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Pacific Women and Peace: Bougainville's 'Mothers of the Land'

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Abstract

War is widely regarded as men's business. Women are often assumed to have a particular affinity and talent for peace. These stereotypes have the unfortunate effect of reinforcing conceptions of manliness defined in terms of warrior-like qualities (Bates 77; Dyfan 1). They may also change, especially as modern militaries admit women to combat responsibilities. Either way, they do not make it easy for women to secure seats at the negotiating table or to make themselves heard in the context of peace processes,¹ which tend to be dominated by the presence and concerns of former fighting men and their political spokesmen. Even when they manage to participate, the contributions by women tend to go unrecognised; women's support for peace is frequently overlooked, or simply taken for granted.

EDWARD P. WOLFERS

Pacific Women and Peace: Bougainville's 'Mothers of the Land'

War is widely regarded as men's business. Women are often assumed to have a particular affinity and talent for peace. These stereotypes have the unfortunate effect of reinforcing conceptions of manliness defined in terms of warrior-like qualities (Bates 77; Dyfan 1). They may also change, especially as modern militaries admit women to combat responsibilities. Either way, they do not make it easy for women to secure seats at the negotiating table or to make themselves heard in the context of peace processes,¹ which tend to be dominated by the presence and concerns of former fighting men and their political spokesmen. Even when they manage to participate, the contributions by women tend to go unrecognised; women's support for peace is frequently overlooked, or simply taken for granted.

If this seems a somewhat unexpected introduction to an article in a journal devoted to women of the South Pacific and post-colonial literatures, then it might be wise to reflect on the dire circumstances of conflict within and across national borders in which people of many states decolonised in the second half of the twentieth century actually live, including Pacific islands countries. Think, in particular, of the recent conflicts and peace processes in Papua New Guinea's recently renamed Autonomous Region of Bougainville (formerly the 'North Solomons Province', and often known, both before and since, simply as 'Bougainville') and Solomon Islands; the remarkable contributions women have made to peace-making and peace-building there (and to reconciliation and the maintenance of peace in Fiji); and the growing body of literature documenting women's experiences and concerns in violent conflicts and peace processes, and the work done to maintain and build peace in the South Pacific and other parts of the world.²

A remarkable feature of this literature is the way in which it differs from the generality of other autobiographies and biographies of Pacific islands women. While most other books by and about Pacific islands women tend to focus on the life-story of a particular person, generally (but not always) someone prominent in public life or a writer herself,³ the conflict and peace literature deals with issues and processes, and tells the stories of women of different ethnic origins, diverse social status, and widely varying economic circumstances. Some of these women have written their own stories. Others have had help to record them. Accounts of both kinds are included in the publication which has prompted this

article: ... as Mothers of the Land: *The Birth of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom*, edited by Josephine Tankunai Sirivi and Marilyn Taleo Havini (2004). In fact, this publication is in several parts: a book of more than two hundred pages, and two very substantial online addenda — one of ‘Original Documents’ relevant to the history of the conflict and efforts to make peace in Bougainville, and the other of ‘More First-Hand Accounts’ (which includes the apparently uncut and unedited originals of some materials contained in the book). Rich as they are, the materials in these printed and online publications are only part of a much larger store of information available⁴ about women’s activities and experiences in the lead-up to the Bougainville conflict, on various sides and at different locations during the fighting (including refuge and travel to publicise the issues abroad), and in the processes by which peace has been made and is still being built. Some of these other materials are written from perspectives quite different from those represented in the volumes just cited. They, too, are also very much part of the history of Bougainville during the period.⁵

The Bougainville conflict (1989–1997) has been repeatedly — and accurately — described as the bloodiest, deadliest and most destructive in the Pacific islands since World War II. Estimates of the death toll among a total population of fewer than two hundred thousand range as high as fifteen to twenty thousand (mostly attributable to lack of public health and medical services and not directly to conflict-related violence). Claims for compensation for injuries, death of close kin, damage and destruction amount to many billions of (US) dollars (note: these are claims, not agreed or court-sanctioned amounts).

A remarkable feature of the origins, history and evolution of the Bougainville conflict into a peace process is the role that women have played at every stage. Even more remarkable, women’s contributions have been recognised — sometimes positively, in the way that some Bougainville and other Papua New Guinean leaders, Australian and New Zealand Government Ministers, and various United Nations affiliates have given public acknowledgement, and in nominations for and award of a number of prestigious international prizes;⁶ and sometimes only grudgingly, for example, when leading former combatants have tried to silence or exclude women from meetings where they did not want to hear what they might say.

