovernable”. The article advances recent efforts to bring the island studies literature into closer conversation with political and economic geography.

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1. Introduction

The sustained and growing dominance of extractive resource industries in the economies of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and neighbouring Solomon Islands, in concert with the highly contentious politics that they engender, places them at the centre of efforts to understand state formation, political reordering and the ongoing negotiation of political settlements of various types throughout post-colonial Melanesia. Nowhere is this more apparent than on Bougainville, an autonomous region of PNG, where the future of large-scale mining is imbricated in critical ways with the island’s political fortunes, including its quest for a viable form of self-determination in its relationship with PNG.

Much of the extant social science research on extractive industries in Melanesia has taken the form of detailed ethnographic analyses of individual projects and the dialectics of their articulations with “host communities” (e.g. Bainton, 2010; Ballard & Banks,

2003; Filer & Macintyre, 2006; Golub, 2014; Kirsch, 2014). The research reported here builds upon this work, but adopts a political ecology approach, by which I mean an analytical focus on “the conflicts and struggles engendered by the forms of access to and control over resources” (Peluso & Watts, 2001, p. 25). Moreover, in contrast to the dominant political economy perspectives on the “resource curse” and “resource conflict” (see, for example, Collier, 2000; Collier and Hoffer, 2004; Ross, 2004), my political ecology approach adopts an explicitly spatial sensibility. I am interested in how attention to socio-spatial relations, in particular the politics of scale, might shift our view on the Melanesian version of the resource curse in potentially productive ways¹.

¹ Several researchers have explored socio-spatial dimensions of extractive resource industries in different Melanesian settings (Allen, 2013b; Bainton, 2010; Ballard & Banks, 2003; Banks, 2008; Horowitz, 2009). Banks (2008) explicitly applies a political ecology framework to an analysis of “resource” conflicts in PNG. He examines three different “scales of conflict”: “regional”, “inter-group” and “intra-group” (2008:27). My project builds upon Banks’ framework by deepening its spatial orientation, especially towards the politics of scale.

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The focus is upon a particular dimension of the Melanesian resource curse: the strong association between extractive resource industries and violence of different types and scales, an association that is by no means peculiar to Melanesia (e.g. Korf, 2011; Le Billon, 2001; Ross, 2004). One need only take a cursory glance at recent events at mining projects such as Porgera and Ramu Nickel in PNG and Goro in New Caledonia to be reminded of mining's violent history in Melanesia. Melanesia's extractive economies have been, and continue to be, extremely violent ones. And this has been especially true on Bougainville and on Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands, islands that have hosted the region's most serious armed conflicts since the Second World War, with large-scale mining deeply implicated in both cases, albeit to very different extents.

This brings "islandness" into my analysis as a potentially important variable. Recent decades have witnessed a florescence in thinking about islands as evidenced by the emergence of island studies as a discrete field of inquiry (Baldacchino, 2004) and a growing recognition amongst geographers that islands "offer rich spaces to study political geography" (Mountz, 2013, p. 835). Mountz (2014) distils from the multi-disciplinary island studies literature some of the critical dialectics of islands that render them valuable sites of inquiry for political geography. Foremost amongst these is the tension between exceptionalism and universality that is salient in islands; the on-going debate within island studies about the uniqueness of islands (also see Baldacchino, 2004, 2005).

Returning to the cases of Bougainville and Guadalcanal, important questions emerge from this tension between exceptionalism and universality. Would these mining-related conflicts have played out differently, if at all, if these were "mainland" as opposed to island settings? Does islandness matter for our understanding of contemporary contestations around large-scale mining projects, including proposed projects, in Bougainville and in Solomon Islands? I will argue that in all of the cases considered here – Bougainville, Guadalcanal and three other islands in Solomon Islands – islandness does matter. It matters not only because the territorial qualities of islands renders them paradigmatic settings for territorialising projects, as the island studies literature has shown us, but also because islands can be produced as a scale of struggle in the contentious, and frequently violent, politics of scale that attends the extractive industries in the current round of globalisation and accumulation by dispossession. This points to a coproduction of territory and scale that is uniquely, *though by no mean inevitably*, possible in islands, making them *potentially* exceptionally potent spaces for ideologies and strategies that deploy islands in political economic struggles. I will also suggest that islandness matters, at least in the two main case studies presented here, because of the potential for islands – due to their boundedness and ecological geographies – to become containers for internal socio-economic tensions and contradictions that can be exacerbated by extractive enclaves and can contribute to the island scale becoming "ungovernable".

In making these arguments, I draw upon my previous field research on resource conflict in Solomon Islands and more recent fieldwork in Bougainville and Solomon Islands. The article is broadly structured into three parts. In the first I describe the study's methodology and provide brief accounts of the armed conflicts in Bougainville and Solomon Islands, focusing on the role that large-scale mining played in each case. The second part sets out the study's theoretical orientation by introducing and defining the terms politics of scale and territoriality, and sketching out the territorial dimensions of "islandness" as developed in the island studies literature. I also examine the ways in which Melanesia's large islands were produced by the introduction of capitalist social relations under colonialism, with a particular focus on the emergence of islands as a scale of political struggle and their

territorialisation into sub-national colonial and post-colonial jurisdictions. The third part of the article commences with a discussion of how the more recent encounter with extractive resource capitalism has also seen the production of the island as a scale of violent struggle. This is immediately followed by an examination of how the island scale is problematized by a raft of internal tensions that have been exacerbated by the advent of extractive industries. I conclude by discussing an important counterfactual – large-scale mining on "mainland" PNG – that clarifies my arguments, before drawing out what I suggest to be important implications of the study for the emerging intersection between island studies and political geography.

2. Methodology

The research reported here draws upon seven months fieldwork (carried out between mid-2014 and early-2016) in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and in four island-provinces in Solomon Islands: Guadalcanal, Choiseul, Isabel and Renbel (with fieldwork conducted on the island of Rennell). The research design originally focused only on Bougainville and Guadalcanal. However, with the closure of the Gold Ridge mine on Guadalcanal in April 2014 and the contemporaneous intensification of mining and prospecting activities on other islands, notably Isabel, Choiseul and Rennell, I decided to extend my field research to those islands as well. That said, Bougainville and Guadalcanal remain the two core case studies, where most of my field research was conducted. In the case of Guadalcanal, I also draw upon my earlier research on resource conflict, based on nine months fieldwork conducted in 2005–2006 (Allen, 2012, 2013a).

