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BLACKFELLA ARMIES
- KASTOM AND CONFLICT IN CONTEMPORARY MELANESIA
1994 - 2007.

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree

Master of Arts (Journalism)

from

The University of Wollongong

by

Ben Bohane

Faculty of Creative Arts
School of Journalism and Creative Writing

2007

CERTIFICATION

I, Ben Bohane, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (Journalism), in the School of Journalism and Creative Writing, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document and associated photographs have not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Ben Bohane

May 2007

Abstract

This dissertation accompanies photographs taken in my role as a photojournalist in the region under study. The photographs on CD are a visual narrative in their own right while serving as part of the overall text and they are referred to regularly throughout the dissertation.

The past decade has seen a significant rise in armed conflict throughout the established nations of Melanesia, as well as in those still fighting for their independence. Thus some are wars of independence, others are civil wars, while others are about reclaiming traditional lands within an acknowledged nation state.

These coups and conflicts have resulted in humanitarian crises', the weakening of government authority and in several instances such as Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, the intervention of armed regional peacekeeping forces led by Australia.

What is at the root of these conflicts? In conducting photojournalism, how can we better understand the conflicting forces prevalent within Melanesian societies? This thesis will argue that beyond the usual diagnosis of corruption, unemployment and poor governance, there is a powerful spiritual component at work - ie the role played by *kastom* and cult movements throughout the region.

These movements were often the embryo for nationalism during colonial times and today they continue to play a significant role in their societies and can be seen as something of a weather-bell for the hopes and frustrations of island communities. They have been responsible for instigating conflict and equally have been instrumental in ending conflict and facilitating reconciliation. Traditionally, *kastom* and cult movements have either been ignored or actively suppressed by government authorities (white and black) and by the established churches. However these movements can also play a positive role in the development and stability of island communities.

A better understanding and appreciation of these movements will add a critical analytical tool to journalists working within the region, who are often accused of superficial, "parachute" journalism. The use of sorcery is rarely reported within the mainstream press, yet it continues to have daily relevance for Pacific islanders regardless of whether they are at war or peace. A basic understanding of the role of *kastom* and cult movements will help reduce the chance of journalistic misrepresentation of big issues such as coupes in Fiji and civil war in the Solomon Islands.

To better understand the socio-political landscape of Melanesia, and so to write more accurately on issues affecting the region,

it is essential to come to terms with the spiritual world its peoples inhabit. To do this I am using a methodology incorporating large amounts of journalistic fieldwork (witnessing and documenting rituals and first hand interviews with spiritual leaders), with a study of previous academic work on the subject.

This overall research process is best described as Participatory Action Research - a broad collection of scholarly activities involving community, solidarity, consultation and commitment. These were necessary to both my journalism in the first instance and in conducting research for this thesis. Participatory Action Research was able to identify any advantage and power between the researcher and the studied - a central issue to the notion of working with indigenous people, whether it be in journalism, ethnography, film-making, diplomacy or defense.

The main case study for this thesis rests on Bougainville, charting the history of Christian, kastom and cult activity there over 100 years leading up to its war of independence from 1988-1998, as well as following the evolution of these movements throughout the war, the role they played in ending the war and in facilitating a successful reconciliation process that has (so far) brought peace to the embattled island.

One hundred and twenty images relating to various Christian, *kastom*, cult and militant groups throughout Melanesia and

Australia are incorporated in the thesis in a CD sleeve, including a section entitled *Big Men* with portraits of various leaders.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my family for allowing the time and space needed to complete the thesis. In print, Editors such as Peter Kerr at the Sydney Morning Herald, Peter Holder at Men's Style magazine and those representing my work through Wildlight Photo Agency in Sydney and Contact Press in Paris and New York - all have helped keep me alive over the years. In the world of TV news and current affairs, Executive Producers Mark Corcoran at ABC Foreign Correspondent and Mike Carey at SBS Dateline have similarly supported my Pacific ideas over the years. Ian Affleck and Shaune Lakin at the Australian War Memorial have done me the honour of purchasing a significant number of my photos for their archives.

I wish also to thank Dr. David Blackall, my Supervisor at Wollongong University for stimulating ideas and methodology around my thesis, plus my best friend and fellow photojournalist Steve Dupont for his great friendship and support. I also remember two great friends who died in the field: Richard Walker-Powell and Mark Worth.

Finally, this thesis is also dedicated to the many Pacific islanders and indigenous Australians who have shared their lives, stories and thoughts with me, with such generosity of spirit, over the years.

BLACKFELLA ARMIES

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KASTOM AND CONFLICT IN CONTEMPORARY MELANESIA 1994-2006

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CHAPTER ONE

1:1 INTRODUCTION

"All great truths begin as blasphemies"¹

- George Bernard Shaw

Since 1994 I have worked as a photojournalist specialising in Melanesia and indigenous Australia; incorporating that vast archipelago of islands and nations above Australia, which stretches from Timor and Maluku in the west to Fiji in the east. In recent years, however, it has come to be known by another term: the "arc of instability".

For some time now, these islands have moved beyond the Club Med visage through which many outsiders have viewed them to one of a troubled region where coupes, conflict and corruption have all shaken the perception of a good many holiday-makers. The South Pacific is no longer pacific, if it ever was.

What has happened here to change our notions of the region? Are these conflicts new or simply the periodic exploding of long running tribal disputes? What is the source of these conflicts

¹ Shaw, G.B. (1856-1950), quote from Annajanska in The Bolshevik Empress. The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with their prefaces, Vol.5, ed. Laurence, D. 1972.

and are there any common themes or triggers for them through which a pattern emerges?

This Master of Arts (Journalism) Thesis is set to provide some degree of answers to these questions.

Much of the political and journalistic discourse analysing the troubles of Melanesia have centred on a diagnosis incorporating political corruption, poor management, lack of "good governance", urbanisation, breakdown of "traditional values" and respect for chiefs, blaming the "wontok" system of tribal loyalties, unemployment and poor education.

Many of these elements alone, or in combination, have certainly played a role in destabilising Melanesian nations. However, as this thesis argues, while each nation faces different circumstances and the simmering conflicts in each case stem from different causes, there is one area that is often overlooked when examining the conflicts of Melanesia, yet has proved to be a significant catalyst.

1.2 *KASTOM*

This catalyst is the role played by *kastom* and so-called "cult" movements in these societies. In order to have a better understanding of the social and political turmoil prevalent in

contemporary Melanesian societies, it is instructive to have an understanding of the belief systems that exist in these societies, including the ability of individual messianic leaders to rally people around a *kastom* philosophy and in some cases even create militia groups to confront government authority.

In Melanesia there is no avoiding the spirit world and the power plays of politics are no different; indeed they are intertwined.

At this stage it is useful to qualify some of the key words I am using since they can be perceived to be loaded terms.

Firstly in using the term *kastom* I refer to a full range of indigenous spiritual movements whose principals may not have changed for millennia, or may have reached back to the old beliefs and reconstituted themselves after an unhappy period of contact with rival theologies such as Christianity.

Since Melanesian religions are traditionally dynamic and evolving, rather than say, the timeless, all-encompassing, all-time consciousness of the Aboriginal Dreamtime², it can even be said that what we see today as *kastom* movements are sometimes in fact *anti-kastom*. That is, they are a new form, different to both traditional ancestor worship and Christian theology, but often

² For a comparison between Melanesian and Aboriginal Australian religion and some ideas as to why the latter has not spawned cargo cults, see Tonkinson, R. chapter "Encountering the Other", p.137-156, in Jebens, H. 2004 *Cargo, Cult & Culture Critique*, University of Hawai'i Press.

blending their traditional spirit world with some of the organisational elements of Christianity.

Also, in describing Melanesia I am signifying an ethno-geographic region and not necessarily an exclusive cultural one, since there are also significant Polynesian communities within those nation states. Some indigenous commentators on Pacific culture decry the anthropological break up of the Pacific into Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, claiming that with centuries, if not millennia, of inter-island voyaging, we should not be making distinctions between these areas - they are all Pacific peoples with shared bloodlines and culture.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, I am using the ethnographic Wallis line in eastern Indonesia to separate the boundary between what is essentially Muslim Asia from the *kastom* and Christian-influenced Pacific; beginning in Flores, Timor, Maluku, West Papua and Papua New Guinea in the west, to Bougainville, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caladonia (Kanak) in the east.

I also draw on elements of *kastom* among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia³. Torres Strait Islanders are ethnically Melanesian, while their mainland Aboriginal kin are not, although many Aboriginal communities of the northern coast

³ For an overview of aspects of modern defence and *kastom* in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities, see Appendix 6.

had historic interactions with both Asian (such as Maccassan beche-de-mer traders from Sulawesi) and Pacific islanders.

1.3 CARGO CULTS

Another loaded term I use is "cults", particularly "cargo cults". When referring to cults it can at times be perceived as a derogatory or dismissive term for what are now more politely called "new religious movements". Yet these are terms that continue to endure despite the negative connotations associated with them. For contemporary movements I will refer to "*kastom* movements", while for historical movements I will refer to them as cults, cargo-cults or *kastom* movements where appropriate.

Although there was a significant flowering of cargo cults in the 20th century, particularly after the Second World War, today there are few movements that can be described accurately as cargo cults. Most have evolved beyond a yearning for cargo to become religious and political in nature. Yet these movements continue to play significant roles within their societies.

Cargo cults have been developing in Melanesia since the 16th century when Europeans first arrived in their "heaven ships" laden with cargo and new ideas. Some emerged as classic millenarian movements, waiting for a time when their ancestors,

not missionaries, would deliver an unending supply of the *waitman's kago* (sic).

Other movements are sexual and political, some a hybrid of Christian and traditional beliefs, others still became anti-Church and anti-State. A common story linking such movements throughout the region is the idea that it was their ancestors who sent the missionaries but the missionaries had torn out the first pages of the bible, which had the instructions on how to win an unending supply of cargo (similar notions of heaven are found in monotheistic faiths). Thus, it was believed, the white man had refused to acknowledge the role played by Melanesian ancestors and had greedily kept all the cargo for himself.

Around the world, indigenous people naturally became suspicious, if not hostile, to the way Christianity worked hand-in-glove with colonial authorities. There is an old Ghanese saying: *when the white man came he held the bible and we held the land. When he left, we held the bible and he held the land.*

But lest we fall into the notion of only recognising cultic behaviour among others, of Orientalising the "Other", it behoves us to recognise the universality of cultism as a human trait in all societies including the West. As Lindstrom⁴ points out, real

⁴ Lindstrom, L. 1993. *Cargo Cult: Strange Stories of Desire from Melanesia and beyond*. University of Hawai'i Press.

estate speculation, lotteries, TV Game Shows and Christian notions of heaven are all examples of Western cargo cultism.

Thus, like my journalism, this thesis is written from the inside looking out, rather than an objectified view from the outside looking in.

Also incorporated in this thesis, for illustrative purposes, is a "Whitefella Dreaming" photojournalism essay relating to a classic Australian *kastom* movement - the Eureka rebellion on the Ballarat goldfields in 1854. The flag-raisings and re-enactments, which continue today, are emblematic of a mythological Australian event that can be seen in *kastom* or even in cargo cult terms in a way that would be recognisable from a Melanesian perspective.

Perhaps the true significance of the role of cult movements is their appeal to the Divine in order to bring unity to otherwise warring tribes so they might collectively resist outside invaders. The inherent tribalism of Melanesia with its thousands of separate tribes and languages has forever made it a disparate place and any attempts to group them into nation-states a rather arbitrary exercise. The whole notion is fraught with the familiar colonial problem of drawing boundaries on a map regardless of whether such lines cut tribal groupings and trade routes.

By appealing to nothing less than the Divine will of the Gods and ever-present ancestor spirits, Pacific *kastom* leaders may be echoing a process that has happened throughout the ages around the world; the need to go beyond mere human will in order for once hostile tribes to merge and grow, to transcend ancient tribalisms. Invasion by powerful foreign forces is often a trigger for the *indigines* to band together if they are to have any hope of defending themselves, their languages, their culture and their way of life.

The Ghost Dance movement⁵ among American Indians as they stood on the cusp of oblivion in the late 19th century is a poignant example. The rise of Rastafarianism out of the ghettos and hills of Jamaica, the Mau Mau movement in Kenya and the Hau Hau movement in New Zealand demonstrate a global phenomenon of indigenes embracing cultic and confrontational responses to their disempowerment.

The use of sorcery and engagement in the spirit world is often their last resource, their last defence. Is it any surprise, then, that such movements would emerge in Melanesia in response to the arrival of powerful European and Asian invaders?

⁵ Blackburn, J. 1979. *The White Men* - The first response of aboriginal peoples to the white man. Orbis, Lond.

1.4 FROM CULT TO RELIGION

It is instructive to ponder for a moment the difference between what we refer to as a cult and what we perceive as a full-blown religion. Is it merely a question of size? Do cults, upon acquiring a certain critical mass of followers and political power, then become a legitimate "religion"? How do we establish "the truth" when orthodoxy and heresy seem locked in constant battle?

To see the way such figures as Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha were revered by their small band of followers, who then grew exponentially, suggests that they too would have been perceived as cultists, even heretics, by the politicians and priests of their day. This would be so until their movements gathered such momentum and so many followers that they became legitimised as religions (despite, in some cases, their express wishes not to turn their philosophy into a religion).

All three men were seen as heretics by the prevailing religious authorities of the time; Jesus by both the Roman pantheon of Gods as represented by Caesar - and by his fellow Jews; Mohammed by the animist Arabs; and Gautama Buddha by Hindus, particularly Brahmins, who saw him as a threat to the established Hindu caste system.

1:5 CHRISTIAN HERESIES

If we look at the Christian tradition (since that is most relevant to the Pacific), heresies have been part and parcel of Christianity since the very early Church.

Belief in Christ is no more or less rational than belief in John Frum, and it is worthwhile remembering that Christianity emerged as an anti-colonial movement with strong elements of rebellion, heresy, millenarism and charismatic devotion to a prophetic Saviour⁶.

After Jesus' "death", the twelve disciples and their own supporters did "go forth and spread the good news" in different directions and with different interpretations.

Divisions among the disciples seem to have broken out almost immediately upon Jesus' death. While St Peter and later St Paul went off to establish "the rock" of the Church based in Rome, claiming they were the natural heirs to Christ's legacy, a reading of the Gnostic Gospels indicates that others such as Mary Magdalene (Jesus' lover/wife?), St Thomas (the Cynic) and St Anthony (the hermit) believed they were the philosophical heirs to Jesus. They went south to Egypt and Ethiopia where the Coptic Church was later established, as well as east to Armenia (the first ever Christian kingdom) and beyond.

⁶ Worsley, P. 1957 The Trumpet Shall Sound, Paladin, p. 365

For the first three hundred years of the early Christian church there was no "orthodoxy", no centralised headquarters nor hierarchy. Christianity took root through various cells in various regions with a variety of different interpretations and autonomous leadership.

As the early Church scholar Elaine Pagels states:

...during the first and second centuries, Christians scattered throughout the world, from Rome to Asia, Africa, Egypt and Gaul, read and revered quite different traditions, and various groups of Christians perceived Jesus and his message very differently.... What I did not find in the process of this research was what I had started out to find- a "golden age" of purer and simpler early Christianity. What I discovered instead is that the "real Christianity"- so far as historical investigation can disclose it- was not monolithic, or the province of one party or another, but included a variety of voices, and an extraordinary range of viewpoints.... From a strictly historical point of view, then, there is no single "real Christianity"⁷.

Persecuted by consecutive Roman emperors, it was a secretive and underground movement, of flashing fish symbols and hidden prayers in the catacombs. It was not until the Roman Empire had itself adopted Christianity as its State religion under the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century AD that an attempt was made to standardise and centralise the concept of Christ and his message, under Church fathers such as Justin and Irenaeus, who placed apostolic succession as the foundation of their legitimacy.

⁷ Pagels, E. 1988. *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, Vintage, P. 152.

The drive towards orthodoxy among Church fathers often had more to do with social and political concerns than theological ones.

The Council of Nicea in 325 AD was convened to establish an orthodox approach to Christian initiation, teaching and the liturgy. Bishops selected four out of more than 30 available "Gospels" on which to base their teachings and the subsequent bible as we know it today. It was this Council which officially made the popular "Arian" tradition a heresy, by deeming that only through the Roman Church could salvation be found, as opposed to a Pentecostal approach which claimed the possibility of divine and direct communion between Man and God without the need for clergy.

From the Nicean Council emerged the articles of faith that still underpin orthodox Christianity; the Holy Trinity, Virgin birth, death of Jesus on the cross, followed by his physical resurrection. At the heart of orthodoxy is faith and belief in these articles, although Catholic and Protestant Churches today have a different emphasis. Catholics place less emphasis on the Bible and more on the necessity of the Church and its Holy Father, the Pope, to be our true guides. Protestants and most Pentecostalists, however, place no store in the papacy, believing the Bible - particularly the King James version - to be the literal word of God.

Thus any person or group deviating from these orthodox beliefs have been branded heretics or cultists and often severely persecuted. The past 1500 years has seen a continuous stream of "heresies", from the numerous millenarianists of the Dark Ages, to those crushed during the Crusades and the Inquisition of the Middle Ages.

Two of the Holy Crusades were waged not against Muslim heathens but against Christians; Byzantium in the east, which saw the sacking of Constantinople thus triggering the "great schism" and establishment of the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches; and the Crusade against the Cathars (the "pure ones") of southern France, pacifist vegetarians who were influenced by early Gnostic teachings and who abhorred the violence of the Crusades.

Down the centuries the heresies never cease - the Bogomils, the Walldensians, the Manicheans, Brethren of the Free Spirit, more recently the Branch Davidians at Waco, all persecuted for their interpretations of the liturgy or the gospels.

In the sixteenth century a new heresy took root which would prove powerful and enduring - Lutherism - spawning Protestantism and numerous other movements breaking away from Rome (Calvinism, Mormonism, the Puritans, Baptists and Quakers among them).

More recently we have witnessed established Churches battle the pop heresy of "The Da Vinci Code" novel and film.

1.6 KASTOM VERSUS CHRISTIANITY

Today Christianity is typified as much by its diversity as it is by any unified theology. Why is this relevant to the study of *kastom* and cult movements in the Pacific? Because Pacific islanders have been influenced - or repulsed - by Christianity in varying degrees, more than any other world religion. Some *kastom* movements are exactly that: a return to traditional customs and lifestyle that range from being inclusive, indifferent or actively hostile to Christianity.

Other new religious movements have taken on aspects of Christianity in terms of its structure and organisational ability, or a central belief in the message of Jesus Christ but combined with traditional elements such as ancestor worship and polygamy.

Thus in the context of the history of Christianity, the emergence of *kastom*, cult and cargo-cult movements in the Pacific after four centuries (and in some cases less than 30 years) of contact with missionaries is perhaps a continuum of a kind of tradition of innate heresy in mankind.

1:7 *KASTOM* VERSUS COLONIALISM

During the colonial period, *kastom* movements in the Pacific found themselves at the very least frowned upon and marginalised. In many other cases they were actively suppressed. Typically, the emergence of cults were often ignored, or seen by colonial authorities as simply a problem for the missionaries. But in time many such movements, such as the Maasina Rule movement in the Solomons, Hahalis Welfare in Bougainville or the John Frum movement in Vanuatu⁸, began confronting the colonial administrations by refusing to pay the head tax. They defended their traditional lands from being alienated by settlers or "the Crown".

In time it would become apparent that some of these movements, dismissed as mere "cargo-cults", were in effect the embryo of nationalism. Colonial administrations began to understand that such movements could no longer be ignored or dismissed.

There's no doubt that the administrations in Port Moresby and in Canberra had begun taking the role of cargo-cult movements seriously by the late 1960s according to "John", a former Australian "Kiap" (patrol officer⁹) and ASIO agent whose job was to provide intelligence specifically on cult movements and whether they posed a threat to the colonial administration.

⁸ For an overview of the John Frum movement, see Appendix 4

⁹ Interview , 2002, Sydney. 'John'- for security reasons, surname suppressed.

A quick survey of pre-independence nations in the region confirms the confrontational role played by some *kastom* movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s: in Papua New Guinea there was the Matanguan Association, responsible for the killing of an Australian patrol officer and the charismatic Manus Island "prophet" Paliau Malawot, all pushing for self-rule.

Bougainville was, at the time, being agitated by the Mungkas Association and the Hahalis Welfare Society. In the Solomons, a man called Nori and his followers established Massina Rule and despite years of harassment and imprisonment, they would effectively be recognised as making the first nationalist push for self-determination. In Vanuatu the Nagriamel movement led by the charismatic Jimmy Stevens was the first to bring a symbolic gathering of the tribes together in one community to push for the reclamation of *kastom* land and eventual independence.

1.8 INDEPENDENCE

Most of the nations of Melanesia gained their independence in the decade between 1970 and 1980. Fiji was first in 1970, followed by PNG in 1975, the Solomon Islands in 1978 and Vanuatu in 1980. Only recently did East Timor win its independence from Indonesian and Portuguese rule in 1999.

Several other territories in the region are still waging independence campaigns; West Papua and Maluku from Indonesian rule, Bougainville from Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia from France. Each of these have a history of resistance and in most of them can be found *kastom* movements that provide the spiritual and cultural legitimacy to wage a war of independence. This is particularly so in West Papua and Bougainville, whereas the independence movements in Maluku and New Caledonia appear more political in nature.

1:9 POST-COLONIAL *KASTOM*

Yet even in post-colonial Melanesia, among nations that won their independence decades ago, *kastom* movements continue to rise and fall and in several cases challenge the central government with threats of violence and "breaking away". As the embodiment of traditional culture, with aspirations for the future, contemporary *kastom* movements continue to play an active role in the social, political and economic life of their nations.

Perhaps the lesson is that they never disappear - they evolve, mature, spawn and lie dormant. But the ideas and visions they represent never die. Sometimes a movement may appear to die out, particularly after the death or disappearance of a leader. But in time, similar ideas invariably reappear when a new charismatic

prophet arises, sometimes within the same community, other times in nearby provinces. Movements can become lightning rods for either dissent or unity as a nation spirals into crisis and conflict.

Journalists in the role of the Fourth Estate must be able to read and interpret the indicators. Movements can, after all, play decisive roles in exacerbating the conflict and can equally be part of the resolution of conflict.

In Bougainville for instance, the subject of my main case study for this thesis, *kastom* movements played a significant role in triggering the war but later became instrumental in the reconciliation process and in maintaining peace. At such times, understanding the role played by *kastom* movements is essential when trying to understand contemporary Melanesian crises' and how to defuse them through diplomacy and other actions, often taken up by the Australian and New Zealand governments.

1:10 REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS

In Fiji, a nationalist quasi-*kastom* movement committed to the supremacy of indigenous Fijians, known as the "Taukie Movement" was behind both Colonel Rabuka's coups in 1987 and more recently George Speight's coup in 2000. Its leader is Apisai Tora, a former trade union leader and Minister of Agriculture in the

Qarase government who was charged in 2005 for his involvement in Speight's coup. Curiously, he happens to be an indigenous Fijian who converted to Islam.

In West Papua the struggle for independence continues after 40 years. Perhaps the most meaningful symbol of their quest is the Morning Star flag, an inverted Dutch flag with the Morning Star (Venus) planted on the left hand side. It continues to be raised illegally throughout West Papua by OPM guerrillas in the bush and community leaders in the towns. Many Papuans have been killed or imprisoned for raising the flag and this symbol of resistance and freedom has taken on a quasi-religious quality as much as a political one¹⁰.

It is also the symbol for the Mansren Movement, a movement that throughout history has helped communities along the north coast of West Papua and Biak Island come together in waiting for the Prophet Mansren to return bringing freedom for his people. Earlier this century the movement agitated against Dutch and Japanese rule and today continues against Indonesian rule.

Chief Theuys Eluay, former President of the Papuan Presidium Council, inherited the mantle of being the latest Mansren *Konor* (prophet) during his leadership of the independence movement and

¹⁰ For an overview of West Papuan situation, see article in Appendix 1.

ending with his subsequent assassination in 2002. He will be forever remembered as an incarnation of the Mansren prophecy.

And in the recent Solomon Islands conflict, it was the Moro Movement that gave the IFM (Isatabu Freedom Movement) Guadalcanal militants their spiritual and political legitimacy. Opposing them was the Malaitan Eagle Force, led by coupe leader Andrew Nori, whose father was one of three founding members of the Maasina Rule Movement. This movement had begun as a classic cargo cult following the islanders' exposure to the egalitarianism and generosity of American troops during World War Two and evolved into the embryo of Solomon Islands nationalism¹¹.

The presence of American troops, particularly black troops, created nothing less than a social revolution in many Pacific islands during WW2. The egalitarian interaction of white and black troops was in stark contrast to the black and white divide in colonial Melanesia before the war.¹²

Today, at a time when the nation state in much of Melanesia faces upheaval and *kastom* movements are often seen as a threat, it is useful to consider that such movements may actually be the key building block between disparate tribalism and a collective

¹¹ For an overview of recent Solomon Islands conflict and *kastom*, see Appendix 2

¹² Bohane, B. 2003, *Song of the Islands*, The Bulletin magazine, p.26. See Appendix 9.

society building a modern nation state. Indeed Bougainville serves as a fine example.

Rather than viewing *kastom* movements as irrelevant or as a threat to be crushed - regional governments would do well to see them as, at the very least, a "canary in the coalmine", a litmus indicator for brewing discontent, or in some cases, as a model for peaceful communities.

How these societies fuse their spirit world with the political one will determine much of the Pacific's - and Australia's - regional security landscape now and into the future.

1:11 METHODOLOGY

As part of this presentation it is perhaps of some interest to know why I am drawn to working on the subject material for this thesis and thus work to understanding motivations and methodology employed herein.

I have a personal and professional interest in theology and comparative religion. It has infused my journalism and photography throughout my working life and is essential, I believe, to get under the skin of a culture or story. As a correspondent covering the war in Burma with Associated Press for 5 years, I was intrigued by the role Theravada Buddhism played in the Burmese peoples' hopes as well as their sense of resignation in the face of *Samsara* (life as a constant wheel of suffering) under a brutal military dictatorship.

Similarly, in covering Afghanistan and Indonesia, it was helpful to immerse myself in Islamic thought and scripture to find ways of analysing the situation beyond just a news story, an approach very much incorporated in Participatory Action Research, as applied to this thesis.

A year before September 11, 2001, I spent 3 months in Indonesia doing a series of stories looking at the whole range of Islam in the world's largest Muslim nation; from the mystical Sufi tradition adhered to by then-President Wahid in Java, to the Laskar Jihad militia operating against Christian communities in Ambon, the Maluku and now West Papua.

1.12 BOUGAINVILLE - A CASE STUDY

In 1994 I did my first story in the Pacific - running the naval blockade of Bougainville Island in order to report from the "other side" on what was Australia's nasty little proxy war in its backyard.

I spent nearly two months moving with the BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army) and getting exclusive first pictures of their leader Francis Ona. After I had interviewed Ona, he suggested that I speak to Damien Damen, leader of the 50 Teoa Movement whose followers had provided Ona and his first band of BRAs with sanctuary in the Kongara mountains above the Panguna mine, when the BRA first began operations against the mine and the Papua New Guinea State.

I interviewed Damen, whose angry manifesto made it clear that his movement had evolved from a cargo cult to a more militant *kastom* movement; isolationist, anti-development, anti-church and anti-state. Only later would I realise that Damen was actually Francis Ona's mentor and personal *Sanguma* (sorcerer) and one of the real inspirations behind the BRA'S push to close the mine and declare independence.

Later that year, for journalistic balance, I went into Bougainville with the PNGDF (Papua New Guinea Defence Force) and their allies in the Resistance (BRF) who were fighting the BRA. Once again I was introduced to a cult leader - King Tore - whose

church was marked with a large 666 on its spire and who had provided a sanctuary for those fleeing the BRA. King Tore's movement was more amenable to Church and State and seemed to provide a theological middle ground between Church and State on one hand and *kastom* inspired resistance on the other¹³.