Most (though not all) Bougainville societies are matrilineal: they trace the inheritance of land rights, in particular, through mothers, not fathers. Anthropologists have long researched, written and argued over the implications for the relative status of women and men. But, whatever their findings (which seem to suggest that women generally enjoy no higher status or better treatment in matrilineal than in other Melanesian societies, which are generally dominated by men), many contemporary Bougainvillean women claim that, as ‘mothers of the land’ — a term which ambiguously suggests both birth in Bougainville and a special, maternal relationship with land — they have substantial influence in

public affairs (Garasu 1; Hakena 2000 18).⁷ According to Roselyne Kenneth, land rights provide ‘an important base for a person’s status’ in her home area, Haku, on Buka. Although discussions about land rights are often dominated by men, who therefore, appear to dominate socio-political life, the reality is quite different: absence from public life was not the same as lacking power’. She goes on to cite a number of social, cultural and other factors which constrain women’s overt participation in public discussions and decisions over land (374). The contributors to ... *as Mothers of the Land* generally seem to hold a similar view. In societies, such as Nagovisi on the West Coast of Bougainville, where it is reported that women control land and administer gardens, and men work in the gardens under their wives’ direction (Nash 401), it would be hard to argue the point. The tension between competing conceptions of the importance and implications of gender in matrilineal societies in Bougainville can probably best be resolved by recognising the extent to which individuals’ and communities’ links with the land are often a matter of claims, not precisely defined and mutually agreed or externally enforced rights.

In any event, there can be no doubt about the role women have played at critical junctures in Bougainville’s modern history. They include the occasion in August 1969, when a group of women from Rorovana Village on the East coast of Central Bougainville, attempting to prevent bulldozers from working on village land to prepare it for developments in support of the open-cut copper mine at Panguna, were confronted by police. The particular incident is burnt into the consciousness of many Australians who were interested in Papua New Guinea at the time by the newspaper billboards which appeared on Australian streets showing a metal-helmeted and baton-wielding Papua New Guinean policeman trying to push aside a bare-breasted village woman who had just removed a survey peg from the ground — under the headline ‘Australia’s shame!’.

Other events in which Bougainvillean ‘mothers of the land’ played a critical role included the mobilisation and reconstitution of the Panguna Land Owners’ Association in 1987 under the late Francis Ona’s first cousin, Perpetua Serero (who died in September 1989), and subsequent efforts to raise and seek resolution of landowners’ grievances concerning the amount and distribution of benefits, as well as the wider social, environmental and other disturbances caused by mining and related activities in nearby areas.

However, when it came to the political activities which led to demands for Bougainville’s secession from Papua New Guinea, the attempt at secession just before national independence in 1975, and the subsequent negotiations which resulted in the formation of the North Solomons Provincial Government and eventual establishment of the provincial government system throughout the country, women’s names are not prominent on relevant public records.⁸ Perhaps, as Roselyn Kenneth (374, 381, 386) has argued, Bougainville women were preferred — and were most effective when — operating behind the scenes.

