



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies

State Society and Governance *in* Melanesia

DISCUSSION PAPER

Discussion
Paper 2002/4

ASPECTS OF CONFLICT IN THE CONTEMPORARY PAPUA NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDS

To the foreign observer, Papua New Guinea is readily associated with violent gang crime, tribal fighting and electoral violence. In the Highlands region, high-powered weapons render tribal fighting increasingly problematic, particularly in provinces hosting large-scale resource extraction operations such as Southern Highlands Province and Enga. This discussion paper, based on presentations made to an AusAID seminar, provides an overview of aspects of conflict in the contemporary Papua New Guinea Highlands.

Beginning in the Southern Highlands, Weiner explores the nature of conflict in areas surrounding the Kutubu Oil Project, examining not only contemporary land disputes, but also the cultural milieu in which they occur. Moving to Enga, Yala investigates the similarities and differences between 'traditional' and contemporary conflict in the Highlands, drawing primarily upon his personal experiences of conflict in Enga. McLeod then provides perspectives on conflict in Simbu Province, with a particular focus upon the nature of 'social rules' in that area. Collectively, these essays, all of which are based upon the authors' extensive experiences in Papua New Guinea, seek to provide an insight into the nature of contemporary conflict in the Papua New Guinea Highlands.

CONFLICT IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS, PNG

James Weiner

I'd like to talk about some aspects of conflict in New Guinea communal life in Southern Highlands Province (SHP). I come to you as an anthropologist who has spent over three years in Papua New Guinea (PNG), two and a half of them living in a village where I spoke the local dialect. I would thus like this talk to be a modest defence of anthropological practice – nothing can substitute for thorough, vernacular, in-depth understanding of a non-western mode of social life at the most local level. No other experience can provide one with the insight as to how profoundly differently Papua New Guineans conduct their social life in comparison with ourselves. My view is that PNG politics at the grandest level are not very far removed from such locally-engendered practices.

JAMES
WEINER,
ABBY
MCLEOD &
CHARLES
YALA

The contribution of AusAID to this series is acknowledged with appreciation.

Western and New Guinean Forms of Sociality

Let me first try to draw a broad contrast between the way people of the Kutubu Oil Project Area and we English-speaking westerners “do” social life. Our own English-derived western notion of social life starts with the irreducible “individual”, the “given” of social life. The individual is thought to be born as a unique organism—genetically, temperamentally, and in terms of history and identity. We westerners then pose “society” as a matter of deliberate, conscious, rational “contract” between discrete individuals, a contract entered into by those individuals for their common good. The social contract stipulates that it is in the interest of the individual to forego some of his/her passions, drives, strivings, and so forth in order to forge a functioning and positively-valued social system in which the individual can pursue his/her interests with the maximum amount of freedom and yet also (under ideal conditions) serve the community or public interest as well. To sum up, we see the individual as “natural”, or “God-given”, and society as a human artifice set up to mediate the innate strivings and drives of the individual (in broad terms, self-preservation and the maximisation of property and comfort).

For many Papua New Guineans such as those within the Kutubu Oil Project Area, this scheme is exactly reversed. People are born not as unique individuals, but as already-connected—through bodily substance, ancestral intervention while in the womb, in terms of the series of debts and obligations that attended the marriage of one’s mother, by being nourished on the same land—to others within their social field. What is “natural” or “given” in social life is this web of connections. If this is the case, what then do people consciously and deliberately “do” themselves? Under these conditions, Papua New Guineans must consciously and deliberately “achieve” individuality—it is not a condition that is given to them at birth. They must strive to cut themselves off from others, to preempt the duties of debt and obligation, to make themselves unique and powerful in the face of this convention which connects them to others.

But when one’s world is given to one as a total universe of connections, where one connection implies all the others in that world, to break one’s self off means to break one’s self off from the total world. To make one’s self different means finding a different “whole” world for one’s self, with a whole different set of connections. In other words, in the Foi social world, it is all or nothing. A quarrel, over

property, over adultery, over sorcery accusation, inevitably leads to the departure of one of the disputing parties to another place, especially if powerful men are involved.

I worked with the Foi, who are involved as landowners in the Kutubu oil project area. I had not been with them for long, collecting clan and individual genealogies and histories before I realized that their history is one of constant migrations, exiles, the taking in of refugees and granting them what we would call “land rights”. Their history is the history of disaffected men taking their retinue, that is, the fragment of their social universe remaining to them, leaving their natal residence, and migrating to other places. At these places, they are given access to and control of sites so that they can carry out the total range of subsistence tasks.