It occurred to me then that *kastom* and cult movements were playing a significant - and completely unreported - role in the Bougainville conflict and that numerous cults had been active against the Germans, Australian and Japanese administrations at various times over the past century. I had been hesitant at first, not wanting to make too much out of it or sensationalising this aspect with lurid stories of crazy cargo cults muddying the waters of what was already a complex political war.

Over time, however, as I began covering other conflicts throughout Melanesia, such as in the Solomons and West Papua, a similar pattern emerged¹⁴. I came to realise that the role of these *kastom* and cult movements was not to be underestimated in any political analysis.

Along with the attempt to understand these movements by drawing on theological and anthropological methodology, is a journalistic belief in the need to "report from the other side", as Wilfred

¹³ For an overview of *kastom* movements and conflict in Bougainville, see Appendix 3

¹⁴ See various articles in the Appendix section to confirm this pattern.

Burchett did, even if it means embracing a view that is opposed to the prevailing foreign policy judgements of my own government. My work in Bougainville and West Papua is a clear example of this.

In this capacity I have simultaneously researched, observing and incorporating any findings back into my professional practice of photojournalism. This research method is best defined as Participatory Action Research, an egalitarian approach to research, critical in my context.

1.13 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory Action Research is able to define any advantage and power disparity between the researcher and the studied - a central issue to the process of conducting photojournalism about indigenous people. In this sense the journalist and researcher is part of the research process and is acknowledged for it through the narratives and politics embedded in subsequent texts - images or print.

Participatory Action Research is particularly appropriate to photojournalism, negotiating release of image and stories, obtaining accounts, testimonies and background critical to the formulation of the story. It strives to be consultative with the

host group and to operate with their acknowledged consent on a power-sharing basis.

There are at least three democratic intentions that are adopted by a participatory action researcher and these are: that the twenty first century democracies should empower all citizens, not only those of the privileged elite; that research of any kind in the social sciences generally, is never morally or politically disinterested; and that maintaining a separation between research and practice (photojournalism) is simply inefficient and may lead to false findings and distanced elitism.

Because participatory action researchers sought to redefine the often privileged relation of the researcher to the researched, the vindication of participatory action research required more than the validity of arguments to achieve acceptance by the research establishments it confronted and by the people it claimed to support.¹⁵

A full and pluralistic ethical discourse facilitates discussion and argument through dialogue, and can bring about agreement through acquiring journalistic information and photographic images in the public interest through a non-confrontational manner. A pluralistic ethical discourse of this nature should recognize the pre-existing legitimacy of indigenous people, of the legal obligations and local custom, of international law and of civil and human rights inscribed in covenants and international agreements.

¹⁵ McTaggart, R. 1997, *Participatory Action Research - International Contexts and Consequences*, State University of New York Press, p. 1.

Participatory Action Research is a systematic and collaborative approach that is ideal in collecting evidence in these ways and generally, in arriving at a theory of action. This process is ideal for journalistic reflection, dialogue, decision and analysis of outcomes in published stories - the results of which can be deployed back into the next stage.

Participatory Action Research involves problem posing in tandem with problem solving. It does not start with 'problems' as negative and insurmountable, rather it is motivated by a search to improve and understand the world by changing it and democratising it.¹⁶

Participatory Action Research is not 'done' on other people, on the poorer and less powerful by those from the first world, as was so often the case in much nineteenth century ethnographic photography. Rather, my photojournalism process has Participatory Action Research being woven throughout the work that I am involved in, so as to improve professional practice and complete journalism production in a more egalitarian way than of the old and so called 'objective', empirical and impartial method. This way, Participatory Action Research reduces the likelihood of disenfranchising subjects of journalism stories and of their images.

¹⁶ McTaggart, R. 1997, *Participatory Action Research - International Contexts and Consequences*, State University of New York Press. p. 39.

This inclusive and consultative process within Participatory Action Research assists in establishing guidelines for ethical and personal, yet professional discourse, which is ideal for reflection.

The process should include all the interested parties - treating them as autonomous and responsible agents in their own right. As previously stated, the primary research method (Participatory Action Research), provided validation for me to proceed as being part of the research. I have been part of it as witness, manager, producer, photographer, television current affairs reporter and most often, features writer. This enables me to immediately affect the system as a participant, in my interaction, interviewing, responding, follow-up and other journalistic imperatives.

One popular scholarly source I have relied on has been Jürgen Habermas. Like many recent writers on social theory, Habermas (1972) points to the "objective illusion" of pure theory. Instead he espouses a focus on knowledge, methodology, and human interests. Habermas explicitly rejects the objectivism of the scientific and so called impartial objective approach.

Habermas believes that anyone involved in this consultative journey should participate actively in making their histories and

conditions known to all. The outcome hoped for is that subjects will not be treated as scientific or ethnographic objects, rather, with more transparency than usual, they will be involved as agents in the process. Their active responses contributing and providing member checking to the evolving journalism story and accompanying images.

In applying the essence of Habermas theory to the context of this research, there is value in the consciousness of privacy and respect, particularly when navigating around Melanesian *kastom* and respect for chiefly authority, of secret men's business and secret women's business.

As journalists, as news-media workers under pressure for the story, we might collectively value our own privacy and time, while being in danger of simultaneously projecting onto others an invasion of their privacy as we go about compiling information for journalism in the public interest.

As a repetitive and applied process, Participatory Action Research leads towards a better understanding of a given situation. It facilitates such an approach emerging over time from the recurring exposure to the issues (in the Melanesian and Pacific region particularly) rather than a 'fly-by-night' parachute journalist approach.

As researcher involved in photojournalism I would often apply some modification to my approach, depending on the situation and context. This is usually easier to achieve when those affected by the change are also empowered by being involved in some consultative way. Due to my participation in most of the societies being examined in my journalism, my research method was also to naturally evolve within a Participatory Action Research context where I was part of their community rather from the outside looking in.

In this light Habermas is also a strong advocate for the power of free speech and involvement. Habermas envisages a perfect state of free speech, the 'ideal speech situation'¹⁷. Regardless of how imperfect the journalism process, getting stories published, there is always an implied intention to create perfect speech, where everyone can share and participate openly and freely in the conversation, which ultimately leads to journalism outcomes.

In this context of free and democratic speech, the approach in my journalism, there is no one person more powerful or influential than any other. No one is attempting to

¹⁷Habermas, J., (1984). Theory of communicative action volume one. Reason and rationalization of society, Polity Press, Cambridge, Mass.

Habermas, J., (1987). Theory of communicative action volume two. Lifeworld and System: A critique of functionalist reason, Cambridge, Polity Press, Cambridge, Mass.

silence or inhibit some other member.

It is rare for a communication to fulfill all of the necessary conditions of this so called 'ideal speech situation'. Most speech acts (publication, dissemination, broadcast) have power inequalities. However this does not preclude that the ideologies of ideal speech are not intrinsically present and sought.

In the real world of journalism, speech can be corrupted. In Habermasian theory there is a dichotomy of life-world and system. Life-world is a metaphor for agreed norms that mediate values systems and social behavior. The system world is concerned with instrumentalism and is composed of power and money and authority. Both worlds are necessary for social function, however in more complex advanced western societies the system world most often colonizes the life-world. Melanesian societies are still caught between these two "systems".

The Participatory Action Research as applied to this thesis, has been about the "paradigm of mutual understanding" - the researcher amongst it. Societal mores that govern human behavior are often substituted and infiltrated by the system world with the steering mechanism of power and money. The "paradigm of mutual understanding" in the production of journalism should work

at replacing the distanced, supposedly objective and controlled process of the system world.

Ideally and ultimately, it is about building bridges and establishing "coconut wires" as Melanesians would say, opening up lines of communication in a region that suffers in its inability to receive and transmit information, from a Melanesian perspective, to the all powerful and colonising outside world.

Thus my goal has been not to tell my story with Melanesia as a backdrop, but to act as the agent, the bridge, for Melanesians who are struggling for their identity and freedom, to tell their own story, filtered thinly through me, to provide them a voice to the outside world. Equally, it helps inform an often ignorant Australian (and international) community about the realities of life and belief in Melanesia.

This is critical when Australia has adopted a more assertive if not at times aggressive diplomacy throughout the region at a time of growing conflict.

In keeping with the spirit of consultation, I have "member checked" this thesis with some key Melanesian leaders such as Moses Havini, John Somer and Hilda Lini for their feedback and approval before submitting it to academic institutions.

1.14 PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

This thesis also relies on photographs as evidence of ritual and the key personalities involved and examines the significance of each movement as it relates to the political conflict found in that particular region. This will demonstrate an evident pattern: that the conflict found in each Melanesian nation can be best understood by a study of the role played by *kastom* and cult movements in those countries.

The final chapter, therefore, is a visual narrative - a journey through the major themes of Melanesian life beginning with the landscape of sea and earth, to daily life and traditional tabus, to Christianity and modernity as evidenced by urban life, mining and logging. This flows onto its associated problems such as poverty, unemployment, raskolism and crime, leading in turn to militant organizations, symbols and war.

From war we move to reconciliation, peace and the landscape of land and sea again. While the photojournalism essay is a somewhat abstract and arbitrary representation of the themes in this thesis, it will crystallise a visual narrative of a spiritual journey into the dynamic soul of this region, rather than impose a scientific and unsuitable anthropological paradigm on an indigenous world.

1.15 LITERATURE REVIEW

In general and compared to the rest of the world, Melanesia has not been a popular region on which to base literature - either fiction or non-fiction. A combination of its oral tradition, its remoteness and its peripheral contribution to world affairs in terms of economics, politics and demography has seen the region largely ignored.

However, in the realm of anthropology and religion, Melanesia has been the subject of considerable study and publishing. The post World War Two years in particular saw a flurry of publishing in this area as the great diversity of language and culture in the region became apparent and also as islanders began agitating against Church and State for greater self determination and the end of colonial rule.

One of the first significant works to combine an analysis of the region through the prism of cult activity was "The Trumpet Will Sound" by Peter Worsley, first published in 1957. In 1970, John Ryan included a chapter on cargo cults in his book on the island of New Guinea called "The Hot Land". This is useful for his journalistic insight and first hand accounts of witnessing *kastom* coming into conflict with Australian authorities in Bougainville and Buka in the late 1960s.

Professor Garry Trompf remains one of the world's foremost authorities on new religious movements in Melanesia, having studied them in the field and as an editor/contributor to books such as "Prophets of Melanesia" (1977), "Powers, Plumes and Piglets" (1979), "New Religious Movements in Melanesia" (1985) and "Melanesian Religion" (1991).

In more recent years Lamont Lindstrom has energised the study with a more general discourse on the movements and turning the mirror on our western selves in "Cargo Cult: Strange Stories of Desire in Melanesia and Beyond" (1993). He was also a contributor to the most recent collection of essays on this subject, edited by Holger Jebens, called "Cargo, Cult and Culture Critique" (2004).

In terms of specific cults and countries, Roger Keesing and Peter Corris give an informed account of the rise of the Maasina Rule movement in the Solomons in their book "Lightening Meets The West Wind" (1980) while Jonathon Fifi' gives a more personal account of his involvement in the movement in his autobiography entitled "From Pig-theft to Parliament" (1989).

For Bougainville I have drawn on "Black Islanders" (1991) by Douglas Oliver, a long-time anthropologist on Bougainville, Ryan's "The Hot Land" and "Getting Under The Skin" (2000) by

Donald Denoon, which examines the Panguna mining agreement and subsequent war without going into the role played by cult movements.

Two books on Bougainville actually had a role in inspiring events there - perhaps even the conflict itself. "River of Tears" (The Rise of Rio Tinto Zinc Corporation Ltd, 1972) by Richard West provides an account of the shadowy mining behemoth RTZ throughout its history. Written from a concerned environmental and social viewpoint, the book is an indictment of RTZ operations, includes a chapter on the effects of the Panguna mine on Bougainville and was mentioned to me several times by Francis Ona and other BRA leaders as an inspiration to take action. Similarly, Ona also referred to "Solomon's Seal" a pulp fiction novel by Hammond Innes in which the Panguna mine is taken over by local rebels.

For Fijian movements, some of Trompf's edited studies cited earlier and Worsleys' "The Trumpet Shall Sound", give accounts of early *kastom* and cult movements there, as does Kim Gravelle in "A History of Fiji" (1979). "Blood On Their Banner - Nationalists Struggles in the South Pacific" (1989) by David Robie gives a solid general introduction to regional struggles with a chapter on Fiji following Rabuka's coups of 1987.

More expressive personal accounts of philosophy can be found in "Black Writing In New Guinea" (1973), edited by Ulli Beier, which

contains indigenous poetry, prose and story-telling by a range of New Guinean writers.

In terms of photojournalism in the Pacific, very little exists beyond general photo travelogues popular from the 1930s (in magazines such as *Walkabout*) to Colin Simpson's "Adam in Plumes" adventure travel trilogy of the 1950s and 1960s to the recent "Pacific Journeys" (2003) by Peter Hendy.

Much more has been produced detailing photo reportage of the Pacific campaign in World War Two. *Time/Life* produced several photo books on the campaign but perhaps the best recent contributions have come from Neil McDonald in his biography of Australian war cameraman Damien Parer in "Damien Parer's War" (2004) as well as "200 Shots - Damien Parer, George Silk and the Australians At War in New Guinea" (1998) which McDonald produced with Peter Brune.

Osmar White's "Green Armour" (1945, Penguin Australian War Classics) covering the New Guinea campaign, including Kokoda, until White was wounded in the Solomon Islands, remains for me the most compelling journalistic reportage of these campaigns.

A recent photo-reportage book based on a current Pacific liberation struggle is "West Papua - Follow The Morning Star" (2003) which I produced with Liz Thompson and Jim Elmslie, which

for the first time documents the history, daily life and armed struggle of the West Papuans for independence from Indonesia.

In terms of the photojournalism which is most relevant to this thesis, I have drawn deeply from the work of Edward S Curtis and a biography of his work "Coming to Light" (2001) by Anne Makepeace as well as the excellent study of Australian anthropologist / photographer Donald Thomson in "Thomson Time" (1996) by Judith Wiseman.

As a photojournalist it would be remiss not to mention some of the fine practitioners who opened up the craft and remain an inspiration: Robert Capa, George Rodger, Lee Miller, Marc Riboud, Damien Parer, Eugene Smith, Don McCullin, Raghu Rai, Tim Page and Henri Cartier-Bresson.

"In Our Time", a superb collection of images by the Magnum Photo Agency members demonstrates the power of eyewitness photography that formed the basis of our conscious images of recent history.

The IndoChina wars (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos) produced a generation of significant "engaged" photographers: Larry Burrows, Tim Page, Sean Flynn, Dana Stone, Henri Huet, Giles Carron and Giles Perez among them. Many of them died there but are remembered poignantly in "Requiem" (edited by Horst Faas and Tim Page).

In the contemporary scene, two outstanding photojournalists need mention: Sebastiao Salgado as found in his books including *Workers* and James Nachtwey in his tomes "Deeds of War" and "Inferno".

Some incisive essays (some by indigenous photo artists themselves) and collections of early Aboriginal and Pacific Islander photographs can be found in "Portraits of Oceania" (1997), a book published to coincide with an exhibition of the images at the Art gallery of New South Wales.

I also enjoyed the photographic assemblies of Jon Rhodes in his monograph of the Aboriginal communities at Kiwirrkura, 1974-1996 entitled "Whichaway".

For critical studies on the nature of photojournalism there is Susan Sontag's seminal work "On Photography" (1977) and her last book "Regarding the Pain of Others" (2003). For documentary film there is the considerable compendium "Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary" (1996) by Kevin MacDonald and Mark Cousins.

I found some curious parallels between Melanesian and Celtic societies as warring clan societies living in a rich oral culture and polytheistic. "The Sea Kingdoms" (2001) by Alastair Moffat

opens a whole new mental geography of Britain and Ireland in his excellent general introduction to the history of Celtic Britain and Ireland.

On Christian theology three books in recent years have drawn me into the mysteries and possibilities of the early Church and the on-going tradition of heresy. "The Gnostic Gospels" (1989) by Elaine Pagels is an elegant study of the cache of early eyewitness gospels about Jesus written by some of his closest followers: the Gospel of Mary Magdalene and St Thomas among them, referred to as the Nag Hammadi library, discovered in Egypt in 1943.

In "A Brief History of Heresy" (2003) by G.R. Evans, we find a winding thread of heresy burrowing into remote Europe in her somewhat whimsical journey through Christian heretical and millenarian movements over two thousand years. Some could easily be interpreted as European cargo and cult movements and it might be asked: were these Europe's own *kastom* movements?

"Holy War" (1988) by Karen Armstrong explores the legacy of the Crusades by adopting a "triple vision" of Christian, Jewish and Islamic empathy to try and come to terms with the never-ending battles fought between them. Along the way, Armstrong provides useful theological backgrounds to orthodox and heretical movements, which influenced European and Middle Eastern thought.

Finally a collection of stories, myths and movements relating to "the first response of Aboriginal peoples to the white man", called "The White Men" (1979) by Julia Blackburn is an intriguing collection of essentially oral accounts accompanied by related photos and illustrations. There is an account of the Native American "Ghost Dance" movement and accounts of other global movements - such as the rise of Rastafarianism from the hills and ghettos of Jamaica - with striking similarities to the rise of nationalism, cargo cults and *kastom* movements in Melanesia.

In the next chapter I embark on a brief history of journalism and photography. This sets the context of my understanding of the medium, of my Participatory Action Research and of how my subject matter has been dealt with by others before me.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM SAGAS TO STREET PRESS:

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF JOURNALISM AND REPORTAGE PHOTOGRAPHY

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2:1 THE GENESIS OF JOURNALISM

On our earth, before writing was invented, before the printing press was invented, poetry flourished. That is why we know that poetry is like bread; it should be shared by all, by scholars and by peasants, by all our vast, incredible, extraordinary family of humanity.¹⁸

Since the focus of this thesis rests on photographic reportage and a written account of *kastom* and rebel movements throughout contemporary Melanesia, drawn primarily from fieldwork, it is instructive to know something of the history of this form of representation in journalism and ethnographic photography.

This will set a context for the thesis and in particular the photographic images as a critical part to this text. An overview of the evolution of photojournalism covering the past 150 years also provides context for the challenges faced by contemporary photojournalists, including ethical considerations.

Before the advent of modern journalism and photography, the main transmission of "reporting" in the sense we know it today came from historians and poets who have chronicled man's achievements and folly through text for at least 4000 years, evolving from Sumerian cuneiform, to Egyptian hieroglyphs, to the ancient Greek and Chinese alphabet and script.

¹⁸ Neruda, P. intro to Essential Neruda, selected poems edited by Mark Eisner, Pehuen press, 2004

Thus we have records of great military campaigns and artistic flourishing from Sumerian and Babylonian times, to the Semitic scribes such as Josephus, Homer's epics and Roman writer philosophers such as Virgil and Marcus Aurelius.

For much of the world, however, the main vehicle to transmit historical events was, and in many regions such as the Pacific still is, through oral storytelling. Since the advent of writing in the Middle East, India, China and the west, however, there has been a consistent bias against the validity of the oral tradition in transmitting history, knowledge and myth. Language has often proved to be the ultimate weapon of conquest. When we use the cliché that "history is written by the victors" it is because the operative word is "written" as much as "victors".

In his history of Celtic Britain and Ireland, Alistair Moffat relates that although the Romans saw the Celts as "war mad", they nevertheless acknowledged:

. . . such sustained eloquence (of Gaelic) was made possible by a prodigious memory, also recognised by the Romans as peculiarly Celtic...Culture was to be found almost entirely in an oral form which was, in turn, sustained by a memory underpinned by a particular arrangement of ideas and facts. With its devices of metre, rhyme, repetition, alliteration and onomatopoeia, we forget that poetry was originally no more than an aid to memory and better storytelling.

. . . Genuine Celtic eloquence, sadly, is no longer seen as a virtue. During the long period when England

grew into Britain, oral culture became gradually discredited and was replaced with the perceived greater certainties of ink and paper. Not only did Anglo-Saxon historians like Bede of Jarrow commit an English version of history to writing, thereby giving it permanence and authority, but the engines of government also came to depend on signed, witnessed and dated texts. The Domesday Book of 1086 is a thumping affirmation of the view that nothing is true unless it is written down. We have inherited that approach to the world, and in our courts a written and signed statement will always be preferred to reported speech, or hearsay.¹⁹

A very similar view continues to inform the western - and Asian - view of Melanesia and black Australia up to today.

The development of language itself is sometimes credited with being the moment when humans became humane; homo sapiens moved beyond communicating simple desires and fears to developing rationality, organization, and collective consciousness.

We can trace a line from the great ancient oral "sagas" to the evolution of various tools for the transmission of information; visually we move from cave drawing to painting to illustration to photography to moving pictures. In literacy terms, the technology advances from sand and stone to papyrus to ink and paper and today, computers and the internet.

Then there is radio, whose invention in 1908 brought an aural transmission of information to a worldwide audience. It is arguably the cheapest and most effective means of dissemination

¹⁹ Moffit, A 2002. *The Sea Kingdoms*. Harper Collins. pp.10-11

of information, to more people on earth, than any technology developed before or since. It remains the most valued informational tool among oral-based societies today, including the Pacific.

Photography was developed in the 1830s but its antecedents were perhaps the realist school of painting and illustration that preceded it by centuries. Renaissance painting added perspective, what photographers call "depth of field" and for the first time light and shade were properly depicted. Painting in the West moved from iconography a step towards realism. It was once said of Diego Velasquez's paintings, for instance, that

All other painting is art. This is truth.²⁰

It could be argued that the trend towards a realist approach to scene was lacking not because of technology - paint and canvas had been around for centuries - but because European painters were liberated by the Renaissance period. On the other hand, perhaps it is merely a case of certain brilliant individuals, some subversive, who take the form further.

Of particular note was the Spanish painter and illustrator Francisco Goya, whose graphic depictions of war and its victims were stark, unadorned and clear-eyed. His work, such as his book

²⁰ Sister Wendy quoted in *Art Odyssey*, at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, documentary for Channel 4 UK.

of 83 etchings called "The Disasters of War", made between 1810 and 1820 was controversial in its time and seemed completely opposed to the prevailing tradition of depicting war in glorious paintings that owed more to hero mythology than barbaric realism. As Susan Sontag wrote:

The ghoulish cruelties in The Disasters of War are meant to awaken, shock, wound the viewer. Goya's art, like Dostoyevsky's, seems a turning point in the history of moral feelings and of sorrow - as deep, as original, as demanding. With Goya, a new standard for responsiveness to suffering enters art.²¹

Goya produced a visual satire and an indictment of war, something reportage photography would later embrace as almost its very *raison d'être*.

2:2 THE GUTENBURG PRESS

The advent of "modern" journalism is perhaps best traced back to the invention of the Gutenberg press during the 1450s with its revolutionary "moveable type" printing process. This allowed, for the first time, replicate printing of books and pamphlets en masse for public consumption. It suddenly broke the monopoly of book-making - and therefore the control of information - which had been the preserve of the Catholic Bishops and royalty.

²¹ Sontag, S 2003. *Regarding The Pain of Others*, Penguin. p.40.

Coinciding with Martin Luther's protest and split from the Catholic Church, the first bestseller of the Gutenberg press was the mass printing of the Bible so that individual worshippers could read the Old and New Testaments themselves, in their own language. This was a historical turning point since until that point the Bible could only be read by the Catholic clergy when instructing the faith, and the language of instruction was Latin only.

Individual monks routinely spent a lifetime in the service of inscribing one or two bibles. Bibles were so expensive and time-consuming to produce that they were only to be found among the clergy or noble families who could afford one and then pass it down as a priceless family heirloom. According to F Tupper Saussy:

Prior to 1450, Bibles were so rare they were conveyed by deed, like parcels of real estate. Johannes Gutenberg intended his first production, a folio edition of the sixth century Latin Bible (known as the Vulgate), to fetch manuscript prices. Dr Faust (Gutenberg's financial backer) discreetly sold it as a one-of-a-kind to kings, nobles and churches. A second edition in 1462 sold for as much as 600 crowns each in Paris, but sales were too sluggish to suit Faust, so he slashed prices to 60 crowns and then to 30.

This put enough copies into circulation for the Church authorities to notice that several were identical. Such extraordinary uniformity being regarded as humANELY impossible, the authorities charged that Faust had produced the Bibles by magic. On this pretext, the Archbishop of Mainz had Gutenberg's shop raided.... Faust was arrested for conspiring with Satan. Meanwhile, the "pressmen" who had been sworn not to disclose Gutenberg's secrets while in his service,

fled the jurisdiction of Mainz and set up shops of their own. Translators busied themselves in other countries. An Italian version (of the Bible) appeared in 1471, a Bohemian in 1475, a Dutch and a French in 1477 and a Spanish in 1478.

As quickly as our generation has become computer literate, the Gutenberg generation learnt to read books, and careful readers found shocking discrepancies between the papacy's interpretation of God's Word and the Word itself²².

As a result of the invention of printing presses, social observers and critics were able to challenge the authority of Church and State, distributing their critiques widely and cheaply for the first time. The first journalists were "pamphleteers" who used this new technology to create a street press that spoke to ordinary people. The birth of newspapers soon followed, as did the ability of authorities of Church and State to also use the "press" to counter pamphleteers and provide their own news and propaganda.

It is not surprising that faced with this challenge to authority, monarchies and governments would be quick to label press critics as subversive, scurrilous and even treasonous. The Roman Church saw in the invention of the press, the mass printing of the Bible and the rise of Protestantism, a threat so serious that it would end its campaign to wrestle the Holy Land back from Muslims, to concentrate on putting down the "heretics" at home in Europe.

²² Saussy, F. Tupper, 1999. *Rulers of Evil*. Harper Collins, pp.19-20

The invention of the press and the democratisation of its technology brought with it the democratisation of news. The so-called "Fourth Estate" was born - ordinary people had a voice - and with it a powerful new pillar of society that could equally be used to manipulate public opinion or help rally it in opposition. The press concerned itself with providing "facts" for its readership to decide for itself what constituted "truth" in a given event. Some remained suspicious of the idea of empirical fact, however.

Facts, like telescopes and wigs, were not invented until the 17th century²³.

Those called to journalism from the outset had to be independent thinkers, to "report the news without fear or favour" (as the basis for all codes of ethics today). They had to risk being branded a heretic by the Church or as subversive by the State and big business. Its ethical foundations have not really changed over the centuries, resting on a commitment to balanced reporting, whether it is a subjective or objective report, to fairness and accuracy, empathy for subjects, quality research, modesty and the courage to pursue one's own convictions for a public audience and the public's "right to know".

²³ Radcliffe, T. a former Master General of the Dominican Order, addressing Angelicum University in Rome, November 15 2004, as cited by John L Allen in his weekly The Word from Rome, National Catholic Reporter, ncronline.org.

A 'secular' humanism acts as a guiding and egalitarian ethic, lurking within the text, which is not surprising since it was after the Renaissance and the birth of the Age of Reason in Europe that saw the advent of modern journalism, as well as the Jesuitical notion of "doing the most good for the most people".

To be a true journalist is to embrace a form of secularism (or even ethical fundamentalism): it begins with the fundamental premise that there are no sacred cows, that anything and everything can be discussed openly in a free and civilised society. To be an ethical researcher is to also embrace through participatory action research and its ethos, this same position.

It was with secularism and reason in mind that the founding fathers of the United States of America sought to write a constitution that represented this freedom, by clearly separating the powers of Church and State. Freedom of press was considered so vital that Thomas Jefferson, one of the constitution's primary authors, defended it thus: when asked which was more important - a free press or parliamentary democracy - he chose a free press, claiming that you cannot have parliamentary democracy without a free press - it is the first building block of any democracy.

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without

government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter²⁴

A primary task of the journalist is to be able to wade through a sea of information and disinformation, from a variety of sources, and put together a concise and informative distillation of it, in clear language, for a general audience. Research is vital and the ability to see through the lies and hubris of authority. The journalist is an information filter and a public watchdog, creating, as the cliché goes, "the first rough draft of history".