At the conceptual level, the research design is informed by the political ecology of extractive resource industries and violence and, in particular, Michael Watts' work on oil and violence in Nigeria. In an earlier article, I drew upon Watts' (2004) "governable spaces" framework and Colin Filer's (1997) work on the "ideology of customary landownership" in Melanesia to argue that, as has been the case in Nigeria, the advent of large-scale extractive resource industries in post-colonial Melanesia has produced contentious politics that are fundamentally spatialised and frequently violent (Allen, 2013b). Central to this framework – and to political ecology more broadly – is a concern with the politics of scale, which I elucidate in a later section. Drawing upon my earlier article, the working hypothesis animating my research design is that the contentious and often violent politics engendered by extractive industries in post-colonial Melanesia are produced within and between three "governable spaces" – defined as particular configurations of resources, territory, power and identity that are hierarchically-scaled: customary landownership, indigeneity and nationalism.

My initial research objective was to explore this hypothesis by applying it to the cases of Bougainville and Guadalcanal where large-scale mining projects had not only contributed to previous episodes of wide-spread organised violence but where, in both cases, various mining agendas continue to be a critical animator of contentious politics within and between different scales. However, it became increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that these two case studies are islands. While the original research design did not contain any explicit hypotheses in relation to "islandness", I began to suspect that it mattered somehow, or at least that it could potentially matter, in the scalar and potentially violent politics of resource access and control. I wondered, for example, whether the Bougainville conflict would ever have occurred (or occurred to the extent that it did) if Bougainville were not a sub-national *island* jurisdiction (i.e. province) of PNG but instead a landlocked province within "mainland" PNG. In this manner, I became increasingly

interested in how islandness might interact with the contentious, scalar, politics of extractive resource industries. The inclusion of three additional island case studies has enabled me to give fuller consideration to islandness as a potentially significant variable in the conjunctures of identity, territory, scale and power that are produced and animated in the encounter with globalised extractive resource capitalism.

The field research reported here is qualitative and ethnographic in nature. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with a range of actors at the three scales, or “governable spaces”, of analysis². These actors include: the heads of landowner associations; representatives of women’s groups, youth groups, church groups and social movements of various kinds; former militants; elected political representatives and public servants at different levels of government; and representatives of extractive resource companies. This article draws upon and is informed by data collected in over 200 semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

3. Mining and violence in island Melanesia

The geographical focus of this study is on what geographers know as the Solomons chain of islands consisting of Bougainville, an autonomous region of PNG, and the adjacent archipelagic nation of Solomon Islands. These islands possess the extraordinary ethnolinguistic diversity that is characteristic of Melanesia, with 25 languages spoken by Bougainville’s estimated population of between 300,000 and 350,000, and 80 languages spoken by Solomon Islands population of around 500,000. Rates of urbanisation are low, with most people living in rural hamlets and villages where contemporary forms of “community” are based on complex interplays of kinship and exchange relations, neo-traditional governance structures, membership of Christian churches, and myriad claims to customary land of which genealogical descent is only one. Population growth rates are high and the age structures very young. Participation in education and formal employment remains problematic; and the recent armed conflicts have left profound legacies in terms of the education and socialisation of young people, especially men and especially in the case of Bougainville (Kent & Barnett, 2012).

As mentioned above, the Solomons chain has hosted the region’s two most serious armed conflicts since the Second World War, with large-scale mining operations implicated in each case. Moreover, while the offending mines currently remain closed (with Gold Ridge having re-opened in 2011 only to have closed again in April 2014), their re-opening is being actively pursued by a range of stakeholders, including state authorities, as is the commissioning of new mines throughout the Solomons chain, notably on the islands of Isabel and Choiseul. At the time of writing the only active commercial mining operation in the region – as opposed to small-scale and artisanal mining activities, which are widespread on Bougainville but restricted to the Gold Ridge area in Solomon Islands – is bauxite mining on the island of Rennell. In order to situate the analysis that follows, it is necessary to provide some brief background on the two core case studies.

² As mentioned in the main text above, these are: the space of customary landownership (i.e. communities that host actual or proposed mines); the space of indigeneity/islandness (including non mine affected communities); and the space of nationalism. This scalar typology is slightly problematic in the case of Bougainville because of its autonomous status within PNG. That said, the PNG state remains a critically important actor in the contentious politics of scale surrounding the future of the Panguna mine, and, in this sense, the analytical distinction between the island and national scales remains important.

3.1. Bougainville

Most informed commentators agree that the Bougainville conflict would not have occurred were it not for impacts and grievances associated with the Panguna mine (Filer, 1990; Lasslett, 2014; Regan, 1998, 2014; cf.; Griffin, 1990). Commencing production in 1972, it was one of the world’s largest copper and gold mines and critical to PNG’s economic viability as it prepared for independence from Australia in 1975. Up until the mine’s closure in 1989 as a direct consequence of militant activity – at which time it still had an estimated 20 year life – it had contributed an average of 17 percent of PNG government revenues and 40–50 percent of gross export earnings (Oliver, 1991, p. 121). One of the primary sources of tension was benefit-sharing at different scales. Under the terms of the Bougainville Copper Agreement a very small proportion of mine revenues, in the form of royalties, rents and compensation, was granted to mine affected communities, other Bougainvilleans, and Bougainville’s provincial government. Moreover, it was widely perceived by Bougainvilleans, with some justification, that jobs and other economic opportunities associated with the mine were dominated by non-Bougainvilleans.

Grievances associated with benefit-sharing were a key factor in Bougainville’s attempted secession from PNG just days before PNG’s independence. The PNG government placated these secessionist demands by introducing constitutionally enshrined decentralized arrangements for PNG’s 19 provinces. However, from the mid-1980s, grievances with the Panguna benefit-sharing arrangements intensified, as did the negative social impacts of the economic benefits themselves (Filer, 1990). The grievances took on a salient inter-generational dimension, which found voice in a rival mine-lease landowners’ association that challenged the authority of the existing association (Lasslett, 2014, pp. 51–72). Leaders of the younger generation of landowners formed a coalition with young Bougainvillean mine workers who had their own set of grievances with BCL, as well as with “pressure groups” from relatively disadvantaged areas of south Bougainville (Regan, 2014). In late 1988, some of these young men set about sabotaging power lines essential to the operation of the mine. Their objectives were the negotiation of a greater share of economic benefits from the mine and improved conditions for Bougainvillean mine workers.