The origins and development of the Bougainville conflict have been outlined and analysed in a number of official and other publications.⁹ Many issues were of longstanding, dating back to the 1960s, when commercial copper deposits were identified at Panguna, and mining development began. (Perceptions of Government neglect and questions of Bougainvillean identity date back even further). Failure to resolve key issues associated with mining (and even to address some, including the seven-yearly reviews for which the *Bougainville Copper Agreement* provided following the 1974 renegotiation of the original *Agreement*) led to mounting frustration in landowning communities around the mine. The conflict acquired an increasingly violent aspect from November 1988 on, when talks between landowners and the Papua New Guinea Government broke down, explosives were stolen, and a series of pylons carrying electricity up to the mine were progressively felled, disrupting production. Local police, then Police Mobile Units, and, in time, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force were brought in: in the case of the Defence Force, first, 'in aid to the civil power', and subsequently under a State of Emergency declared in June 1989. Operating together, the Police and Defence Forces became known as the 'security forces'. In ... *as Mothers of the Land*, it is in the atmosphere of uncertainty which accompanied their entry into many villages and their actual conduct on the ground that the story of the conflict begins. Thus, Marcelline Tunim tells how her brother, Kaea, disappeared from her home, to be found a few days later with 'his heart blown out by a powerful gun, his body swollen all over. His front tooth knocked out by a powerful blow. There were signs of knife wounds all over his limbs. He lay there in a pool of blood' (10). The following year, 1990, she was in Vito Village, on the coast just North of Arawa, when she reports seeing members of the security forces 'firing guns as they entered. They scared the villagers with gunfire and shot all the animals: pigs, dogs and chickens. They shot the walls and roofs of the houses and water-tanks' (11). Her neighbour, Marilyn Taleo Havini, records the 'horror' (18) she felt as she learnt what had happened to Kaea. While many Bougainvilleans who had been living in town fled to the bush or sought refuge in Solomon Islands, Havini and her family eventually left for Australia. In addition to raising a family and participating in other activities documented in ... *as Mothers of the Land*, she then produced two volumes documenting alleged human rights abuses in Bougainville (Havini 1995, 1996), while her husband, Moses Havini, became one of the overseas representatives for the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG), the political arm of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). His colleague, Martin Miriori, and wife, Scholastica Raren Miriori, eventually sought refuge in the Netherlands after the house in which they were living in Honiara, Solomon Islands, burnt down. Stories of and by women in all categories — some whose families hid, others who sought refuge in Government-organised 'care centres', and yet others who worked to engage the outside world's interest in the Bougainville conflict — are included in ... *as Mothers of the Land*.

In a paper he wrote when the Bougainville crisis had developed into armed conflict, the partner of one of the contributors to ... *as Mothers of the Land* (Spriggs 1990) has described the uncertainty, rumours and fears in his wife's village when Government personnel were withdrawn in March 1990, and unidentified groups of young men began moving around and trying to establish their sway in local communities.¹⁰ They have been described, according to judgment and taste, as 'militants', 'fighters'/ 'fighting men'/ 'combatants' ('paitman' in Tok Pisin), 'soldiers' (Yep 2), or specifically as members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) or the Bougainville Resistance Forces (BRF), which was formed subsequently, or as 'Rambos' (Liria 78–79). When the security forces began to return to Buka later in the year, and the Buka Liberation Front (the BRF's precursor) was formed, the conflict began to enter a new phase. Rival armed groups of Bougainvilleans were increasingly pitted against each other — with the BRF allied with the security forces, and against the BRA. Many 'civilians' sought refuge in Government 'care centres', or fled from their homes to hide in the bush.

How, then, did women react? Whom did they fear and why, or perceive as a potential or actual threat to themselves, their families, or the particular communities where they lived? In her contributions to ... *as Mothers of the Land*, Josephine Sirivi is clear. She married former Papua New Guinea Defence Force platoon commander turned BRA 'General', Sam Kauona, during the conflict, fled into the jungle when seven months pregnant, and went into labour for two days before giving premature birth to a daughter without any medical assistance (15). As she repeatedly says in her contributions to the book she co-edited, for her, the security forces are 'the enemy'. But when her daughter fell sick, she overcame her tendency to regard members of the security forces as 'being like devils or monsters' (42), and took her to a military hospital, where the mother was recognised, the daughter was treated, and they were both able to 'escape' back to the jungle where the husband and father was fighting (43–44).

Other women's views and experiences were different. Helen Hakena in Buka was also seven months pregnant when the security forces and other Government personnel withdrew. It was then that, '[I]ate one afternoon the ... BRA chased my husband to our home after he refused to give them our car' (the BRA had previously taken five of their company vehicles). Her husband hid; eleven gunmen came to their home looking for him, and threatened to shoot her and the children. After other villagers had forced the gunmen to leave, the BRA returned the next day, 'beating anyone in their path and destroying homes. Our entire village fled and hid in caves on the cliffs'. Malarious, she went into labour ten days later, 'when our home — indeed our entire village — was burnt to the ground' (Hakena 2003 online).

For her part, Sister Lorraine Garasu has described her situation in what was described as a 'Government-controlled area' as 'life between two guns', where

women were harassed by members of both the BRA and the security forces (Garasu 2; UNIFEM 3).