Amidst the cacophony of competing facts and interest group pressures, it can be hard to trust intuition and find clarity when searching for a variety of truths, but that is the goal.

Gore Vidal, America's great contemporary dissident writer finds such clarity when he claims:

Politics is a matter of who gives what money to whom, for what, and nothing else²⁵.

The one "indispensable" journalist of the twentieth century, George Orwell, brings a similar verve when he wrote:

Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind²⁶.

²⁴ Jefferson, T. writing to Edward Carrington in 1787. Document 8, Papers 11:48-49, Volume 5, Amendment 1 (Speech and Press). *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 1950, Princeton University Press.

²⁵ Vidal, G. 2002 *United States Essays* 1952-1992. Abacus press.

2:3 PHOTOJOURNALISM IN THE ERA OF ABU GRAIB AND LIFESTYLE

CONTENT.

Now, for an absurdly small sum, we may become familiar not only with every famous locality in the world, but also with every man of note in Europe. The ubiquity of the photographer is something wonderful. All of us have seen the Alps and know Chamonix and the Mer de Glace by heart, though we have never braved the horrors of the Channel. We have crossed the Andes, ascended Tenerife, entered Japan, "done" Niagara and the Thousand Isles, drunk delight of battle with our peers, sat at the councils of the mighty, grown familiar with kings, emperors and queens, prima donnas, pets of the ballet and "well graced actors". Ghosts we have seen and have not trembled; stood before royalty and have not uncovered; and looked, in short, through a three inch lens at every single pomp and vanity of this wicked but beautiful world²⁷.

The daguerreotype is not merely an instrument which serves to draw nature... (it) gives her the power to reproduce herself²⁸.

Since its invention, photography has always sought the frontier: geographic and emotional. Developed by Daguerre in 1838 in France, photography was not long out of the cradle before it found itself in the wilderness and on battlefields.

²⁶ Orwell, G. 2005. *Why I Write*. Penguin Great Ideas. p. 120

²⁷ "D.P." columnist for *The London Once A Week*, 1861, in Sontag, S. 1977, *On Photography*, Anchor Books, p.104.

²⁸ *ibid*: Daguerre, L. 1838, from a notice circulated to attract investors, p. 188.

Modernism was still decades away as a school of thought, but photography seems to have been one of its earliest promises. Once it became portable, the camera was able to document our industrial age and is, in a way, a perfect symbol in itself of the ability to mass reproduce. As WW1 introduced for the first time a mechanised war and mass-equipped soldiers, so too was photography, through its own inherent mechanisation, able to capture the many dead, for mass circulation newspapers.

Earlier, Matthew Brophy and his teams' coverage of the American civil war (1861-1865), particularly his images of the dead in the fields at Antietam, was perhaps the first to substantially document human conflict. They contained graphic images of death, something that until then had been the preserve of illustrators and painters who tended to glorify such moments rather than reveal war for its waste and savagery.

Photography still has the power to shock but increasingly there are questions of authenticity in the age of computer software like Photoshop and manipulation in the era of political spin. One should always question the nature and impulses of "professional" reportage and the framing of a classic news picture.

As general distrust of media is heightened by an increasingly educated and cynical population, there is often more trust placed

in candid amateur photography to witness "truth" rather than by professionals. Numerous alternative internet news sites have taken advantage of this, such as Indymedia²⁹ and books including "here is new york"³⁰, with every photograph taken by ordinary New Yorkers on Sept 11 and the days following to create "a democracy of photographs".

The Vietnam war is often cited as the last major war to be freely covered. The two recent Gulf wars waged by America and its allies including Australia, have made media coverage much more restricted and critics have pointed out the essential compromise of photojournalists being "embedded" with US troops. This has not, however, guaranteed that all embedded journalists will report nice things. Stephen Dupont, an Australian photojournalist with much experience in Afghanistan over ten years, proved this decisively when his report on American psy-ops operations and their burning of Taliban bodies, forbidden in Islam, was exposed³¹.

Images of death from the latest US campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan are not widely circulated and there has been a ban on any photos of dead US servicemen and women or even their flag-draped coffins by US authorities. In a climate of rising fear and

²⁹ Indymedia, www.indymedia.com.au [last accessed: November, 2005]

³⁰ *here is new york, public exhibition NYC 2002*

³¹ Stephen Dupont's footage of US troops burning Taliban bodies first screened on SBS TV's 'Dateline' program in Australia and then was screened around the world, including the BBC.

patriotism, the temptation for self-censorship among journalists and editors also reaches a new peak.

Yet ironically, by banning extensive access for reportage photographers, US authorities have unwittingly allowed the circumstances to arise whereby the most shocking pictures of the war to have emerged so far, are not taken by news photographers, but soldiers themselves.

Three words sum up this conundrum: Abu Graib prison. Blurry snapshots of torture victims and grinning US soldiers next to them have achieved more outrage than any professionally composed reportage photo of the war in Iraq so far. The intimacy and "truth" of the "snapshot", enhanced by its subjects of smiling white women torturers in uniform, cut to the quick of our feelings of debasement in a new era of war.

We should not be surprised that such torture exists - as it has done so for millennia by all sides - but rather that the images found their way into an international arena of public exposure and consciousness, despite the US military's best attempts to suppress them. In this way photography can have a mercurial property - you can apply pressure here but photographic "truth" seems to somehow morph and appear somewhere else, perhaps echoing the adage "information wants to be free".

Two or three photographs from Abu Graib prison have thus vividly pricked the bubble of hypocrisy and an elaborate State propaganda machine to expose the reality behind the War on Terror; that States employ terror to terrorise the terrorists - and innocent civilians - who subsequently resort to terror. At this base level, locked in circular violence, no one wins and no one has any moral high ground.

Photographers might be displaced or marginalised by TV operators but photography is not. Photography and its practitioners may change, but its ability to shock and inform are still useful in the 21st century and continues to shape our understanding of events around us.

Today modern photojournalists must contend with governments whose policy towards open media coverage ranges from accommodating or indifferent to actively hostile. These days, as many photographers and journalists die from assassination as they do on the battlefield. For instance, since 1986 more than 80 journalists have been assassinated in the Philippines, making it currently the second most dangerous place in the world, after Iraq, for journalists to operate in³².

In the Age of Terror photojournalists are increasingly being seen as fair game by all sides. "Embedded" with the invading force,

³² Pacific Media Watch report number 4695, 5/4/05,
pacific_media_watch@lists.c2o.org

like that of the USA, Australia or Indonesia; photojournalists risk losing their prized neutrality, which is sometimes their only defence in a theatre of war, with consequences for all.

2:4 THE END OF THE "HEROIC" AGE OF PHOTOJOURNALISM

Only with effort can the camera be forced to lie: basically it is an honest medium: so the photographer is much more likely to approach nature in a spirit of enquiry, of communion, instead of with the saucy swagger of self-dubbed "artists". And contemporary vision, the new life, is based on honest approach to all problems, be they morals or art. False fronts to buildings, false standards in morals, subterfuges and mummery of all kinds, must be, will be eliminated³³.

These photos, like poems, will sing in dark times³⁴.

Since the medium began, the role of the frontier photographer - at war or documenting Antarctic ice flows or Amazonian tribes - has evolved substantially. This is partly from professional motivation and ethics and partly from camera technology.

According to Peter Howe:

The first war photographers didn't really photograph war at all. Because of the bulk of their equipment and the length of time it took to make an exposure, they were limited to battleground landscapes, posed pictures of fighters, simulated combat, and portraits of soldiers prior to battle³⁵.

³³ Weston, E. in Sontag, S. 1977, *On Photography*, Anchor Books, p. 186.

³⁴ Robert Capa, quoted in the PBS documentary "Capa in Love and War".

³⁵ Howe, P. 2002 *Shooting Under Fire*. Artisan press. page 14

When Roger Fenton was dispatched to cover the Crimean War (1854-1856), the first war to be covered photographically, he went to provide propaganda for the British authorities. He went to document the "excellent" conditions that troops were fighting under and the success they were achieving. His portraits of British officers showed them relaxed and confident, but the landscape around them was bleak and littered with the debris of war. Although he had the latest gear with him, it still necessitated hauling a horse-drawn cart carrying his darkroom, which greatly limited his ability to get close to the action.

2:5 EDWARD S. CURTIS

On another frontier, the American photographer Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952) spent a lifetime dedicated to capturing a photographic inventory of each native American tribe in the US, Canada and Alaska. Between 1900-1930, he laboured to produce the 20 leather bound volumes called *The North American Indian*, which have become a unique collection of historical value for both American academics and Indian descendants. The New York Herald called his project "The most gigantic undertaking in the making of books since the King James edition of the Bible."³⁶

The life and work of Curtis is worth dwelling on since he was arguably the first great pioneer of ethnographic photography

³⁶ New York Herald on Curtis' *North American Indian*, quoted in *Coming To Light* by Anne Makepeace. 2001 National Geographic press. p.89

whose legacy has inspired generations of photographers after him, including this author. His work was not without controversy - he sometimes staged and paid for some ceremonies - but the vast majority of his work has an authenticity and empathy for his subjects which remains enduring.

Curtis was motivated by a belief that native North American cultures were vanishing and thus they should be documented to preserve a semblance of what was left of their dying cultures. A census taken in 1906 stated that the Indian population of America had decreased 95% from their pre-contact numbers.

In his forward to Volume 1 he states:

The passing of every old man or woman means the passing of some tradition, some knowledge of sacred rites possessed by no other; consequently the information that is to be gathered, for the benefit of future generations, respecting the mode of life of one of the great races of mankind, must be collected at once...³⁷

Curtis was particularly drawn to the spirituality he encountered among the Indians.

There seems a broadly prevalent idea that the Indian lacked a religion. Rather than being without a religion every act of his life was according to divine prompting³⁸.

³⁷ Curtis, E. *The North American Indian*, foreward to Volume 1, quoted in Makepeace, A. 2001, *Coming To Light*, National Geographic press p.203

³⁸ Curtis, E. quoted in *Coming To Light* by Makepeace, A. 2001 National Geographic press, p 142

Curtis' biographer Anne Makepeace claims it was a religious ceremony - The Sun Dance of the Peigan "Plains" Indians - that inspired him to begin his life's work in 1900.

He became determined to capture traditional Indian ceremonies. In some cases he photographed rituals as they were being performed; in others he paid people to enact them. In every case, Indian people drew the line about what he could photograph. In recent years, his photographs have inspired a resurgence of traditional ceremonies and are sometimes the only visual reference available for their revival.

During the course of his life's work, Curtis' photographic style visibly moves from idealised, romanticised portraits of Indians and daily life, to a starker, bleaker style, capturing the sense of loss and grief of his Indian subjects. But he still manages to convey a dignity and pride inherent among them. This perhaps mirrors Curtis' own growing bitterness about the squalid conditions he found on Indian reserves as well as his own personal difficulties - namely looming bankruptcy and his wife Clara divorcing him.

After decades of documenting the desperate conditions of Indians and the wealth of their culture slipping away, Curtis began to grow disillusioned with his own "civilisation" that he had never questioned before. He had found corruption, hunger and government indifference to the plight of Indians on reservations

deeply upsetting. In one diary note during his trip among the Nunivak Island people, he writes:

They are so happy and contented as they are that it would be a crime to bring upsetting discord to them. Should any misguided missionary start for this island I trust the sea will do its duty...³⁹

By the end of his life, having documented more than 80 tribes, Curtis' body of work included 40,000 photographs, the world's first full-length ethnographic motion picture ("In The Land Of The Headhunters"), 10,000 wax cylinder recordings, 20 volumes of ethnographic text with accompanying portfolios, and several books of Indian stories.

He died at the age of 84 in relative poverty and obscurity.

Curtis may also have been the last of the frontier photographers to have to rely on the heavy, large format cameras that made every trip an expedition. In a lecture to the Seattle Camera Club in 1907 he described the logistical nightmares he had to endure:

Our camp equipment weighing from a thousand pounds to a ton, depending on distance from source of supplies; in photographic and other equipment there were six and a half by eight and a half cameras, a motion picture machine, phonograph for recording songs, a typewriter, a trunk of reference books...correspondence in connection with the work, its publication and lectures all from the field. Tents, bedding, our foods, saddles, cooking outfit, four to eight horses - such was the outfit. . . at times the handling of the

³⁹ Ibid, p 197

material side of the work almost causes one to lose sight of art and literature. And then come the elements. . .⁴⁰

Curtis' ethic of photography continues to inform and remains an early benchmark of artistic and ethnographically significant photography.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p 98

2:6 THE LEICA REVOLUTION

Photography itself - and in particular war and frontier photography - was greatly revolutionised in 1925 with the invention of the 35mm Leica SLR (single lens reflex camera). It was small, light and had a cassette of film that could be wound on frame after frame, rather than having to insert and remove each exposed plate-glass negative as before.

A new generation of photographers emerged to take advantage of the new mobility, cheapness and relative freedom made possible by the Leica. They included Andre Friedman, who took up the name "Robert Capa". Capa is famous for saying "if your pictures aren't good enough it's because you're not close enough" which has become something of a maxim, rightly or wrongly, ever since. The compact Leica gave him and others the ability to get close and personal with their work.

The notion of "engaged photography" to confront audiences with stark images of human suffering and struggle began around the turn of the 20th century. Jacob Riis spent the 1890s trying to prod the consciences of middle-class viewers with his images of poverty and slum dwellings in New York's lower east side. Lewis Hine documented the reality of child workers in the cotton mills and mines of North Carolina in 1909.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans travelled over the American Midwest to capture the day-to-day struggle of itinerant and immigrant labourers for the Farm Security Administration. Their images were meant for US govt archives but the power and sadness exhibited in the images saw them widely published in newspapers and they have since become iconic images of The Great Depression.

The establishment of magazines such as Life in the US and Paris Match in France suddenly gave photographic reportage a serious outlet and wide audience, particularly with the onset of WW2. After the war, in Paris, 1947, the Magnum Photo Agency was born of a collective of distinguished photographers including Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, George Rodger and David "Chim" Seymour.

They sought to control the use of their published photographs and by insisting that its photographers hold copyright over their photographs, not the magazine which commissioned the story. This has become the standard practice for almost every photo agency ever since.

The post-war years saw a further flowering of photojournalism to engage the whole spectrum of the human condition. The United Nations had been recently established to guard the world from never again descending into world war and a stated belief in the

basic equality of all human beings. On the heels of prosperity and a renewed optimism came a desire to see the world and its people as one. A landmark exhibition of photography in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York captured this mood and 60 years later the images still have an elegiac grace and innocence.

The exhibition was called "The Family of Man", containing 503 photographs from 68 countries, taken by 273 photographers.

Curated by Edward Steichen, the exhibition, he wrote:

demonstrates that the art of photography is a dynamic process of giving form to ideas and of explaining man to man. It was conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions of the everydayness of life - as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world.

The Family of Man has been created in a passionate spirit of devoted love and faith in man.⁴¹

Although the photographic medium has become more ubiquitous today and there have never been so many different magazine titles on sale, few of them show a commitment to photojournalism anymore.

The editorial market for reportage has gradually withered in the past 20 years throughout the west, due to factors including budget restrictions, advertising pressure ("we don't want our ad for a new luxury fragrance next to your pictures of dying children"), and a focus on aspirational "Lifestyle" content

⁴¹ Steichen, E. 1955, introduction to *The Family of Man*, MOMA

rather than informative, or disturbing - "reality" content, with the exception of Benneton clothing ads.

There has been a large consolidation of photo agencies around the world over the past decade. In the early 1990s there were at least forty significant independent photography agencies and libraries around the world. Now there are less than a dozen as the new 'mega-agencies' like Corbis and Getty Images buy up small agencies around the world. The price of stock photographs has fallen considerably. This might be good news for budget-conscious magazine editors but not so good for freelance photojournalists, arguably the lifeblood of photography.

In countries like Australia, Britain and the US, reportage as a distinct category of story - not news, not entertainment or lifestyle - is no longer regularly employed. Ironically it is not because of economic recession but perhaps the rising affluence of these communities that may have undermined the editorial market for photojournalism.

Does photojournalism matter anymore? Is it just adding to the daily bombardment of images on people? Are we just adding to the noise and confusion? No doubt the medium will change with technology. Photojournalists may even morph from homo sapien versions into "homo roboticus photojournalist" one day (perhaps parachuted from drone aircraft). But for as long as we remain

human, our memories hold perhaps our greatest treasures in life. The photographic image is one of the great visceral conductors to memory.

Photography - particularly engaged photography - is likely to continue being a mainline stab into the visage of the human and post human condition.

2:7 AUSTRALIA'S FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHERS 1914-45

4.10.16

Last night, a night of tension & anxiety - on par with the night of the ship's destruction . . . sea and wind increase & have to draw up onto an old isolated floe and pray to God it will remain entire throughout the night. No sleep for 48 hours, all wet cold & miserable with a N.E. blizzard raging...no sight of land & pray for cessation of these wild conditions.⁴²

My fellow Australians... the Jap is upon us...⁴³

During the nineteenth century, the pioneers of Australian photography fell broadly into two camps - the studio photographer and those who travelled to collect emerging city panoramas and idealised bush landscapes.

⁴² Hurley, F. 1914, diary entry on Shackleton's Antarctic expedition of 1914.

⁴³ Parer, D. 1942, introduction to Kokoda Frontline documentary, the Ministry of Information, Australia.

Those who set up portrait studios generally came to photography with a more commercial, rather than artistic motivation. They captured the social elite, the famous, the ordinary and, in a form of visual taxidermy - Aborigines in traditional clothes, armed and posing for the studio camera. Some took their cameras bush but it was more to show the gentility of country life rather than to "document" the working lives of cattlemen or disappearing indigenous culture.

Some whitefellas did, however, immerse themselves in Aboriginal culture from the start of the 20th century as missionaries or anthropologists and their photographic legacy is one of the few windows we have on this era.

In terms of cinema and narrative, Australians were quick to embrace the possibilities of photography and cinema; for instance Australia is credited with having made the world's first ever feature film, based on Ned Kelly's last stand at Glenrowan, called "The Story of the Kelly Gang", in 1906.

What attracted the photographers at first was the same thing that drew in a great many of Australia's pioneering settlers - the bush: vast, lyrical, menacing, full of promise and pain.

T.G.H. Strehlow provided a passionate, though controversial insight into the Arrrente people of the central desert, after

growing up with them on his family's Lutheran mission at Hermansburg at the turn of the century. The photographers Spencer and Gillen captured the dance and ritual of the Arrente and other Central Desert Aborigines that are now an important part of the national story. But it was left to a young, determined man from Melbourne named Donald Thomson to combine anthropological study with documentary photography to produce the most satisfying early record of Aboriginal life.

2:8 DONALD THOMSON

Now that ngata (vegetable food) is getting short...the camp is hungry and restless...the ceremonial season is over and they will scatter in a few days - are scattering now, into little groups that will spread over the country for the wet..."When bara (west wind) blows, they get greedy for beef" - they get "meat hungry" - but really he (Raiwalla) means it is the hunting season, when the urge to hunt, to go off to the hills, is strong in the diltjipoi yulngo.⁴⁴

In Arnhemland in the 1930s, an anthropologist took up photography for his fieldwork among the Yolngu people at a time when they were still living in their country largely uninterrupted by white authorities. Like Edward S Curtis, the American photographer who travelled widely to humanely and simply document the last age of North American Indian communities as they were being

⁴⁴ Thomson, D. 1937, field notes, Arnhemland, in Wiseman, J. 1996, *Thomson Time*, Museum of Victoria.

marginalised, Donald Thomson (1908-1970) comes closest of all his peers in Australia to bringing a warmth and intimacy to his Aboriginal subjects living in this twilight era between *kastom* and modernity.

Thomson had studied Botany and Zoology in Melbourne during the early 1920s and subsequently earned a Doctorate of Philosophy and Diploma of Anthropology from Cambridge University.

While on a field trip to Cape York in 1933 he heard about the killing of five Japanese and three white men by Arnhemland Aborigines in the Caledon Bay area. The government in Canberra proposed sending a punitive police expedition, but Thomson had an idea. His biographer Judith Wiseman has written:

Thomson had already witnessed the harsh treatment of and lack of justice for Aborigines at Aurukun in Queensland. No doubt this played a part in offering his services to the Federal government to find a resolution to the conflict in Arnhemland. He was convinced that a peaceful, scientific approach, backed by deep personal concern, could do more than force. Thomson consequently sought a commission to investigate the reported killings. The Attorney General of the day, Sir John Latham, was of a like mind and persuaded his Cabinet colleagues that they should accept the young anthropologist's offer.⁴⁵

In 1935 Thomson travelled to eastern Arnhemland to begin studying the language and customs of the Aboriginal people there. He stayed for 11 months on his first trip and travelled over 500

⁴⁵ Thomson, D. 1937, in Wiseman, J. 1996, *Thomson Time*, Museum of Victoria, p.ix introduction.

miles of country on foot and by canoe. On the second trip he stayed 17 months. It was the beginning of a lifelong attachment to documenting and attempting to understand Aboriginal and Melanesian societies that would sometimes bring him into conflict with Australian government authorities.

When he died in 1970, Professor Thomson left 4600 pages of handwritten field notes, 5000 artefacts and 11,000 photographs from negatives and glass plates. He had worked in east and west Cape York peninsular, in central and eastern Arnhemland, the Great Sandy and Gibson deserts of Western Australia, as well material from his World War Two service years in West Papua (Irian Jaya) and the then-British Solomon Islands.

Like Edward S Curtis, Thomson also began questioning his loyalty to "civilisation" noting in his diary in 1937 as he was about to leave Arnhemland after a long stint:

I . . .realised that I did not want to go back. . .that I knew and loved the Arnhemland people and that I had more in common with them than with my own kind.⁴⁶

Unlike Curtis, Thomson is not known to have staged or paid for any of his photographs and the intimacy he gets from his subjects - whether portraits, group shots or ceremonies - shows that he was largely embraced by the communities he sought to study.

⁴⁶ Thomson, D. 1937, in Wiseman, J. 1996, *Thomson Time*, Museum of Victoria, p.3

Thomson was one of the early champions of Aboriginal people in Australia, writing in a report called Justice for Aborigines that there should be:

Recognition of the fundamental right of the Australian aboriginal merely to live his life as a free, independent human being. This is the simple essential. By this I mean complete cultural, political and religious freedom.⁴⁷

He also demanded :

Recognition of the territorial rights of the aborigines and hereditary ownership of land by clans in Australia.⁴⁸

Despite his many clashes with government bureaucracies and fellow anthropologists, Thomson's ideals have since been largely vindicated: for instance, today, 55% of the Northern Territory is recognised under native Title and is administered by local Aboriginal Land Councils.

⁴⁷ Thomson, D. 1937, in Wiseman, J. 1996, *Thomson Time*, Museum of Victoria, p.83

⁴⁸ Thomson, D. 1937, in Wiseman, J. 1996, *Thomson Time*, Museum of Victoria, p.83

2:9 AUSTRALIAN WAR PHOTOGRAPHERS

The first Australian frontier photographer and correspondent of note is perhaps George E Morrison, later to become famous as "China" Morrison. An adventurous career saw him report on aboriginal Australia, New Guinea (where he was wounded by spear), New Hebrides, the US, West Indies, Spain, Morocco and the Far East. In 1893 he crossed the Chinese Empire from Shanghai to Rangoon on foot, before settling in Peking as the London Times correspondent and becoming a pioneering authority on China. In 1900 he was on hand to document the Boxer Rebellion.

In the Pacific, photography was largely limited to the picture postcard market, studio portraits and the occasional meticulous detailing of its people and implements by anthropologist/photographers such as the Swiss photographer Felix Speiser.

One Australian who combined a range of photography- anthropological, war, film stills and landscapes - throughout his flamboyant career was James Francis Hurley (1885-1962), better known as "Captain" Frank Hurley. An adventurer who accompanied the Shackleton expedition to Antarctica in 1914, Hurley was forced to live in an upturned whale boat for 5 months living on seals, after their ship Endurance was crushed in pack ice. Yet Hurley, when rescued, was able to bring back a range of large

format and 35mm photographs with him, which documented daily life among the crew, snow blizzards, majestic frozen landscapes and whaling.

Hurley was sent to the Western Front and the Middle East during WW1 as an official Australian War Photographer and during the inter-war period of the 1920s accompanied several expeditions to Papua and Torres Strait. He toured an early version of a public "slideshow", a "magic lantern talk", together with musical accompaniment (this was still the silent motion picture era) and his own live narration over the top. Called "Pearls and Savages", his film and photo narratives were a pioneering attempt to meld reportage, anthropology and b-grade movie schlock adventure.

During WW2 he was again assigned to document the war for the Ministry of Information's propaganda services, where he sometimes had a testy relationship with two emerging photographers who were also to make their names: Damien Parer and George Silk. After the war, Hurley continued to photograph, this time a more gentle pursuit; the various regions of Australia into large format photo books. He also produced books on Australian and Tasmanian wildflowers. He died in 1962 at the age of 76, still on assignment, still lugging his heavy camera gear.

We have two significant photographic bodies of work by Australians at the Gallipoli campaign but the principal coverage

of the campaign in text and photos was provided by the official war historian, C. W. Bean. Bean was accompanied by photojournalist Phillip Schuler (1889-1917), official photographer at Gallipoli for both the government and *The Age* newspaper. Schuler accumulated the most significant photographic archive of the Gallipoli campaign, only to be shot dead on the Western Front in 1917.

Damien Parer covered North Africa, the Middle East and New Guinea campaigns. He was the first Australian to win an Academy Award, for his Kokoda Frontline documentary on the New Guinea campaign in 1943. His bravery was legendary but his luck ran out in Pallilu in 1945 when he was part of a US Marine assault on the beaches and was killed by raking Japanese machine gun fire, with his back turned, photographing the Marines.

The eminent American photographer W. Eugene Smith, who had been with Parer in Guam, paid tribute telling his wife:

You have been told just over 15 minutes ago by a very casual and disinterested third party, as it should be in war, "a ah what's his name" that your best friend is dead - damn it stupid Your Best Friend is dead... He was scheduled to join you in a day or so. You had even carried your copy of Life with your Saipan pictures just to show him...You didn't care what most people thought of your pictures. There were some, like Steichen, like Sloan, like your wife, like Damien - you cared what these people thought.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ McDonald, N. 2004, *Damien Parer's War*, Lothian books, p. 352

George Silk, a New Zealander, joined the AIF in 1940 and went on to take the famous photo of the blinded digger being guided to safety along a jungle path by one of the 'fuzzy wuzzy angels'. Silk took many compelling images of the Papua campaign but resigned from the Ministry of Information, angered by censorship of a dramatic photograph he took during the battle for Buna and Gona. He took up a job with *Life* magazine in the US where he became its most senior sports photographer, vowing never to photograph war again. He died in the US in 2003.

There is also the remarkable work of George Aspinall, an Australian soldier who was captured at the fall of Singapore and imprisoned in Chiangi prison along with thousands of other Allied soldiers. Whilst inside, he assembled a rudimentary pinhole camera with film and lab. He took many clandestine shots depicting daily life not just in Chiangi prison but also on the Burma "Death" railway. His pictures are a unique photographic collection of Australian and allied troops in captivity.

Although all brought a different style to their photography, Spenser and Gillen, Morrison, Thompson, Hurley, Aspinall, Parer and Silk all brought a formal approach to their work that resulted in classical images and portraits rather than spontaneous, off-the-hip, observational images that are a large part of the photojournalist canon today.

Australian reportage has a one hundred year pedigree that stands with the most eloquent in the world. But it remains a constant struggle for survival today by its independent practitioners who face a dwindling editorial market and the consolidation of a few mega-photo agencies driving the price of published pictures downwards.

Today we are witnessing the rise of the video-journalist, who operates instead, much like a traditional photojournalist but with a digital video camera. There is already a convergence of these pictorial storytellers, who will use both tools to the story.

Sometimes, though, a single image can transcend the "message" to become great artefacts of illumination in their own right.

Now the Age of Terror and the Age of Lifestyle presents a new challenge to Australian frontier and conflict photographers.