The heavy-handed response of PNG security forces led to a rapid intensification of the conflict, which initially remained localized³. However, following the closure of the mine in 1989, young Bougainvillean mine workers returned to their home communities and mobilized local youth, and, by mid-1989, branches of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) had been established throughout Bougainville. The continued escalation and spread of the conflict saw it become increasingly separatist in nature, culminating in a unilateral declaration of Bougainville independence by BRA leader Francis Ona in May 1990.

However, cleavages within the BRA, especially around the question of secession, intensified as the conflict progressed, resulting in the emergence of the Bougainville Resistance Force (BRF) during 1992–93, which had the support of the PNG Defence Force. The internal conflicts that ensued were often highly localized in nature, involving longstanding disputes over issues such as land (Regan, 2014, p. 24). A peace process commenced in 1997 and

³ Lasslett’s recent analysis of the Bougainville conflict sheds new light on the role played the company, Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL), in applying strong political pressure for a securitized response to the initial acts of sabotage carried out at Panguna. He situates BCL’s approach within a broader corporate incentive structure that resonates strongly with the “spatial fixes” discussed in the next section of the main text (Lasslett, 214:73).

culminated in the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) in 2001. The settlement granted autonomy to Bougainville, but deferred the vexed question of full independence for Bougainville to a future referendum that must be held between 2015 and 2020 and is currently scheduled for 2019.

3.2. Solomon Islands

Between 1998 and 2003 Solomon Islands experienced a period of violence and unrest known locally as the “Ethnic Tension” (Allen, 2013a). The conflict was centered on the island-province of Guadalcanal, which hosts the capital Honiara, and saw the mobilization of two of the nation’s largest island-wide ethnicities, those of Guadalcanal and the neighboring island of Malaita. North Guadalcanal also hosts the Gold Ridge mine, small in comparison to Panguna, but, until its recent closure, Solomons only large-scale mining operation. Gold Ridge played a much lesser part in the origins of the conflict in Solomon Islands than that played by Panguna in the case of Bougainville. That said, Gold Ridge was a flash point during the violence and eventually shut down as a direct consequence of it (Evans, 2010). More importantly, Gold Ridge has contributed to the strong sense of relative deprivation expressed by Guale (meaning an “indigenous” person of Guadalcanal) communities, especially those from the isolated and underdeveloped southern coast of the island, known as the Weather Coast (Allen, 2013a). The mine has also featured prominently in benefit-sharing tensions between Guadalcanal Province and the national government that have found expression in longstanding calls for greater autonomy for Guadalcanal under a federal system of government.

The Ethnic Tension commenced in late 1998, when Guale militants set about a violent campaign of harassment that led to the eviction of around 35,000 migrant settlers from rural areas of north Guadalcanal, most of whom originated from the island of Malaita. A rival Malaitan militant group emerged and joined with the Malaitan dominated paramilitary Police Field Force. The open conflict ended with the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000. However, the country remained militarised and, as was the case on Bougainville, there was significant in-fighting amongst the formerly united Guale militants, especially on the Weather Coast. The violence continued until the deployment of an Australian-led intervention force in July 2003, which brought about a rapid restoration of security and law and order.

4. The production of islandness in island Melanesia

In this section I briefly define what I mean by the terms scale and territory, highlighting, in particular, how both of these dimensions of social spatiality are deployed as *strategies* in the political economic struggles that attend capitalism. I also introduce the idea of the island as the quintessential platform for territorialising projects, as developed in the island studies literature, before discussing the historical production of islandness in Melanesia with a particular emphasis on the emergence of islands as a scale of political economic struggle and their territorialisation into sub-national colonial and post-colonial jurisdictions. My starting point for these discussions is an encompassing view of space and spatiality, derived from the work of David Harvey, as “actively produced and as an active moment within the social process” (Harvey, 2006, p. 77). Harvey develops a tripartite division of space as absolute, relative and relational, but argues that all three forms occur simultaneously and are best kept in dialectical tension (Harvey, 2006, pp. 121–125).

4.1. Scale

Since the 1990s much attention has been given in human geography to the concept of scale, giving rise to sometimes heated debate (e.g. Brenner, 2001; Marston, 2000; Marston et al., 2005; Smith, 1990, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1997, 2004). Neil Smith (1990:172) coined the phrase “politics of scale”, which has become shorthand for the proposition that scale is socially produced and constantly reconfigured through socio-political struggle (Brenner, 2001, p. 599; Swyngedouw, 1997, pp. 139–140). While some theorists have called for flat “spatial ontology” (Marston et al., 2005), with Neil Brenner (2001) and others (for example Leitner, Sheppard, & Szarto, 2008, p. 159), I see relationality and hierarchy as critical defining characteristics of the politics of scale. Moreover, scalar politics are deployed *strategically* by a range of actors in political power struggles (Leitner et al., 2008, pp. 159–60, Swyngedouw, 2004, p. 34). This dimension of the politics of scale foregrounds scale as both the object and product of political struggle, as concisely articulated by Smith: “The scale of struggle and the struggle over scale are two sides of the same coin” (1993:101).

4.2. Territory

It is now widely recognised that globalisation has brought about a decoupling of the Westphalian nexus between national territory and state sovereignty (Agnew & Corbridge, 1994). It has also become accepted that actors other than the state can engage in processes of territorialisation (Sack, 1986) and that these processes can occur at the sub-national level (Brenner, 1999; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995). Moreover, as is the case with the politics of scale, territory has come to be associated with a *strategy* predicated upon the enclosure and control of geographical space, often referred to as territoriality (Sack, 1986, p. 19).