On what might be regarded as ‘the other side’ of the conflict to the BRA, a remarkably thoughtful, critical and self-critical young Defence Force intelligence officer who was assigned to Bougainville in 1990, wrote of the complexity of the situation he faced:

I was in Bougainville, North Solomons Province . . . , just another province of Papua New Guinea. The people were Papua New Guineans just like me. I was a member of the PNG Defence Force, whose role was to fight to protect all the citizens of PNG. Therefore this army belonged to the Bougainvilleans just as much it belonged to other PNG citizens. Therefore they were my people, our people, the very people we were supposed to protect. Then what the bloody hell was I doing here, trying to fight against them? (Liria 16–17)

Subsequently, he attended a briefing at which another officer deliberately referred to ‘your opponents’ in the hope it would ‘psyche up’ his men (71). Soon, the young intelligence office, too, was referring to ‘rebels’ (97); he had already used the term ‘Rambo’ (78–79).

Read one after another, the passages quoted highlight the need for care in any description of the structure and character of the conflict — the more so when account is taken of the involvement of criminals, adventurers, and others for whom the conflict was an opportunity not a political cause,¹¹ and of the ‘commanders’ and other ranks who, for whatever reasons, split away from one of the major armed factions, or even changed sides.

The names of the major armed factions, as well as the titles borne by their members and allies, convey a superficially familiar impression of a war between conflicting disciplined forces; but the reality on the ground was different, much more complex and, in certain respects, both more interesting and difficult to understand. This became clear when arrangements were being made for peace negotiations and it became necessary to ensure the attendance of large numbers of Bougainvilleans (at times, including seventy or more factional ‘commanders’) at meetings, and to provide opportunities for reconciliation between men who had fought on what was otherwise the same side. When the agreed plan for weapons disposal was almost completed in 2001, National Government officials involved in the talks asked for an explanation of some of the terms the main former combatant factions were using — ‘regional’, ‘company’ and ‘unit’ commands, and so forth. It took quite a substantial adjournment before their leaders and spokesmen came back with even the rudimentary diagrams which appear in Attachment 1 to the weapons disposal plan contained in the *Bougainville Peace Agreement*. A noticeable feature of the language used in Bougainville since has been the increasing frequency with which former fighters are now described by other Bougainvilleans as ‘ol yangpela’ or youth — as if the interests and problems they represent are not so much matters of political preference (for and against a separate independence for Bougainville) or post-conflict

demobilisation and (re-)integration into their communities, but more the familiar problems of youth, such as shortage of skills and opportunity for productive employment. Meanwhile, former BRA members still loyal to the late Francis Ona and his decision to remain outside the peace process have announced themselves as belonging to the Meekamui Defence Force (MDF), which has, in turn split, as some of its members have chosen to dispose of their weapons and join in peace-building. When it comes to the BRF, attempts to meet claims for outstanding allowances for assistance provided to the security forces during the conflict have produced sharply different estimates of their numbers because of uncertainty over who really served and what 'membership' actually entailed.

In May 1990, the Government's response to Francis Ona's declaration of Bougainville's independence was to impose a quarantine zone, intended to cut off communications between Bougainville and the outside world (and, as an inevitable consequence, to render travel and the sending of messages within Bougainville more difficult too). While some of the contributors to ... *as Mothers of the Land* were among the people who had left Bougainville when Government personnel were withdrawn earlier in the year, others remained behind, where they were forced to develop and practice self-reliance. As Josephine Tankunani Sirivi reports, this sometimes meant walking up to four hours each way every day to what were believed to be safe locations for making, tending and harvesting food gardens (35).

One of the positive impacts of the mining project was that it gave many Bougainvilleans access to technical training or, at least, the opportunity to study, often both formally and informally, and learn from sometimes complex scientific and technological processes at first hand. As a result BRA members were able to build their own small tank (a metal contraption built on another vehicle's chassis, most recently observed in a ditch in the former provincial capital, Arawa); they managed to dig up and repair both weapons and ammunition left over from World War II; they made their own knives and guns; they ran vehicles on coconut oil; together with their 'civilian' supporters in the BRA's political arm, the BIG, they set up their own radio station, Radio Free Bougainville; and they innovated in other ways. The hills around Arawa (and in other parts of Bougainville) are lit up at night by small hydro-electric schemes, which are often not really safe but nonetheless show what could be done if longstanding political commitments to promote rural electrification in Papua New Guinea were pursued with the same commitment and energy which some participants brought to the Bougainville conflict.

