State Society and Governance in Melanesia

WAR AND PEACE IN HIGHLAND PNG:
## SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NEBILYER VALLEY, WESTERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE

INTRODUCTION

The Highlands have long been regarded as the most fight-prone part of Papua New Guinea, and the Nebilyer Valley (shown near the centre of Map 1) as one of the most fight-prone parts of the Highlands. For as far back as anyone can tell there have been considerable differences in the scale and intensity of warfare within different parts of the valley. Until recently, the most deadly conflict had long been the one between the two largest tribes in the valley, who live on the fertile, densely populated valley floor; the Ulka, and their western neighbours, the Kulka (shown on the righthand side of Map 2). For as long as living memory or oral history can attest, these two tribes have been major enemies. Over recent decades, they fought in the 1970s, in the mid 1980s, and from 1993-1995; during the latter two periods with high-powered automatic rifles instead of bows and arrows and spears, destroying much property including a community school and

police station that have never been rebuilt, and killing over a hundred people. During all of that time, and right up until 2005, conflict in the central Nebilyer Valley contrasted sharply with the course of events in the western Nebilyer Valley where I have been doing anthropological field research (partly in collaboration with Francesca Merlan) on and off since 1981.

During the entire period from about 1950 to 2005 the Kopia and Kubuka tribes, with whom we have lived at Kailge, were not involved in any lethal warfare. They were on the verge of it in 1982 when they joined in with their eastern neighbours - the Epola-Alya and others - in a fight that had broken out between them and their neighbours to the south, the Tea-Dena. This conflict (for reasons discussed in Merlan & Rumsey 1991) became known as the Marsupial Road War (see Map 3). But that war was stopped

ALAN RUMSEY

2
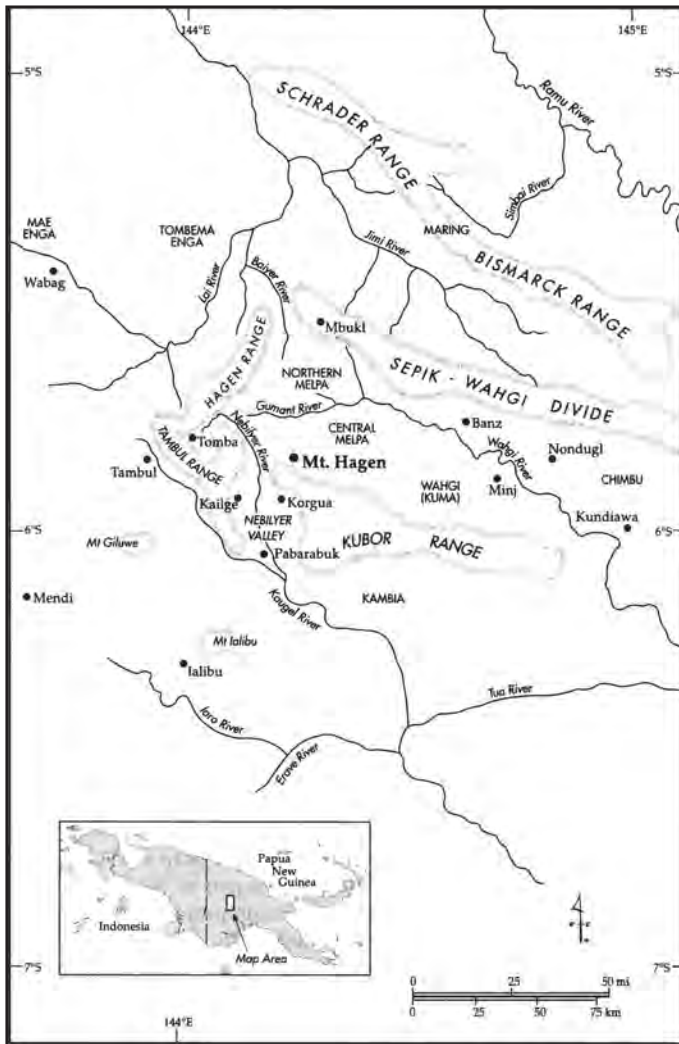
Map 1. The Nebilyer Valley and nearby areas in the Highland Papua New Guinea

by a dramatic intervention by a local women's group who marched out on the battlefield between the opposing sides and broke it up. That intervention established a peace that lasted 23 years. This changed dramatically in 2005 when the Kopia and Kubuka people got into the biggest fight that they had experienced in living memory in which approximately 80 people were killed over then period 2005-2007. Here I give an account of how that turn of events took place, use it to illustrate what I see as some general features of the socio-political order in this region, and try to develop some conclusions about the problems and prospects for conflict resolution there and in Highland New Guinea more generally. First, I'll present some background regarding the region and its forms of social organization.

Many aspects of social life among the Ku Waru people have been, and continue to be, organized in terms of named social units called *talapi*, a term which can be roughly translated as 'tribe' or 'clan'[1]. These are territorially distinct units, each of which owns and occupies a single, contiguous


Map 2. Tribes in the Western Nebilyer Valley
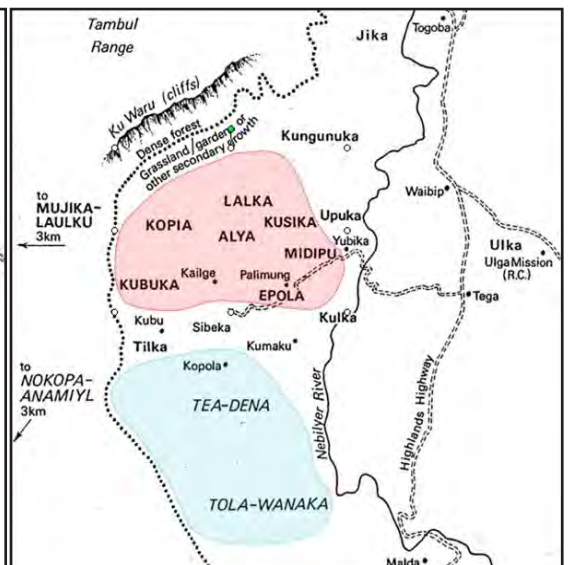
Map 3. Sides in the Marsupial Road War of 1982