2:10 ETHICS

You know that feeling...you want to look, but you
don't want to look.⁵⁰

The ethics of photojournalism have been debated ever since the medium came into existence; how close can I get? How long should

⁵⁰ Herr, M. 1977, *Dispatches*, Picador, p.23

I linger? Can I, should I help? Am I just an observer in the situation or a participant? For the purposes of this thesis I do not wish to engage in a debate on ethics or a deconstruction of photography since it has already been widely done so, and well, by critics such as Susan Sontag.

In her seminal work "On photography", Sontag claims there is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera, which photographers must be aware of. But equally:

Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood. . .To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge - and, therefore, like power.⁵¹

To be conscious of this "power" inherent in photography, whether making something beautiful, or shocking, or merely informative, is at the heart of a photographer's instinct. But other questions remain - has the subject consented to be photographed? If not, is that an issue? How and where will the image be seen and in what context? What is the photographer's personal motivation in the circumstances?

Suffice to say that photojournalists, by nature if not by decree, are generally motivated by humanist concerns, respect for their

⁵¹ Sontag, S. 1977, *On Photography*, Anchor Books, p. 3.

subject, a sense of personal adventure and a sense of history itself. They are also wonderfully deluded.

It is not an easy affair, as James Nachtwey, arguably the current doyen of conflict photojournalism in the world today, explains:

It's not easy to witness another human being's suffering. There's a deep sense of guilt - not that I caused the situation, but that I'm going to leave it. At some point, my work will be finished, and if I'm lucky, I'm going to get on an airplane and leave. They're not.

It's a hard thing to say, but there is something a bit shameful about photographing another person in those circumstances. None of this is easy to deal with, but overcoming emotional hurdles is just as much a part of being a photojournalist as overcoming physical obstacles. If you give in, either physically or emotionally, you won't do anybody any good. You might as well stay home or do something else with your life.

People understand implicitly that when a journalist from the outside world shows up with a camera, it gives them a voice they wouldn't otherwise have. To permit someone to witness and record at close range their most profound tragedies and deepest personal moments is transcendent. They're making an appeal; they're crying out and saying, "look what happened to us. This is unjust. Please do something about this. If you know the difference between right and wrong, you have to do something to help us". It's that simple, that elemental.⁵²

Nachtwey says that he tries to connect with people in a respectful manner, to let them know that he appreciates what they're going through, that he's not there to threaten or exploit them but to give them a voice.

But it takes a toll. You carry a weight, you carry a sadness, you carry anger and guilt. And it doesn't go away; if you have a conscience, you carry it with you

⁵² Nachtwey, J. in Howe, P. 2002, *Shooting Under Fire*, Artisan press, p.178

always. Sometimes I think it's ruined my life, and other times I think it's given my life meaning.⁵³

There are no easy answers for photojournalists trying to maintain an ethical approach to their work. Unlike much of their photography, an ethical life itself is not black and white, and tends to operate generally in the mid-tones, to use some photo parlance.

There are the grey zones of conscience that must be navigated when good and evil is not so easily quantifiable. How desensitised does one have to become to operate?

It is more complicated than Capa's maxim to "get close". Often there is dignity in distance, too - and good pictures. The positioning, the footsteps around the subject becomes the photographer's sacred dance. Photography is a constant joust with dignity.

We remain in an era of photography always trying to get in our face, grab our attention. Photographs work best when we are allowed to linger and get drawn in and behold an image that can sing beyond the sum of its parts. There are infinite ways to do this, nullifying any attempt to standardise ethics (or technique) because they evolve with the way every generation tries to see things and comprehend their world.

⁵³ Ibid

Many photojournalists claim that by photographing the horrors of war they are actively creating an anti-war sentiment through their work and in the viewers' response. Robert Capa once said that it is the war photographers' most fervent hope that they would one day be unemployed. But some war photographs are obviously triumphalist (military parades, victorious flag-raising, soldiers standing proudly above their vanquished enemies) and the sentiment of the viewer will usually depend on their own bias. Will an Iraqi look at photographs of dead American soldiers and dead Iraqi soldiers with the same sentiment?

War photography is always a subjective experience; it can make us tribal and partisan, or connect us to a sense of universal outrage, or compassion, depending on the viewer's personal loyalties. It can polarise or unify.

Indeed, the question may be asked if it is possible to create a definitively anti-war image in the first place? As an example, take the celebrated portrait of a US soldier in Vietnam captured by Don McCullin during the battle for Hue. The portrait shows a man with deep sunken eyes, shell-shocked and weary, clutching his rifle. We are immediately drawn to the horror in his eyes, verging on madness. For most viewers it unmistakably displays the degrading effects of war on a soldier.

Yet equally, many young men could view the picture and, whilst acknowledging it as a statement against war, can also see an attraction to it, to the very experience of being there or even being the soldier. The soldier, however weary and scarred, has endured a battle and survived; he has done his duty and experienced something that could make a young viewer even envious of him and his experience in battle. There is a dark, subtle glamour attached. To photograph soldiers in the hope of producing an anti-war sentiment may be the goal of the photojournalist, but once the image is in a public domain it takes on a new life and can be interpreted in many ways - including the opposite of its intention by the photographer.

Focusing on war's civilian victims, particularly women and children, is more likely to elicit a similar response from the viewer as intended by the photographer. There is no glamour in witnessing a dead and mutilated woman or child lying in a ditch next to the ruins of their home. Thus paradoxically, the most powerful images of war, which do carry an anti-war sentiment, are usually those which are not about soldiers.

Susan Sontag writes of a related paradox:

Central to modern expectations, and modern ethical feeling, is the conviction that war is an aberration, if an unstoppable one. That peace is the norm, if an unattainable one. This, of course, is not the way war

has been regarded throughout history. War has been the norm and peace the exception.⁵⁴

Later, she asks:

Is there an antidote to the perennial seductiveness of war?⁵⁵

The photojournalist Tim Page, for one, has answered this question in a contentious and truthful way that rattles the mindset of the politically-correct:

Take the glamour out of war! I mean, how the bloody hell can you do that?... Ohhh, war is good for you, you can't take the glamour out of that. It's like trying to take the glamour out of sex, trying to take the glamour out of the Rolling Stones... it just can't be done!"⁵⁶

Since war is one of the penultimate human experiences, it also activates any number of emotions from raw fear to exultant joy. Photojournalists try to capture that range and however suspect their intentions may be, or whatever life their photos may go on to live, the images become part of history, so there will always be an intrinsic value to them as documents, compared to the practice of fine art photography.

Photojournalism is an art, not a science; it deals with the fleeting - like love and music - sensations that are tangible and

⁵⁴ Sontag, S. 2003, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Penguin, p. 66.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Page, T. in Herr, M. 1977, *Dispatches*, Picador, p.199.

intangible at the same time. It requires a reach into the soul of things in order to give everyday scenes and objects a certain gravitas. It creates a mirror to ourselves and the images reflect our intent as we make them. Photography is the art of making love by making light; and it depends equally on our moods.

Photography can confront us with beauty and savagery in ways that force self-reflection, something the Gods have previously claimed as their mantle, ever since human consciousness began.

Photography was an invention of the rational mind, yet it affords us glimpses through an almost divinely inspired eye to capture the rational and irrational behaviour of human kind and the hum and fracas of all things on earth.

Over the past two chapters I have examined a brief history of journalism and photojournalism through the ages, with particular reference to "frontier photography" in an Australian and Pacific context. I have also provided an overview of the role that *kastom* and cult movements have played in contemporary Melanesian politics and society. In the following chapter I will outline some broad themes of Melanesian philosophy which underline the nature and evolution of Melanesian thought.

CHAPTER THREE

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3.1 MELANESIAN BELIEF SYSTEMS

"There are no laws, only chemistry"

-Marc Chagell

Is there a Melanesian consciousness? Is there a Melanesian philosophy which has underpinned *kastom* and political movements? This chapter takes an overview of what it means to be Melanesian, the commonalities found among a diverse range of peoples and culture. Because our notion of "Melanesia" is itself a construct, we must recognise that in trying to analyse it we are limited.

I will examine briefly the ideas of land (man in his natural environment), community (man's place in society) and what we can call The Within (man's personal sense of the Divine), before looking at a particular era when modern notions of Melanesian struggle and identity began to take root.

Other kastom related issues regarding warfare, trade and song are also briefly examined.

The first thing to note, however, is that in traditional Melanesian societies there was no separation of belief and tribal law. They were fused and intertwined. Every village operated as a polytheistic theocracy in which the best man suited to lead his clan was chosen, rather than as a hereditary right. As I state elsewhere, at the village and clan level, they have nothing to learn from the West about democracy - that is their root foundation. This contrasts with Polynesian communities which are generally led by hereditary chiefs and in the case of Tonga, a royal family with a King and Queen who rule absolutely.

This is sometimes a cause of land and community squabbles in Melanesia which have been influenced or absorbed by Polynesian settlers, such as the case with the Polynesian warrior Roi Mata, believed to be the first to unite the *nasaras* (village councils) of Efate island in Vanuatu under his rule. This has influenced

the current rivalry within Mele village over who should be its next High Chief⁵⁷: a candidate with Polynesian heritage who has hereditary rights to succeed his father, or a candidate who the village believes is the best person for the job, in Melanesian fashion. The power struggle is complicated by a further issue : that it was Catholic missionaries who helped install the Polynesian chiefly line.

3.2 LAND

Along the high mountains
Line the the numerous rows
Of cultivated plots and tended gardens;
Along the flowing rivers
Grow the freshly-grown crops
That earns the money we seem to need,
Oh My Blessed Land

Crafted above the ocean
Lies my home, my heritage
Of soils untouched and gardens
protected;
Crafted below the sky
Lies my status, my sovereignty
Of woods unharmed and forests
preserved,
Oh My Beloved Land

Between the Pacific seas
Enters the Western hand
Of depletion, degradation and disperse
destruction;
Between the thick forests
Stems the civilisation site
Of change, corruption and complete
conflict,
Oh My Bereaved Land.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Garae, L. "Two Chiefs for one village" article in Vanuatu Daily Post, 02/03/06. p.4

⁵⁸ Telstar Newman, 2002, poem given to author.

The first thing to acknowledge in any study of Melanesia and Aboriginal Australia is the importance of land: its spiritual and practical value. It is not hyperbole to suggest that for most Melanesians and indigenous Australians there is no more important issue than land ownership and it is viewed literally as a life and death issue.

It permeates and surpasses all other issues in life and society. Whether the land owning system is patrilineal (passed down through men) or matrilineal (through women) seems to make little difference in the overall value and responsibilities attached to land owning.

Land has been fought over for millenia and tribal boundaries were strictly enforced until the arrival of Europeans and the modern nation state. While trade between neighbouring tribes was constant, so too was warfare - or the threat of it. Coastal communities had wider freedom of movement and trade and were more exposed to new cultures and technology, but for many tribes of the interior, particularly highlanders or central desert Aborigines, there was limited scope for movement.

This perhaps made them more defensive but the isolation also strengthened their own sense of identity and culture. The great agricultural cultures of the highlands were (and remain) highly refined, attuned to a lifestyle that rewards hard work and

provides time for the arts; decorative, religious and musical. The highlanders of New Guinea practice the oldest continuous agricultural culture in the world, a tradition that goes back 8,000 years. This overturns the Euro-centric view that ancient Babylon was the cradle of civilisation and agriculture.

While Melanesians fully understand the notion of land as a commodity that can be traded and temporarily alienated, there is no such tradition of the European notion of real estate: where land is sold in perpetuity. For the past 100 years a lease system has been established in most countries in the region, but "freehold title" exists in very small pockets.

In PNG, for example, just 3% of land has been alienated for government use or as freehold property for residential purposes. Fiji is around 12%. The general rule of thumb is that land is never "sold" it is leased, to be reclaimed by future generations as their *kastom* land.

Tribal boundaries are often contested and fighting over contested land remains a feature of life today. Growing population and unemployment adds to the pressure on land and resources, particularly in urban areas, which can spill into ethnic conflict as seen on Guadalcanal from 1998-2002.

Aboriginal societies in Australia were far more nomadic than

their Melanesian cousins, living a more hunter-gatherer life, harvesting wild fruits and tubers, hunting wildlife and sealife, only at particular, *tabu*-free seasons of the year. Although Aboriginal lands, particularly deserts, provided large tracks of land to roam, Aboriginal people knew their land intuitively; that is to say they knew the extent of their boundaries and the important sites within it, retaining them in many cases as "songs" which were aural maps of their "country". The spiritual attachment to land was central to every man and woman and manifest in their creation story of The Dreaming.

The Australian anthropologist and photographer Donald Thomson records an Arnhemland man ritually weeping for his country because he has been away from it for too long. Yilkara, leader of the Liagallauwumirri people was photographed by Thomson as he sat ritually weeping on a ceremonial ground on arrival at the Miramina waterhole on the Glyde River in 1937. Thomson noted Yilkara's explanation for it :

Wanga (my country) long long time he been leavim....Him
sorry for wanga.⁵⁹

Thomson relates in his own field notes on 22-23 April, 1937:

As soon as we arrived at the sacred ground Yilkari, the oldest man in the group sat on the place where the snake swallowed the women, as recounted in the myths and rubbing hand across eyes, wailed and wept ritually

⁵⁹ Yilkara , 1937, in Wiseman, J. 1996, *Thomson Time*, Museum of Victoria. p. 73.

(ngati).

Meanwhile since the place and the myth are not duyu to women (though the significance of these things in ceremonial life is) Woipari, Borti and Bulaimbir took their wives, all young women, and went over the ground, telling them the story in snatches illustrating points - the two women and their children lay down, the points at which they held the Bilma (sticks) trying to make dances....Then they cleaned up the ground - reknewing the almost overgrown and weathered grooves and outlines of the place - but though did not hesitate at all to clean the ground, pull up the grass, walk all over the place, the younger men, themselves no youngsters in reality, always consulted old Yilkari before they pulled at or broke any old ngatilingo (which they believed to be original) growth.⁶⁰

This demonstrates the intricate care and delicate connectedness to the land, which is one of the dominant features of Melanesian and Aboriginal Australian societies. The land is alive, sentient.

3.3 SOCIETY

Traditional (Bougainville) life was communal. There was no room for individualism beyond the boundaries of tribal law.⁶¹

Melanesians by tradition are communally minded. It largely remains so today. This means that an individuals' worth is gauged very much by their role and achievements as part of the

⁶⁰ Thomson, D. 1937, in Wiseman, J. 1996, *Thomson Time*, Museum of Victoria. p. 73.

⁶¹ Momis, J. (Father John and Governor), 2002, in conversation with the author, Buka.

community rather than their individual pursuits outside of it. Since initiation for men and women at adolescence was such a pivotal moment in their lives, it became the binding fabric for each generation and acted as a continuum linking ancestor spirits with the present and future well-being of the tribe.

Although the oral tradition passes down the heroic tales of great fight leaders or the wisdom of particularly revered chiefs, there appears few stories of individual glory achieved outside the group and little appreciation for serious dissident voices within the group. The notion of individualism was largely seen as a negative since it usually implied someone who was exiled or banished from the group, forced to survive on his/her own, away from the protective spirits of their ancestors. This contrasts somewhat with Polynesian tradition, which is full of stories of great individual warriors and seaman who would bring extended families with them to found new settlements away from their clans.

In individual terms, the best a man could hope for in his life was to be considered a "Big Man" by virtue of his feast-giving for the tribe, his oral ability (storytelling or singing), his wisdom, his hunting, fishing, sailing and fighting prowess, or agricultural ability. By using his skills, he could be initiated into higher "grades" (to be closer to ancestor spirits) and could take as many wives as he could reasonably afford by providing

pigs, shell money and (in some cultures) woven mats.

It is worth noting that although the communal nature of society could be seen today as limiting the enterprise and free-thinking of the individual, Melanesian society is profoundly democratic at the village level and everything is shared : there is no real notion of "private property" held by an individual.

Melanesians and Pacific islanders generally, believe that it doesn't matter how much you have but how much you give away. This is rooted in traditions of feast giving and an "obligational" sense of trade. One gives generously, knowing it will be repaid in kind in future. The more productive you are, the more you can give away and thus the higher status you achieve since more and more people are indebted to you. It is a form of banking.

Decisions affecting villagers are canvassed openly by men and women alike; everyone has their say and the goal for any inter or intra village assembly is to aim at a non-confrontational, consensual agreement on any issue. This has sometimes been called "The Melanesian Way" by Melanesian observers such as the Papua New Guinean politician and author Bernard Narakobi⁶².

Trade between tribes and within tribes is an essential element of Melanesian societies : it is culture. Trade in Melanesia is not

⁶² Narakobi, B. 1983, *The Melanesian Way*, Port Moresby, Institute of PNG Studies.

just *bisnis*, it has spiritual and administrative dimensions and is about creating enduring human and social relationships as well as regulating conflict. Elaborate barter systems and ceremonial exchanges (such as shell rotation within the "Kula Ring"⁶³ of the Trobriand islands, PNG) ensured the blessing of ancestral spirits that could affect people's health and the fertility of their crops.

The use of song and dance play an integral role in Melanesian societies, whether it is entertainment played by string bands or ritual dance and song for *kastom* and religious practices.

In Aboriginal societies "songlines" are an elemental and vital connection between man and his living "country". They are maps of the heart and land as well as being elegies to ancestral spirits residing on that land. This is partly why Aboriginal people living traditional lives cannot bear to be away for too long from the land and often feel deep distress when forced to do so.

In Melanesia, songs carry similar importance in *kastom* since they provide a direct communication with ancestral spirits. Songs are repositories of accumulated knowledge and wisdom and history passed orally down the generations.

⁶³ For detailed look at the Trobriand islands and their Kula ring trading ceremonies, see Malnic, J. 1998, *Kula - Myth and Magic in the Trobriand Islands*, Cowrie Press.

In the case of West Papua, the preservation of traditional music in the face of Indonesian repression and cultural hegemony has been an intrinsic element of local resistance. This is best illuminated by the case of Arnold Ap:

Arnold Ap formed the famed musical group Mambesak in 1978. Mambesak was formed to uncover, revitalise and introduce West Papuan traditional artistic culture at a time when the Indonesian government outlawed such nationalist activities. They travelled all over the country recording songs and dances. Mambesak's songs of Papuan freedom proved to be popular amongst all Papuans and could often be heard blaring out of village tape recorders. Ap had intimate ties with both customary leaders and grassroots artists. He was appointed Curator of the Museum at Cenderawasih (Bird of Paradise) University in Jayapura. He believed his role was to uncover, cultivate and develop Papuan songs, language, stories and arts which he believed were under threat.

He saw the University as a "Khasana"-meaning a treasury or storage area for valuable objects. Ap's producing and recording of songs in local languages rather than Bahasa was also considered a strong cultural statement, akin to flying the (Morning Star

independence) flag. He was seen as a threat by the military rulers, such was his status. He was accused of writing songs that were intended to inspire the OPM seperatist struggle.

He was arrested in November 1983. On April 26th, 1984, Arnold Ap was killed by soldiers, allegedly as he escaped from jail where he been detained since his arrest. He was regarded by his people as a "Konor", a saint with many powers⁶⁴.

3.4 THE WITHIN

O skull
a smoked old bone
that's what you really are!

But you are the father of this house
your spirit guards us
we fear you.

When a child of this house is sick
you are the cause
when a child of this house is well
you are the cause

Oh skull
you hang there useless
you hang there powerless

Oh skull
you hang there useful
you hang there powerful

⁶⁴ Sleeve notes for music cd *West Papua - Sound of The Morning Star*, 2003, produced by Bridie, D. EMI music Australia.

Oh skull
my ancestor
mysterious skull
skull...⁶⁵

The traditional life of most Melanesians centred on a life that worshipped and appeased a variety of spirits, primarily ancestors. Offerings were made, images carved into wood and stone for deification, festivals of song and dance held, tabus observed and initiation rituals completed. Some particularly respected chiefs were smoked and mummified and kept in the Men's House.

There was no separation of life from the spirit world; it was all-pervading. Apart from ancestor spirits there was often nature spirits, known in Tok Pisin as "masalai" that had to be appeased or drawn on, which regulated weather, the seas, crop fertility, the human and the animal world.

Before Jesus, there were spirits of land and sea. Tambu places. Missionaries destroyed our totems and dispelled the bad spirits. People here have accepted this mostly and now believe their life is a mixture of Christianity and kastom life. We are not devil people. We are Christians but we want to keep our traditional way of life. This means no development that spoils our land and environment. The trees and gardens and rivers

⁶⁵ Tawali, K. in Beier, U.1973, *Black Writing From New Guinea*. p. 66

give us life and we must keep them. We are a matrilineal society so women control the land. The land is our mother, the land is our life, the land is our future⁶⁶.

The course of life and death was invariably put down to the presence of spirits that were either guardian-like and protective, or malevolent and evil. The concept of people dying a natural death was not easily accepted and most believed someones' sickness or death was usually attributed to evil spirits or the work of sorcery by the living.

In most villages there was (and often still is) a man who is recognised as a *Sanguma* (Tok Pisin), *Kadaitcha Man* (central desert Aborigine) or *Kleva Man* (Bislama), a man with the power to communicate with the spirit world and the ability to use sorcery for good and/or evil. They had the ability to heal or cause sickness and were often employed to cause grief to tribal enemies. Women, pigs and the perceived use of sorcery ("puri puri" in Tok Pisin, "putim lif" in Bislama) are perhaps the most common causes of tribal war.

The Sanguma man and his shamanic powers played an essential role in traditional communities, but with the arrival of Christianity and colonialism, their role was soon marginalised. Christian

⁶⁶ Chief Moro in conversation with the author, 1999, Guadalcanal, Solomon islands.

missionaries were quick to condemn such practices as the work of the devil. Those naturally disposed to being Sangumas defended their traditional *kastom* to the bitter end, often dying with the secrets of the trade. Others enthusiastically embraced the new God of Christianity and became disciples of Jesus and helped to convert the tribe. Yet others still would become visionaries who tried to meld the two, adapting *kastom* and Christianity, or rejecting everything and starting something new.

Many of these prophets would be condemned by the Church and State as cargo cultists and heretics and rebels, but as we shall see in later chapters, it is precisely those invested with the Sanguma spirit who would introduce new hybrid *kastom* movements charged with a political agenda that challenge and re-invent modern Melanesian society. In several instances, yesterday's cult or *kastom* leader has become today's nationalist leader. MPs in parliament have continued to be voted in as representatives of *kastom* movements.

3.5 WARFARE

Although warfare continues to be a feature of contemporary Melanesian life, in *kastom* terms it was generally limited and highly regulated.

It did not seem to include the Western and Asian notion of total

war: that is, the annihilation of one's enemies. Instead there was traditionally an "art of war", where ritualised war played out on a battlefield between warring sides until sufficient "payback" was completed, usually with the death or wounding of several men, before a battle was called off.

If someone comes into your garden and takes one of your pigs and does not tell you, then you have a right to kill them : that is kastom law.⁶⁷

The Melanesian notion of "payback" remains very strong today and despite Christian exhortations, the practice of taking "an eye for eye", of retribution by random attacks on any member of an "enemy" tribe, not necessarily guilty individuals, is common.

Since many clashes had their origins over land, women and pigs, serious conflicts could be resolved with the payment of compensation to the victim and their extended families. Gifts of pigs is the most common payment but woven mats (in Vanuatu) or beetle nut (PNG and Solomons) are other common compensation items. More serious conflicts, where a continuing cycle of payback violence extends over years or even generations, requires substantial reconciliation procedures that in themselves can take years to unfold.

⁶⁷ OPM Commander Titus Murip in conversation with author, as published in Bohane, B. 2003, *West Papua - Follow The Morning Star*, Prowling Tiger Press, p.93

Gradually emissaries from warring sides are brought together by a neutral third party until a final great reconciliation ceremony is performed, including feasts and dancing and the ceremonial breaking of weapons such as bows and arrows.

In the case of Bougainville, where the reconciliation process took up to five years to complete after ten years of war, lines of once-warring men filed past each other shaking hands and apologising to each other, often through tears. Beetle nut was chewed and pigs slaughtered for a great feast. Leaders of both sides publicly broke bows and arrows and dug a hole in the ground. Into this hole, two leaders spat a mouthful of beetle juice before covering the hole, symbolising the burying of differences and an end to conflict.

By coming in unarmed and allowing kastom reconciliation procedures to take precedence, the regional Pacific peacekeeping force led by Australia has ensured a largely successful reconciliation outcome for Bougainville. It is now being used as an example to end other regional conflicts.

3.6 CARGO CULT CRITIQUES

As stated earlier, the term "cargo cult" is loaded with cultural baggage and forever in danger of being a derisory term. Academics and anthropologists are these days far more wary in using the

term and some have called for its outright expulsion from serious anthropological discourse.

But are Western academics just giving themselves a hard time? Is this because they see in cargo cults a reflection of the "dirty mirror of the European self"? Implicit in this is colonial guilt and the danger of "Orientalising the Other", removing oneself from the actuality for objective "empirical" purposes. There are intellectual implications: explaining the Self (rational, progressive) against the Other (irrational, backward).

Yet we remain fascinated by Melanesian attempts to win economic liberation by spiritual mimicry at a time when, for Westerners, "the economy has become the primary locus of cultural innovation".⁶⁸

Central to the concept of being a "Big Man" in Melanesian society was the ability to be a great feast-giver in a wholistic sense: lavish offerings of food, sex and ritual (dance, prayer). Since Big men could harness all the known Gods at their disposal, the thing that made them cargo cultists in European eyes was when they began to include a new range of goods and trinkets and rituals that the white man had. In local eyes, they were merely extending their repertoire as Big Men or Sangumas: it was not necessarily a radical new theological response to the arrival of

⁶⁸ workshop question, analysed by Dalton, D. 2004, in *Cargo, Cult and Culture Critique*, edited by Jebens, H. University of Hawaii Press. p.189

white men.

Ironically, the very time that Melanesian cargo cults began to dissipate in the face of national independence and a better understanding of modernity and the factors of production - the 1970s - was also the time when the "Christian" and "rationalist" West had well and truly embraced the new God of mass consumerism under Thatcher and Reagan.

In our desire for credit cards, vast shopping malls, real estate speculation, lotteries and game shows (*Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*), the cult of Hollywood celebrity and sports stars, much of the world has now embraced a collective cargo cult. The ability to buy now and pay later has legalised and legitimised our own cargo cravings.

Our economies now run on credit and debt: the economist Henry Lui claims that the biggest fiscal achievement of the 1990s was the creation of more and more sophisticated instruments of debt. This underlines our own abstract "irrational" notions of wealth creation.

Modern Melanesian nations have inherited this legacy of economies underpinned by debt to global financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. Some observers see in the constant local striving for "development", encouraged by international business

and regional powers, as itself constituting a cargo cult mentality.

The quest for development has become a mantra among modern Melanesian politicians but what should we expect? By leaving a system of parliamentary democracy and elected MPs we have institutionalised their ability to become cargo cult leaders. The modern politician claims: *I am your leader, vote for me and I promise a direct supply of goods and services.*

The term cargo cult is one of the few anthropological terms that has found its way into popular discourse and is now widely used by both outsiders and Melanesians alike.

When Joe Kabui was elected President of the first autonomous government of Bougainville in June 2005, he said that this type of government had been the cry of the people for as long as they had been searching for a political formula.

In those days, people have resorted to cargo cults in their own way of searching for a government that is theirs. They do not want a government that is superimposed from outside on them like wearing another person's shirt. Today I thank God because that day has dawned today. We have a Constitution. After going through the crisis, it has made us strong to be

confident that we can stand in unity⁶⁹.

Cargo cult is universal. Lindstrom accurately turns the focus back on the West as being equally gripped by cargo cultism in modern life, not to mention similar millenarian movements which flourished during the European Dark Ages and Middle Ages. The arrival of the Japanese during WW2 also created cargo sentiments among the Melanesian population and it is likely in future that the spread of Islam and growth of Chinese economic power will also inspire renewed cargo dreams. Cargo cults can be "the dirty mirror" for everyone, not just Europeans.