I think it is important to understand that these quarrels and departures and migrations are the visible form that the *normal state of affairs* takes in this part of the world. They are not aberrations within the theoretically smooth functioning of a social organism, because there is no social organism as such. When people become disaffected from their nominal groups of affiliation, they do not assert their individuality and leave, for individuality is not the “default setting” of non-sociality for Papua New Guineans. Rather, they take a miniature fragment of the social world to which they belonged, in the form of immediate family and other assorted hangers-on and sympathisers, and go off and recreate another, albeit smaller, version of the social whole from which they have detached themselves. It is clan fragments that migrate, immigrate and emigrate, not individuals, and it is clan fragments that are taken in and given land, status and brides as *clan groups*. The consequences of fragmentation of groups then is not ultimately a set of atomised individuals, but smaller and smaller versions of a single global social totality. As Roy Wagner writes of the Daribi, households, clans, lineages and villages are “not so much building blocks” for a social order as much as they are “divisions and deconstructions” within it (1998). For both the Foi and the Daribi and many other Southern Highlands peoples, the “origin story” or “charter” for their “group” is the story of the fight or quarrel that led to their fissioning from some previous entity. These quarrels, the view of sociality that engenders them, and their consequences, are the real “elementary structures” of kinship in Southern Highlands Province and elsewhere in PNG.

Bridewealth

The matter of distribution of resources and personnel, in any number of forms, some of which I will mention here, is of central importance to the articulation of Foi social activity as well as throughout PNG. Those of you who know something about village life in PNG also know that bridewealth distributions are always marked by verbal contests, arguments and the airing of disputes. If my characterisation of Foi sociality is correct— if, in other words, there can be no decomposition of social groups into component individuals, but only into smaller groups which retain the functions of the original group— then we should be able to confirm this in the kinds of distributive mechanisms associated with these groups.

We can begin to inspect it at its most basic level when we watch a Foi hunting party deciding how to distribute the various portions and cuts of an animal collectively trapped or killed. Considerations of, for example, the ownership of the dog involved, who first sighted the animal, who dealt the lethal blow, who may have been injured during the chase, who did the work of butchering and cooking, all contribute to determining the correct portions allotted to all. In line with what I have said about social convention, in such occasions, the “rules” of distribution are usually tacit and understood by all and rarely, except in an explanatory passage to the visiting anthropologist, articulated as “a rule”. The coming of the government administration and Missionaries provided them with exposure to the idea that social law and customary action, including these tacit conventions of distribution of resources, were something that could be objectified, codified and altered by human effort, rather than as phenomena that were only revealed in the course of humans reacting to otherwise situational and contingent social engagements and encounters.

Because social rules are not usually overtly articulated, as ethnographers such as Merlan and Rumsey (1991), Goldman (1983), A.J. Strathern (1975), M. Strathern (1974) and more recently Brison (1994) have demonstrated, communal agreement concerning the normative in social life is often reached after a protracted process of public argument and verbal contention. As Marilyn Strathern suggested in an early paper (1974), the idea that in a public dispute, all points of view should be aired and made visible, all person’s opinions should be voiced, is very important to achieving an acceptable resolution to a conflict in these areas

of Papua New Guinea. We can suggest, again to elaborate on the metaphor I am employing, that points of view must be distributed as widely as possible, at least in these public speech events.

There was never, therefore, a hard and fast rule concerning how much bridewealth one had to give in earlier times; there was only the communal assessment of a bridewealth as being proper or insufficient. Since the obligations of wife-takers to wife-givers was a continuing one, it was likely that agreement as to sufficiency of bridewealth at the time of a bride’s transfer did not preclude requests for additional payment in the future. What was important about distributive mechanisms of this sort was not exactly how much material resource was spread out within a social field but rather how wide one could expand one’s social network of indebtedness and obligation to others.

It is important to understand also that there is no such thing as a single transaction—be it of wealth, persons or land—in isolation. An agreed upon exchange is always a situational and temporary agreement at best. Usually, additional demands for further wealth are made after the initial exchange. As the items of exchange alter in value over time, so does the perception of the standing of the original exchange partners. Especially in the case of wealth paid for human life—bridewealth, childwealth, death compensation, etc.—there is the understanding that wealth can never replace human life or its potential but merely temporarily offsets its loss.

Furthermore, it is the tension, as it were, of unbalanced and uncompleted exchanges which maintains the social relationship between the original parties. Any attempts to make it come out exactly even may stop the prolongation of balancing exchanges but would also bring the relationship to an end. That this relationship often originates in acts of violence or damage between the two parties does not negate the overall positive value that Papua New Guineans place on the fact of being in such relationships, full stop.

I was in Hegeso in 1988 when three men in their late twenties came down to the village from the Poroma area (Nembi Plateau region). They came inside the longhouse and sat down and started talking to the head men there. They said their uncle had been killed 25 years ago by a Hegeso man (who was still alive and was there at this encounter) when they were infants and now that they are men, they are coming down to demand their share of the compensation payment. The thing that floored me was the Hegeso men took this request very seriously and

in fact wound up giving them a payment of shell wealth. These matters were still important in 1988, still inflected social relations between villages, clans and tribes. I don't think the presence of large-scale developments has made them disappear at all. One of the public arguments I recorded in January 1994 at Pimaga, the government station at Kutubu, still involved the revelation of trans-generational inheritances of debts and blood feuds. Even though the conflicts at issue seemed to be the result of the new highway and the oil company's presence, they needed to be foregrounded against these historical facts so that people could think they understood them.