block of land within the western Nebilyer Valley (such as the one shown for the Kopia tribe in Map 4). Within each tribe there are internal subdivisions, each of which is identified with a sub-region within that larger block. This is illustrated by Map 4, which shows the internal subdivisions of Kopia territory as of 1986 and the territories of the neighbouring tribes. The subdivisions of each tribe are organised into multi-leveled branching structures of a kind known to anthropologists as 'segmentary' structures. These are illustrated in Figure 1 (following page), which shows the segments of the Kopia tribe[2]. With approximately 600 members, Kopia is a relatively small tribe by Western-Highlands standards, with a correspondingly simple segmentary structure; three levels of internal subdivision. By comparison, the Kulka and Ulka tribes referred to above each have well over 5000 members, and at least six levels of internal subdivisions.
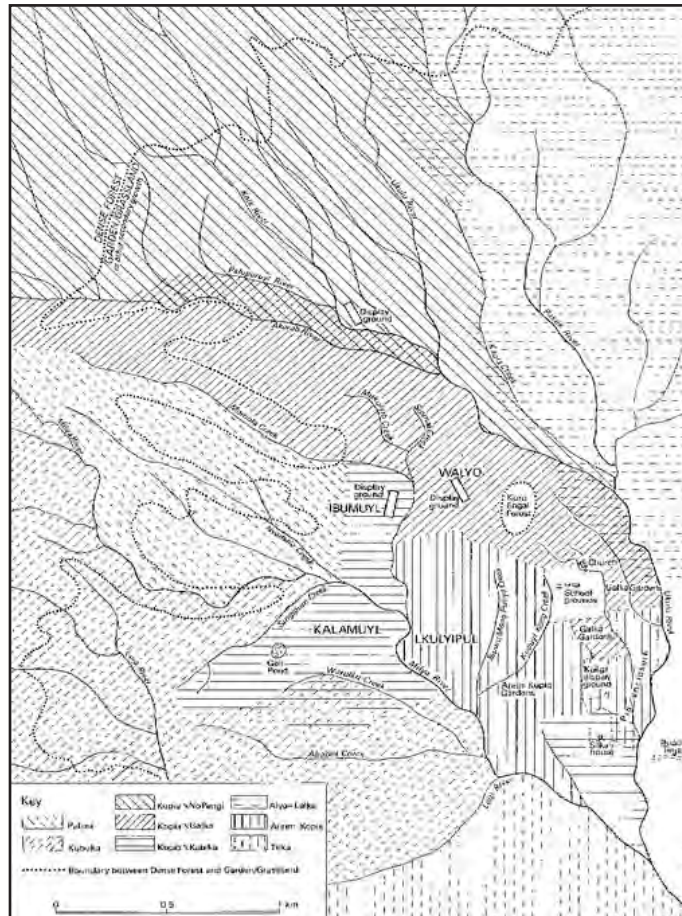

Map 4. The Kailge area and territorial distribution of named segmentary groups there as of 1986

WARFARE, COMPLEMENTARY OPPOSITION AND INTERGROUP EXCHANGE

One of the aspects of social life in which these segmentary structures continue to figure strongly across much the Western Highlands is warfare. For any given pair of groups, the more closely related they are within a branching segmentary structure, the stronger are:

1. the sanctions against their engaging in warfare with each other.

2. the mechanisms for settling disputes so as to insure that they don't escalate into open warfare.

3. the obligation to join in with the other groups as their allies in case a war breaks out between them and another unrelated or more distantly related group.

Segmentary systems of this kind - or with this degree of elaboration at least - are not commonly found elsewhere in Papua New Guinea or other Melanesian locales, but are (or were) common in sub-Saharan Africa, where they were extensively studied by anthropologists in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. In the African systems that were the subject of such classic studies as Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940) and Bohannan and Bohannan's (1953) *The Tiv of Central Nigeria*, a key principle on which the systems were said to be organized was that of 'lineage'. In this context subdivisions of the social groups were understood to be related to each through descent from common ancestors at various generation levels. When anthropological studies of Highland New Guinea began in earnest in the 1950s and 60s, researchers were struck by the similarities between the segmentary social systems they found there, and the African ones described in the earlier studies. At first this led them to overplay the similarities and neglect some
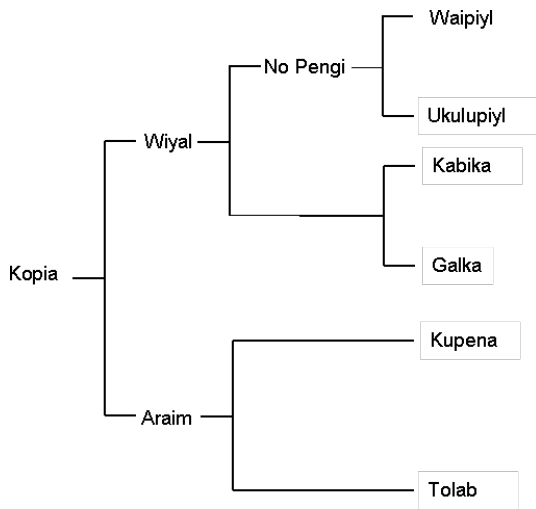
Figure 1. Segmentary divisions within the Kopia tribe.

key differences, such as the fact that in most parts of highland New Guinea people don't keep track of their ancestors beyond two or three generations back, and by and large, construct their segmentary relations on other bases than genealogical ones. As often happens in academia, this was followed by a strong swing of the pendulum in the opposite direction - in this case one which began with a judicious critique of the over-reliance on 'African Models in the New Guinea Highlands' (Barnes 1962) and ended up with more extreme one in which not only those models but the very notion of 'social group' on which they rested was deemed inapplicable to the New Guinea Highlands (Wagner 1974)[3].

This is not the place for a detailed critique of that more extreme position, and recasting of the notion of the 'segmentary' that I believe can help to shed light on political processes in the Highland PNG (for which see Merlan and Rumsey 1991:34-45). Suffice it to say here that the classical 'African models' include several different features which, while treated by their critics as all of piece, are logically independent of each other; and that some of them are in my view highly applicable to social processes in Highland PNG, while others are not.

One of the features which is highly applicable is the principle of 'complementary opposition'. A good first approximation of what this entails is to say that it is a way of summing up the practical tendencies stated

in 1) – 3) above. The Africa-based work in political anthropology that I have referred to included an elegant and useful formal model of complementary opposition which I think is worth laying out here for interested readers. Those who are put off by formal models can take note of the first approximation above and skip the next three paragraphs.

The principle of complementary opposition is illustrated in schematic form in Figure 2, which is taken from a classic account of the subject by Evans-Pritchard (1940) in his book on political organization among the Nuer of southern Sudan. The squares labeled 'A' and 'B' in the figure correspond to two tribes, each of which is internally sub-divided in the manner shown for B by the divisions into X and Y, X_1 and X_2, etc. According to the principle of complementary opposition, as stated in hypothetical form by the Nuer themselves (according to Evans-Pritchard), when groups Z_1 and Z_2 fight no other group gets involved. But if Z_1 fights with Y_1, Z_1 and Z_2 unite as Y_2. When Z_1 fights X_1, Y_1 and Y_2 unite and so do X_1 and X_2. And so on, up the segmentary scale to the level at which even A and B may unite when A raids the Dinka, who are enemies of the Nuer in general.