The terrible, negative effects of the withdrawal of Government services, the quarantine zone and the ongoing conflict included a consequent lack of medical services and the closure of schools. Women's groups organised to fill the resulting gaps. According to Havini, between 1990 and 1997, they established twelve health centre bases which provided supplies for twenty-three aid posts and forty-seven

village health clinics, and trained people to staff them. They also operated seventy-one community schools with 4,726 pupils (71). In one of her contributions to ... as Mothers of the Land, Sirivi (73–76) describes how Bougainvillean communities began to produce rice, manufacture wooden spoons, make oil and soap, and prepare their own sweets. They revived the use of traditional medicines, and used cocoa to make bleach.

Even so, a generation of young-to-middle-aged people has grown up, frequently called the ‘lost generation’, who, having missed out on schooling, lack the knowledge and skills to help themselves by undertaking further education, seeking employment, or developing their own businesses. The provision of seeds to encourage planting, tending, harvesting and marketing of cocoa, copra and other agricultural products has become an accordingly important priority for Government, foreign aid donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The importance of providing special programmes for the ‘lost generation’ lies not just in the need to provide opportunities for them to improve material standards of living, but in the contributions such programmes can they make to strengthening social stability and thereby improving the prospects for good governance and development.

... as Mothers of the Land, both the book and the other First-hand Accounts available online, give insights into the experiences of women, in particular, during the Bougainville conflict. They add to the otherwise hidden human dimension concealed beneath and within the plans and statistics produced by Government, foreign aid donors and NGOs trying to assess and assist in the post-conflict situation. They also cast interesting, new light on the challenges faced by women working for peace, and finding a place and a voice at the negotiating table. During the conflict, women, determined to overcome the multiple challenges posed by the absence of telecommunications and the dangers involved in moving around, organised a number of marches and meetings — not always successfully — to promote peace. Their activities included a march which was stopped by a BRA roadblock in September 1990; the declaration of a ‘peace area’ at Selau in North Bougainville in the following year; the convening of the Bougainville Inter Church Women’s Forum in 1995; a week-long meeting of women at Arawa in July 1996; and other events (some relevant documents are reproduced in the online Addenda — ‘Original Documents’). Bougainville women also lobbied to be included in meetings at which Bougainville political leaders and leaders of the main combatant groups came together to discuss how to make peace.

When women managed to be included in the first meeting between the main combatant groups, an all Bougainville affair, at Burnham, New Zealand, in July 1997, the men there were reported as fearing the women’s ‘politics might be uninformed or “wishy-washy” and therefore counterproductive to the need for facing tough issues.’ They were, therefore, apparently,

very surprised to find that women are as passionate as men in redressing the horrors of wars and bloodshed. In fact, the men who had not heard the women speak before were amazed ... to find the women as vehement as the men on issues of both politics and human rights. On our return to barracks each evening, men would come to congratulate the women for their contributions during the sessions and express surprise at their politics. (Havini 2004)

The outcome was that Bougainville women were present at most subsequent meetings, including those between the Papua New Guinea Government and the various Bougainville groups (other than Francis Ona and his closest supporters, who remained outside). Women's representatives were even allowed to speak at the formal ceremonies when major agreements were signed.¹²

However the women had to keep struggling. At the formal signing ceremony for the *Lincoln Agreement* in January 1998, the chairman, the then-Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, apparently forgot that a Bougainville women's representative was included in the programme to speak at the end of the meeting, and announced the conclusion of proceedings before he was reminded that Agnes Titus was waiting to read out the combined *Women's Statement*. The women were then unexpectedly asked to close the meeting with a song — which they did (Sirivi and Havini 2004a 146–48).

Women were generally not at the meetings, especially those concerned with weapons disposal, because men welcomed their presence and participation (some men made it quite clear that women should not be there, and should certainly not speak). However, the women did not give up. They spoke out very strongly. Who among those of us who were privileged to hear will ever forget the passion with which some Bougainvillean women castigated the men for the suffering, destruction and damage the conflict had brought?¹³

For some of the women, including the editors of ... *as Mothers of the Land*, peace and freedom (by which they mean a separate independence for Bougainville) are inseparable: one leads to the other, and cannot continue for long without it. For others the cause is substantially different: they are willing, and in some cases actively prefer, that Bougainville remain an integral part of Papua New Guinea. For still others, the main issue is not political in the conventional sense, it is simply peace and a strong desire to resume what would otherwise be a normal life.