Territoriality depends upon the communication of territorial boundaries (Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995). Indeed, boundaries and boundedness have always been central to the Westphalian ideal of the territorial nation-state. Steinberg notes that “the cartographic construction of the territorial state was made easier when the ‘naturalness’ of such a unit could be supported by pointing to an evident geographical feature” (2005:255). In this manner, the notion of the island as the paradigmatic setting for the nation-state has enjoyed considerable currency amongst scholars of islands. John Gillis, for example, writes:

Nothing seemed to objectify the existence of territories better than so-called natural boundaries – rivers, seas, and mountains – so it is not surprising that *islands would emerge as the most clearly marked territories of all ...* [my emphasis] (Gillis, 2004:114).

More recently Godfrey Baldacchino, one of the leading figures in island studies, has written that:

Islands represent quintessential platforms for nation states: they are delineated spaces and discrete bounded territories ... Such a finite and self-evident island geography smoothens the nurturing of a sense of identity that is contiguous with territory (Baldacchino, 2013:3).

In this vein, a strand of the island studies literature has also paid considerable attention to the empirical association between sub-national autonomies of various types, including agendas for autonomy, and sub-national island jurisdictions (Baldacchino &

Milne, 2006; Hepburn and Baldacchino, 2013). The introduction to a recent edited volume on independence movements in sub-national island jurisdictions notes that many of the “candidates for increased autonomy” in the contemporary world are “relatively small islands or archipelagos” (Baldacchino & Hepburn, 2012, p. 397). Again emphasis is given to the unique territorial properties of islands, which facilitates a sense of identity that finds expression in “sub-” or “infra-nationalism” (Baldacchino & Milne, 2006). While this sense of identity, manifest and expressed in terms of cultural, linguistic and ethnic difference, is seen as an important driver of agendas for island self-determination, this literature is also attentive to the role of economic and security agendas on the part of both local/island elites and central or metropolitan governments. That said, the literature to date falls short of *explicitly* linking agendas for sub-national island autonomy to the contentious politics of scale that surrounds political economic struggle in the era of globalisation.

4.3. Scale and territory

An important perspective on both territoriality and the politics of scale comes from research on the political economic geography of globalisation and urbanisation that has drawn attention to the “spatial fixes”, and the contradictory logic of de- and re-territorialisation, that have characterised capitalist accumulation in the current round of globalisation (Brenner, 1999; Swyngedouw, 1997, 2004). In articulating his theory of “accumulation by dispossession”, Harvey singles out resource rich sites as important loci of capitalism’s “spatial strategies” (2006:91–92). These strategies have both territorial and scalar dimensions. Indeed, struggles over mineral-resource development are, quintessentially, struggles over scale: “the scale of ownership and the scale of distributional costs and benefits” (Huber & Emel, 2009, p. 371). The contradiction between the fixity of mineral-resource deposits and the multiscale forces that vie over their development “must necessarily be resolved through the politics of scale” (Huber & Emel, 2009, p. 374). For those seeking to gain access to mineral-resources a “scalar fix” is required: “... an institutional compromise amongst various social actors at multiple scales ...” (Huber and Emel, 2009:375).

To summarise, then, extractive enclaves can be seen as stark manifestations of the “spatial fixes” that characterise capital accumulation in the current round of globalisation; and the strategies adopted to achieve these fixes have salient scalar and territorial dimensions. We have also seen the emergence of the idea of the island as the paradigmatic setting for territorialising projects, including the nation-state and various types of sub-national jurisdictions. Arguably, however, island studies has paid less attention to the production and deployment of the island as a *scale* of political economic struggle, an issue to which I now turn.

4.4. The historical production of Melanesian islands

Historical materialist struggles have been central to the production of Melanesian islands as a scale for collective political action. In the Melanesian context, island-wide identities and socio-political movements are, in the first instance, the product of experience and struggle associated with the introduction of capitalist social relations under colonialism. Not only did these struggles unite the culturally and linguistically heterogeneous populations of the large Melanesian islands in ways that were previously unknown, they simultaneously produced and deployed the island as a *scale* of struggle.

A paradigmatic example is the island of Malaita. Before the advent of Solomons Pijin on the sugarcane plantations of Queensland and Fiji, people at one end of the island, speakers of one of its

13 languages, had no way to communicate with those at the other. Prior to the interaction with other Solomon Islanders afforded by the indentured labour experience, Malaitans had no way of knowing the extent that their world views, referred to as *kastom*, were broadly shared across their island, but different to the *kastom* of other islands. The exploitative labour policies of the British colonial administration, and its clumsy attempts to establish native courts and councils, coalesced in the emergence of the Maasina Rule movement immediately after the Second World War, the most remarkable island-scale political resistance movement the region has witnessed (Akin, 2013).

The introduction of capitalist social relations under colonialism had similar effects on Bougainville. Despite its internal ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity, a distinct pan-Bougainville identity developed during the 19th and 20th centuries as Bougainvilleans interacted more intensively with “other” Papua New Guineans in the colonial plantation economy, both on Bougainville and in other parts of PNG (Nash & Ogan, 1990). The very dark skin color of most Bougainvilleans became the key marker of this distinctive ethnic identity, with the quintessential “other” being the comparatively light skinned PNG highlanders whom were referred to, pejoratively, as “redskins” (Nash & Ogan, 1990).

We are reminded here of Harvey’s treatment of relational space, which draws attention to social and political subjectivities. From the perspective of Island Melanesians, islands might be said to exist in a scalar hierarchy that starts with the person – seen in one strand of Melanesian anthropology as existing only in relation to the kinship group (e.g. Strathern, 1988) – who identifies strongly with place and kin, and moves up to the language group, the island, the nation, and then to various levels of supra-national identity (Melanesian, Pacific Islander and so on).

While the important work of Pacific scholars such as Vicente Diaz (2011), Epeli Hau’ofa (1994) and Teresia Teaiwa (1994) has done much to deconstruct longstanding Orientalist depictions of Pacific islands as inherently remote, isolated, and backward – instead emphasizing the dense webs of social relations that bind and connect Pacific islanders – recent anthropological research in Solomon Islands has highlighted the growing ontological significance of the island scale. Writing about the Arosi speakers of the island-province of Makira, Michael Scott employs the term “ethnogenesis” to explain the emergence of oppositional island-scale ethnic identities in the context of the Euro-American “Cartesian mandate to classify ... to map, Christianize, exploit, govern, and assist ...” (Scott, 2016, p. 483). Within this context, and in the wake of the Ethnic Tension, Scott describes how Arosi identity discourses are being increasing deployed at the scale of the island of Makira.