The applicability of this principle to inter-group politics in the Nebilyer Valley can be illustrated by comparing Figure 2 to Figure 1 showing the subdivisions within the Kopia tribe as discussed above, and considering them in relation to the following case. Early in 1982 a serious dispute broke out within the this tribe, between the Kabika sub-group and the Araim, over moves taken by a leading Kabika big man, Silka, to build a house for himself and his family in the area between
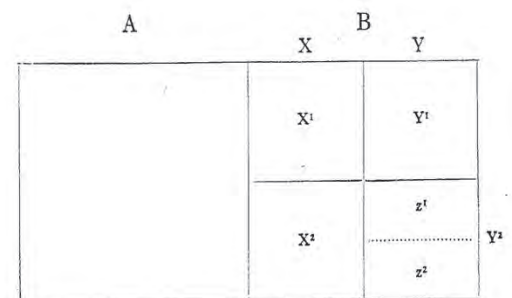
Figure 2. Schematic representation of principle of complementary opposition from Evans-Pritchard (1940: 144).

the Luip and Ukulu Rivers immediately to the south of the Kailge Display Ground as shown near the lower right hand corner of Map 4, and to fence off a portion of the land there to use as a sweet-potato garden. Until then that area had been used by the Araim Kopia as commonage on which to put their pigs to pasture. The dispute was argued out on a nearly daily basis for several months, growing ever more heated until, by May of that year some of the Araim Kopia were openly urging armed attacked on the Kabika – albeit with sticks rather than bows and arrows and spears. But this dispute quickly faded into the background during the next month when the Kopia tribe became involved in the war with the Tea Dena to the south. At around the time when the first battle of that war was fought, Silka quietly went ahead and began building his house, unopposed by Araim[4].

In terms of the formal model of complementary opposition shown in Figure 2, Kabika is equivalent to Z_1, Galka to Z_2 No Pengi to Y_1, Araim to X, Kopia to B and Tea Dena to A. A comparison between the events described in the previous paragraph and the hypothetical scenario set out in the one before it shows that those events would not have completely predictable in terms of the model, but that they were broadly consistent with it. For example, given the identifications I have made above, according to the model one would have expected that when the dispute broke out between Kabika and Araim, all of Wiyal would have joined in with Kabika against Araim. But it is consistent with the model in that the other segments of Wiyal did *not* join with Araim, and in that the conflict between Kabika and Araim was suppressed when the Kopia tribe as a whole came into conflict with Tea-Dena. It is in these elaborately ramified segmentary structures and associated patterns of complementary opposition that the indigenous systems of social organization of the PNG Highland regions discussed in this paper are most similar to the ones in Africa that were described by Evans-Pritchard and Bohannan.

A point of difference, however, is that in the New Guinea Highlands there are also systems of inter-group wealth exchange, whereby, for example, each of the tribes referred to above (Kopia, Kubuka and Tea, Dena) has exchange relationships with one or two others in the area, of the kind known as *makayl* (the more well-known, Melpa word for which is *moka*). Until the 1960s, the main items in these exchange transactions were live pigs and gold-lip pearlshells. Live pigs continue to be as important as ever in the transactions, but pearlshells have been replaced by money.

Each *talapi* also has relations of alliance and hostility with others in the area. There is a sliding scale among these relations, such that, for example, tribes A and B can be enemies of each other for some purposes but allies of each other relation to common enemy tribe C (compare for example the relation between Britain and the Soviet Union vis à vis Nazi Germany in World War Two). To describe what is happening in cases of this kind Andrew Strathern has coined the terms 'major enemies' and 'minor enemies'[5]. In these terms, tribes A and B in my hypothetical example above are minor enemies of each other, and both together are major enemies of C. These are relative terms, as shown by the fact that, for example, a conflict may develop between C and an alliance consisting of D, E and F, whereupon C recruits A and B to fight on its side as allies. In Strathern's terms the 'major' enmity between A+B and C becomes a 'minor' one relative to their shared enmity with D+E+F.

Now let us consider the relationship between these patterns of military alliance and hostility, and the *makayl* exchange relationships mentioned earlier. Like the Melpa (Strathern 1971) Ku Waru people say that all *makayl* exchange relationships have originated in previous bouts of tribal warfare. This has happened in two ways. To understand them one needs to know a little more about the way in which tribes are brought into war. When an alliance of tribes, call them A, B, and C, fights another, D, E and F, they do not fight each other as undifferentiated blocks. Rather, one of the tribes on each side is considered to be a principal 'owner', 'cause', 'base' (*pul*) of the fight. The fight is viewed as having originally broken out between A and D, for example, and these tribes are seen to be primarily responsible for it, and for bringing other tribes into it to fight on their side. The recruitment itself usually happens in stages, whereby, for example, in the first stage A recruits B and D recruits E; and the second stage B recruits C and E recruits F.

The way in which wealth exchange comes into the picture is that each of these acts of recruitment must be followed up by

compensation payments among the allied tribes on either side. Tribe B has to pay compensation to tribe C arising from injuries and deaths they may have incurred in the fight, and tribe A must similarly compensate tribe B. Likewise on the other side D must compensate E and E must compensate F. This is represented at '1' on Figure 3, which shows the simplest case of this kind of compensation, where there are only two allied groups on either side of the fight.

Any of these transactions between the pairs of tribes in such a scenario may give rise to *makayl* ceremonial exchange relations. This happens when the exchange which was initiated by an act of warfare gets converted to a back-and-forth flow of wealth items. For example, the payment by to B to C in the above scenario may be reciprocated years later by a payment from C to B. This payment should be larger than the one it is reciprocating (the earlier one from B to C). Years later there may be another payment in the other direction again, from B to C which should be larger again, and so forth.

The other way in which warfare gives rise to exchange relationships is when the 'fight owners' in such a scenario, in this case C and D, agree to pay compensation directly to each other arising from the deaths and injuries that each has inflicted on the other. This too may give rise to a continuous series of escalating wealth exchanges between these two tribes.

This latter kind of exchange relationship – the one arising from direct compensation between the belligerents – is far less frequent than the other kind, involving compensation among allies. And in almost every case where

it has occurred, it has been in a context where the donor and recipient groups are jointly opposed to another tribe or coalition, against which they are seeking to form an alliance. In other words, it is has almost always been transacted between minor enemies in the context of joint opposition to a common major enemy[6] - shown at '2' - on Figure 3.

Ku Waru people do not explain these compensation payments as direct recompense for the blood that has been shed or the lives lost. In fact they often remark in their orations at the exchange events that no amount of money or wealth can pay for the life of a man. Rather, they say that they are paying to compensate for the anger and grief that people suffer from the injuries and deaths.

In view of the above discussion it can be seen that the exchange of wealth and the exchange of blows in a sense comprise two different aspects of a single system (cf. Rumsey 2003). Each wealth transaction between clans or tribes creates or strengthens an alliance between them, but at the same time poses a threat to their common enemies, who can read it is an act of provocation. Relations of hostility, such as that between C and D above, can be converted to relations of alliance by exchanges of wealth; but by the same token relations of alliance such as that between B and C can be converted to ones of hostility by the failure to exchange wealth, or the failure to give as much as expected in terms of the requirement for increment[7].