The outcome of the negotiations which produced the *Bougainville Peace Agreement* is a new Part of the *Papua New Guinea Constitution* and a new Organic Law (itself a Constitutional Law) made under that Part bearing titles, 'Peace-Building in Bougainville — Autonomous Bougainville Government and Bougainville Referendum', which make quite clear that their purpose is peace-building in Bougainville, not only or primarily constitutional change or political self-determination. They are probably the only provisions with 'peace-building' in their names in any national constitutional laws in the world (the focus on 'peace-building' was vital to securing the political support of Papua New Guinean

politicians who were otherwise reluctant about their contents, but recognised the need, both political and moral, to support what had been agreed for the sake of peace). They provide for the establishment of an Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) with very substantial functions, powers and control over resources, including assured financial grants from the National Government, the ability to participate through agreed arrangements in activities otherwise reserved to the National Government, and the right to initiate the gradual transfer of additional responsibilities. They also contain a guarantee of a referendum on Bougainville's political future ten to fifteen years after the election of the ABG (which took place in the middle of 2005), in which the option of a separate independence for Bougainville will be available to Bougainvillean voters (the outcome of the referendum is not automatic; it is subject to the final decision-making authority of Papua New Guinea's National Parliament).

Women were active participants in the process by which the *Constitution* for the ABG was made.¹⁴ Three of the twenty-four members of the Bougainville Constitutional Commission — one each from North, Central and South Bougainville — were women; women were also represented in the Bougainville Constituent Assembly which adopted the *Constitution*. In addition to objectives and principles which apply to all human beings, it makes the following commitment:

The role and welfare of women in traditional and modern Bougainville society shall be recognised and encouraged and shall be developed to take account of changing circumstances (s 28).

It also contains specific provisions providing for 'fair representation of women and marginalised groups on all constitutional and other bodies' (s 19), and encouragement of 'customary practices of provision of care for widows' (s 20) and others.

At a practical level, Bougainvillean women are guaranteed at least three seats in the Bougainville legislature through the establishment of special electorates (again, one for each Region of Bougainville) for which women alone can stand but all eligible adults can vote (s 55); the legislature consists of a total of thirty-nine elected members, together with a directly elected President, and a Speaker chosen from outside the chamber. At least one of the ten members of the Bougainville Executive Council must be a woman, chosen by the other woman members (s 80). Women have the same rights as men to enrol, vote and stand for all other seats (except, arguably, the three seats especially set aside for former combatants) and to enrol and vote. It is, therefore, to say the least, somewhat ironic that a team of international observers who followed and reported on the first general election for the ABG in 2005, aware that women did not contest other seats, has speculated that the creation of the special seats for women 'may have had an unintended effect of marginalising them within the [electoral] process' (Commonwealth Secretariat 14). It also seems worthy of note, though

the meaning is not clear, that, while a number of women who had been prominent in the events depicted in ... *as Mothers of the Land*, including one of the contributors (Marcelline Tunim) nominated in the election, they were not successful.

The three women members of the Bougainville legislature include a journalist and former member of the Bougainville Constitutional Commission, a former diplomat, and (in a positive sign as regards local acceptance of persons from other parts of Papua New Guinea) a woman born on Karkar Island in the Madang Province married to a Bougainvillean. One of these members, Magdalene Toroansi, is a Minister in the ABG, responsible for Women, Religion, Traditional Authority, Local-level Government, and Non-Government Organisations, while another, Francisca Semoso, is Deputy Speaker (the meeting at which she was elected was noteworthy for the vigorous way in which women activists lobbying outside the chamber reminded the male members of the Bougainville House of Representatives of the importance of 'gender equity').

Thus Bougainville women have not only played a critical role in Bougainville's recent history but continue to contribute to shaping the future. Their experiences have been recorded not only in ... *as in Mothers of the Land*, but also in the accompanying online annexes, and other published materials.

As the United Nations Security Council¹⁵ has recorded in the preamble to path-breaking Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, women are often among the main victims of war. Women have a great deal to contribute to making, maintaining and strengthening the prospects for peace. Experience in Bougainville, in particular, shows how they can contribute to making and building peace. (Bougainville is also one of very few places where international truce and peace monitoring teams have included women, both civilian and military personnel, all of whom were at all times unarmed.) The same experience also shows how women have to keep struggling to make themselves heard and play a part. Recognition does not come easily. Evidence of this can be seen in the way that, of the eighty-six occasions on which the Nobel Prize for Peace was awarded between 1901 and 2005, only twelve winners were women (this actually represents a bigger share for women than in the case of the other Nobel Prizes). Only two of the prize-winners, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan in 1976, have clearly worked in the context of an intra-state conflict, Northern Ireland (Nobelprize.org 2006: 'The Nobel Peace Prize Laureates', 'List of Women Laureates'). As previously noted, reactions have included the creation of the Millennium Peace Prize for Women, and the unsuccessful nomination of 1,000 women for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

... *as Mothers of the Land* documents the views and experiences of some of the women affected by the Bougainville conflict and actively involved in working for peace. Other publications, including a number cited in this article, document other perceptions and stories. Together, they form part of a Pacific post-colonial

literature of particular poignancy now, and likely relevance to the future, especially when it comes to lessons that should be drawn and taken to heart.