The term cargo cult should be kept precisely because it is inadequate and troublesome, as Doug Dalton points out⁷⁰. It forces us to think and reflect on universal human desires and their place in society. We ponder these conjoined opposites: "cargo" and "cult", where cult can also be seen as "culture". There is an echo here of the dichotomy presented by Jesus when he states that one cannot love both God and Mammon (money).

It is an eternal and necessary connundrum that requires every generation in history to ponder this morality of existence. If

⁶⁹ Kabui, J. quoted in article from PNG's The National newspaper "Kabui wins polls" by Faiparik, C. 06/06/05

⁷⁰ see Dalton's chapter "The Mimetic Critique of Capitalist Culture", 2004, in Cargo, Cult and Culture Critique, edited by Jebens, H. University of Hawaii Press

cargo cults are indeed the dirty mirror reflecting our own anxieties (such as keeping up with the Jones') then they have enduring, universal value.

The latest approach has been to nativise "cargo cult" by seeing it as an expression of normal, rational and logical processes and functions of indigenous Melanesian cultures.

Dalton views cargo cults as:

Wholly insightful mimesis of Western capitalist bourgeois cultural precepts and illusions. I see the strangeness of the behaviour as less the outcome of the stress of exploitative colonial apartheid situations and more the product of the bizarre irrationality of the Western cultural precepts that Melanesians accurately enact, thus shifting the analysis away from indigenous "culture" and towards Western delusions⁷¹.

Yet by rationalising and normalising cargo cults a new problem surfaces: we become in danger of removing their inherent power, their spiritual visions, their political rebelliousness and social experimentation. There is no more shock value, a risk of absorption into the body politic, similar to the way the Catholic

⁷¹ *ibid*, p.195

Church absorbed pagan beliefs into their own "universality", thereby extinguishing the primal power of animist belief and earlier totems.

Jean Francois Lyotard calls this period in time, when the world is becoming globalised and perhaps homogenised:

...a period of slackening. From every direction we are being urged to put an end to experimentation, in the arts and elsewhere. In the diverse invitations to suspend artistic experimentation , there is an identical call for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security or popularity"⁷².

There is Francis Fukayama's contention that we are "at the end of history" - that the system of capitalist democracy has triumphed over all others and thus there is no point in trying to accomodate other systems of human governance and ideology.

This contributes to a fear that the 21st century will be marked by the imposition of one ideology, one government, one economy, one faith. But do we want universal government? Does that risk a form of global tyranny?

Among kastom and cargo cult leaders, the idea of unity is a very

⁷² *ibid*, p.192

powerful force itself and appears regularly in their rhetorical justification for such movements. Here, unity is wrapped up in notions of community harmony, known in Tok Pisin/Bislama as "wan bel": it is almost always one of the foundation principals of any kastom or cult movement in Melanesia.

Prophet Fred, who leads a breakaway group from the John Frum movement on Tanna island, Vanuatu, says his purpose is unity between traditional John Frummers, Christians and followers of kastom:

Abu, the spirit of John Frum, has always been here on Tanna guiding us. Then in 2000, new millenium -I got a new message, new spirit. The message of John Frum now is peace and unity, unity of John Frum people, Christian people, kastom people⁷³.

Chief Isaac, who leads the original John Frum movement, is suspicious and doesn't want his movement watered down or infiltrated by Christians. Yet he too, is driven by a sense of waiting for a divine unity, of waiting for a time when there is one God and one government on earth for all people⁷⁴.

Cults are a summoning of arcane power and their ritual enactments (ritual as technology?) are often an end in themselves, a kind of

⁷³ Prophet Fred quoted by Bohane, B. 2004 in article "Temptation island", Men's Style magazine (Australia) December 2004, #7, p.92

⁷⁴ Chief Isaac Wan in conversation with the author, Tanna island, Vanuatu, 2003.

performance philosophy. The emphasis on signal words like "waiting" and "yearning" and "unrequited desire", which have become popular symbols of such movements, can be overstated. If their mimicries of Western delusions over the past century are accurate reflections/critiques, does that suggest that Melanesians embraced post-modern irony before we did?

Or could it be, horror of horrors, that in contemporary times people involved in such movements just want to be *suburban* since they have been largely neglected by central governments? Read their wish lists: tvs, refrigerators, trucks, lawnmowers.....

Tempting, but no. They are too full of supernatural vision, requiring leadership charisma and groups of people prepared to embrace the ecstatic. There is almost a punk, shamanic quality to these leaders and their people which makes it unlikely they can be absorbed into a docile, mainstream existence.

Part of what makes us human, after all, is not that we Know (that is the province of the Gods) , but that we Believe.

CHAPTER FOUR

PAN MELANESIANISM AND REGIONAL GEOSTRATEGY

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4.1 PAN MELANESIANISM

As stated earlier, the term Melanesia (from the Greek: Mela- (black) -nesia (islands)) is an innaccurate ethnographic and geographic construct. Today there is no Melanesian flag, or song, or binding mythological story, but that is changing. Traditionally there was no instinctive pan-Melanesian brotherhood since most tribes were afraid of their neighbours and travelling was restrictive until the arrival of Europeans.

The failure of independent Melanesian states to support other aspiring Melanesian states such as West Papua and Kanaky (with the notable exception of Vanuatu) puts the lie to the notion of Melanesian solidarity at a State level, but this is not reflected at a grassroots level.

There is, however, an instinctive hospitality accorded to all visitors and an understanding of widespread values attributed to this particular region, and a regional Melanesian consciousness is starting to build.

The concept of Melanesia began in anthropology but is now most prevelant in politics and business, where a regional sensibility is starting to filter down to the grassroots, who have long had an ambivalent relationship with nationalism, let alone regionalism.

At the forefront of this regionalism was the first homegrown generation of political leaders who won their nation's independence. This included Michael Somare in PNG, Ratu Mara and Sitiveni Rabuka in Fiji, Solomon Mamaloni in the Solomon Islands, Fr Walter Lini and Barak Sope in Vanuatu and a variety of leaders in West Papua and New Caledonia still fighting for their independence.

Among the most articulate contemporary leaders among the West Papuans are the human rights campaigner John Rumbiak and OPM military commanders such as John Somer, who has often claimed the struggle for West Papua is also a struggle for Melanesia.

In 1988 the Melanesian Spearhead Group was formed to act as a sub-regional grouping of Melanesian States to consult each other on a range of political, trade, cultural and security issues. For the first 19 years the MSG was little more than a discussion group, but by 2007 the group emerged as a more substantial organisation with a permanent headquarters in Port Vila, Vanuatu. It has brokered trade deals, resolved trade disputes, established its own Constitution and flag and may establish its own regional security force. See Appendix 12: "Melanesia's New Spear" for an analytical account of the historic MSG signing in Port Vila in March 2007 and its implications for Australia and the region.

2003 saw the emergence of the first regional political party, known as the Pan Melanesian Congress (PMC), with representatives and party affiliations in each country from East Timor to Fiji. Their success or otherwise will be a very interesting phenomenon to watch in the years ahead, posing the question of whether we might be moving towards a Federated States of Melanesia, a regional bloc, better able to handle the outside pressures they face as small individual nations.

Where the PMC aims for an integrated Melanesian political force, the Melanesian Brotherhood aims for a regional spiritual force - an Anglican order founded in 1922 on Guadalcanal island which has since spread to other Melanesian states as well as the Phillipines and Australia. They played an invaluable role in bringing peace to the Solomon islands during the war by acting as neutral Christian agents separating warring factions.

There was also a period in the early 1980s, at the University of PNG, which saw the genesis of a political Melanesian identity, providing a useful background to the upheavals throughout the region in recent times.

4.2 JESUS OF MELANESIA AND THE CLASS OF '82

Significant clues to organised, indigenous pan-Melanesian ideas can be traced back to a convergence of personalities and politics

at the University of Papua New Guinea campus in 1982⁷⁵. It was a time when the optimism of post-colonial PNG had not completely diminished and as the largest independent nation in the Pacific, PNG had assumed a certain amount of regional leadership gravitas. Today there is a kind of lament in some quarters why PNG has not gone on to become a role model and "conscience" for the region as envisioned back then.

The university campus of UPNG in Port Moresby is spread over a few hectares of flat land, close to Parliament house in Waigani and the Botanical gardens. Despite the sorry state of PNG's political establishment, the student movement there seems not to be as organised or vocal as their counterparts in, say, neighbouring Indonesia. Apart from student groups being involved in protests during the Sandline mercenary affair back in 1997, UPNG of recent years has not been a "radical" campus in any ideological way, although 3 students were shot dead during an anti-globalisation rally in 2002.

However in the early 1980s a core group of students studying at UPNG, drawn from all over Melanesia, came together in solidarity before going on to lead real revolutions in their respective neighbourhoods. Many of the recent regional conflicts - particularly Bougainville and West Papua - are being led by key personalities from the Class of '82.

⁷⁵ For a full overview of the Class of '82, see Appendix 5

4.3 COMMANDER JOHN SOMER

Some call him "Jesus of Melanesia", others "Supreme Commander", but the stocky man with full beard introduces himself simply as "John" Somer.⁷⁶

Somer's jungle headquarters is on the banks of the Fly River and this demarcates roughly the border between PNG and Indonesia. His Southern Command of the OPM (Free West Papua guerilla movement) is the largest and best organised of the OPM's regional commands and his area encompasses a string of villages which are home to around 6000 refugees.

Somer's hut has a desk full of papers and an old black Remington typewriter, which are bathed in a shaft of light from the window. After days of witnessing flag-raising ceremonies and basic training for OPM recruits, as Commander Somer spoke of future strategies, I am drawn to an anecdote he mentions in passing about his time at UPNG and the formation of MELSOL (Melanesian Solidarity), the first indigenous NGO in the region, established in 1984.

I had come from this border where many of my people have lived as refugees. I had been given a scholarship from a Catholic mission to study at UPNG and I knew that I had to do something to help the West Papuan struggle.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Bohane, B. 1999, 'The Class of '82', *Sydney Morning Herald*, World Section.

⁷⁷ Somer, J. 1998, in conversation with this author in researching, 'The Class of '82', *Sydney Morning Herald*, World Section, May 1999.

Somer describes his first day at UPNG, in the "big smoke" of Port Moresby, sitting on the steps of the Campus entrance and feeling a bit shy. "I was sitting there alone and then this man who was sitting near me with some friends introduced himself as "Sam" and from that day on we became best friends."

The "Sam" who Somer refers to is Sam Kaouna - later "General Sam" of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), the Commander of all BRA forces since their war of independence from PNG began in 1988.

Sam was doing Law at the time, before he joined the PNGDF and I was studying Philosophy and political science. He was not very political at first but when a group of us started MELSOL he became a strong supporter.⁷⁸

Two other significant players helped begin MELSOL; Powes Parkop, now PNG's most prominent human rights lawyer and Pierre Xurue, a Kanak from New Caledonia who went on to become deputy Foreign Minister in the FLNKS, the pro-independence Kanak movement there. Others from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands soon joined. The movement was also facilitated by a "whitefella"; Brian Brunton, who became a judge in PNG and more recently has worked for Greenpeace International.

Our philosophy was to see us all as brothers in Melanesia and to help each other in many different areas, from health and education projects to

⁷⁸ Ibid

supporting each others' liberation movements.

We were all into Bob Marley's music back then and I was the first to grow my hair into dreadlocks. I became a "charasmatic", sometimes doing crazy things to attract other students to our group so they would have some political awareness. I was a wild dancer in the clubs and many girls would come to me, but as soon as I started talking about politics they would get bored and leave. Someone gave me a nickname at the time - "Jesus of Melanesia" and people still call me that today. That's ok because Jesus was a revolutionary too.⁷⁹

When asked of his heroes, he replied "Che Guevara of course (pointing out that he happened to be born on Cuban independence day), and Socrates, "because he stuck to his principles and died for it."

When people ask me what ideology I follow, I just say "I am a Melanesianist". Throughout this region, we all have similar customs relating to pigs and agriculture, cannibalism and the "wontok" system (mutual support for those of the same language or clan group). Before colonial times we were already living in societies with a high degree of etiquette and people respected tribal law and their elders. Everything was shared equally among villagers so that even the laziest man or sickest people were taken care of.⁸⁰

It was through MELSOL's New Caledonian and Vanuatu connections that after his time at UPNG, Somer was offered an opportunity to travel to Libya to be trained in guerilla warfare. It was during a period in the mid-1980s when Colonel Gaddafi began sponsoring certain Pacific liberation groups through his Mataba intelligence network, sending the then Hawke government in Australia into a

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Ibid

brief panic. But Somer chose not to go to Libya.

Libya is a desert environment and I wanted jungle warfare training which is more appropriate for the struggle in West Papua. Also, Libya is a long way away. I wanted to make connections in my region. So I went and trained with the NPA (New People's Army) in the Phillipines instead.⁸¹

One of MELSOL's driving features is its desire to transcend the inherent tribalism of the region, so it can help build a regional consciousness. Where many countries in the world grapple with the problems of ultra-nationalism, throughout Melanesia the problem is the opposite - there is little faith in national institutions. In PNG for instance, someone will identify themselves as a Chimbu first, a highlander second, and a Papua New Guinean third.

It has become apparant that after years of upheaval in the region, the model of Westminster-style parliamentary democracy planted on top of a collection of tribal cultures is not faring well. 30 years after most countries in the region became independent, infrastructure is decaying, corruption endemic and old colonially-imposed borders are no longer recognised. Tribalism and raskolism is becoming further entrenched.

What MELSOL and some of its key personalities represent is a new generation of thinking towards issues of the nation state in Melanesia. They see the basic model of parliamentary democracy as

⁸¹ Ibid

essential, but power needs to be devolved, national boundaries more indicative of ethnic realities, tribal law taken into account and parliament used to properly debate and implement policies, rather than just be a trough for MPs to enrich themselves. The problem is, this new generation of leaders who are trying to refine the post-post colonial region are precisely the ones still labelled "rebels" and "terrorists" by Australia and other governments in the region.

As Sam Kaouna states :

The reality of this region in the future will be something like a Federated States of Melanesia. But first everything has to be broken down and then, brick by brick, we can rebuild our nations. Canberra only worries about disintegration. It has to get out of its colonial and cold-war mentality when it comes to issues like East Timor, West Papua and Bougainville. It should understand that to have strong foundations for nation building in the future, we need to form our own associations, not live under colonial boundaries imposed by Europe in the nineteenth century.⁸²

It is something that Somer, and a growing number of other Pacific leaders, agree with. Somer and Kaouna still keep in touch and help each others' struggle. Kaouna :

I don't understand why PNG is still trying to hold onto Bougainville. They should be concentrating on helping their "wontoks" over the border in West Papua. It would help restore their military pride since they can never win in Bougainville, but they could help the liberation of West Papua. But if PNG is too much of a coward to accept West Papuan refugees because of pressure from Indonesia, then I will invite the

⁸² Kaouna, S. 1998, in conversation with this author in researching, among other texts, 'The Class of '82', *Sydney Morning Herald*, World Section, May 1999.

refugees to come to Bougainville.⁸³

Lawyer Powes Parkop, who is current chairman of MELSOL, has represented both OPM Commanders Matthias Wenda (at his trial in PNG on charges of raising an illegal army inside PNG) and John Somer who was forced to surrender his PNG passport to PNG authorities in 2000. MELSOL issued a press release condemning the PNG government for "doing the work of the Indonesian military", claiming that a deal had been struck between Jakarta, Port Moresby and Canberra to try and contain the Free West Papua movement.

The Australian government under John Howard has tried to maintain the status quo but a new dynamic has emerged in the region in recent years: Pacific nations are not listening to Canberra as before and have adopted a "look north" policy towards Asia, particularly China and Malaysia.

4.4 MELANESIA "LOOKS NORTH"

On a number of issues like labor mobility, curbing greenhouse gases to prevent their islands from being submerged, to fear of nuclear fallout over their islands if Australia and the US pursue NMD (National Missile Defence or "Son of Star Wars"), there is a regional perception that Canberra does not have the interests of the Pacific at heart. Australia continues to prevent Melanesians

⁸³ Ibid

from entering Australia's labour market leading to accusations that a "White Australia" policy is still being maintained.

Australian pressure continues to keep regional independence movements like West Papua and New Caledonia off the agenda at annual South Pacific Forum meetings.

For the first time, the countries of Melanesia, from Timor to Fiji, are often deciding their own foreign policy instead of immediately following Canberra's directive, as has been the case over the past 30 years. The MSG now aims to present policy as a bloc, rather than bi-laterally, to regional organisations such as the South Pacific Forum Secretariat.

Spearheaded by Vanuatu, three countries in the region have already said they are diplomatically and financially backing the West Papuans. More have indicated they will follow. MSG officials claim West Papua will ultimately become part of the "MSG family".

PNG has also ruled out legal immunity for 220 Australian police deployed there as part of Australia's "Enhanced Co-operation" program, claiming it is unconstitutional. The police were then dispatched back to Australia. A new deal has been struck for a smaller deployment, but under PM Somare, PNG is moving more towards a Malaysian-inspired "guided democracy " than one of an Australian and Westminster nature.

In April 2006, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabow launched a summit in Fiji attended by Pacific heads of State in which he has outlined the beginning of a "road map" for a comprehensive free-trade and security pact with China. This in effect offers an alternative to the Australian and Allied-backed "Pacific Plan" through the South Pacific Forum Secretariat.

China will increasingly assert itself in the region, in ways beneficial and exploitative to the Pacific and in ways which will create new geo-strategic faultlines - and sources of conflict - in the region.

In his article "How We Would Fight China" in the US publication *The Atlantic Monthly* in 2005, Robert Kaplan, who spent three years researching the US Pacific Command based in Honolulu, puts the new paradigm starkly:

The Middle East is just a blip. The American military contest with China in the Pacific will define the twenty-first century. And China will be a more formidable adversary than Russia ever was⁸⁴.

A new Cold War has begun in the Pacific and Melanesian States will from hence play host to new and significant geo-strategic chess games for the perhaps the first time since World War Two.

⁸⁴ Kaplan, R.D. 2005, intro to "How We Will Fight China" article in the June 2005 edition of *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine.

CHAPTER FIVE

BOUGAINVILLE - A CASE STUDY

“TO MEET WITH IMMORTAL SPIRITS”

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5:1 IDENTITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Bougainville, Buka, the Mortlocks, Shortland and the Nissan Islands are part of PNG's "North Solomons" province, far to the east of the PNG mainland and close to the border with the neighbouring Solomon Islands. It has a population of over 200,000 people with 19 language groups, the largest being the Nasioi who occupy central Bougainville.

Archeologists studying the movements of the Austronesians and other earlier settlers claim that New Guinea, Bougainville and much of the Solomon Islands have seen human settlement for at least 28,000 years.

Historically, Bougainvilleans claim their trade and ancestral links were with those of the western province in the Solomon Islands before European contact. There seemed to be little contact with Papua New Guineans from either the mainland or islands such as New Ireland or New Britain. There was however, substantial contact with seafaring Polynesians who came to trade and in some places, settle.

The Mortlock islanders, for instance, are predominately Polynesian. The high chiefs from Buka, who have a title passed from father to son in a hereditary fashion, are thought to have

strong Polynesian origins, both in terms of blood lines and the concept of a royal or noble right to rule.

The first recorded Europeans to arrive in Bougainville and Buka were those aboard the British ship *Swallow*, commanded by Philip Carteret, in August 1767, but they remained offshore. The first to make contact was the French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville and his crew aboard *La Boudeuse* and *L'Etoile* a year later in July 1768.

Bougainville named the main island after himself, but apparently Buka island was named after numerous locals had paddled out to de Bougainville's ship in their canoes crying "buka? buka?" which meant "who?" or "what?" in their local language, referring to the strange new boat and its waitmen. It would not be the first or last time such places would be named after misunderstandings.

In the afternoon three periaguas (canoes), in each of which were five or six Negroes, came from the shore to view our ships. They stopped within musket shot, and continued at that distance near an hour, when our repeated invitations at last determined them to come nearer. Some trifles were thrown to them, fastened on pieces of planks, inspired them with some confidence. They came alongside the ships, shewing cocoa-nuts, and crying bouca!bouca! onelle! They repeated these words incessantly, and we afterwards pronounced them as they did, which seemed to give them some pleasure. They did not long keep alongside of the vessel. They made signs that they were going to fetch us cocoa-nuts. We applauded their resolution; but they were hardly gone twenty yards (18 metres), when one of these perfidious fellows let fly an arrow, which happily hit nobody.

After that, they fled as fast as they could row; our superior strength set us above punishing them⁸⁵.

Bukans and Bougainvilleans were never united in any sense of island nationalism or ethnicity until the arrival of the Europeans, in particular the Germans, who established large copra plantations and maintained an authoritarian administration based largely on commercial interests.

The administration of German New Guinea, including Bougainville came to an end in 1914 when the Australian Army took control of German possessions in New Guinea and the New Zealanders took over German Samoa at the outbreak of WW1. The League of Nations gave Papua and New Guinea to Australia to administer until PNG's eventual independence in 1975.

The first stirrings of independence for Bougainville came in the 1960s as opposition to the Panguna mine site increased among primary and secondary landowners and certain *kastom* movements such as Hahalis Welfare Society began passive resistance. The Mungkas Association ("mungkas" means "black" in the Buin language) was an even more assertive organisation made up of some educated Bougainvillean men who had worked and travelled throughout the rest of Australian administered PNG and had come to see themselves as a distinct people within PNG who deserved more say in the running of their province.

⁸⁵ Bougainville, L. 1768, cited in Oliver, D. 1991 *Black Islanders*, Hyland House, p.17

In their own type of racism, some Bougainvilleans began to see their very blackness (they are allegedly the blackest people on earth) as a form of racial purity and a source of pride. They looked down on the "redskins" of PNG, seeing their lighter skins as a sign that they were of mixed races and therefore racially "impure".

As the rest of PNG began moving towards independence in the early 1970s, a number of prominent Bougainvillean and Buka leaders, such as Moses Havini, began agitating for independence. Two weeks before PNG became independent, Bougainvillean leaders declared independence, hoping to pre-empt rule from Port Moresby.

Australian colonial riot police were dispatched, teargas fired, Bougainvillean flags pulled down and dozens of demonstrators were bashed and imprisoned in the capital Arawa. This first public attempt at independence was crushed and would lie dormant for another decade until local discontent boiled over again and resulted in widespread-armed conflict.

5.2 THE BOUGAINVILLE WAR 1988-1998

The Bougainville war began in late 1988 when a small cell of armed men, led by a former surveyor at the mine, Francis Ona, began operations against Panguna. Dynamite stolen from the mine

was used to blow up some mine facilities, including power pylons and a number of mine workers, including an Australian, were shot. The mine was closed and a state of emergency declared as PNG sent riot police and the PNGDF to hunt down the rebels.

The brutality of PNG forces turned many Bougainvilleans towards supporting the embryonic Bougainville Revolutionary Army.

The reasons behind the outbreak of conflict are many. It reflected widespread grievance of primary landowners and other Bougainvilleans, towards pollution and perceived lack of compensation from the mine, social tensions from so many arriving mainlanders from PNG, and increasing hostility towards the central government. Many locals were upset at the number of mainlanders from PNG who obtained work at the mine, rather than relying on a local labour pool, and highlanders from PNG in particular had a reputation for violence and rape. Prostitution, gambling and squatting on *kastom* land all increased over the time of the mine's operation.

There was also significant anger at the failure of the central government in Port Moresby to renegotiate the terms and conditions of the mine lease every 7 years, as stipulated in the original mining agreement with the Panguna Landowners Association. By the time conflict had broken out, no re-negotiations had taken place for more than 16 years.

Bougainvilleans had expected that it was the government's duty to protect them and act in their interest when dealing with a foreign multinational company exploiting their land and resources.

Instead there was a growing sentiment among ordinary Bougainvilleans and in particular primary landowners, that the mining company had the government in their pocket. The PNG government was unlikely to pressure the company lest it jeopardised the income it provided to the struggling nation state; at the time of operations, Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL) was providing more than 30 per cent of total export earnings for PNG and was the nations' single largest tax payer and private employer.

To be balanced, any analysis of local grievances must contend with the seemingly generous amounts of money spent on social services and infrastructure on the island. It is often stated by Papua New Guineans and expatriates who lived in Bougainville at the time that around Arawa existed perhaps the best hospital and schools in all of PNG. There was a good road network linking much of the island and for those Bougainvilleans who had employment at the mine, there was the opportunity to learn trade skills together with scholarship offers for further education. Many Bougainvilleans took the skills learnt at Panguna and other

businesses in Arawa and found employment elsewhere in PNG and Australia.

According to Denoon:

BCL tried to become good corporate citizens. Services were devised to help small businesses and to provide agricultural extension. BCL canteens were good markets for growers and local contractors moved into transport, security and building. Much of this extension work was organised by the Bougainville Copper Foundation (BCF)⁸⁶.

Oliver, an American anthropologist with 30 years experience in Bougainville, believed that BCL's operation was largely positive for Bougainville and PNG and that "the outstanding economic success of the Panguna mine cannot be disproved". He believed shortterm resistance would give way to long term acceptance. In this, Oliver has been proved wrong, but he is on firmer ground when noting that BCL was caught in a bind between intergovernmental rivalry and unrealistic local expectations.

The 1974 Bougainville Copper Agreement stipulated the review of the agreement in terms of mutual "fairness" etc would take place every seven years. For its part, the company appears to have welcomed the prospect of such review, and prepared for it by drawing up lists of proposals to be discussed, but the national government failed to participate. Changes of government and bureaucratic inertia may have been partly responsible for that default, but another impediment was the company's insistence that the provincial government also take part in the review, a

⁸⁶ Denoon, D. 2000, *Getting Under The Skin - The Bougainville Copper Agreement and the Creation of the Panguna Mine*, Melbourne University Press, p.168

proposal that the national government refused to accept⁸⁷.

Yet it could be argued that there were not enough locals given preference for employment and others complained that BCL had a stranglehold on local businesses, which also supported the mine. Thomas Rabbanz was a Bougainvillean who rose through the ranks to become head of the Panguna Metalworkers Union.

All the supermarkets and bars and cinemas were owned by BCL subsidurries. Most of the salary that we earnt from working at the mine then went back into their pockets because they owned all the local businesses as well. Instead of being so greedy, they could have paid local farmers for fresh fruit and vegetables and meat which would have won them more community support.⁸⁸

Rabbanz makes another more serious claim, which further alienated those Bougainvilleans like Ona and Rabbanz himself, who were privy to the inside workings of the mine.

BCL claimed that they were primarily a copper mine with some smaller amounts of gold that was also extracted and processed. They did this so that the mine was taxed as a copper mine, not a gold mine. But this is all bullshit. . .Panguna was mostly a gold mine and they had many ways to cover up the amount they were taking out. As a union leader I was informed by some other workers that they were told to put gold concentrate in drums marked "waste" which was then transported by ship directly to CRA headquarters in Melbourne. I investigated the claims and found them to be true; BCL was ripping off not just the Bougainvilleans but also the PNG government as well".⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Oliver, D. 1991 *Black Islanders*, Hyland House, p.154

⁸⁸ Rabbanz T, 2001, a Bougainvillean and head of the Panguna Metalworkers Union in interview with this author, Bougainville.

⁸⁹ Ibid

There were suspicions that BCL planned more mines on the island, which Francis Ona claimed were confirmed when his men broke into BCL headquarters at the mine at the start of the conflict. Ona claims that aerial surveying in the mid 1980s had established that there was much copper and gold in the mountain ridges of the Bougainville interior. In one media interview in 1994, Ona produced survey maps, which indicated the sites of a further three mines as planned.

Ona claimed that Bougainvilleans feared their whole island would be mined and ultimately turned into one giant pit, with all the Bougainvillean population moved and resettled elsewhere in PNG. He stated that this fear was one of the main reasons he and the embryonic BRA decided to take action to close the mine.