THE RECENT WAR AND ITS ROOTS

Now let us turn to the specifics of the 2005-7 fight. For reasons which will become clear below, this fight has become known as the 'Poison War' (*kupena el*). It developed out of a dispute between the Kopia-Kubuka and their neighbours to the south, the Tilka (see Map 5). In order to understand how and why it developed, it is important to know that the Kopia and Kubuka tribes have been allies for as long as anyone can remember, but that until about forty years ago they had been enemies of all the other tribes immediately to the east of them and nearly all those to the south: Kusika, Midipu, Epola, Alya, Lalka (hereafter referred to as K-M-E-A-L), Tea and Dena, as shown on Map 6. In the 1940s there was a war in which all those
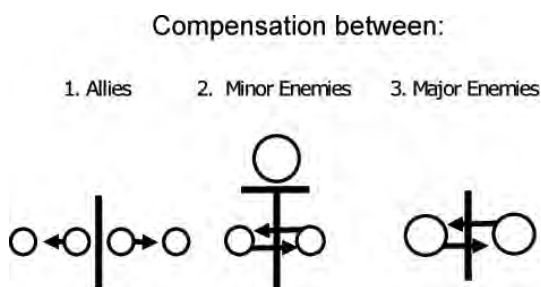
Figure 3. Schematic representation of types of intergroup compensation arising from warfare
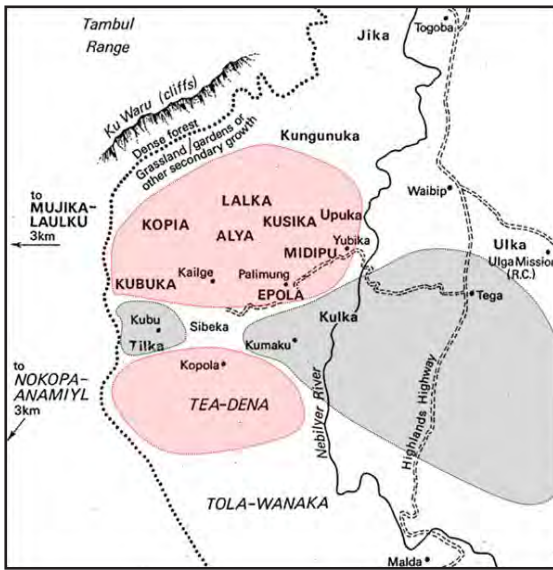
Map 5. Sides in Poison War of 2005-7.
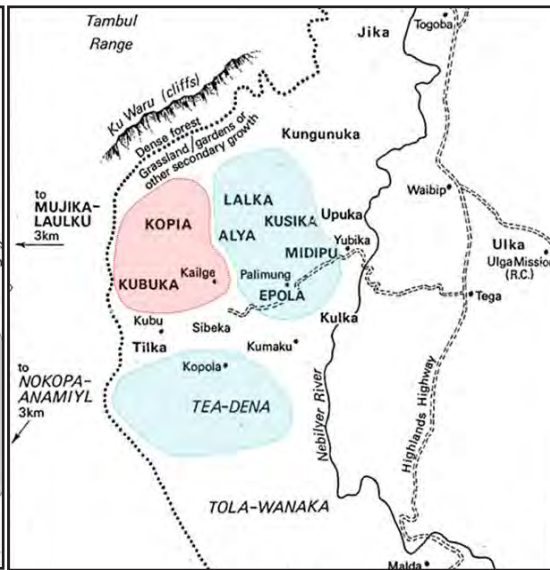
Map 6. Sides in the war fought in the late 1940s (the Kopia and Kubuka tribes were joined by Mujika-Laulku and two other tribes to the east who are not shown on the Map.)

tribes fought against Kopia-Kubuka and their allies from over the Tambul Range: Mujika-Lalkuwu, Poika-Palimi and Engal-Kanibe. In that war the Kopia were regarded as the *el pul* or 'owners' of the fight on one side, and the Tea-Dena in the other.

By 1973, when a community school for the whole region was built at Kailge, in Kopia territory, peaceable relations had been established between Kopia-Kubuka and K-M-E-A-L. Indeed, in recent accounts of that period it has been emphasized that the building of the school was one of the main reasons why peace was made among those groups, all of whom were to send their children to it. But the relations between the 'owners of the fight', Kopia-Kubuka and Tena-Dena (who were also included within the school district) remained tense into the 1980s.

The only neighbours of the Kopia-Kubuka with whom they had *not* had hostile relations at any time in the remembered past were the Tilka. I am not certain how long ago the first Tilka people settled in the area to the south Kubuka territory, but it is clear that at least some land in the northern part of it that region had previously been Kubuka territory was given to Tilka precisely because they were at the time a non-aligned group with respect to the old enmity between Kopia-Kubuka and Tea-Dena, thereby further consolidating

the status of Tilka country as a buffer zone between the two.

In 1982 there was a big shift in political relations in the region. In July of that year the war broke out that I have referred to above, between the Tea-Dena and their former allies the Epola-Alya. The Tea-Dena recruited the Tola-Wanaka to fight on their side. On the other side the Epola-Alya were joined by their old allies Kusika, Midipu and Lalka, but also by their former enemies the Kopia-Kubuka, who were recruited as allies by the Kusika-Midipu. The resulting sides in that war are shown in Map 3. As it turned out, the 1982 war was not a major one, thanks to the woman's intervention that I have referred to above (for further details of which, see Merlan and Rumsey 1991: 156-197, Rumsey 2000).

Building in part on that successful act of peacemaking, many new initiatives were taken over the next fifteen years which not only ended the remaining hostilities between the warring sides, but resulted in the creation of a formal alliance then known as the *Faipela Kansil* – a coalition of people in the five local-government council areas which are associated with all those groups. This alliance, also known as *Hapwara*[8], was sealed by a series of wealth exchanges, beginning with the payment of compensation by the Kopia-Kubuka to their allies in the 1982 war, and entering a new phase in the late 1990s with

the initiation of *makayl* ceremonial exchange relations between tribes that had fought on opposite sides of it as major enemies: Tea-Dena and Kopia-Kubuka. At the time this was seen as an exciting new development in that it was the first occasion that anyone in the area could recall in which compensation was paid between the two sides in a war rather than between the allied tribes on either side (for details see Rumsey 2003). Previously, in keeping with the discussion above, this had only happened in cases where the warring sides were joining to fight another tribe or alliance which was a common enemy of both. That is, in terms of Figure 3, all previous cases had been of type 1 or 2 rather than of type 3. Alternatively, rather than thinking of this is a case of type 3, we can think of it as a case of type 2 in which the common enemy (as represented by the large circle at the top of the diagram) was understood to be warfare itself – which both sides were keen to prevent in view of what was happening between the neighbouring Kulka and Ulka tribes, who had been engaged in highly lethal warfare during the 1980s and 90s as described above.

Unfortunately the *faivpela kansel* alliance did not include the Tilka. This seems not to have been due to any animosity against them, but to the fact that even though the Tilka were living in the western Nebilyer valley between the Kubuka and Tea-Dena, their main connections were to the east, with the Kulka.