POSTSCRIPT

As some of the experiences recounted above and the accompanying cartoon by Biliso Osake make clear, participation in the Bougainville peace process and the achievement of peace have not freed Bougainvillean women, whether or not they aspire to be writers, from the vicissitudes of daily life, neither those which are specific to the post-conflict situation in Bougainville nor those which affect women in Papua New Guinea (and other countries) more generally. As the Papua New Guinea poet and playwright, Nora Vagi Brash, has observed in a poem entitled 'I ought to be writing' (James 25):

Today someone asked me
'How's your writing going?'
'Fine, except it's washing day.' ...

The still more challenging realities of daily life for women in Bougainville, even after the conflict, are underlined in stories which appeared in the media just as this article was going to press.

In one, a number of chiefs from Kunua in North-West Bougainville were quoted as feeling frustrated because women have been wearing T-shirts and laplaps (or waistcloths) depicting the upe, a hat which has traditionally been used in male initiation ceremonies in the Wakunai area of Central Bougainville ('Chiefs



Slam Use of Sacred Emblem' online). The same symbol also appears on coffee mugs, pens, and other souvenirs freely on sale in Bougainville and tie-pins given to visiting dignitaries by the ABG. Young boys wearing the traditional hats were paraded (and photographed), with their eyes firmly closed, at the ceremonies when the *Ceasefire* and *Bougainville Peace Agreements* were signed in Arawa in 1998 and 2001 respectively.

However, according to one of the chiefs, this symbol of Bougainvillean identity 'must not be worn by women because it is forbidden, according to the *upe* culture'. He went on to express pride that the *upe* appears on the Bougainville flag — which, according to ... *as Mothers of the Land* (181), is 'widely recognised in Bougainville' as having been designed by one of the women who co-edited the book, Marilyn Taleo Havini.

Other stories which appeared in the media two weeks later highlighted problems which owe more to the lingering effects of the previous conflict and the immediate circumstances of the post-conflict situation. One referred to a rally for a protest against the abuse of women being organised in *Bel Isi* (Tok Pisin for 'peace') Park in Buka, where the neutral, regional Peace Monitoring Group had had its northern headquarters. Issues to be addressed included HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, rape, prostitution, pornography and wife bashing, which were described as major issues in Bougainville and Papua New Guinea-wide. The report of the proposed rally did not refer specifically to the post-conflict traumas from which many Bougainvilleans continue to suffer and which have been cited elsewhere as a major cause of serious, continuing violence against women in Bougainville. The main organiser, Bougainville Deputy Speaker, Francisca Semosa, was concerned because village women feel 'suppressed and stuck' because nobody would address their problems with enough vigour. Police and other agencies were reported to be giving up on issues such as the use of alcohol and drugs by youth — 'which were getting out of hand.' The idea behind the rally was 'for women to stand up' ('Abuse of Women to be Focus of Rally' online).

On the very same day, the same leader, Deputy Speaker Francisca Semosa, responded to a recent incident in which a young woman graduate teacher from East New Britain had the water tank at her house damaged and then been personally abused by a group of young Bougainvillean men before fleeing from Bougainville the very next day, by calling on Bougainvilleans to respect other people who come to work and serve people in Bougainville (*Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, ('Abuse of Women to be Focus of Rally' online).

Thus do Bougainville's mothers of the land continue to experience the lingering effects of the previous conflict, to struggle, and to speak out for peace, freedom and mutual respect following a conflict whose progress and resolution have been documented in the publications discussed above, and whose end owes a great deal to the efforts they made to promote, make and build peace.