The emergence of ethno-political agendas associated with island-scale identities – described by Wittersheim (2003) in the case of Vanuatu as “islandism” – has been buttressed by the legacy of colonial cartographies. Colonialism delineated not only individual “possessions”, but also the administrative units within them. In the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, individual islands and clusters of islands became districts within the administrative structure of the colony and later became provinces within the unitary nation-state of Solomon Islands, most of them territorially coterminous with a large island (see Keesing, 1989). In other words, they became island-provinces. Through colonialism, then, Melanesian islands have been territorialised into sub-national jurisdictions, as has been the case in many other post-colonial contexts. But through the introduction of capitalist social relations, islands have also been produced and deployed, at particular junctures and moments, as a scale of political economic struggle.

5. Islands as scale in recent resource conflicts

Contemporary struggles over extractive industries have also seen indigeneity/islandism deployed at the scale of the island, perhaps most explicitly in the case of Guadalcanal where there have been longstanding appeals to the “bone fide” grievances of the “indigenous people of Guadalcanal” (Allen, 2013a). During the Ethnic Tension, Guadalcanal militants expressed indigeneity in a number of ways: by wearing the *kabilato*, the traditional dress of the Gaena’alu Movement (formerly known as the Moro Movement); by claiming ‘Isatabu’ as a pre-contact name for the island of Guadalcanal; and by invoking *kastom* and ancestral connections to land (see Kabutaulaka, 2001).

Struggles between settlers and landowners on north Guadalcanal over access to land and livelihood opportunities were mobilised to the larger project of autonomy for Guadalcanal, itself driven, *inter alia*, by a desire to capture a greater share of the benefits that flow from the island’s resource industries, most notably Gold Ridge mine and the country’s only commercial oil palm operation (see Allen, 2013a, pp. 112–118). It is in this arena that the Guale identity narrative has been cast most strongly in terms of indigeneity as it seeks to exclude outsiders, including the national government. In this manner we see the mobilisation of indigeneity as a territorialising strategy in a politics of scale centred on the *island* of Guadalcanal.

In January 2015 I interviewed three senior Guale leaders as they enjoyed a late lunch on the veranda of the Honiara Hotel with its sweeping views over Honiara and the north coast of Guadalcanal. One of these men was the Member of Parliament for North Guadalcanal and then Minister for Mines in the national government. Seemingly oblivious to any suggestion of a conflict of interest, he was also, at the time, chairman of one of the three Gold Ridge landowner associations. Another of the men was a recent former premier of Guadalcanal Province. Completing the trio was a former member of the Guadalcanal provincial assembly and one time Minister for Mines in the national government, who, at the time of our meeting, was somewhat controversially serving as an unofficial advisor to then Minister of Mines. He has subsequently become chairman of the Board of Directors of a “landowner” company that purchased the Gold Ridge mine from Australian company St Barbara for a nominal sum in April 2015. This sale has been contested by other prominent Gold Ridge landowners, including the chairs of two of its three landowner associations. All three of these men are self-styled “paramount chiefs” for different parts of north and central Guadalcanal.

A question on my part about the Gold Ridge mine immediately morphed into a discussion about inter-governmental benefit-sharing arrangements and greater autonomy for Guadalcanal under new federal constitutional arrangements. In other words, the conversation about Gold Ridge quickly became framed by a politics of scale, informed, at least implicitly, by the islandness of the very territory that we were surveying from our elevated vantage point.

I have since been struck by the extent to which these sorts of men might be seen as ‘masters of scale’ or ‘scale fixers’. Their simultaneous nesting at multiple scales – as paramount chiefs, as heads of landowner companies or associations, and as provincial and national level politicians – makes them critical agents in the brokering of the “scalar fixes” that are required, alongside territorial fixes, for large-scale resource extraction to occur (Huber & Emel, 2009, p. 375).

During his presentation at a national mining forum in Honiara in November 2015, the Premier of Choiseul Province, Jackson Kiloe, directly invoked the politics of scale that lie at the heart of large-scale mineral extraction. He stated that while most of the economic benefits from mining accrue in Honiara, which is also where

the key decisions are made, the social and environmental costs are borne locally, in the provinces that host the mines. He called for a much stronger place at the table for provincial governments in decision-making and benefit-sharing arrangements. When I later spoke to Kiloe on Choiseul, he said that while he recognises that “sacrifices” must be made at the local level in the interests of the national economy, provincial governments have to receive a greater share of the economic benefits from mining in order that *all* parts of the province, not just landowning communities, can benefit from improved government services⁴. Choiseul’s recent experience with logging, which has produced significant negative social impacts but no lasting economic benefits, and growing national-level corruption in the governance of the extractive resource sectors, give him little confidence that things would be any different if large-scale mining was to take place on Choiseul. He also expressed frustration that provincial governments are merely facilitators for decisions made by national authorities in relation to logging and mining (interview with Jackson Kiloe 12 March 2016).

Similar views were expressed by the Premier of Isabel Province, who explicitly linked them to the fact that Isabel Province is an island. Having initially raised islandness in the context of a statement about lessons from the Bougainville conflict, I pressed him on how, in his view, it mattered that Isabel is an island. His response was: “Being an island ... it’s very obvious ... everyone’s focus, whether they are linked to the [mining] project or not, they are aware of it ... Most of the benefits of the mine should be felt by our island” (interview with James Habu 3 November 2015). He went on to connect these issues to the debate about constitutional change and the introduction of a federal system of government that would give provinces greater powers in relation to extractive industries.

Each of these neighbouring island-provinces, where the rights to mine large nickel deposits are being actively pursued by two rival mining companies (one a small ASX-listed company, the other a large multinational company listed on the Tokyo stock exchange), hosts well organised island-scale socio-political institutions that merge *kastom* and church, and work closely with their respective provincial governments. Strong opposition to mining was consistently expressed during my discussions with representatives of these institutions (the Luru Land Conference on Choiseul and the House of Chiefs and Church of Melanesia on Isabel). Moreover, the scale of the island was explicitly invoked by several of these interlocutors. This was especially the case with women on different parts of Isabel, including representatives of the Isabel Mother’s Union (part of the Church of Melanesia), several of whom said words to effect of “our beautiful island is too small for large-scale mining”.