In 2003 a dispute arose between Tilka and Kopia over the death of a Tilka man, Alfred Alima, who, at his mother's urging, had been given medicine by a Kopia man, John Iki, who had been working at the Mt. Hagen Hospital. Alima is said by some Kopia-Kubuka people to have been HIV positive and may have died of AIDS. But the Tilka blamed it on the medicine and held the Kopia responsible for the man's death. While not necessarily accepting this view, the Kopia paid compensation to the Tilka to assuage their anger, as is customary in such cases.

In 2005 a Kubuka man named Robert Wambu died. The Kubuka claimed that he had been poisoned and blamed the Kopia for it. The two men who were said to have administered the poison were a man from lower (Araim) Kopia who was married to a Tilka woman and a man from upper (No Pengi) Kopia whose mother was a Tilka. Not all Kopia accepted this account of Robert

Wambu's death. Some of them claim that just prior to it he had been bingeing for a solid week on OP (over-proof) rum, and that that was really what killed him. Nonetheless they agreed to make a placatory payment, to Kubuka. The two Kopia men who were charged with the poisoning are said to have confessed to it, but apparently this was forced at gunpoint. In any case they were severely beaten by other Kopia, after which they fled the community and are still living in exile as of 2009. But the ultimate blame was placed on the Tilka, who were said to have given the poison to the two Kopia men via the Tilka mother of one and wife of the other. This was thought to have been done by the Tilka in revenge for the earlier death of Alfred Alima.

Since the Tilka were deemed ultimately responsible for the death by most Kopia and Kubuka, compensation was demanded from them. They refused to pay it, pointing out that the slain man's mother was a Tilka woman, so why would he have been killed by her own kind? Nonetheless, the Tilka were pressed for compensation. One day as all this was going on, and a group of Kopia people were gardening at Sibeka, a Tilka man reportedly tried to shoot at them, and they were saved only by the fact that his gun misfired. When they came back to Kailge and reported this, a large band of Kopia and Kubuka went and attacked the Tilka, driving them from their territory and burning all their houses. They fled to Kulka territory. Kulka then joined them as allies, and in counter-response to that escalation, the K-M-E-A-L joined Kopia-Kubuka. This made a big difference because neither the Kopia-Kubuka nor the Tilka had any guns at that time, but both Kulka and K-M-E-A-L did.

Over the next 18 months, there were several battles and the battle line shifted back and forth, at times deep in Kulka territory and at other times deep into K-M-E-A-L and Kopia-Kubuka territory. All the houses, school buildings and aid post at Kailge were destroyed and only the two churches – Catholic and PNG Bible Church – were left standing. On the Kulka side, all houses on the western side of the Nebilyer River were destroyed and all the residents driven out. Most of them, and most of the refugees from Tilka as well, have settled with the Kulka who live on the eastern side of the Nebilyer. Altogether about 40 people were killed on each side.

As of January 2009 when I visited Kailge, there had been no fighting for a little more than a year, but it was still not considered safe for people from any of the Hapwara groups to travel through Kulka territory. This meant that they could not use the only vehicular road with a bridge across the Nebilyer River that connects the Hapwara area to the outside world. Therefore the area has been for most purposes inaccessible by car since 2005. But a new walking track had been put in that that allows Hapwara people to get to the Highlands Highway, including a new footbridge.

The school at Kailge had not operated since 2005. Plans were being made to get it started up again for the 2009 school year, and I subsequently learned that this has happened, albeit in temporary shelters, with very limited teaching materials.

Because of the fighting my visit to Kailge in January of 2009 was my first to the area since 2004 (after having visited there nearly every year between 1997 and 2003). During the interim I had keeping up on local developments as best I could through phone conversations, work with Kailge people in Goroka, a visitor from Kailge in 2007, and email contact with Douglas Young, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Mt. Hagen. My contact with Douglas Young over the last several years has developed over a shared interest in trying to support efforts by Western Highlanders in warfare-affected regions to make peace. He has long experience in work of this kind, and a keen theoretical and comparative interest in the subject as well a thoroughly practical one, having done a PhD in Conflict Resolution at Macquarie University based on his work Enga Province[9].

THE 2009 PEACE BUILDING WORKSHOP

When Douglas Young heard from me that I was coming to Mount Hagen in January of 2009, he invited me to join him in a workshop on tribal fighting and peacemaking, with special reference to the recent fight in the Nebilyer. At first he had thought of this primarily as a workshop for parish priests and other church personnel, to allow me to share and exchange perspectives with them about the fighting and how to contribute to peacemaking. But as our plans for the

workshop developed, especially in view of the fact that the fighting had been dormant for some time by then and leaders on both sides of it seemed ready to talk, we decided to invite them to participate as well. Written invitations were sent to three of the elected village Councillors on either side of the fight. The workshop was held on 21 January, 2009 in a meeting room on the grounds of Repiamul Catholic Mission in Mount Hagen. It was attended by 38 people, including five of the six invited councillors and five other men who had been involved in the fighting. All of the discussion was conducted in Tok Pisin, the only language common to all the participants. Archbishop Douglas opened the workshop with some remarks about the how it was related to previous peace-building efforts in the region, including an ecumenical action-research project called 'The Churches and Peacebuilding'[10] and a current campaign in the Western Highlands called '*Tok nogat long vailens na pasin birua*', 'Say no to violence and hostility'. He stressed that the main aim of the workshop was not to serve as a forum for the negotiation of a peace a settlement but rather, to help us understand the conflict. While we hoped that this would help build the foundation for a future settlement, we considered it premature to try to broker one here. Nor was the occasion to be considered an inquest for the purpose of determining who was to blame for what had happened. It was simply to improve our understanding of the conflict and share ideas about how to resolve it. This was followed by a Bible reading (Matthew 5:9, *Ol man i save mekim dai ol kros na fait, em oli ken amamas, bai oli kolim em pikinini bilong God…*), and a prayer in which God was asked to help workshop participants deal with each other in a spirit of reconciliation. Each of us then introduced ourselves.

I was then asked to give the opening presentation on the recent fighting in the Nebilyer Valley. I began with a review of the background to the fight as presented above. Using those events as an example, I then set out some general points which I think were already familiar to most of the participants, but which I wanted to get on the table for discussion. Since they may be less familiar to some of the readers of this paper, I will summarize the main ones, most of them very briefly, but the first of them from a broader comparative perspective than would have been appropriate for the workshop.

CONCLUSIONS

That first concluding point I made at the workshop is one that I have stressed above, namely, the continuing absolute centrality for people in this region of the named segmentary groups to which everyone belongs. This has been stressed by many anthropologists and other social scientists, but especially by indigenous ones from the region such as John Muke (1993), Joseph Ketan (2004), and Andrew Lakau (1994). This is of course true of some other areas of PNG besides the central and western highlands, but those latter areas are unique within PNG for the sheer size of the groups and the extent of their internal ramification. In the Mount Hagen region for example it is not uncommon to find named groups with 5,000-10,000 members and seven or more levels of internal subdivision within them. In keeping with the principle of complementary opposition that I have discussed above, this provides a built in potential for small local conflicts to escalate into large regional ones, such as we have seen the case of the Nebilyer one that I have described.