The final issue which saw the end of talking and the start of fighting centred around compensation: first Perpetua Serero, then Francis Ona in his capacity as President of the New Panguna Landowners Association had demanded the payment by BCL of 10 billion Kina (Aus\$12 billion at 1987 exchange rates) or the closure of the mine. After months of half-hearted negotiations the mine continued to ignore the demands and set the scene for confrontation, but the mine was not anticipating any organised armed action.

5.3 PERPETUA SERERO & THE NEW PANGUNA LANDOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Perhaps the best account of how many Bougainvilleans, in particular the Guava people, felt about the presence of the mine on their land, is an ear-witness account of the final meeting of the Panguna Landowners Association at Guava village on the 16th November 1988.

The text was recorded by Applied Geology Associates Ltd, New Zealand, who were hired by BCL to conduct an independent assessment of local grievances. No author is mentioned on the report, entitled "Environmental, Socio-Economic and Public Health Review of Bougainville Copper Mine Panguna", which was published in January 1989.

It contains the body of a speech given by Perpetua Serero, and bears reproducing in full because it is a summation of grievances, delivered angrily by the most important landowner in the Panguna area, and warns of violence to come. It is the last time the Panguna Landowners Association issues a public demand for 10 billion kina in compensation.

With the benefit of hindsight, the speech reads virtually as a declaration of war. The report is prefaced thus:

It is not possible to record in detail the many meetings and discussions held in the mine-affected

area. Each had its own particular form and the outcome was influenced by the amount of time available and the people participating. The meeting at Guava was unusual in that it involved several key members of the Panguna Landowners Association, including the Chairwoman, Perpetua Serero (in whose haus kuk, lit by a generator-powered neon light, the meeting took place), a former radio announcer and Asitavi High School student, her sister Cecilia Genel and Philip Miriori. The committee members played the major roles in the meeting with few of some 20 other hamlet members, apart from Perpetua's husband John (a Manam migrant employed by BCL) taking a significant part.

Secondly the meeting was unusual in that it took the strongest possible line on the necessity to transform the relationship between BCL and the Panguna landowners. Most of the discussion was in Tok Pisin or English and was constantly led by Perpetua Serero, who spoke both these languages (and Nasioi) fluently. Although it is not now possible to identify particular speakers she was very much the key speaker and her views were clearly shared and often acclaimed by all the people present. Some repetition inevitably occurred, sometimes in response to questions from team members, but this is the fullest possible account of a highly articulate discussion. No other meeting covered such a range of issues.

Then, in first person the monologue begins:

Mining is an emotional issue; our lives have been ruined by modern technology. My health has been damaged. My mind has changed.
BCL is like an octopus.
From River of Tears we knew that we could fear the worst.
There are now too many holes.
Chemicals are ruining our agriculture; we will not have money for fertilizers when our agriculture is damaged. Land is our lifeline.
We have grown up with the Company.
We have seen no changes here since the 1950s. We are still living as our ancestors did. If Fr 'Ogan came back now he would see that nothing had changed.

What the company gives to the people is peanuts compared to the profit.

Our people were forced to sell their land in colonial days. The agreement was only between the National Government and the mine, not with the landowners. The Company are using some of our people against us; this is divide and rule tactics.

If the mine closes tomorrow BCL and the National Government will be the losers.

It is too late now to have shares in the Company; we want part ownership of whatever BCL owns, including BCL itself. The Jaba people should become automatic owners of the Mananau piggery and chicken business. BCL should stick to mining.

Our parliamentarians (Momis and Bele) are not fighting for a better share for the North Solomons but are far too involved in national politics, which is full of white advisors (such as Roman Grynberg who came and greased us, tried to buy us off and told us to buy shares).

The original agreement over-rode our customs, denied us our land rights and was too rushed. It contradicts our way of life : what comes from the land should benefit the landowners. Only land title holders (850 of them) gain the benefits. Nobody else.

BCL must pay all the landowners since our land is almost finished. We oppose this resettlement scheme. Dapera and Piruari have lost their land rights. They must put the land back to its original state, but it's too late.

Daily blasting causes landslides; our water is slipping down into the ground.

Chemicals cause unknown damage to plants and animals. All the old people know what agriculture was like before.

Mining causes mental illness and asthma. Dust and chemical pollution cause problems.

We are still very firm on kicking the Company out. Oni told lies to Espie that all the ground was his and he would give it to the Company to use. When CRA was new, there were promises of good schools and hospitals but those promises were never kept.

The Trust Fund is only for rich people. The funds are never distributed to the people.

Landowners must get 25 per cent of the profits and PNG, BCL and the Provincial Government can also take 25 per cent, so that shares are genuinely equitable.

Before BCL vehicles used to give people lifts with their cargo. Now they refuse to do that but we expect that kind of service.

The National Government is selling us for 30 pieces of silver. To the government and the Company we are nothing.

There must be one landowner on the Board of Directors. We don't trust white men or national Government leaders.

The type of houses in the resettled villages are just matchboxes; landowners deserve something better, the same standard as the mineworkers.

Why doesn't BCL show more goodwill?

The Company has created classes in our society, where there were none before the Company came. Family disputes have now occurred over land, even within families and within villages. Matthew Kove of Guava is in dispute with us.

There must be a new land review; there are too many disputes over overlapping ownership, since the surveyors did not do a good job.

Contracts are not given to PNG companies but to foreign-owned companies, even the small contracts. Most contracts are owned by redskins, who also cause social problems.

Another example is Kieta Plumbing Contractors, part owned by Barry Wynn of BCL. These contracts should be shared out.

MINENCO mainly employ people from outside this area. The Business Liason Office (BCL) started but when they got our land they lost interest. They should train landowners.

Black men in the top offices - such as Joe Auna and Philip Mapah - are just window-dressing. We don't know who to believe - the National Government, the Provincial government or who? And we have no advisors, unlike them. But we don't need them. We grew up with the problem.

We will never allow anymore mining.

Women are the real landowners so we know.

If this is not sorted out there will be problems and violence.

We don't want a history of CRA to be written by an Australian woman. If they want our history they must come with a cheque.

There is acid rain, chemicals, dust on the cassava leaves - all from the mine. Our food is not as good as before.

We may experience the same second-generation problems as the Marshall Islands.

We do not trust any white men.

The North Solomons people are really firm against any more mining.

We are planning how we can use force against the Company; if necessary we will die on our own soil. We don't want to finish up like the African Third World countries.

We are willing to lay down our lives for our land. This is our land, not that of the National Government - they cannot take away our land rights. Trees and crops don't bear fruit like they did before. Riverbeds are drying up as water disappears into blasting cracks.

Landowners should be given medical check-ups like those that are given to mineworkers. They should send a doctor round to the mine villages. The hospital at Panguna has no permanent doctor, so we get sent to Arawa. BCL should provide a doctor there, with accommodation who could be directed by the Provincial Government. The BCL ambulance refused to attend a child who died on the Jaba River, but they said they had to get the Arawa ambulance, whereas the accident occurred in the lease area, because of the impact of the tailings. Such cases are compensated on a goodwill basis of K5000 each, but each case should be treated on its merits. Women can bear many children so they should receive more. Two children have died inside the mine area, one by sand and one by electrocution. Even paybacks in the Highlands lead to more compensation than BCL provide. Relatives of these people were even told to go through the court to get insurance payments from the Company.

All essential services should be distributed freely to the landowners.

A high technology operation can help us. There must be a landowner on the mine review process. In the Provincial Government the Premier, Joe Kabui, is a landowner but he doesn't help us. If we had spoken out forcefully and raised problems the government wouldn't have sent this review team to grease us.

As Chairperson and spokesperson of my people I say that we want to get rid of the Company. We want compensation for crops on the side of the Kawerong valley. There is no proper compensation in the special mining lease area.

Not enough children are going through high school. We need more education for employment. Most young people finish at Grade 6 and jobs only go to those with

education. We were promised 75 per cent of BCL employment. Employing outsiders is not good for us and it costs the Company extra money to pay their fares, accommodation etc. Here there are many unemployed youths who could work for BCL.

Landowners own what is above the land and what is under the ground.

Roads for landowners are just bulldozer tracks. We deserve something better. Before there was no road at all until we got angry and demonstrated.

The permanent houses here in Guava were built by us, not the Company.

There are only five beneficiaries; we're only secondary beneficiaries.

When the money is distributed from occupation fees and royalties the share is not enough for any of us, since there are two clans in Guava and one has more than a hundred people. It's not our job to settle these distribution issues; the initial agreement was too rushed.

We never see any donations from BCF though it goes throughout the country, even to Expo 88 in Brisbane. Exactly the same is true of the Trust Fund. That's why we want to get rid of the Company.

We strongly recommend that Philip Mapah be removed since he gives contradictory information to the Company. We requested CRA to demote him. If Joe Auna and Philip Mapah weren't there, these problems wouldn't have arisen. They're helping the Company not the landowners. Landowners should be in these positions. The South Bougainvilleans are only there for the money.

We see no evidence of the operations of the Trust Fund, except that it benefits a very small group of people. Matthew Kove and Severinus Ampaoi were the people who gave our land away. They are doing the same with the Trust Fund. It's just a cover-up to keep us all quiet. Quadling fooled the old men. We were all happy when it started. Now we have tried to change the leaders at the AGMs, but the only way we can do it is when they leave in coffins.

Crop compensation should go to those with garden rights not the titleholder alone.

Flying foxes and possums are not dying out from any epidemics, but from chemical pollution. Flying foxes fly everywhere, as far as Rabaul, and drink the seawater. Now there's not one left. This is our proof.

BCL said they would stay for only five years. We are fed up with white men telling us what to do. We are going to get rid of Arawa town.

BCL sell gold on the black market, exported in full 44-gallon drums in specially chartered ships which go to Melbourne. The gold is scraped from the bottom of the ball mill every 3 months when the mine is closed down. It is not recorded since it doesn't go down the pipeline, so this adds even more to BCL's profit. This is tax-free smuggling. They guard the drums so we know it's not just rubbish. We know this because we have people everywhere watching BCL. That's why we don't believe any white men. We have never told this to anyone before. This is our knowledge.

The Village Relations Office are selling sand and gravel and old BCL machinery, such as screen wire. To get this you must give them a carton of beer and then pay.

The Hash House Harriers destroy the image of the North Solomons. It must be stopped. It operates as a cricket club, with naked dancers and striptease. It's just a front for prostitution, even if they do provide money for charity.

The Company must stick to mining activity; they have no other business on our land.

All the modern houses have come from BCL wages not royalty payments.

Our demand for K10 billion is for the whole province, to set the province up for when the mine ends and all we have left is a hole.

The Panguna Landowners Association are having no more discussion with BCL.

This is the last meeting we will have with outsiders. We have had too many useless meetings. They must now give us the cheque.

Real BCL figures are quite different from the Annual Reports. They use transfer pricing and buy equipment from overseas CRA subsidiaries.

This is the only village that knows what's going on.

The coconuts in the Jaba river are not bearing properly now.

When it came, the outbreak of fighting surprised many who thought the local situation was basically harmonious and that any threats emanating from a supposedly radical group like the Panguna

Landowner's Association were "all talk" and claims for compensation were evidence of a "cargo cult mentality" among Bougainvilleans.

5.4 EARLY WARNINGS

Yet there were some Australians and other expatriates, from the mid 1960s, who could see trouble ahead. One copra planter interviewed in an ABC TV *Four Corners* story from 1968 warned that the forceful imposition of the mine against landowner wishes meant "there will be a fight for this land in the future".

A valuable account of the early exploration phase of the mine and its relations with local people is provided by one of CRA's first employees, geologist K.M. Phillips. Phillips had extensive dealings with primary landowners around the Panguna area between 1964-66 and his recollection of events, written for what appears to be an internal CRA analysis of subsequent events on Bougainville, shows that warning bells were clearly being rung about the establishment of Panguna even before it opened, by one of its own employees.

Phillip's account is valuable because it is written by someone working in the field, at the coalface of relations, who is sympathetic to both local concerns and his employer CRA. It covers many of the themes relating to this thesis, including

interaction between the Australian Administration and Bougainvilleans, the rise of cargo cult movements in the area and demonstrates the all-too-often scenario of knowledgeable and sympathetic local officers working for both the Administration and CRA who get over-ruled by their seniors in Canberra and at CRA headquarters in Melbourne.

Below is an extract from Phillip's report to CRA, starting at the point he describes as a turning point in relations around the mine site and continues through to the end of his report.

NOTES ON CONTACT WITH BOUGAINVILLEANS IN THE EARLY
EXPLORATION PHASE, 1964-66

Also somewhere in the first half of 1966 we had a toplevel Canberra visit by the Minister (Barnes) and one of his secretaries. This was the major milestone in the rapid deterioration of relationships that took place from here on. Probably both (Assistant District Commissioner) Max Denehy and myself had been hinting to the people that better things were coming (with regard to the new Ordinance, etc) - we probably even believed this at this stage.

We hoped we could get the ear of the Minister and his advisor before they got too close to the people. This was not to be. The Minister stopped for about half an hour at Jackson's Airport on arrival in PNG where he was briefed by the Assistant Administrator (Henderson). He flew to Aropa, was met by Denehy who couldn't get a word in and drove straight to a meeting with the Kieta people who were told in effect that there was nothing in it (Panguna) for them but the development would be for the benefit of PNG as a whole. Denehy was thunderstruck and although not at that meeting so was I when we talked to the Ministerial party at dinner. Next day was even worse. The Ministerial party met a number of Guavas at the Panguna camp. When old Oni asked plaintively if there was not a silver shilling in it somewhere for them and the Minister said no - nothing (in spite of the fact that he knew of the impending

changes in the Ordinance), I knew that we had troubles ahead. One cannot blame the Minister so much as his advisors and the briefing he got in Moresby.

Needless to say it was not long before *I tambu* signs sprang up like mushrooms and the area in which we were permitted to work shrank even further. Also a new Bougainvillean arrived on the scene that we had never seen before - Anthony Ampei. A young man who claimed to have been at Sohano with the Bishop for the past two or three years and who came from Guava, he told us that he was the owner of the land which comprised the central third of the ore body and on which 3 of our drills were operating and we were to stay off it forthwith. So resignedly I withdrew our drillers, suspended all work, advised Max Denehy and Melbourne office and suggested they come up and sort it out. Ampei turned out to be something of a religious/cargo cult fanatic who had been undergoing treatment in Moresby for the previous three years, not at Sohano, and subsequently returned there where he still is. It was curious in a way that the people allowed him to become their chief protagonist for a time, although a fair degree of mysticism still existed and cults were still rife.

We carried on for some time in the areas outside his ground (curiously the other people did not follow his lead) but the "show of force" philosophy eventually won out. Denehy was removed from having anything to do with Panguna and confined to Kieta and then transferred to Samurai at the end of 1966. By about October 1966 we were back on Ampei's ground and shortly afterwards a patrol post was established at Barapinang with a kiap and a police detachment. In October I fell ill from the work and other pressures and took three months sick leave and returned only briefly in early 1967 before being transferred and subsequently resigning about April that year. The subsequent events (the Hahala uprising in Buka and women blocking the access road at Rorovana) from October 1966 on are well documented and there is little else I can add. Except to say that when I returned in February 1967 the situation was appalling - the majority of the expatriate staff had lost all contact with the Bougainvilleans and were contained in a vacuum almost by the Administration - a sentiment with which John Dagg, the kiap, agreed.

The early exploration people in any project are normally more vitally, almost emotionally involved in everything that is going on, whereas the next stage of evaluation and then construction brings in people who are often just doing another job for wages and don't

have this involvement. This change had taken place over the few months I had been away at the end of 1966 and it was pretty obvious that tolerances all round were going to deteriorate for some time to come.

Concerning amendment to the Mining Ordinance in 1966, Mr Phillips notes:

There is an implication here that the Ordinance was amended to help solve the Panguna problem. This is not true and in fairness to some of the Mines Division people I think I should explain the position. Ivo Wood was chief of the Mines Division from about 1960-1970. As such he came under the Director of Lands. Ivo was quite a remarkable character and something of a philosopher. From the outset he was most unhappy about the Mining Ordinance and its lack of pertinence to the Melanesian situation, especially the lack of requirement to compensate customary landowners for mining on their ground, etc. At least as early as 1963 he began rewriting the Ordinance to try and correct some of these anomalies - that is before CRA even came to Bougainville. I know that he and two wardens, Stephens and McKenzie, were very sympathetic to the share of royalties going to the landowners and most of the 1966 amendments were generated by these three in principle some years previously. The Bougainville developments merely accelerated the completion of the new Ordinance.

David Moorehouse was another who sounded the warning bells but was effectively ignored. Moorehouse was a kiap and former Deputy District Commissioner in Bougainville from 1969-1972.

I told the administration in Port Moresby that Bougainville was at crisis point 30 years ago, long before the war started. I said there was going to be trouble here, but the visiting delegation from Canberra thought I was "beating up" the situation and over-reacting. I was then posted off to the Sepik river for a few years. I had trekked all over Bougainville listening to local people's views. They have always had a sense of separateness, but when I presented their strong views on land ownership and compensation, it was over-ruled by Canberra bureaucrats.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Moorehouse, D. 1999 (former Deputy District Commissioner in Bougainville from 1969-1972), in telephone conversation with this author.

As well as planters, geologists and even kiaps who were voicing their concern, were some of the Catholic missionaries on the island. The priests, usually Australian, Irish and American, were warned off by Australian Administration officials angry at the influence these priests had in local communities, especially with regards to their criticism of the mine. The role and dismissal of these priests can also be seen as further warnings ignored by the Administration.

The writer and journalist John Ryan wrote of the frustrations felt by some of Bougainville's priests in his book *The Hot Land*:

The missionaries Fingleton (Tabago), WF Mentzer (Kuraio), Bernard Brosnan (Sipai) and others all had their opinions on Panguna and Tonolei, and in the considered opinion of some outsiders at least, they were justified. Bishop Leo Lemay at Tsiroge a few miles south of Buka Passage had a difficult two years until 1967, trying to keep his priests out of politics. The open opposition ended unexpectedly following Minister Barnes's visit to Bougainville and reports from Canberra that a Cabinet Minister had gone to Roman Catholic Apostolic Delegate Enrici in Sydney, demanding that the priests keep out of Bougainville's politics or leave the island.

If the missionaries were not guilty of anti-government advice to the villagers, many were suspected of it. In 1968, at Tabago, Fingleton told me how the government had "tried to find a way of getting rid of us".

"I have no intention of leaving" Fingleton said.

"Certainly, I may have caused the Australian Government some heartburn, but there is more to governing Bougainville than just telling the black man what to do. I am helping them to understand what the Government wants them to do. If I disagree with the Government, I damn well say so". And he does.

At the northwest coast of Sipai, Father Bernard Brosnan told me the Panguna landowners "are being robbed. They look like getting \$30,000 a year in mining occupation fees and royalties. They should be getting ten times as much...the company will be getting plenty of money, there's nothing surer. The only ones losing are the landowners".

Further down the coast at Kuraio, Father Mentzer wanted to talk about Panguna. "I can't though. There's been a lot of trouble; a lot of pressure from the Government."

At Tabago, Fingleton was convinced the reported visit to Apostolic Delegate Enrici was the reason. "The Minister wanted to shift four of us out of Bougainville - Wylie, who eventually left in disgust, and Brosnan, Mentzer and me; and there may have been one or two others on the borderline. I suppose the row started because we told the government what we thought about letting the prospectors in without permission. Then the business of the mineral ownership and the royalties. You'd think the Government was trying to make enemies deliberately on Bougainville."⁹¹

A ten-year war ensued from 1988 to 1998, seeing an Australian backed PNGDF enforcing a naval blockade of the island and making numerous attempts to recapture the Panguna mine and eliminate the BRA.

The BRA leadership, including Francis Ona, held a ceremony on 17 May 1990 to formally declare a "unilateral declaration of independence" for the Republic of Bougainville.

An estimated 10-15000 people died during the conflict, mostly from preventable diseases and lack of medical care brought about

⁹¹ Ryan, J. 1970 *The Hot Land*, Macmillan, pp.331-332.

by the naval blockade. Most died from malaria. More than 200 PNGDF soldiers and an unknown number of Bougainvilleans (civilian, Resistance or BRA), perhaps up to 1000, were killed in combat.

5.5 THE BLAME GAME

Anthropologist Douglas Oliver acknowledges the usual litany of grievances against the mine and colonial paternalism as being contributors to the outbreak of war, but also wonders whether the payment of any amounts of compensation would have settled the matter. He speaks of a gulf of misunderstanding, cultural differences, cargo cultism, the trauma of modernity and environmental destruction as all playing a part.

Fundamentally the issue was about land and the Bougainvilleans wanted it back - or at least to be in control of it. He also cites the anthropologist Colin Filer when making the point that land use is renegotiated by every generation, something relevant to the usurption of the original Panguna Landowners Association by the more militant New Panguna Landowners Association.

Compensation "deals" done with one generation of land owners, or their leaders, will be repudiated by the next generation regardless of the manner in which deals are negotiated...the authority of (the elder generation) leaders within their communities may well

be undermined by the very fact of their having been party to some previous agreement⁹².

As Denoon points out, the complicated land tenure system made it difficult to please the landowners; primary, secondary and province-wide.

The scale and scope of payments were perpetually under angry review and even two million kina did not go far among recipients - only far enough to ignite feuds...Nasioi society erupted in internal violence before its resentment was directed at BCL⁹³.

In looking to apportion responsibility for the descent into war, the obvious candidates are successive PNG governments who failed to renegotiate the terms of the mining agreement every seven years, the paternalistic attitude of Australian colonial officials and the exploitative nature of a major mining company like RTZ/CRA.

If blame must be allocated, it should attach less to Australian individuals than to Australian principles, the transcendent value of the nation state and the valuation of land as a commodity. The longer-term tragedy was that these principles survived PNG's independence, making it all too easy for landowners to be ignored until they turned to violence⁹⁴.

5.6 THE BURNHAM AGREEMENT

⁹² Oliver, D. 1991 *Black Islanders*, Hyland House, p.210

⁹³ Denoon, D. 2000, *Getting Under The Skin - The Bougainville Copper Agreement and the Creation of the Panguna Mine*, Melbourne University Press, p.171

⁹⁴ Denoon, D. 2000, *Getting Under The Skin - The Bougainville Copper Agreement and the Creation of the Panguna Mine*, Melbourne University Press, p.203

In 1998, New Zealand brokered a ceasefire and peace deal known as The Burnham Agreement. It came in the wake of the failure of the PNGDF's Operation High Speed Two assault on the island and the Sandline Mercenary affair, which had plunged PNG into a major political crisis.

PNG's Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chan, was forced to resign after his government had secretly employed a British and South African mercenary force called Sandline, a subsidiary of Executive Outcomes, to be mobilised against the BRA. This triggered an army revolt, led by the PNGDF Commander Brig. General Jerry Singarok. After a month of secret training in Wewak, the Sandline force, led by ex British Paratroop Officer Tim Spicer, were ejected from PNG.

Among the BRA, who had proven themselves resourceful guerrilla fighters capable of holding most of the island, was a general sense that they had effectively won the war against a demoralised PNGDF clearly unable to take the province by force. A more moderate group within the BRA, led by its military commander "General" Sam Kaouna and the former Premier of the island Joe Kabui, then opted to pursue independence through peaceful and diplomatic means, reflecting the will of a great many Bougainvilleans - particularly the women - who had suffered much privation during the decade of war.

Just as women had been instrumental in supporting the rebellion in the first place, prominent women now decided it was time to end it.

Josephine Tankunani Sirivi, founding president of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom (BWPF) movement and wife of General Sam Kaouna, was prominent among women leaders putting pressure on Kabui and Kaouna to find a negotiated settlement.

We wanted peace, but not peace at any cost since we knew that the PNGDF could never defeat us⁹⁵

At Burnham, New Zealand, on October 10, 1997, Kaouna and Kabui signed the ceasefire declaration, which ended the war, on the proviso that PNG guarantee a referendum on independence for the island within 10-15 years. This required a change to PNG's constitution, which was approved in 2000.

In 1998, Australia led an unarmed regional peacekeeping force, known as the Peace Monitoring Group (PMG), made up of personnel from New Zealand, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga. The force had UN authorisation as well as a fulltime UN mission led by Ambassador Noel Sinclair, from Trinidad. The PMG formally withdrew from Bougainville in 2003 after supervising a largely successful

⁹⁵ Sirivi, J. 2000, Sydney in conversation with the author.

operation with no peacekeepers killed and relatively few ceasefire violations. The UN office remained until 2005.

Initial fears of payback violence did not materialise and Bougainville's reconciliation process, involving many *kastom* practices such as breaking bows and arrows and ceremonial chewing of beetle nut, have so far kept the peace among former BRF (Bougainville Resistance Force) and BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army) fighters.

5.7 RECONCILIATION

One reason the BRA and Resistance have largely kept the peace is because they shared similar goals - independence. Although the Bougainville Resistance Force (BRF) was largely played in the media and elsewhere as a "pro-PNG" force, this is not accurate, although certainly true in some instances.

There is no doubt that a number of Bougainvilleans saw their best hope for the future as remaining part of PNG, particularly if they had been educated and worked elsewhere in PNG. Others were pro-PNG because of BRA atrocities, especially among those in Buka who lost family and property during the BRA rampage through Buka in 1990. Many were drawn to the Resistance because of their need to avenge killings, in their families or clan by BRAs, or because they needed government pay to help them and their families

survive the harsh conditions on the ground. They may have also felt that joining the Resistance was the best way to ultimately bring about peace and were largely apolitical.

There were also tribal rivalries at play: several Resistance soldiers in Sovele, working with the PNGDF, claimed that they were in fact pro-independence, not pro-PNG. The reason for this, they said, was because the BRA leadership was dominated by the Nasioi clan from central Bougainville; Francis Ona (President), Joe Kabui (former Premier and then President of the Bougainville People's Congress) and Sam Kaouna (Commander of BRA forces). They were afraid that any future independent Bougainville would be dominated by the Nasioi clan.

According to one Sovele Resistance leader who spoke on condition of anonymity, summing up the general feeling among many of his men:

We still want independence but we want the leadership to be representative of all Bougainvilleans, not just the Nasiois⁹⁶

Bougainville's transition to peace and reconciliation has been largely successful and some observers have viewed it as a potential role model for conflict resolution throughout trouble spots in Melanesia and beyond. But that is conditional on the implementation of the most important agreement reached with the

⁹⁶ "Isaac", 1994, BRF guerrilla, in interview with author, Sovele

Burnham Declaration: that PNG changes its constitution to allow a referendum on independence "within ten to fifteen years" after the establishment of a Bougainville Autonomous Government.

Only Francis Ona and several hundred hard-core militants, called the Me'ekamui Defence Force (MDF), remained outside the peace process from 1998-2005, but at the same time never threatened it. Ona died in July 2005 but his MEF remain armed and maintain roadblocks and a "no-go" area around Panguna. The No-Go zone was mostly respected by the regional Peace Monitoring Group (PMG) whilst it was on the island and now by Bougainville's own Police force.

Bougainville and Buka now have high autonomy in theory but many leaders complain that the implementation is slow, national funds due to the Bougainville administration are held up and often skimmed by corrupt officials in Port Moresby and the pace of reconstruction and economic development is also slow. Unless the PNG central government dramatically improves its delivery of essential services and infrastructure, it is likely that a majority of Bougainvilleans will vote for independence in the proposed referendum to be held within the next decade.

5.8 KASTOM MOVEMENTS & LIBERATION

*Bipo taim mipela i lotu long ol tumbuna spirit ol i savi bekim pre bilong mipela. Tasol nau god bilong waitman i no save harim mipela*⁹⁷.

In the times before, we prayed to our ancestral spirits and they heard our prayers. But now, with the whiteman's God, he doesn't hear our prayers.

In any understanding of how and why the Bougainville war erupted in late 1988, it is necessary to acknowledge the crucial role that a variety of *kastom* and cargo movements played in the lead-up to war and how they evolved during the course of the war.