The only active commercial mining activity in the entire Solomons chain of islands is the bauxite mining that has been taking place on the tiny Polynesian outlier island of Rennell since 2014, albeit intermittently due to a series of court injunctions. These mining operations have been enormously controversial with extensive allegations of bribes and inducements being paid – by three rival companies (two being reinvented Asian logging companies, the other an Indonesian mining company) – to landowners and relevant national authorities, and the direct involvement of national politicians in corrupt dealings. A 2015 investigation by the Attorney-General’s Chamber found procedural anomalies in the issuance of mining licenses to two of these companies, which resulted in the termination of several senior officers in the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification and a cabinet reshuffle (*The Island Sun*, 18 July 2016). My interviews on Rennell

⁴ The only direct benefits to provincial governments are business license fees and a 0.3 per cent share of royalties.

corroborated claims that landowners had been paid inducements to sign up with at least one of these companies: I heard a firsthand account from a landowner to this effect (interview with Panio, 4 March 2016).

The tensions surrounding bauxite mining have led to extensive litigation, several incidents of interpersonal violence on Rennell, and the hostaging of mining equipment by disgruntled landowners. They have also seen the revival of a longstanding but dormant separatist agenda for Renbel Province whose Polynesian population has long resented being governed by Melanesian dominated governments in Honiara. During my visit to Rennell in March 2016, several informants warned that the tensions over bauxite mining have the potential to escalate into more widespread violent resistance. The key source of frustration is the perceived greed and corruption of bureaucrats and politicians in Honiara and the corollary marginalization of the provincial government, which was repeatedly described by provincial officials as merely “an agent of the national government”.

In the case of Bougainville, in contrast to Guadalcanal, there have never been explicit appeals to an “indigenous” identity. That said, a pre-existing Bougainville-wide ethnic identity was undoubtedly galvanised by benefit-sharing tensions with the PNG government over the mine, by the presence of thousands of non-Bougainvilleans (“redskins”) who were seen to be benefiting disproportionately from the economic development associated with the mine, and by the heavy-handed response of PNG security forces to the initial acts of sabotage at Panguna. Moreover, just as Guals appealed to “Isatabu” as an indigenous name for their island, Bougainvilleans rallied under the banner of “Me’ekamui” which means “holy island” in the Nasioi language (see below).

Moreover, the island scale continues to be explicitly invoked in the current, highly contentious, politics surrounding the potential re-opening of Panguna mine, a stated policy objective of the current Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) which sees it as the quickest way to generate the revenue required for either independence or genuine autonomy (a view that is shared by many people that I spoke to on Bougainville). My interviews with people in different parts of Bougainville reveal a widely-held view that because the Panguna mine triggered a conflict that came to engulf all regions of Bougainville, the question of the re-opening of the mine (and the closely associated issues of reconciliation and compensation) is one that *all* Bougainvilleans, not only the customary landowners of Panguna, have a stake in. My interlocutors would often employ the word “island” when expressing this sentiment, with an emblematic example being: “The mine caused bloodshed on the whole island so the decision must be made by everyone” (Tinputz men’s focus group, 28 January 2016).

This sentiment is recognised by the ABG, which convened a series of “Regional Forums” between 2012 and 2014 in order gauge community views from across the island about the re-opening of Panguna. It is also reflected in the Bougainville Mining Act (2015) – adopted under the auspices of the ABG’s autonomy powers – which obligates the ABG to use its revenues from any new large-scale mining operations to benefit all Bougainvilleans and especially those from the least developed parts of the island.

Moreover, despite Bougainville’s autonomy status, the Panguna question continues to loom large in political tensions between the ABG and the PNG government. In June 2016, the majority shareholder of Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL), Rio Tinto – which had walked away from the negotiating table following the passage of interim mining legislation on Bougainville in 2014 that stripped BCL of its mining lease over Panguna – announced that it would transfer its BCL shares to the governments of Bougainville and PNG for “no consideration”. The shares would be divided in proportions that would make the two governments equal, and between them,

majority, shareholders in BCL. This development was strongly disputed by the ABG which pushed not only for the transfer of all of the shares to the ABG, but for Rio Tinto to be held to account for the social and environmental legacies of the mine.

The latest twist, at the time of writing, is O’Neill’s announcement on 17 August 2016, that the government of PNG will transfer its portion of the shares in question to the “landowners and the people of Bougainville” meaning that “the people of Bougainville will own a combined shareholding of 53.8 per cent of BCL” (while PNG will retain its original 19.2 per cent shareholding) (*Post Courier*, 18 August 2016). While it remains to be seen what, precisely, is meant by “landowners and the people of Bougainville”, it is clearly O’Neill’s intention that these shares will be transferred to an entity representing Panguna landowners.

In this context, O’Neill has held a number of meetings in recent years with the Me’ekamui Government of Unity (MGU) that claims to represent the customary landowners of Panguna, a claim that is directly contested by the ABG-endorsed Special Mine Lease Landowners Association (see below), raising the spectre of a possible transfer of some or all of the BCL shares in question to the MGU. Bougainville President John Momis expressed fury at O’Neill’s announcement: “The future of peace is now truly under threat. This is the most serious dispute ever between the two governments” (Media Statement, Office of the President, ABG, 18 August 2016).

6. Islands as containers for relative deprivation

The potential for islands to become containers for internal socio-spatial tensions that are exacerbated by mining enclaves has also been constitutive of violent contestation. Once again our attention is drawn to historical materialist struggles manifest in processes of agrarian change and differentiation, and, more recently, in intense disputation over the benefits that flow from extractive enclaves. These processes have the capacity to intersect and scale-up through the medium of ideologies such as socio-economic justice, *kastom* and indigeneity/islandism. That said, these internal socio-spatial dynamics also have the capacity to fracture the island scale; to render it ungovernable. Recall that the conflicts in both Bougainville and Guadalcanal were characterised by phases of intense violent contestation *within* each island.