In the way this escalation is modelled in classical segmentary lineage theory, it is treated as a matter of conflicts between lower-level groupings that escalate to become ones between large groupings. In the case of the Poison War of 2005-7 as described above something else is involved as well: the projection outward of conflicts *within* the lower-level groupings. This is exemplified by the way in which a conflict that had begun to develop between the closely allied Kopia and Kubuka tribes was transformed into one in which Kopia and Kubuka were jointly opposed to Tilka. That transformation had two aspects to it. First, rather than supporting the two men accused of poisoning Robert Wamu, their fellow Kopia accepted the Kubuka account of what had happened and turned on the two men, in effect expelling them from the area. Second, while accepting the claim that those men had been in on the poisoning, rather than allowing all of the blame to be attributed to them, their fellow Kopia identified the Tilka as its ultimate source. This in effect allowed a potential conflict between Kopia and Kubuka to be projected outward, on to the preexisting one between Kopia and Tilka – ultimately with disastrous consequences.

A similar turn of events lay behind the 'Marsupial Road War' of 1982 that I referred to above, which was said have started as a dispute between a Tea man and a Dena one, Peam, who then left the Dena area to live with his in-laws among the Epola, some of whom then attacked a Tea man in retaliation for the Tea's treatment of the Peam[11]. Both in these kinds of cases involving outward projection and the ones involving the more usual sort of complementary opposition as discussed earlier, we see conflicts becoming amplified in ways that are especially facilitated by the kinds of segmentary group structures that are found in the Western Highlands region, and by people's strong commitments to them as a key aspect of their social identity.

The second general point is that, if we are going to think about the payment of compensation as a form of conflict resolution, we have to pay close attention to what it is being paid for, and to the nature of the relations between donor groups and recipient ones as shown in Figure 3. That is, it makes all the difference in the world whether the payment is being made between: 1) groups who have fought on the same side, i.e. between a 'fight source' group and its allies; 2) groups who have fought against each other and are paying compensation to build an alliance against a common enemy group; or 3) groups who have fought against each other and paying compensation to end the fighting and assuage their anger with each other, but without a common enemy in view. These three different scenarios have very different potential consequences – 1) and 2) being understandable as a 'zero-sum game' with respect to the balance of probabilities between war and peace[12] while 3) is in principle more conducive to peacemaking per se.

Third, when trying to promote peacemaking efforts here as elsewhere in the world it is important to recognize the crucial role played by persons and groups who are what is called in Tok Pisin *namel*, 'in the middle, 'in between'. More than merely 'neutral', these are persons or groups who have an active interest in the welfare of people on both sides of the fight, and therefore in helping them try to put an end to it. Kulka and Tilka men for example were able to play this role vis à vis the opposing sides in the Marsupial Road War of 1982. The Kulka Women's Group was able to play it to an even greater extent, in part because they were identified with Kulka (many by marriage rather than birth), but also because they were *women*, who are *in general* positioned as 'in between'

with respect to the groups who fight the wars – named segmentary groups such as the ones discussed above (cf. M. Strathern 1972, Merlan and Rumsey 1991:156-97, Rumsey 2000). At the workshop I pointed out that women's groups have played this kind of role to a greater extent elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, perhaps most famously in the Bougainville Peace Process (Sirivi and Havini 2004). Since Francesca Merlan and I have found that men in the Nebilyer Valley readily recognize the potential value of women's position in this respect, and generally speak approvingly of the Kulka women's action in the Marsupial Road War, I challenged those at the workshop to think about why such actions are relatively rare in the Highlands and about what could be done to provide more scope for it.

A related point concerning the *namel* position is one that has one that has been well developed in the literature on conflict resolution (e.g. Young 2004), namely the importance of appealing to common interests shared on both sides of the conflict. A good example of this is the way in which the Kulka Women's Group drew on the fact that their raison d'être was business and economic development – something that everybody wanted. When the women marched onto the battlefield between the opposing sides they brought with them trade goods they had bought with the proceeds of their cash-cropping activities and distributed them to the men on both sides, pointing out to them in no uncertain terms that tribal warfare was inimical to such activities, and that was one of the reasons why they should lay down their arms.

Another local example of the importance of the recognition of common interests is the observation I have reported above that people made in relation to the putting aside of old hostilities between Kopia-Kopia and other tribes in the region as a condition for establishing the first school in the area at Kailge in 1973. In the wake of its destruction in 2006, the headmaster of that school came to see me with a delegation the day before the 2009 workshop to impress on me how important it was for the peace process that the school be rebuilt, as a resource for the future that people would be loathe to put at risk by fighting again.

Finally on the subject of *namel*, I stressed that perhaps the single most effective force of this kind over much of Papua New Guinea

– and certainly in the Nebilyer Valley – are the churches. The workshop itself was an obvious example, hosted as it was by the Catholic Church, in the context of the ongoing Catholic and wider ecumenical peace-building programs that were referred to by Archibishop Douglas in his opening remarks. At the 'grassroots' level, on my visit to Kailge I heard about a peace ceremony that had been conducted by Catholic and PNG Bible Church leaders a few weeks before among men who had fought on the Hapwara side. At the workshop two of the Kulka speakers from the other side told of an Evangelical Christian 'Crusade' meeting that had been conducted in the Kulka heartland in December of 2007 at which the Kulka belligerents had vowed to not to fight any more. Both of these events helped prepare the way for January 2009 workshop, which was the first time when leaders from both sides had come together and made the same pledge to each other. During the fighting itself, the special status of the churches in this and other respects was tacitly but powerfully acknowledged by the church buildings having been left untouched when the rest of the Kailge was routed by the Kulka and Tilka.

Still as of the time I am writing this discussion paper in October of 2009, there are three remaining obstacles to long-term peace in the Western Nebilyer region that remain to be resolved. The first is that, in keeping with the protocols I have described above, there are massive amounts of compensation that remain to be paid by the 'fight source' groups to their allies. A second obstacle is that both sides are still armed with automatic rifles and – so my friends on the Hapwara side tell me – prepared to use them if conditions take a turn for the worse. Third, there is the fact that the Tilka have been driven off their land and that it has been occupied by Kubuka people with no intention of ever allowing them to come back (as opposed the to *hapwara* Kulka area with is being kept unoccupied with a prospect left open of allowing the Kulka to return to it if relations improve).

This third point leads to a question that I will briefly consider here. Was the fight really about land? So far, given my long-term identification with Kopia, I have not had a chance to discuss this matter with any of the Tilka people who were routed from their land. The Kopia and Kubuka people who routed them and have moved onto that land never say that the prospect of doing so was why they fought with the Tilka, attributing

it instead to the alleged poisonings I have discussed above. But it seems more than fortuitous that one of the main stirrers in favor of fighting was a man who had ceded a good deal of his land to Tilka back when it was useful to have them in a neutral buffer zone between him and Tea-Dena to the south; and that the fighting between Kopia-Kubuka and Tilka broke out only after that had ceased to be the case, owing to the peace that been established between Tea-Dena and Kopia-Kubuka.