For those who care to look, there are examples that go back a century, beginning in 1904 when the Germans banned a "pagan" called Muling, who was then agitating against the colonial administration. Continuously, over the next 100 years a number of movements flourished and confronted successive administrations. They evolved, mutated, expanded, contracted and died out until a new generation spawned a new charismatic leader, preaching a similar message as those before him. He (there appears to be no recorded women who have led such movements in Bougainville, but have elsewhere in Melanesia) would crystallise grassroots

⁹⁷ Moses, elderly Bougainvillean from Wakunai district, in conversation with the author in his village, May 1996.

political sentiment and spirituality. Sometimes it would manifest in open rebellion.

With the arrival of the Europeans, for the first time in their history Bukans and Bougainvilleans were faced with an organised group of foreigners who were seemingly more powerful than themselves. Many thought that this had been ordained by their ancestors and thus accepted the new foreigners and chose to live under their administration and learn new ways. Others instinctively believed the white men were not superior and had no right to rule them. Defenceless against modern weaponry, they knew the only weapon they had left was sorcery and the spirit world.

The only way to confront the white man effectively was to join together and build a movement defined not by tribal loyalties as had always been the case historically, but by a spiritual calling, legitimised by the ancestors. Realising they had more in common together than with the whiteman, they would have realised the need to stop fighting each other and transcend their tribal bonds. The missionaries were already breaking down the tabus and beliefs they had lived with forever. Their gods were being replaced and nothing less than an appeal to the Divine would stop it.

This requires some basic ingredients: the ability to communicate with God directly, not via the white man and his Bible, to demonstrate the power of their own ancestral Gods. Secondly it needs charismatic leadership to win the people over with their interpretation of the message these Gods have for them. It requires discipline, courage and effective social organisation.

Many used the structure of the Churches or the culture and organisation of WW2 American army camps as a basic model for their own movements. In this way they absorbed, sometimes by osmosis if they were previously raised in the Church or been a carrier during the war, the architecture with which to rebel.

When war came to Bougainville in 1988 it took the PNG government and Australia by surprise. Yet to those in Bougainville it was not unexpected if they had been listening to the *kastom* movements then flourishing. It seems BCL and the National government either weren't listening to the local people or underestimated the depth of hostility brewing.

A study done on the Kopani movement, published in 1985, demonstrates that warning signs were there.

5.9 KOPANI CARGO MOVEMENT

We cannot say the cult leaders were altogether ignorant of modern progress. They saw enormous machinery and equipment coming on huge ships. (There were) gigantic 105 ton and 210 ton trucks, puzzling mechanical hands, great electric shovels, metres and metres of diamond drill going into the ground to test copper content (1000 metres down!). Interestingly, once when a diamond drill snapped, these people told everybody the Masalai had broken it because it did not want CRA to disturb him and did not want the white man to take the copper out.

As the Kopani believed, the CRA was intercepting the machinery and everything coming off those ships, (but) in actual fact the goods were meant to be sent to the Kopani people (from their dead ancestors).

In 1985 Herman Sipari published a short outline of the Kopani "Cargo Religion", a new religious movement operating in the mountains to the northwest of Panguna. It described the rise of the movement in the early 1960s as a classic cargo cult which shadowed the establishment and growth of the mine itself. As the mine evolved, so too did the movement until it hardened into outright hostility towards the mine, the Church and the State.

According to Sipari, the aims of the cult were:

To bring cargoes and wealth to the people.
To meet with immortal spirits.

The laws and regulations included:

1. No one is to engage in any sort of development projects.

2. The cult followers are not to adhere to the principals of Christianity.
3. Meals are to be served in common in two groups, the leaders and ordinary people. The leaders eat with the spirits inside the mess house while the rest eat assembled outside the dining hall and have their meals there.
4. Cult police are to have drill exercises every day.

Sipari describes how leaders of the movement had forbidden its followers from growing any cash crops, raising domestic animals, or private gardening. All gardening and eating was communal. The penalty for disobedience was hanging "because it was believed any sort of private interest would stop the cargo coming."

All the cultists were baptised Catholics but they had long stopped going to Church. Instead, the men performed bone-burning ceremonies in the "coffin house", where human skeletons were stored and then used in sacrificial burnings to communicate with their ancestors. The message preached was anti-Church and anti-State. There was a nearby armoury containing traditional weapons like clubs and spears and men drilled every day. They established their own police force.

More ominously, Sipari notes:

For reasons unknown, the cultists have been very strong supporters of the Bougainville Secession Movement. However they seldom come to meetings at their village assembly centre at Atamo. But the members took an active part in public province-wide demonstrations in Arawa and Panguna.

Some leaders of the Kopani movement were arrested by the authorities.

This report on the Kopani cargo movement and its growing militancy in 1985, just three years before the outbreak of fighting, is a prime example of how examination of these movements can provide a prophetic forewarning of trouble to come. It is an indictment of the PNG and Australian intelligence services that this canary in the coalmine was either ignored or misunderstood.

A few years later we have the angry speech of Perpetua Serero at the last Panguna Land Owners Association meeting in late 1988 and then the descent into conflict.

5.10 TAIM BEFO (THE TIME BEFORE)

Bougainville's 10-year war pushed many into the bush and its old tribal ways. The chieftain system of village governance was revived by both sides and equally, both sides were nurtured by a variety of *kastom* movements that mixed Christianity with sexual, cargo and ancestral worshipping. As elsewhere in the region, they also provided the seed for nationalism.

Yet even in peacetime Bougainville has spawned numerous *kastom* movements, often erroneously labelled "cargo cults", in response to the activities of foreign traders and organised religion.

Previous to European contact, Bougainvilleans and their kin throughout the Solomon Islands practised forms of animism that included fire and food offerings and other forms of worship to honour both their ancestors and the "Masalai" (place spirit). There was often inter-tribal warfare but it was usually regulated and ritualised. Headhunting and cannibalism were features. Coastal communities appeared engaged in, if not permanent tribal war, then permanent suspicion of mountain communities. This did not stop trade, however, and a barter system (such as coastal fish for mountain taro) was evident, as was the use of shell money to purchase pigs and wives.

There were elaborate and secretive initiation rituals for boys and girls as they entered adulthood (such as the Upei initiation rituals for boys) and some men became "Big Men" in their communities if they became great feast givers. By providing regular feasts of pigs and vegetables, men were able to improve their status and communities were then indebted to them, underlying the obligational system of trade and feasting that underpinned their communities. Some have even seen in the feast-giving tradition a form of proto banking: wealth that is accumulated and then publicly shared puts members of the community "in debt" to the feast-giver, arguably a form of "credit".

Into this realm came Catholic and Methodist missionaries from the middle of the nineteenth century, followed by Anglican, Baptist and Seventh Day Adventist missionaries. They were intent on saving souls while the British, German and Australian governments tried to administer them into an economically viable colony. The first trade posts were established on Buka in 1884.

5.11 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

Herman Sipari writes about the establishment of the Catholic missions in the Solomons and Bougainville beginning in 1898. This was in fact the second attempt by Marists to settle missionaries into Oceania, following the failure of the first band of Marists who had set out in 1845. By 1903 Bougainville and its outer islands became a Vicariate with the American Father Thomas Wade, S. M. consecrated as Bougainville's first Bishop.

The people of the North Solomons did not show any really violent opposition towards the missionaries, as did their counterparts in the South Solomons. In the South Solomons, for example, a bishop was murdered on the island of San Cristobel. In the North Solomons, admittedly, people at first disallowed priests to baptise babies because the children were usually dedicated to the clan ancestral spirits. The intervention of a new Spirit would anger the ancestor's spirits.

Most natives came to accept the missionaries, I believe, out of curiosity, because of their strange ways of worship, with priests dressed in brightly coloured vestments, new rituals being performed and read from richly bound books. Perhaps some accepted the missionaries hoping that by being members of the church the natives would also acquire the things they

saw the missionary owned. The missionaries, to them, seemed a lot better off than the natives - in the way they dressed , their ways of doing things are their intelligence. There is no doubt that the natives considered the missionaries to be superior⁹⁸.

Up until the arrival of missionaries, most Melanesian societies were essentially polytheistic, embracing numerous gods and spirits, not least of which were their ancestors. The arrival of Christianity was largely tolerated at first since it could have been seen as just another god that required worship and appeasement.

But as Christianity's monotheistic underpinning became apparent - that this was one God to be worshipped to the exclusion and expulsion of all others - then hard choices had to be made among Pacific islanders. Little wonder that some would hold fast to *kastom* beliefs and reject Christianity to the last, or that others would try to syncretise the teachings of Jesus with their own traditional beliefs.

Still, it is remarkable how quickly the Pacific, as a region, converted en masse to Christianity. Sipari provides statistics for Bougainville at the time of independence in 1975 but there is a curious admission that a sense of disillusionment had entered the native converts by then.

⁹⁸ Sipari, H. 1985 chapter on Friday Religion in *New Religious Movements in Melanesia*, p 27, edited by Loeliger, C and Trompf, G, University of South Pacific and University of PNG.

The Catholic population numbered more than 75,955 out of 102,850 civic population. Non-Catholics and other Christians 8,760, the pagans and the cultists numbered around 4,021. The Diocese of the North Solomons has 29 main parishes and 30 substations with 41 churches. The taskforce or the native clergy at present looks very discouraging with 50% of the native priests having left the ministry!⁹⁹

As most Melanesian societies are based on exchange, it is not surprising that the missionaries, particularly Marists, "purchased" their initial converts, through payment for labour on their own coconut plantations. Hired labour, together with payment of goods to relatives, was a guaranteed means of establishing a following through which religious instruction could be passed on. Generous supplies of tobacco, calico, gardening tools and religious 'medals' were further enticements. Two books throw light on these early endeavours; Hugh Laracy's "Marists and Melanesians" and "Black Islanders" by Douglas Oliver. An American anthropologist who began work in Bougainville in 1938, Oliver explains:

. . . the incentive to conversion supplied by a few specific trade goods was increased for some by their comprehensive belief that Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular, would somehow provide an unending supply of *waitman's* goods of all kinds, as witnessed by the boatloads of objects that whites continually received. Medical aid was instrumental in winning many converts.¹⁰⁰

Another reason for missionary success lay in the similarities in some concepts shared by the islanders and Christians. "Heaven"

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.28

¹⁰⁰ Oliver, D. 1991 *Black Islanders*, Hyland House, p.61

was one: the locals also believed in a millenium of endless cargo that would come, bringing fulfilment of all spiritual and material desires. When the 'supernatural' whites arrived with their endless supplies, it was taken by some to be a materialization of such prophecies. The idea was further reinforced by the belief that the cargo would be brought to them by their long dead ancestors; the whites with their ghost-like skin seemed to match that description.

The Church may be reluctant to acknowledge it, but viewed from a local perspective the Church would provide the basic framework from which future breakaway "cargo cults" and *kastom* movements would structure themselves. Christianity was thus the first, best organised and most enduring of Bougainville's "cults" up to today.

Buka island, just north of Bougainville, was the first to foster cults and *kastom* movements, perhaps because it had been in contact with whites longer. Ruled by white controlled missions, plantations and government administration, the first such recognised cult was most likely an attempt to localise the power of such institutions.

5.12 MULING AND PAKO

In 1904 a pagan named Muling began preaching that through his magic he had the ability to acquire *waitman's* goods. His group soon swelled to such a size that a fearful German administration arrested and exiled Muling and his partner Novite to Madang, where Novite died. Muling later returned and teamed up with another *kastom* leader called Pako.

When the Australian administration took over during WW1 and Marist missionaries were introduced, they were well received by locals keen to continue the supply of *waitman's* goods. Thus Sydney, Australia was believed to be the future "abode of the righteous" in part, no doubt, because it was known to be the source of most goods coming to Buka. Within a few decades, 90 per cent of locals had converted to Catholicism.

But this was no guarantee they would remain entirely within the fold. If the Catholic *lotu* (ecclesiastical services) brought cargo, some Bukas reasoned, why can't our own Ministers? Pako, another pagan, promised deliverance. Using mission-style services to pray to their ancestors, Pako and his followers were so confident the cargo would come that they ceased gardening and built wharves and storehouses to receive the goods.

At its peak, around 1920, the cult embraced around 5,000 Bougainvilleans and was left alone until they began claiming goods which had arrived at ports for the whites. The Australian administration stepped in and banished the leaders to Madang, where Pako later died. The movement was revived however, when Sanop, also a pagan, moved into Pako's house and began receiving "messages" from Pako's spirit, promising cargo but this time the message was ominously anti-white.

As the movement spread to northern Bougainville it became more militant. Talk of liberation was backed by a mass desertion of labour from plantations and the Administration again stepped in. Leaders were arrested, together with 100 followers and Pako's house burnt to the ground. When the promised cargo failed to materialise and people starved because they had neglected to tend their gardens, the movement ebbed away.

5.13 WAR AND CARGO

Cargo sentiments revived again with the onset of World War Two. As locals watched the evacuation of the Australian administration, planters and civilians, replaced by thousands of Japanese and their hi-tech weaponry, they somewhat naturally transferred their loyalty accordingly. The Japanese were initially generous with their cargo, consulted local chiefs and encouraged ancestor worship as a bridge to Japanese Shintoism.

As huge bases were established in Buka and Buin, south Bougainville, the locals had no reason to disbelieve the Japanese when told that the days of the Whiteman - and his cargo - were over. But a handful of Australian commandos and 'coastwatchers' remained in the bush and their supply drops by air from Catalina flying boats and by sea from submarines demonstrated to those who stayed loyal that the whiteman's ability to summon cargo was still potent.

The post war years saw the blossoming of several new movements with one thing in common; increased hostility towards white missionaries and the Administration - a portent of things to come. In 1959, some militants near Teop on Bougainville attempted to murder the local missionary, blaming his prayers for delaying their cargo. The following year the mission station at Kiriaka was looted and the priest fled for his life for similar reasons.

5.14 THE KIRIAKA CARGO CULT

Mark Roberts¹⁰¹ describes the rise and demise of the Kiriaka cargo cult in northwest Bougainville that neatly encapsulates the life cycle of one such movement, drawing on typical elements of alienation, hostility, cargoism and then a kind of resolution.

The Kiriaka were known as a bush people who "took pleasure from their feelings of inferiority and persecution" and were known to be hostile to outsiders. In 1938 they allowed a Catholic mission station, C.M. Kuraio, to be established on the coast near their areas. But they were disgusted to find that the missionary did not live the moral code he had expounded. He also banned their *Upei* initiation cult.

During WW2 the elders learnt to light fires at night when they heard the drone of aircraft so that the cargo would come falling gently out of the sky to them, the American and Australian pilots believing that they were dropping their supplies to troops in the field. Some of the Kiriaka were taken on as guides and carriers and were astounded at the amount of supplies at base camps and also the egalitarian interaction between white and negro American troops.

¹⁰¹ Roberts, M. 1985, chapter on The Kiriaka 'Cargo Cult', p. 40, in *New Religious Movements in Melanesia*, University of South Pacific and University of PNG

After the war, the Kiriaka, partly because of their isolation in the mountains, were largely neglected by government and visiting Kiaps. In the late 1950s there was a taro blight, which led to widespread hunger and famine. Infant mortality for 1957 was 100%. A trade store set up by the missionary went bankrupt. According to Roberts:

Only the ancestors were sorry for the Kiriakas. The ancestors sent all that was good while the whites were stealing the goods that the ancestors sent¹⁰².

1960 saw the "cargo outbreak" of the Kiriakas, influenced to some degree by some of its men who had returned from working on plantations in Buka and had heard Anton Keari preach his "New Ideas", a forerunner to the Hahalis Welfare Society he established later with John Teosin.

The bones of the ancestors were exhumed and reburied in new cemeteries. Seances were held with the dead. Houses were built to store the cargo. All material goods, money and even the luluai hats were burnt in an act of faith in the coming of the cargo. The Kiriakas expected the cargo to burst forth from around the mouth of the craters of Tutuai (Mount Balbi).

The ancestors were truly sorry for the people and wanted them to be happy. Therefore, the puritanical code was abandoned and all the men, who could not expect to marry until they were in their forties, were allowed complete sexual freedom. (It was actually on this charge that the cult leaders were sent to jail)¹⁰³.

¹⁰² Loeliger, C and Trompf, G. 1985, *New Religious Movements In Melanesia*, University of South Pacific and University of PNG, p.42

¹⁰³ *ibid*, p 43

The movement came to a head when they planned to kill their missionary, who was tipped off by a loyal parishioner and fled. A government patrol marched in to find the mission station, including the church, destroyed. The cult leaders were imprisoned for several months.

The Catholic Bishop of Bougainville put the area under interdict, suspecting nothing more could be done for them. But a Marist priest, Father William Mentzer, took up the challenge and went into the mountains in 1961, promising to tell the Kiriaka the secret of the cargo - and it worked.

His plan was to use the tremendous human dynamism inherent in the cult to enact social and spiritual fulfilment through economic development. Resettling the Kiriakas on the fertile coastal plateau (once believed to be useless swamp), he had the people cut and clear enormous tracts of land, planting coconut and cocoa plantations. But the economic success was only a tool whereby he rebuilt the Kiriaka's self-image; reaffirming their traditional values and Christian principles. Today the Kiriakas are one of the richest tribes on the island. Their cult was more of a transition cult as they have found the secret of the cargo¹⁰⁴.

The Kiriakas were one of several groups throughout Bougainville that were influenced by the rise of a new movement emerging in Buka, the Hahalis Welfare Society and its charismatic leaders.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, p.44

5.15 HAHALIS WELFARE SOCIETY

By far the biggest of the post-war new religious movements in Bougainville and Buka was the Hahalis Welfare Society. Two Bukas who had returned from studies, intent on collectivising the economy of their local communities, founded it in the 1950s. From modest Kibbutz-like ideals sprang a successful enterprise covering livestock, copra, cacao, dressmaking and trade stores. All money was collectively pooled and doled out according to need.

Spiritually the movement was a synthesis of Christian and *kastom* values, which its opponents quickly dismissed as cargo cultist. Having lost hundreds of their faithful, the missions were particularly irked by the sexual "immorality" of the "cult".

According to Oliver:

The Marist opposition to the society focused mainly on its "baby gardens", where young unmarried women were domiciled and visited by male members of the society. To its scandalised opponents these baby gardens were regarded as free and communal brothels, which served to attract and hold male members within the society and to express open contempt for missionary imposed morality. To their defenders, who labelled them "matrimonial clubs", they were a rational system of trial marriage and served as a sensible means for satisfying rational and God-given sexual needs.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Oliver, D. 1991 *Black Islanders*, Hyland House, p.88

At first the Administration viewed "Welfare", as the group became known, as rather enterprising and a problem solely for the missionaries. But in early 1962, Welfare leaders told their congregations not to pay the annual head tax as the government had done nothing for them, prompting the government to act. Successive attempts to arrest the defaulters were repulsed and it took hundreds of Australian police re-enforcements flown in to make the arrests. 256 were sentenced to periods of up to 6 months and resentment lingered for sometime afterwards.

Fr Mentzer, who had already trekked into the Kiriaka area armed with a pistol and Catholic devotion, was under no illusions what the problem was with Hahalis and the spread of "New Ideas" - communism.

At Hahalis, there was open disregard for European authority and refusal to pay taxes. International communism was imported for a time and flourished. The Christian missionaries have attacked the problem - in fact some missionaries warned the government as early as 1957. Hahalis envoys have come down the coast, and we are trying to defeat them. Our development societies in the Kiriaka and Kunua communities are designed to keep this Hahalis Communism out. We need help. The Kiriakas were in chaos throughout 1961 because of cultism. They believed nobody wanted to help them, and their only hope lay in the pagan spirits¹⁰⁶.

Yet other Catholic devotees during this period, particularly indigenous Bougainvilleans, were not so hostile to the development of such movements. At the time, Leo Hannet was a

¹⁰⁶ Ryan, J. 1969 *The Hot Land*, Macmillan, p.322

Bougainvillean from Nissan Island who was studying at the Catholic seminary in Rabaul to become a priest. His perspective is illuminating since he was a Bougainvillean trying to reconcile Christian belief with *kastom* and a growing political awareness.

5.16 LEO HANNETT

Hannett was already starting to become ambivalent about joining the priesthood after seeing what he called the "double-standards" and "inequality" at work within the nascent local Church and the Administration. He claimed that labourers on Mission plantations were badly treated, poorly paid and no better off from those working on private plantations.

What really upset me in Rabaul was the discovery that the priests themselves were not free from racial prejudices. At the time there were two cinemas in Rabaul, one for natives and one for Europeans. The Fathers, trying to be liberal I suppose, occasionally took some of the light-skinned students to the European cinema: the Gilbertese, some Papuans and one or two Tolais. We Solomon islanders were told that we were too black!

But we did not only have two different cinemas, we had two different masses: one for Europeans and one for natives. I remember that once a Papuan came into the European mass and he was literally chased out of the Church by the Australian priest, who, incidentally, was a member of the Legislative Council!¹⁰⁷

When the Hahalis confrontation started, Hannet found himself emotionally involved partly because he had gone to school with

¹⁰⁷ Beier, U. 1973 *Black Writing From New Guinea*, University of Queensland Press, p. 43

Francis Hagai, one of the leaders of Hahalis. Hagai had been a prefect at the school and although older, he had taken the young Hannet under his wing at the time.

The way I saw it, the Hahalis Welfare Society was merely out to improve the material lives of the people. The Church had started them off on this road with the foundation of the St Joseph's Welfare Society, which had collected money to build better homes. The people had been induced to become carpenters in imitation of the husband of Mary¹⁰⁸.

It was the Church that had made people conscious of the need to better themselves, Hannet believed. When the government came and asked them for taxes, they wondered whether they should give away all that money (for which they would see little return) when they might in fact use it to build themselves better homes. Instead of paying the money to some remote government in Port Moresby the people decided to use it for something that would change their lives substantially.

But the Church took a very different view of Hahalis. From the pulpit they denounced all the Hahalis women as prostitutes and they interpreted the whole movement to be nothing but a cargo cult.

I felt the priests had misunderstood the whole thing. I was deeply disappointed at the way in which they denounced Hahalis in public. It is completely against our custom to put a man to shame in public, because of all the family and in-law ties. I could not bring myself to believe that my people were as bad as the Church had made out. I loved my people too much. I knew that cargo cults existed. My father, like the rest of the people, had been involved in such activities - in spite of the fact that he was a

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, p.45

catechist. Like most people of his generation he led a kind of double life.

But I felt that the Church had lost touch with the people - that if they had given better leadership, instead of rejecting Hahalis outright, they might have led the people the right way. And so over the Hahalis issue my loyalty was split between my people and the Church.

For the first time also, I became very critical of the Administration, their attempt to solve the whole issue simply by flying in police was extremely insulting¹⁰⁹.

The Hahalis Welfare Society never really died on Buka. The ideals it espoused had considerable influence on many successive *kastom* and cult movements on Bougainville - perhaps was even the root of all contemporary movements there - and continues to exert political influence today.

John Teosin was its leader from 1957 until his death on September 27, 2000. The community now marks September 27 as its annual "cultural day" and is currently being led by Matthew Pomis.

Both Joe Kabui and "King" Francis Ona both tried to cultivate support from villages clustered around Hahala during the recent elections for President of Bougainville's Autonomous Government in 2005. Most of the remnants of the Hahalis movement appear to have voted for Joe Kabui, although there are still active members of Ona's MDF from north Buka.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, pp.45-46

Leo Hannett continues to play a prominent role in both PNG and Bougainvillean society today, as both a businessman (a former chairman of PNG Telecom) and now as the newly elected regional member (MP) for Bougainville in the PNG parliament.

5.17 NAPIDOKEO NAVITU

Knoebel describes a similar movement to Hahalis Welfare that emerged in the 1960s but one that didn't seem to take on the same confrontational nature as Hahalis, at least in name.

The Napidokeo Navitu was established to help the Nasioi people in the Kieta area and gradually its ideas spread to other parts of the island.

Aims of the society included the encouragement and fostering of economic, social, and political development on the island of Bougainville, development of community spirit, respect for customs and traditions, maintaining respect for family and marriage ties, uniting all races as well as political and religious bodies, early self-government for the country and respect for rights of workers while maintaining harmonious relations with employers.

At first the movement seemed to be strongly in favour of secession, especially after the results of a referendum on this topic by the group itself were in. However with the advent of District Government in Bougainville, the society seems to be expending its energy more in line with the local government on the island¹¹⁰.

¹¹⁰ Knoebel, J. 1982 *A History of Adjustment Movements in Melanesia*.

This movement appears to have tried to foster a middle ground between a variety of interests, attempting a broad unity among Nasioi landowners against BCL. While it created no adversarial relationship with authorities, clearly there remained an element of political education and workers rights that it helped to filter through to communities.

It would be left to other, more spiritually fused groups led by *kastom* leaders such as Damien Damen, to signal an implacable break in recognition of the authority of Church and State.

5.18 DAMIEN DAMEN & THE FIFTY TOEA MOVEMENT

Into the 1960s another movement emerged in central Bougainville which would prove not just enduring, but would have considerable impact on the secessionist war that gripped Bougainville for more than a decade.

Led by the enigmatic Damien Damen, the movement was originally known as the Bauring Society ("Bauring" in Nasioi language means "the/his child"). According to one Nagovis elder (southwest Bougainville), there were many *kastom* movements and cults flourishing in the mountains at the time and Damien Damen's group were to be found close to where the vast Panguna mine was being established. It began as a classic cargo cult believing that the spirits of their ancestors - not white men - would send cargo

from the sky. Through the 1970s it acquired a sexual flavour, involving "prostitutes" and became known colloquially as the 'Bang Bang' cult, for obvious reasons.

The movement had always carried a traditionalist and anti-government (any government) line and this hardened during the 1980s. The movement, now called the Fifty Toea Movement from the contribution (roughly 50 cents) members were required to pay each month, became more politically polarised. It shed its cargo cult ideals and moved more towards a *kastom* movement rejecting the cargo and outside authority. As most of his followers are Nasiois from central Bougainville, including primary landowners around Panguna mine, Damen's fiery rhetoric no doubt fell on open ears.

5.19 WOMEN CUSTODIANS

At this point it is time to introduce an essential underlying factor to the spiritual and political equation of landowning in Bougainville; it is predominately a matrilineal society.

Melanesia is one of the few regions on earth, which has a significant number of matrilineal societies and many are clustered in an arc from Milne Bay in PNG across to Bougainville and almost all of the Solomon islands except Malaita.

Indeed it was women who first actively opposed the establishment of the Panguna mine in the early 1960s, as a mine access road and

port facility began construction. Women confiscated concrete marking pegs and lay down in front of bulldozers, long before such resistance became fashionable in the environmental movement in the west. Film Australia has documentary footage of Australian colonial riot police forcefully suppressing a protest led by women in Loloho, where the port facility was built close to Arawa town. The riot police are seen using truncheons and tear gas.

Bougainville Copper Ltd had failed to do its anthropolgy, or if it did, it refused to acknowledge the importance of negotiating the leasing of land by women. Josepha Kanawi states:

In matrilineal societies, women are the custodians of land. They are the ones having the capacity to execute contracts as understood not only under customary law but under the modern contract law as well.

It is arguable that the Bougainville Copper Ltd mine agreement could be said to be null and void as the proper custodians of land rights being women were not signatories to the agreement. It is possible to argue that there was no valid contract under custom and (modern) law¹¹¹.

Kanawi takes the argument further, claiming that because women's land rights were continuously ignored, women who were primary land owners around Panguna and involved in the Old and New Panguna Landowners Association then gave their men the spiritual and customary legitimacy for taking armed action against the mine and the State. One of the most strident leaders of the New

¹¹¹ Kanawa, J. 29 July 2003, article in PNG Post Courier newspaper

Panguna Landowners' Association was Perpetua Serero, Francis Ona's sister, who died mysteriously not long before the outbreak of conflict. Perpetua was vocally opposed to the continuation of the mine unless significant compensation was paid. After she died, Francis Ona was given the support of other women in the Association to take action.

As Kanawi states:

The women custodians of the Panguna land have protested for a long time that (sic) eventually their maternal male cousins had to defend their land through the traditional method of warfare. This is my understanding of the (origins of) the conflict which has attracted international attention¹¹².

The *kastom* responsibility, belonging to women in terms of protecting Bougainvillean land, appears to be a factor much underestimated by both the mining company and the PNG government.