My previous research on the conflict in Solomon Islands demonstrates that spatial inequalities and the socio-economic marginalisation of young men in rural areas of Guadalcanal were significant causes of the violence (Allen, 2013a). The island’s two large-scale resource projects intensified spatial, gender and inter-generational inequalities and grievances associated with long-standing trajectories of agrarian differentiation and uneven development (also see Kabutaulaka, 2001; Monson, 2015). In a similar vein, Regan’s (1998) analysis of the causes of the Bougainville conflict draws upon earlier ethnographic and geographical studies to argue that processes of agrarian change associated with the adoption of smallholder cocoa production from the 1960s, in concert with high population growth rates, set in train spatial and inter-generational inequalities that were exacerbated with the advent of the Panguna mine (also see Lasslett, 2014).

In both cases, men from the relatively disadvantaged and ecologically constrained southern regions played an important role in agitating for the scaling-up of more localised struggles around benefit-sharing, struggles that had salient gendered and inter-generational dimensions as both young men and women were marginalised within the space of customary landownership (see Allen, 2013a, 2013b; Filer, 1990; Regan, 2014). In both cases, men from these southern regions believed that their relative deprivation – relative at multiple scales, but most saliently, I suggest, at that of the island-province – would be alleviated if their respective island

governments were to acquire greater control over the proceeds of extractive industries via some sort of autonomy arrangements, or, in the case of Bougainville, full independence. In the case of Guadalcanal, a paradigmatic articulation of this sentiment comes from an ex-militant I interviewed on the Weather Coast in 2006: “If it [the government] addresses this issue [state government], everyone will go back to their places and Guadalcanal will become one of the *richest islands* ... we have all the resources” [my emphasis] (interview with an anonymous Guale ex-militant, April 2006).

We know anecdotally and from a limited amount of existing data that both Guadalcanal and Bougainville continue to be characterized by a North-South axis of socio-economic inequality. Will the potential reopening of the Gold Ridge and Panguna mines exacerbate on-going spatial patterns of inequality, as they did previously?

7. The contested island

Intra-island patterns of uneven development and socio-economic inequality, not to mention internal ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity, are not the only tensions that can work to deconstruct the scale of the island. A critical axis of tension runs between the scales of landownership and islandism, as we have already seen with the recent BCL share divestment saga on Bougainville. This tension speaks directly to the politics of scale that frame extractive resource development. On Choiseul and Isabel there are tensions between all three governable spaces. On the one hand, landowner representatives (but to be sure, not all members of their landowning groups) and the Solomon Islands Government support the development of nickel mining; whilst on the other, coalitions of island-level institutions that merge provincial government, *kastom* and church stand opposed to large-scale mining, at least under the current governance arrangements.

On Bougainville, the ABG claims that its Regional Forums indicate wide-spread support for the reopening of Panguna⁵, a view that is shared by the leaders of the nine recently re-constituted landowner associations in the mine-affected area but certainly not by all members of their communities (Jubilee Australia, 2014). My fieldwork in the Panguna area indicates a wide-spectrum of views about the re-opening of the mine. A number of individuals that I interviewed in different parts of the mine affected area expressed deep and vehement opposition to the resumption of any form of large-scale mining at Panguna. As is the case on Isabel and Choiseul, several women expressed the view that the “island is too small” to support large-scale mining⁶.

In addition to these scalar tensions between the spaces of landownership and islandism, islands such as Guadalcanal and Bougainville are criss-crossed by socio-political movements that espouse alternative ‘roads’ to development, movements that are by no means unique to island Melanesia, but which nevertheless work

to problematise the scale of the island in its articulation with extractive enclave development. In 2006 the leader of the Gaena’alu Movement on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal told me that the Movement is opposed to developments like Gold Ridge mine. Such developments are at odds with its philosophy of preserving and protecting the land, resources and people of Guadalcanal. To use his words, they are “too big” (interview with Jerry Sabino, 19 April 2006). Similar sentiments have been expressed by similar movements on Bougainville, the most influential of which has been the Me’ekamui movement, established in the undeveloped mountainous areas to the south-east of Panguna in 1959 by Damien Dameng who became a “significant figure” in the origins and direction of the Bougainville conflict (Regan, 2007, p. 99).

Me’ekamui is now deeply fractured, largely as a consequence of legacies of the conflict, with one of its factions, the Me’ekamui Government of Unity (MGU), continuing to control a “no-go-zone” around Panguna. During my fieldwork I spoke to a man in the former mining town of Arawa identifying himself as a leader of the “original Me’ekamui”, who not only questioned the legitimacy of the MGU, but expressed staunch opposition to any form of large-scale mining on the basis of its incompatibility with the foundational Me’ekamui principles of “looking after the land, people and environment” (anonymous interview, 13 March 2015). During a focus group with men at Moratono, downstream of Panguna in the lower tailings area, it became apparent that the community was divided between followers of the MGU, original Me’ekamui, Noah Musingku (the charismatic leader of a notorious ‘ponzi scheme’, based, under armed protection, at Siwai in south Bougainville) and the ABG. One man evoked the metaphor of multiple roads that were working to pull Bougainville, and the Panguna and referendum questions in particular, in very different directions (Moratono men’s focus group, 8 March 2015).

On both Guadalcanal and Bougainville, tensions between competing visions for development also find expression in a preference for either artisanal mining or large-scale mining, again a tension that has been documented in many parts of the global South (Bebbington, Hinojosa, Bebbington, Burneo, & Warnaars, 2008:893). On Bougainville it is estimated that 5000 or 6000 people are engaged in artisanal mining in various locations, but especially at the disused Panguna mine pit and in the downstream sections of the Jaba and Kawerong rivers into which the tailings from the mine were disposed (Regan, 2014; Kirakira, n.d). Most of the people involved hail from other parts of Bougainville and have gained access by appealing to the principle, discussed earlier, that the conflict that started at Panguna caused blood to be spilt throughout Bougainville. My interviews in the area indicate that this principal enjoys considerable recognition on the part of landowning communities, again highlighting the extent to which Panguna has become imbricated onto the scale of the island of Bougainville.