In the literature on New Guinea warfare and local politics generally there has been much discussion of the question of whether or to what extent the need for land has been a cause of tribal warfare. Partly under the influence of Mervyn Meggitt's writings on the subject (Meggitt 1977), at one time 'land pressure' was widely believed by anthropologists and government officials to be an important causal factor, especially in the most densely populated parts of the Highlands such as the central Enga region where Meggitt had done his research. More recently this view has been strongly contested, not least by scholars from the Highlands such as Kundepen Talyaga (1978) and Andrew Lakau (1995) and from Enga region – who claim that there is adequate land for everyone's use throughout the area – and Joseph Ketan from the Melpa region who argues that a far more important factor is competition for renown for one's group, as encapsulated in the name of his excellent book *The Name Must Not Go Down* (Ketan 2004). These scholars are no doubt right that the way in which warfare and land pressure had been thought to be linked in the earlier accounts was too direct and simplistic. But before ruling it out altogether in this case I would want to canvas the issue with the vanquished as well as the victors.

My talk at the workshop was followed by many outpourings of sorrow over the fighting, exhaustion, self criticism for it, and an agreement for the leaders to go back to their constituencies to plan a peace settlement. This is still in train. Overall, the workshop was successful, showing the real potential of churches to play a *namel* role. A condition of its success was its timing. It came just when the combatants were ready for it – thoroughly exhausted by the fighting, with by then a roughly equal number of casualties on both sides.

Given the remaining obstacles I have pointed out above it is by no means certain how long the current peace the Nebilyer Valley will last, or whether the dispute that gave rise to the war can be resolved. But the likelihood of its breaking out again in the near future was almost certainly reduced by the workshop. More generally, along with Douglas Young, I hope that some lessons were learned there which can be applied in the other parts of the Western Highlands from which most of the participants came – and perhaps more widely still by readers of this discussion paper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHOR NOTES

Alan Rumsey is a Senior Fellow in Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. His research fields are Highland New Guinea and Aboriginal Australia, with particular focus on language and its relation to other dimensions of culture and social life, including its political ones. Recent publications include 'The articulation of indigenous and exogenous orders in Highland New Guinea and Beyond' (*The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 17: 47-69, 2006) and, with Joel Robbins, an edited collection entitled Anthropology and the Opacity of Other Minds (In *Anthropological Quarterly* 81: no. 2, 2008) Address: Department of Anthropology, RSPAS, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia. Email: alan.rumsey@anu.edu.au

REFERENCES

Barnes, John 1962. African Models in the New Guinea Highlands. *Man* 62: 5-9.

Bohannan, P.J. & L. 1953. *The Tiv of Central Nigeria*. International African Institute, London.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1940. *The Nuer*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Gibbs, P. & D.W. Young. 2007. *The Churches and Peace Building in the Papua New Guinea Highlands*. Available as a free download at http://www.pngcpp.org.au/pngcpp/restricted/documents/Peace%20Building%20final.pdf

Ketan, J. 2004. *The name must not go down: political competition and state-society relations in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea*. Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.

Lakau, A.A.L. 1994. *Customary land tenure and alienation of customary land rights among the Kaina, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Department of Geographical Studies, University of Queensland.

Meggitt, M. 1977. *Blood is their Argument: Warfare Among the Mae Enga Tribesmen of the New Guinea Highlands*. Mayfield, Palo Alto.

Merlan, F. & A. Rumsey. 1991. *Ku Waru: Language and Segmentary Politics in the Western Nebilyer Valley*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Muke, J. 1993. *The Wahgi opo kumbo: an account of warfare in the Central Highlands of New Guinea*. Cambridge University PhD thesis.

Rumsey, A. 1999. Social Segmentation, Voting, and Violence in Papua New Guinea. *The Contemporary Pacific* 11: 305-333.

Rumsey, A. 2000. Women as Peacemakers - A Case from the Nebilyer Valley, Western Highlands, Papua New Guinea. In, S. Dinnen & A. Ley. (eds.), *Reflections on Violence in Melanesia*, pp. 139-155. Hawkins Press and Pacific Studies Press. Annandale, Canberra and Sydney.

Rumsey, A. 2003. Tribal Warfare and Transformative Justice in the New Guinea Highlands. In, S. Dinnen, A. Jowett & T. Newton (eds.), *A Kind of Mending: Restorative Justice in the Pacific Islands,* pp. 79-93. Canberra, Pandanus Press.

Sirivi, J. & M. Havini. 2004. A*s Mothers of the Land: The Birth of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom*. Pandanus Books, Canberra.

Strathern, A. 1971. *The Rope of Moka: Big-men and ceremonial exchange in Mount Hagen New Guinea*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Strathern, M. 1972. *Women in Between: Female Roles in a Male World*. Seminar Press, London.

Talyaga, K. 1978. Review of M. Meggitt, Blood is their Argument. *Yagl Ambu* 5(2): 179-188

Wagner, R. 1974. Are there social groups in the New Guinea Highlands? In, M. Leaf (ed.), *Frontiers of Anthropology: An Introduction to Anthropological Thinking,* pp. 95-122. D. Van Nostrand Company, New York.

Young, D.W. 2004. *Our land is green and black: conflict resolution in Enga*. Melanesian Institute, Goroka.

ENDNOTES

1   See Merlan & Rumsey (1991: 34-45) for some important qualifications on the use of these terms, and for further details concerning the nature of *talapi*. Following Strathern (1971, 1972) we use the term 'tribe' for the most inclusive named socio-territorial groups in the area.

2   Any such figure is for certain purposes too simple as it represents as static structures what are actually dynamic pro-cesses, with, at any given time, rather more structural indeterminacy than is captured by Figure 1. For a fuller, more delicate account of Kopia segmentation which takes account of this indeterminacy, see Merlan & Rumsey (1991: 34-56). For present purposes Figure 1 is adequate.

3   Both in its title and in its introduction, the publication in which Wagner presents this critique (Wagner 1974) is framed as though it is meant to apply to the New Guinea Highlands in general, but the

13

question is addressed entirely on the basis of evidence from a single region, Karamui, on the southern edge of the central Highlands. The social organization of the Daribi people that Wagner studied there is very different from the segmentary organization that is found in the Western Highlands region discussed in this paper, so his argument is not really relevant for the latter, although it is often read that way. Conversely, I urge my readers to bear in mind that the kind of segmentary organization described in this paper is only found in certain parts of the Highlands, by no means all of them.

4   As shown on the Map 4 at the locale referred to above. For further details of these and subsequent developments, see Merlan & Rumsey (1991: 50-52).