NOTES

- ¹ See United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Louise Frechette (2001).
- ² The literature from Bougainville is discussed in, for example, Paina 2000; Pollard 2000 for Solomon Islands; and Rolls 2000 for Fiji. See also the submissions from women's organisations in Pacific ACP Ministerial Mission to Fiji and Solomon Islands 2000, Volume 2 — specifically, those from the Solomon Islands Women for Peace, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, and National Council of Women, Fiji.
- ³ For Papua New Guinea, see Abajjah 1991, Kidu 2002, Turner 1993, and Wedega 1981, and the interviews in James 1996; Carlyon 2002, discussed in some detail elsewhere in this journal, Mead 1960 and Read (1966: 172–211) are noteworthy exceptions, as is the portrait of the relationship with a Western Highlands woman, Pirip, in McCollum 1999. Watson (1997) is another account of the life of a Papuan New Guinean woman, a Tairora-speaker from the Eastern Highlands, who was not a leader though nonetheless outstanding in other ways (xi) — in this case, presented as an autobiography composed from notes made by an anthropologist before the subject's death twenty years before the book was completed (xiv).
- ⁴ Often at costs beyond the means of most Papua New Guineans, and, in the case of online materials, only to the small elite with access to computers, telecommunications and more or less reliable power supplies.
- ⁵ UNIFEM (7–8) lists a number of women's organisations as playing a part in the Bougainville peace process. They include: the Catholic Women's Association, Bougainville / Papua New Guinea Integrated Development Agency, Bougainville Inter-Church Women's Forum, Bougainville / Papua New Guinea Women for Peace and Freedom, Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, Kieta District Council of Women, and the Bougainville Provincial Council of Women.
- ⁶ The Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency was one of six winners of the inaugural Millennium Peace Prize in 2001, an award sponsored jointly by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and International Alert to counter perceptions that women are simply passive victims of conflict, and, apparently, also because the Nobel Peace Prize has been so rarely awarded to women (WomenOf.com 1).

Three Bougainvillean women are among thirty-six women from the Pacific islands and one thousand women worldwide who were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 (which was won by the International Atomic Energy Agency and its Director-General, Mohammed El Baradei). The three Bougainvillean nominees and the organisations which they lead were: Josephine Tankunani Sirivi of Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom, Helen Hakena of the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, and Sister Lorraine Garasu, a sister of the Congregation of Nazareth, of the Bougainville Inter-Church Women's Forum. These three Bougainvillean women were listed separately from three other Papua New Guinean women nominees (*Islands Business*, 31.12, December 2005, pp. 18–19).
- ⁷ The same point is also made by Kris Hakena (2).
- ⁸ Mamak and Bedford (1974: vii) does not include a single woman in the list of twelve short 'Notes on Modern Bougainvillean Leaders' who played a key role in the lead-up to the 1975 declaration of secession and the eventual establishment of the North Solomons Provincial Government which paved the way for the introduction of provincial governments throughout Papua New Guinea.
- ⁹ Comprehensively in the Independent State of Papua New Guinea 1991 Report. For the perspective of an anthropologist with more than fifty years of close involvement with Bougainville, see Oliver 1991. Quodling 1991 is written by the mining company's

managing director. Regan and Griffin 2005 provide what might be termed 'deep background' to the conflict; Denoon 2000 gives the history of establishment of the mine at Panguna. 'Chronology' 2002 provides a useful outline of important events before, during and following the conflict.

- ¹⁰ Other matching accounts of experiences in the Bougainville conflict (and, in this case, the peace process) by husband and wife are Helen Hakena, 2002 and 2003, and Kris Hakena, 2001 3.
- ¹¹ The element of 'plain old thuggery' which has been described as 'a major catalyst of organised violence everywhere' (King 166).
- ¹² See, for example, 'Lincoln Peace Talks Women's Statement' in Sirivi and Havini 2004a, and 'Speech by Ruby Mirinka' in Sirivi and Havini 2004c.
- ¹³ Some of their number also engaged in such activities as causing disruption of previously planned meetings by arriving uninvited and unannounced, or, on one occasion by covering the walls of a room where the Peace Process Consultative Committee was due to meet with posters calling for Bougainville's independence (the meeting was to be chaired by the United Nations, and include representatives of the National Government, who insisted the posters be removed before the meeting proceeded).
- ¹⁴ The *Bougainville Constitution* was made within the framework of the *Papua New Guinea Constitution*, from which it derives its authority and with which it must be consistent.
- ¹⁵ S/RES/1325 available at online [http: www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html](http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html), 24/1/2006. This is closely annotated at online [http: www.womenwarpeace.org/toolbox/annot1325.htm](http://www.womenwarpeace.org/toolbox/annot1325.htm), 24/1/2006.

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