5.20 DAMIEN DAMEN & THE BRA

In mid 1994 I trekked up to Francis Ona's BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army) headquarters at Guava village. It had been a steady plod over several days, from the coast through dense jungle and abandoned villages up to Ona's base in the mountains above Panguna. Arriving late afternoon, drenched and exhausted, an old woman ran out from a row of smoking huts and began dancing around me in the pouring rain. She was clutching a spear in one hand and a bucket of water in the other, which she promptly threw over me

¹¹² Kanawa, J. 29 July 2003, article in PNG Post Courier newspaper

as a traditional welcome, humming in a low chant all the while.

Two days later, having interviewed Ona on his struggle for independence, he introduces me to Damien Damen with a half-smile that suggests I shouldn't take him too seriously. It became immediately clear that Guava village was not just headquarters to the BRA, but for much of Damen's 50 Toea Movement as well.

We sat in the shade of a hot afternoon and the wiry Damen proceeded with carefully chosen words, part manifesto, part diatribe. He said his philosophy was based on respect for elders, ancestor worship and respect for the absolute freedom of the individual. He believed everything around us is cargo delivered by ancestors and was extreme in his views of the West, claiming western medicine is "for dogs", education "not fit for humans" and Christianity is "for children, not grown ups with grown up minds". His isolationist outlook meant he was specifically anti-mining and encouraged his followers not to vote in any national or provincial elections.

Damen angered some local Christian priests by not only pinching their congregations by the thousands, but by reportedly digging up Christian graveyards and stacking the bones in a 'temple' of his own¹¹³.

Damien Damen is an enigmatic *kastom* leader from the Nasioi areas whose involvement in various movements has played a pivotal role in contemporary Bougainville history.

Although Oliver dismisses *kastom* and cult activity in the Guava area in his 1969 report to CRA, it is precisely from this area that Damen's later movement, the Fifty Toea movement flourished and influenced the rise of the BRA twenty years later. His general overview in 1968, in a section called *A Rise in*

¹¹³ Bohane, B. 1998 *Cults Of War* article in the Australian Financial Review magazine. pp38-42

Nativistic Movements, is concise and demonstrates he is one of the few white men of the time to acknowledge the role played by such movements. Yet he does not stress their importance or potential political and military potential:

Prior to WW2 there were few manifestations of nativistic movements, but since then, they have proliferated, as witness the Welfare movement on Buka (and now in Koromira) and the numerous little cargo cults among the Nasioi speakers and elsewhere. Both Welfare and cargo movements are quite predictable measures by peoples in confrontation with societies overwhelmingly superior in coercive force and in material wealth. In such instances, when their expectations reach a certain level and then become hopelessly frustrated, the lesser people either become apathetic and 'peonized', or they try to do something about their plight. Throughout Melanesia the characteristic form of such efforts of revitalisation is the well known cargo cult, which usually involves some return to ancestor worship and a prophetic prediction that the ancestors will, at some fixed time, arrange for a miraculous supply of trade goods and the destruction or evacuation of all Europeans.

The exact forms of such movements (in Bougainville and Buka), have of course, differed. The Hahalis Welfare Movement is quite large scale, well organised and in many respects economically and politically 'rational'; whereas several pathetic little affairs in the Gauva area have been largely religious in nature.

Although the leaders would probably disavow supernaturalism, the movements involving Paul Lapun and the Guava leader, (Damien) Damen, do contain elements of cargo-ism and helped to account in some measure for these individuals' popular appeal¹¹⁴.

Even in 1968 Oliver can see Damen becoming a figure worth watching.

¹¹⁴ Denoon, D. 2000, *Getting Under The Skin - The Bougainville Copper Agreement and the Creation of the Panguna Mine*, Melbourne University Press, Appendix, section republishes Douglas Oliver's report to CRA p.210-211

In a later interview in Arawa, June 2003, Damen pointed out that his name Damen, in his traditional language, means "stand-up". He says he was inspired from a young age to "standup" for his people. As a young man Damen says he was a practising Catholic up to the early 1960s. He saw the arrival of Church of England and Seventh Day Adventist missionaries and thought they were "hurting" Bougainville culture. Then he heard the story of Martin Luther and his protestant movement aimed at distancing themselves from the power and corruption of the Vatican.

At the same time, the philosophy and influence of the Hahalis Welfare Society in Buka was starting to reach central and southern Bougainville. Damen says he was inspired by these dissenters, and set about establishing his own 50 Toea Movement as a means to protect traditional *kastom* and retake control over the political and spiritual destiny of his followers.

Many have speculated on the influence that Damen wielded over the young Francis Ona. Some attribute Ona's shift from anti Panguna mine *sabotage* to anti PNG *secession* as the work of Damen. Certainly it is worth noting that when Ona and his BRAs first went bush with a stack of stolen dynamite, they found sanctuary with Damien Damen's movement in the forested mountains of Kongara, southeast of Panguna mine.

Damen himself says that when Ona started operations against the mine, his only goal was to win the Aus\$10 billion in compensation that his New Panguna Landowners Association had demanded from the company.

When the war began, Ona wanted to give himself up because he was afraid of his people being more brutalised by the PNGDF. But soon other leaders from around Bougainville, especially James Singko from the Nagovis area, joined Ona and encouraged him to push for independence¹¹⁵.

Damien Damen was Francis Ona's "mentor", according to former Premier, priest and Governor of Bougainville, John Momis:

He rebelled against western exploitation, law and faith. He exposed the education system as simply an expensive system of alienation. At a time of great change, anger and confusion, Damen offered his followers a sense of identity¹¹⁶.

Momis acknowledges the primacy of ancestor worship in Bougainville's pre-Christian days, as well as the strong link between man and community.

The individual was not allowed to excel in isolation from the community¹¹⁷.

Ona portrayed himself as more moderate in his views, emphasising to this author that he was a practising Catholic, but appeared to keep Damen on side to play the traditional role of a *Sanguma man*.

¹¹⁵ Damen, D. 2005, in interview with author in Arawa.

¹¹⁶ Momis, M. 2003, in interview with author in Buka.

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

The use of sorcery on both sides of the conflict was largely unreported, but it contributed significantly to the psychological trauma that PNGDF troops in particular had to endure.

5.21 SORCERY IN WAR

In his book 'Bougainville Campaign Diary', former Lt. Yauka Liria, the PNGDF's first Intelligence Officer posted to the island when hostilities began, describes how terrified PNGDF soldiers were when they saw black dogs sniffing around their positions, believing the BRA had the power to turn themselves into animals and reconnoitre PNGDF positions.

Since those early days of the war however, superstitious fears of the use of *puri puri*, or sorcery, somewhat diminished among PNG troops. One lieutenant commanding 'Charlie' company in the PNGDF described how in an earlier action his company had defended their position from a wave of BRA attacks.

This group was easy to pick off because they came upon us thinking they were invisible. A couple of them actually danced in front of our machine gun! We killed at least 8 that day and when I went up to the dead bodies I could see many of them were wearing human bones like jewellery.¹¹⁸

As it turned out, those BRAs belonged to another syncretic movement called 'Toki' (Nagovis language for 'God'), the members

¹¹⁸ Bohane, B. 1998 *Cults Of War* article in the Australian Financial Review magazine

of whom subsequently moved into the government held areas, cult intact. Once the BRA shock troops, they then formed their own Resistance militia under a certain "Commander Zero" to defend their area against BRA attacks.

When we were BRAs we used puri puri to protect us but that didn't work, so now we become Resistance instead.
¹¹⁹

Curiously, this Bougainvillean militia were rather pragmatic in their approach - their alliances were largely determined by the power of sorcery rather than ideological or material concerns.

5.22 THE TOKI MOVEMENT

"666" beams a plaque mounted above the temple's tin roof. Inside "King" Tore with grey beard and trembling hands makes a fire offering to the spirits of ancestors. First taro pudding, then coconut, betel nut and finally, a young pig is heaped on the fire as the Minister mutters invocations and women in floral 'Mary' blouses sing in deep, resonating chants.¹²⁰

In April 1995 I visited one of the movement's two centres, a couple of hours walk west of Sovele in southwest Bougainville. Having just attended the solemn funeral of a boy shot dead by the BRA in 'payback', I was unprepared for the raucous welcome given upon entering their grounds on a ridge overlooking a small valley and stream.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*

¹²⁰ *ibid*

Hundreds of kids whooped and hollered having never seen a whiteman because of the war and I was treated to a guard of honour by the local resistance. Then, through the crowd, a slender figure emerged introducing himself as "King Tore", leader of the movement. He presented me with two strings of beads, one of which carries the status of a "Big Man" throughout the Solomon Islands, and we moved into the shade of a classroom.

As the crowd surged around the hut, King Tore moved to the blackboard and commenced a series of chalk illustrations that resembled something between astro-physics and a *ye olde* treasure map. He turned to speak in gentle tones and everyone hushed until the only other sound was the splat of betel nut being spat outside.

At Chibu (near Buka), Jesus planted the palm tree to demarcate the border for his people. Then he established the government and missions for the good of his people. Instead of going up to heaven he went down into the earth. But before he could reach heaven he came to a series of obstacles.

The first was a roadblock by soldiers who questioned him and let him pass. Then a thick cloud enveloped him as he came to a *Five Kina Mary* (prostitute) and he passed on. A dog named Balanito approached and sniffed him to see if he had used the prostitute. He hadn't, so the dog allowed him to carry on without biting him. Eventually he came to a chamber room containing a huge serpent, who was in fact God. Jesus fell to his knees, prayed and was ushered through to paradise¹²¹.

¹²¹ King Tore interviewed by the author, 1994 in Bana district, (Nagovis).

Bougainville has a dormant volcano, Tulenua, adjacent to a pristine lake called Lonalu. Both feature in the mythology of King Tore's movement. People who die go to the lake, which acts as a filter to heaven and hell, hell being inside the volcano. Tore describes hell as "a factory". Heaven, meanwhile, is located below Openwato, the mountain next to the lake. When the end of the world comes, his followers will be "filled with rapture and taken to Paradise".

666 is the number of the ticket held by people in hell who wait for the day when the world is united and there is one God and one Government on earth, for black and white, rich and poor, the dead and the un-dead. God - the Serpent - is also Satan; the movement believes God is good and evil at the same time, so they pray to his good side.

King Tore and the several thousand who lived in the 'care centres' of his movement found themselves battling all sides over the years, but once they established their own resistance force they were mostly left alone. BRAs harassed them occasionally for food and there was an incident in 1995 when some evidently God-fearing PNGDF troops stormed into the temple and shot up a wooden carving of Jesus that King Tore had made himself.

The movement was largely tolerated throughout Bana district, partly in acknowledgement that it was the first to establish

'neutral' care centres after Commander Zero established the District's first resistance force. Even those who laughed at its hybrid faith admit the movement's care centres were clean, well administered, and its resistance effective. Government approved schooling was also introduced to the delight of the District Manager.

When war ended in 1998, the Toki movement was one of several *kastom* and syncretic movements that helped broker reconciliation meetings and ceremonies all over Bougainville and Buka. It was the power of *kastom* to break the cycle of war, using traditional ceremonies where bows were broken, betel-nut chewed, pigs offered and public oaths given that helped seal the peace.

They can start wars, but movements like King Tore's 666 Movement can also broker peace and heal the scars when fighting stops.

5.23 THE TAMBU MINE

As the Australian-led regional peacekeeping force pulled out of Bougainville in June 2003, Francis Ona was interviewed at a roadblock above the mine site at Panguna. He confirmed that full independence was still his objective and that until independence is reached he and local landowners have placed a *tambu* over the entire mine site.

Throughout the five year peace process, the mine site was one of a number of "No-Go" areas for regional peacekeepers. Ona planned to maintain these prohibited areas claiming the right of primary landowners to apply *tambu* over their own land, whenever they feel threatened, in accordance to traditional *kastom*.

Damien Damen moved out of Ona's Me'ekamui Defence Force (MDF) area in Guava village, above Panguna in 2002 and has since settled in Arawa. Ona's men claim they expelled Damen because he had used *puri puri* against several people within the Panguna community, which caused the death of a woman.

In an interview in Arawa in June 2003, Damen confirmed that he had been accused of using sorcery and decided to leave before his own life was threatened. Yet he also stated that he disagreed with Ona on a number of issues and thought he would be of better service to his community by acting as a bridge between other Bougainville leaders and Ona's MDF.

One thing both Ona and Damen continue to agree on is the closure of Panguna mine. If the mine re-opens then people will die according to Damen.

Too many people died to close it. If the mine opens again, then the war will start again¹²².

¹²² Damen interviewed by the author in June 2003 in Arawa, Bougainville.

A sweeping gaze over the destroyed Panguna mine pit and the industrial apocalypse that lies wrecked around it is to witness a symbol of broken dreams. Of white and black men whose lust for cargo made them cultists of capitalism and "progress". And of the black men who fought to reject the cargo and return to *kastom* and Christ.

But the death of Francis Ona in July 2005 could have significant repercussions for the peace process and security of Bougainville. There appears to have been a struggle for power within the Me'ekamui Defence Force, prior to Ona's death. The MDF leadership claimed Ona died from malaria but the mountain people around Panguna are not exposed to malaria at their altitude. Although Ona's family agreed to an autopsy, the MDF leadership under Chris Umma refused. There was no post-mortem done on Francis Ona before he was buried.

A hardline and well-armed MDF faction is now controlling the Me'ekamui areas of Bougainville. There have been reports of Australian conmen, Fijian mercenaries and Indonesian intelligence agents operating with the MDF. There is speculation that since Ona was preparing to embark on a *kastom* reconciliation with President-elect Joe Kabui after a decade of estrangement, a

hardline MDF faction had Ona killed in order to preserve the No Go Areas¹²³.

The fugitive Bougainvillean conman Noah Musingku remains in hiding in one of the No-Go areas but his alliance with the MDF is strained. The MDF have released statements distancing themselves from Musingku and it appears Musingku now operates from his own *kastom* land in the Siwai district after being expelled by MDF leader Chris Umma.

New variations of the pyramid scheme U-Vistract he established in the late 1990s continue to flourish, including a new "bank" he is operating called The World Bank, based in the Siwai area. Having looted millions of dollars from Papua New Guineans, Bougainvilleans, Solomon Islanders and Fijians, Musingku has tried to legitimise his scams by declaring himself King Peie the Second, of the Royal Kingdom of Papala. He has declared a self-styled theocratic independent homeland in Bougainville, once connected to Ona's MDF, now operating independently in the Siwai district.

Observers have seen in his scams a criminal manifestation of cargo cultism: promises of 100% interest paid on deposits, accumulated monthly, and given a quasi-spiritual blessing.

¹²³ Bohane, B.25 July 2005 Agence France Press (AFP) wire story "*Bougainville Rebel Leader Dies After Moves Towards Reconciliation*". See Appendix 8.

Bougainville has paid a blood sacrifice to determine its own destiny. It has won a war, can it now win its' peace? The role that *kastom* and Christian movements - and Islam from now on - (at time of writing the most senior Papua New Guinean Muslim in the country, Khaled, deputy Imam of the Hohola mosque in Port Moresby, is a Bougainvillean) - play in the community, will continue to be a crucial factor in Bougainvillean life.

5.24 CONCLUSION TO BOUGAINVILLE CHAPTER

It would be altogether too simplistic and crass to reduce the Bougainville war - and by extension conflict in the rest of Melanesia - to that of a war of cults, but there is little doubt that a variety of *kastom*, cargo cult and syncretic movements helped shape aspirations and loyalties in the lead up to and sparking of, the Bougainville war. They also played a significant role in ending the war and the process of reconciliation.

The power of 'cargo' promises and *kastom* ritual remains undiminished. In the battle for hearts and minds, the PNG government and its local resistance offered increased government services and high autonomy, while Francis Ona's BRA and now, Me'ekamui Defence Force, hold out for what some see as the mother-of-all cargo and *kastom*: independence.

Yet it is more instructive to look beyond notions of "cargo" when looking at the aspirations of Bougainvilleans today. Their struggle is defined less by cargoism and more by political self-determination. They wish to control and manage their own resources and political administration in a way that balances their *kastom* traditions with those of international trade and law, as well as mainstream Christian belief.

Looking back over the past 100 years one can witness an evolution from the rise of charismatic prophets opposing colonial administrations, to the development of classic cargo-cults in response to WW2 and the establishment of the Panguna mine, to the establishment of *kastom* movements effectively rejecting the cargo to return to *kastom* ways by getting rid of all foreigners.

The Panguna people watched the cargo dream unfold before them. Yet it was if they held a winning lottery ticket-all the numbers added up-but they weren't able to cash it in. Add to this the daily trauma of watching once-sacred mountains reduced to rubble and rivers polluted.

It could be argued that cargo and *kastom* movements became the vehicles to inspire a sense of liberation and nationalism among Bougainvilleans, leading to political self-determination in a similar way to say, the Vietnamese used "communism" as a vehicle

to win independence from the French and later American administrations.

Thus it is more accurate to describe the struggle for independence in Bougainville today as a struggle by *kastom* movements and Christian Bougainvilleans, not cargo cultists. In fact, senior members of both the Catholic Church, such as Bishop Zale and Bishop Singkai played just as an important role in supporting the BRA during the war as *kastom* movements did.

There is a tinge of liberation theology at work in the way Catholic clergy supported the grievances of local Bougainvilleans in the lead up to war and then helped manage supply lines to and from Gizo in the Solomon islands once war broke out. Bishop Zale in Gizo was instrumental in arranging boats running the naval blockade to provide medicine, food and clothing (possibly turning a blind eye to weapons and ammunition) into Bougainville and getting wounded and sick people out for treatment at the Gizo hospital in the Solomons' western province. He also helped those few journalists prepared to run the naval blockade to report on the conflict from a Bougainvillean perspective, including this author.

The role of Islam could also be a factor in the future evolution of *kastom*, cult and militia groups in Bougainville. Several Muslims who are part of the MEF attended the funeral of Francis

Ona and vowed to maintain the No-Go zone and MEF operations. Curiously and co-incidentally, Khaled, the most senior Papua New Guinean Muslim, deputy Imam at the Hohola mosque in Port Moresby, is also a "wontok" of con-man Noah Musingku, both being from the Siwai district of Bougainville.

In conclusion, Bougainville offers a compelling example of why *kastom* and cult movements need to be taken seriously in any analysis of how and why conflict has erupted there over the past century. There is a history of resistance to be found in movements operating there beginning in the early twentieth century: from the prophets Muling and Pako, to the rise of Hahalis Welfare Society, the Mungkas Association, the 50 Teoa Movement, the 666 Movement, the Kompani cargo cult and Friday Religion.

Add to this, layers of Christian liberation theology and militant matrilineal land owners giving the BRA the *kastom* and legitimate right to use force to reclaim land, and it creates a heady mix that with the benefit of hindsight, looks like a combustible mixture inevitably leading to conflict.

Yet the governments of PNG and Australia failed to see the warning signs then and today continue to ignore the power of new religious movements in present-day Bougainville and elsewhere in Melanesia.

CHAPTER SIX

PHOTO REPORTAGE CD

6:1 INTRODUCTION

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6:1 INTRODUCTION

The substance of this chapter is to be found in a CD slide presentation of 120 images that the author has taken over the past 12 years of covering conflict and *kastom* in Melanesia and Australia.

It is designed as a somewhat abstract journey through island life: beginning with the sea, then moving onto scenes of daily life, *kastom* and Christian rituals, urban alienation, crime, conflict, death, liberation, peace and reconciliation - and back to the sea again.

I have deliberately mixed the photos from a range of countries so that the imagery is grouped not according to nation, but according to themes in an attempt to show a certain commonality - and diversity - throughout the region. The photographs were taken on a range of formats and cameras from 35mm Leica rangefinder to Pentax 6.7 medium format camera. The bulk of stock was shot on Kodak Tri-X 400 black and white film.

At all times I was welcomed into the local communities and given free reign to photograph as I saw fit, largely due to the philosophy of my approach as outlined in the methodology section of this thesis. In the cases of reporting from BRA held areas of Bougainville and the OPM command areas of West Papua, this has

sometimes meant crossing borders illegally and has brought the ire of PNG, Indonesian and Australian authorities.

In the case of Indonesia I am still banned from entering the country because of my coverage of the struggles in West Papua and Maluku. I have been labelled a "GPK" (security disturbance person) and was deported from Jakarta in 2002, the last time I tried to enter Indonesia.

Since access to Bougainville during the war was prohibited and a naval blockade of the island was enforced in violation of UN laws, I make no apologies for pursuing a *Burchettian* commitment to "reporting from the other side" by using any means available. Similarly, I make no apologies for covering the West Papuan struggle, a struggle that has claimed 100,000 lives and yet seen minimal media coverage, partly due to the standing ban by Indonesian authorities to allow media and NGOs substantial access to the province.

It is hoped that this collection of images tell a story in their own right and are a significant component to the thesis, not just an illustrative sideshow or curious accompaniment. It is also hoped that a new generation of Pacific islanders will pick up a camera and begin documenting their own *kastom* movements, daily life and, inevitably, conflict when it arises.

As an Australian, resident in Vanuatu, I see myself as a Pacific islander and reject the grandiose claims of Australia being "a continent". This has, I believe, blinded Australians to the reality that we remain forever linked to other Pacific islands through the blood and song-lines of our indigenous people and our historical and military legacy in the region.

Australia would do well to see itself as a large Pacific island rather than a continent removed from Asia and the Pacific¹²⁴. It is for these reasons that the photographic essay is linked aesthetically and thematically, including images from the Australian Army's indigenous Norforce unit.

It is in that spirit and humbly in the footsteps of Edward Curtis, Donald Thomson, Robert Capa, Tim Page, Damien Parer and others that I embarked on this photo journey 12 years ago.

¹²⁴ For an expansion on this theme, see Appendix 7

CHAPTER SEVEN

7:1 CONCLUSION TO THE THESIS

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7:1 CONCLUSION TO THE THESIS

Try as they might, successive administrators of Bougainville and other states in Melanesia have never been able to eliminate *kastom* and cult movements and arguably never will.

The same could be said not just of Melanesian societies but any society on earth. *Kastom* movements are arguably the purest reflection (or illumination) of Melanesian culture and identity because they spring from the spiritual depths of their culture and are usually ordained with the power of their ancestors.

The mercurial quality of humankind's innate spiritual "dreaming" and what drives us to collectivise and communalise our beliefs, suggests that attempting to crush new religious movements is like "trying to tie up water with a length of string" as the Sufi Mystic Rumi put it.

The essential story of human spirituality is the story of our unrequited love of God and quest for a sense of certainty that may never come and may be irrelevant anyway. Lindstrom argues that cargo cults are similarly bound up with notions of yearning and unrequited love.

For administrations it would seem prudent to observe the ebb and flow of such movements without hostility or contempt, for they

can be the canary in the coalmine, the socio-political thermometer of the community at large. They are only ever a minority but one that can symbolise or manifest the will of the majority through ascetic virtue or radical actions.

Yet successive administrations have tended to use force against them, which only alienates the followers even further and, in the process, often wins sympathy among the larger community that can ultimately lead to bigger confrontations, including war. A similar mistaken approach seems to have been taken by the Bush administration in the US in conducting its "War on Terror", in alienating moderate Muslims with its overwhelmingly military response to the crisis.

Movements elsewhere in Melanesia, such as the Moro Movement on Guadalcanal, have demonstrated that they can often begin benignly and stay benign: that is, they are not hostile to Church or State but simply a movement of people who want to live a *kastom* lifestyle.

In such cases these movements can actually become a model society, something to emulate particularly because of their organisational ability, self-sufficiency and peaceful outlook. Everyone in the village is gainfully employed living close to a traditional life. Here there remains respect for the paramount Big Man, whether he be chief or fight leader or a *Sanguma man* or

glasman. In matrilineal societies, women can remain respected custodians of the land.

There is an argument to be made for the State to even encourage the very development of such movements as a means to tackle urban drift, unemployment, poverty and raskolism in a region where half the population is under 21 and most of the adult male population is not formally employed.

Yet it appears that modern governments and big business feel an innate threat when people reject the new (but old) god of consumerism.

As far as known, no Australian, British, German or Japanese administration ever attempted to use these movements to their advantage or steer them into solely "spiritual" movements. They merely tolerated them until such movements posed a threat and then they were cracked down upon. Leaders would be killed, imprisoned or exiled.

In Vanuatu, however, the French were able to manipulate a popular *kastom* movement on Santo Island, led by the charismatic Jimmy Stevens. The French backed Steven's Nagriamel movement to declare independence for Santo Island (hoping it would become a French client state) as the British-backed Vanu uaku Parti (VP) pushed for a united independent country of Vanuatu.

The Coconut War as it was referred to, flared in 1980 just before independence and was crushed by PNG's "Kumul Force", invited in by Vanuatu's first PM Father Walter Lini.

The Church too, has long found ways to deal with such unorthodox "breakaway" movements. It has been more subtle in assessing and infiltrating them in an attempt to woo them back to the fold. On the whole, research and field reports from missionaries in the various Christian church denominations and a handful of religio-anthropologists seem to have been far more alert to the importance of *kastom* movements than government administrators, media and intelligence agencies.

Kastom and cult movements by their very nature are unorthodox and unconventional in their strategies. By contrast, most Western democratic governments seem limited by their own inherent conventionalism. Similarly, Western democratic armies are now facing a global enemy-militant Islam-which fights unconventionally, yet so far Western allies appear to be fighting this unconventional war conventionally. This is forcing a strategic rethink in Defence circles about how to tackle an enemy, which is both transnational in scope and deeply religious in conviction.

Melanesia is already witnessing the growth of Sunni Islam in every country from Timor to Fiji. Islam could well be the next significant "ingredient" in the potpourri of religious belief in Melanesia and could well influence the evolution of various *kastom* and cult movements there, particularly as they are well-funded and capable of "bringing the cargo" in both a financial and spiritual sense.

Saudi Arabia is funding much of the mosque-building and missionarisation in the region through its embassy in Canberra, while Malaysia has created a Pacific Imam Training Course at the Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, hoping to recruit Australian and Pacific islanders to become Imams.

Senior Muslims at the Hohola mosque in Port Moresby and PNG claim there is now a lively debate within its community over the degree to which Wahhabist Islam should be allowed to take root, considering that both the mosque and PNG's first Imam (a Nigerian) are Wahhabi influenced.

Meanwhile bush mosques have begun popping up along PNG's highlands highway, instigated by mainly Muslim African missionaries. At least 1000 Papua New Guineans - mainly highlanders (particularly Chimbu)- have now converted to Islam. Other countries in the region are also seeing the growth of

indigenous converts, which will no doubt affect Melanesian *kastom* as it grows.

In neighbouring West Papua, still struggling for independence from Indonesia, there are disturbing reports suggesting that elements of the OPM resistance, traditionally Christian and *kastom*-inspired, are now turning to Jihadi organizations for funding and co-operation, mainly out of frustration that after 40 years their struggle has failed to attract support from either their fellow Melanesians or fellow Christian Governments in Australia and the West. Yet the West Papua issue enjoys widespread public support within the Pacific region that is not reflected in government policy¹²⁵. This represents a significant new element in any contemporary study of the role of religious movements in the geo-political situation in Melanesia.

War is always fought as much in the spirit world as it is on a tangible battlefield, particularly in Melanesia. To understand why requires "rational" as well as "unorthodox" thinking. Where necessary, it may also require the ability to counter such movements unconventionally - which may mean not fighting them at all but instead harnessing their potential for the peace and development of their societies.

¹²⁵ See Appendix 10 for an op-ed piece "Stability in Melanesia should be our priority", The Australian newspaper, 1/5/06.

This thesis is part of a 60-year continuum of academic study into the nature of kastom and cult movements, but gives it a renewed geo-strategic element, in an attempt to better analyse contemporary conflict in Melanesia. It was made with a grassroots methodology - academically known as participatory action research - and in the hope that these new religious movements can be better identified and understood for the weather-bell that they are and in the hope we might learn something by gazing at each other through the "dirty mirror".

Please see print copy for Appendices