5   These terms correspond closely to indigenous Melpa and Ku Waru terms which draw this distinction in terms of kind of feathers worn on the battle shields when fighting. Major enemies are *el parka yi-ma* 'Red Bird of Paradise men'.

6   Likewise, Andrew Strathern reports for the Melpa area that: 'Informants at Mbukl [his field site] maintained that in the past no war payments were made to major enemies, only to minor enemies, with whom it was expected that peace could be made and who might be one's allies in a different fight sequence of fights later (Strathern 1971: 90). Meggitt (1977) says the same thing about the Mae Enga.

7   Unambiguous testimony on this point is provided by the Melpa big-man Onga in the film 'The Kawelka' (in the 'Disappearing World' series made by Granada Television). When asked what would happen if he did not succeed in pulling off the moka event he was trying to organise Ongka replied, only half jokingly, that in that event his exchange partners would take him behind the house and slit his throat.

8   This is a Tok Pisin term meaning roughly 'on one side of the river' – in this case referring to people to the west of the Nebilyer River. For further details concerning this alliance and its relation to national-level electoral politics in the region, see Rumsey (1999).

9   A revised version of his thesis has been published as Young (2004). See also Gibbs & Young (2007).

10 As reported on in Gibbs & Young 2007, which is available online at http://www.pngcpp.org.au/pngcpp/restricted/documents/Peace%20Building%20final.pdf

11 For further details see Merlan & Rumsey (1991).

12 For an example of failure by a government official to recognize this difference when trying to promote peacemaking in the Nebilyer Valley, see Merlan & Rumsey (1991: 179).

SSGM Discussion Paper Series (2004/1 - 2009/6)

2004/1:   Phillip Gibbs, Nicole Haley and Abby McLeod, Politicking and Voting in the Highlands: The 2002 Papua New Guinea National Elections

2004/2:   David Hegarty, Ron May, Anthony Regan, Sinclair Dinnen, Hank Nelson and Ron Duncan, Rebuilding State and Nation in Solomon Islands: Policy Options for the Regional Assistance Mission

2004/3:   Michael Goddard, Women in Papua New Guinea's Village Courts

2004/4:   Sarah Garap, Kup Women for Peace: Women Taking Action to Build Peace and Influence Community Decision-Making

2004/5:   Sinclair Dinnen, Lending a Fist? Australia's New Interventionism in the Southwest Pacific

2004/6:   Colin Filer, Horses for Courses: Special Purpose Authorities and Local-Level Governance in Papua New Guinea

2004/7:   Robert Muggah, Diagnosing Demand: Assessing the Motivations and Means for Firearms Acquisition in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea

2004/8:   Sinclair Dinnen and Edwina Thompson, Gender and Small Arms Violence in Papua New Guinea

2005/1:   Nic Maclellan, Conflict and Reconciliation in New Caledonia: Building the Mwâ Kâ

2005/2:   Michael Morgan, Cultures of Dominance: Institutional and Cultural Influences on Parliamentary Politics in Melanesia

2005/3:   Hank Nelson, Fighting for her Gates and Waterways: Changing Perceptions of New Guinea in Australian Defence

2005/4:   Allan Patience, The ECP and Australia's Middle Power Ambitions

2005/5:   Jerry Singirok, The Use of Illegal Guns: Security Implications for Papua New Guinea

2005/6:   Jaap Timmer, Decentralisation and Elite Politics in Papua

2005/7:   Donovan Storey, Urban Governance in Pacific Island Countries: Advancing an Overdue Agenda

2005/8:   Jon Fraenkel, Political Consequences of Pacific Island Electoral Laws

2006/1:   Hank Nelson, Governments, States and Labels

2007/1:   Peter Larmour, Evaluating International Action Against Corruption in the Pacific Islands

2007/2:   Brij V. Lal, 'This Process of Political Readjustment': Aftermath of the 2006 Fiji Coup

2007/3:   Hank Nelson, The Chinese in Papua New Guinea

2007/4:   Paul D'Arcy, China in the Pacific: Some Policy Considerations for Australia and New Zealand

2007/5:   Geoffrey White, Indigenous Governance in Melanesia

2008/1:   Brij V. Lal, One Hand Clapping: Reflections on the First Anniversary of Fiji's December 2006 Coup

2008/2:   Paulson Panapa and Jon Fraenkel, The Loneliness of the Pro-Government Backbencher and the Precariousness of Simple Majority Rule in Tuvalu

2008/3:   Kate Higgins, Outside-In: A Volunteer's Reflections on a Solomon Islands Community Development Program

2008/4:   Sarah Kernot & Lai Sakita, The Role of Chiefs in Peacebuilding in Port Vila

2008/5:   Debra McDougall, Religious Institutions as Alternative Structures in Post-Conflict Solomon Islands? Cases from Western Province

2008/6:   Abby McLeod, Leadership Models in the Pacific

2008/7:   Nicole Haley, Strengthening Civil Society to Build Demand for Better Governance in the Pacific. Literature Review and Analysis of Good Practice and Lessons Learned

2008/8:   Richard Eves, Cultivating Christian Civil Society: Fundamentalist Christianity, Politics and Governance in Papua New Guinea

2008/9:   Into A. Goudsmit, Nation Building in Papua New Guinea: A Local Alternative

2008/10 George Williams, Graham Leung, Anthony J. Regan and Jon Fraenkel: Courts and Coups in Fiji: The 2008 High Court Judgement in *Qarase v Bainimarama*

2008/11 Keith Joseph & Charles Browne Beu, Church and State in the Solomon Islands

2009/1:   Elizabeth Reid, Interrogating a Statistic: HIV Prevalence Rates in PNG

2009/2:   Michael Green, Fiji's Short-lived Experiment in Executive Power-sharing, May-December 2006

2009/3:   Peter Coventry, The Hidden Mechanics of Solomon Islands Budget Processes - Understanding Context to Inform Reforms

2009/4:   Hank Nelson, Mobs and Masses: Defining the Dynamic Groups in Papua New Guinea

2009/5:   Nick Bainton & John Cox: Parallel States, Parallel Economies: Legitamacy and Prosperity in Papua New Guinea

2009/6:   Robert Norton, The Historical Trajectory of Fijian Power

For details of the SSGM Discussion Papers published from 1996, see the SSGM website:
http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia/discussion.php

Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies

State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) is a program of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University. SSGM's key objectives are to encourage scholarship on governance and state-society relations; generate dialogue throughout Melanesia and the Pacific Islands on these issues; and assist in bridging policy and research. The Program's research and outreach focuses on:

* Island Melanesia - Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji;
* the culturally-related region to the west including Papua/Irian Jaya and Timor; and
* the countries of the Pacific Islands region to the north and east.

State, Society and Governance in Melanesia
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
ANU College of Asia and the Pacific
Australian National University

Contact:
Telephone: +61 2 6125 8394 Fax: +61 2 6125 5525 Email: ssgm@anu.edu.au
http://rspas.anu.edu.au/melanesia