The extent of artisanal mining on Guadalcanal is much more modest and mostly restricted to the Gold Ridge mine pits where I estimate around 200 people are actively mining on any given day. Women from mine-affected communities whom I interviewed in January 2015 expressed a strong preference for the mining operation to remain closed as its closure has made it much easier and safer for them to access the pits to pan for gold. They were also unanimous in stating that when the company was operating the royalty and rental incomes were controlled by men; while artisanal mining, by contrast, affords them a reliable source of cash income.

Returning to Bougainville, artisanal mining is associated with an extraordinary challenge to the territorial sovereignty of the ABG in the form of a mining operation in south Bougainville which is controlled, under armed protection, by a former combatant and reportedly involves up to 400 young men (Regan, 2014). This

⁵ This narrative was contested by some of my informants, especially in South Bougainville. There are currently no publically available records from the Regional Forums.

⁶ Detailed analysis of the tensions within the space of customary landownership at Panguna (and in the other case studies) is presented elsewhere (Allen, forthcoming). Suffice to say that tensions are evident both between and within some of the nine landowner associations. Informants raised concerns over the legitimacy of some of the leaders of these associations, including the means by which they have been appointed. There are also tensions between the Special Mine Lease Landowner Association and the MGU. When I visited the area in February 2015, the latter was attempting to establish a rival landowner association. It would appear, then, that many of the same tensions within the space of landownership that contributed to the original conflict are still extant, and, if anything, have intensified as a consequence of its legacies.

operation, along with the Panguna “no-go-zone” and Noah Musinku’s “Kingdom of Papala”, contribute to a profound territorial deconstruction of the island scale of Bougainville.

8. Conclusion: Islandness and the politics of scale

Drawing upon case studies from the Solomons chain of islands, I have attempted to show that just as Melanesian islands were produced as a scale of struggle in the context of the introduction of capitalist social relations under colonialism, so too have they emerged as a critical, albeit problematic, scale of struggle in contemporary contestations around extractive resource capitalism under the current round of globalisation and accumulation by dispossession. In the two primary cases that I have considered, Bougainville and Guadalcanal, there came a point at which the island emerged clearly and unmistakably as a scale of violent struggle. Moreover, in all of the cases considered here, the insular scale continues to be produced and deployed in the contentious politics of scale that ensnares large-scale mining projects, both extant and proposed. In keeping with conceptualisation of scale as relational and hierarchical, these politics of scale produce islandism in relation to scales both above it (nationalism, and, to be sure, globalisation) and below it (customary landownership). In concluding, I first return to the point from which I departed at the outset of the article – the question of whether the mining-related conflicts on Bougainville and Guadalcanal would have played out differently, if at all, if they were “mainland” as opposed to island settings – before offering a qualified provocation, for further debate and research, concerning islandness and the politics of scale.

First, the obvious counterfactual consists of the many large-scale mines (and oil and gas projects) on “mainland” PNG, which, to be sure, have been productive of various types of contestation, often violent. Indeed, many of the socio-spatial tensions and contradictions discussed here have been evident in these mainland mining contexts, especially when viewed through the lens of governable spaces (see Allen, 2013a). Yet none of PNG’s mainland mines have been implicated in large-scale armed conflict with a distinctive ethno-nationalist or separatist character.

From the foregoing discussion we can see that islands such as Bougainville and Guadalcanal appear as scales on multiple territorialised scalar hierarchies: as a scale of identity, as a scale of governance (a sub-national island jurisdiction), and as a scale that exists below and in opposition to “the mainland”. Notwithstanding the latter dichotomy of island/mainland, one could argue that a province of mainland of PNG might also exist simultaneously across these scalar registers. While this may well be the case, it is in the communication of boundaries that is so critical to territorial strategies that islands take on distinctive characteristics, being, as we have seen, “the most clearly marked territories of all” (Gillis, 2004, p. 114). I suggest that this makes islands *potentially* exceptional types of arenas for ideologies and strategies that deploy islands in political economic struggles at the same time that the physical characteristics of some islands – their boundedness and ecological geographies – can produce patterns of socio-economic disadvantage and relative deprivation that simultaneously work to produce *and* problematize the island as a scale of struggle in the encounter with extractive resource capitalism.

Turning to my provocation for the island studies literature, I shall suggest that while island studies has given much attention to the idea of the island as the paradigmatic setting for territorialising projects, our understanding of islandness might be enriched by a deeper and more explicit engagement with the politics of scale. Indeed, it is in the coproduction of scale and territory that is uniquely, though problematically, possible in islands that they can become exceptionally potent and violent arenas for the struggles

that attend extractive resource capitalism, *at least in the cases considered here*.

The latter qualification points to a broader one: the danger of treating islandness as a given category; a timeless, determining variable. In the cases examined here, the primary drivers of political and economic struggle are best seen in terms of historical materialism, which renders islandness epiphenomenal and, potentially, irrelevant. However, when properly situated within a historical materialist frame, we have seen the clear emergence of islandness as a critical factor in particular moments and conjunctures of political economic struggle, including around extractive resource enclaves. I have suggested that, in these cases, this is not only because of the unique territorial properties of islands, which have been long recognized in the island studies literature, but also because of their scalar properties: the potential for islands to be produced and deployed as a scale of political economic struggle.

All this is to say that while islandness matters in the cases considered here, it will not *inevitably* matter in all political economic contexts that entail a confluence of islands and extractive resource industries. Some islands that host such projects might be unoccupied (though not necessarily uncontested). Others might contain populations that are too small for widespread organised resistance and/or violence to be countenanced. Still others may not be large enough for their ecological geographies to be significant in terms of shaping spatial patterns of socio-economic inequality and exclusion that can be intensified by extractive enclaves. (We can think here of the very small Melanesian island of Lihir that has hosted a large gold mine since 1997 but has not witnessed significant violent contestation – see Bainton, 2010). The scale of the extractive project itself may also shape these dynamics: perhaps the relatively enormous size of Bougainville’s Panguna mine goes some way to explaining the scale and intensity of the Bougainville conflict. And of course “local histories and social relations” (Peluso & Watts, 2001, p. 5), the social contexts into which extractive projects are inserted, will always be paramount and will play a critical role in the extent to which islandness comes into focus in political economic struggle and how coherent and cohesive it will be as a scale for collective action.

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