The Role of Everyday Conflict

It must be understood that a good deal of contestation in PNG public life is precisely because the notion that there is a society consciously governed by a set of rules is not what orders people's social encounters. Western observers look at such social life and label it "anarchic" and so it is—there is no "-archy" at all in New Guinea society. But this is not to say that social life is not governed by conventions—social life everywhere is governed by conventions. It's just that such conventions are not in PNG ordered, made explicit, codified, gradated, attached with sanctions and enforcement procedures, etc. They are immanent in social life or emergent from it, rather than a set of ordering principles which "generates" it. Public contestation and dispute is what happens when one lives in such a milieu—conventions have to be revealed by peoples' reactions to them, contingently and situationally but never permanently. Some of these conventions become well understood and objectified, and are then duly tendered to the anthropologist or colonial administrator or law reform commissioner.

Control of Land within Clan Groupings

The terms with which PNG people defined their local group membership reflected this—PNG people have multiple ways of characterising their social allegiances—language, moiety, class, totem, locality, path, track and so forth. They tended to use the broadest and most inclusive level of membership they could in any given circumstance. A Foi person was characteristically a Foi, an uplands Foi as opposed to a Lake or lowlands Foi, a particular village-group person, a village person, a clan and sub-clan person. But the terms themselves were those of contrast—we are the

speakers of dialect X, and they over there speak dialect Y; we are the people of the river bank, and they are the people of the hinterland; we are of the *bigpela pisin* and they are of *liklik pisin*, and so on. In Foi, local land-holding groups usually took their name from some feature in their country. This relationship was not totemic, it was merely descriptive and distinctive.

In Hegeso, those So'onedobo men who inhabited territory near the "source" of the Mubi (the place where it emerges from its underground traverse) were differentiated from those other So'onedobo men whose land was near the site of the Hegeso longhouse. The former called themselves the "Ibuga" (*ibu*: 'water; stream; river'; *ga*: 'source, head') So'onedobo, and in fact most of these men traced their descent directly from that original group who came down from Nipa via Lake Kutubu, while the latter were known as the *a hua*, the "longhouse" So'onedobo. There was a similar territorial differentiation made within the next largest clan in Hegeso, the Orodobo clan: there, reference was made to the "Hesa" Orodobo, who made their homes, gardens and sago stands near the place Hesa along a stretch of the bank of the Mubi near the longhouse, while another group were called "Yebibu" Orodobo, living somewhat further upstream. Each of these groups centered around a group of full brothers or at most full parallel cousins, and it shows that even within the clan, the local bridewealth and land-owning unit, territorial distinctions were made up to the smallest family units possible. This tendency then, has not been a response to the presence of petroleum revenues, but a mode of differentiation always inherent in Foi and Fasu social differentiation that was given an additional stimulus by the influx of oil revenue.

Terms such as "Ibuga" or "*a hua*" and even "Foi" itself are names for distinctions, as Roy Wagner puts it, rather than names for groups:

They only group people in the way that they separate or distinguish them on the basis of some criterion, and we cannot deduce from the conceptual distinctions an actual correspondence of the terms with discrete and consciously perceived groups of people
(Wagner 1974: 106-107).

They are, as Wagner concludes, "names, rather than the things named" (*ibid.*).

This distribution of ecological variation is replicated at the clan level, the largest *nominal* land controlling unit in the area, and my use of

the qualifier *nominal* will be made clear shortly. Theoretically, each clan also controls all types of subsistence resource within its holdings. But here discrepancies are more common, because clans are more mobile, more variable in their size and more prone to division than are longhouse villages. (Longhouse villages came about because of the exigencies of warfare, raiding and blood feud. Their function is not so apparent these days but they nevertheless maintain a stability of regional, if not political, identity.)

The division of clans into so-called sub-clans is a contingent and situational occurrence in Foi and is not a uniform or defining part of Foi clan organisation. The key distinguishing feature here is that the sub-clans are differentiated by name. According to Charles Langlas, who worked in the Upper Mubi in the mid-60's, this type of division occurs if the local clan "has been large in the past, or if part of the segment is descended from an immigrant" (1974: 46-47). Under such conditions, such as occurred within the Aidobo clan of Herebo Village, intermarriage is even possible and did occur, although it elicited disapproval from some clan members.

A man and his sons, however, exercise more immediate control over specific locales and sites within clan territory, just as they exercise decisive control over the bridewealth of their daughters and sisters. These individual "lines"—and the Foi call them *ira*, meaning "tree"—and which I have previously glossed as "lineages"—are differentiated by the territory they inhabit, exploit and control. Groups of men related as full brothers or sons of full brothers inevitably find themselves living in and exploiting contiguous areas of clan land, and thus are territorially differentiated from other more distantly related groups of agnatically-related men within the same clan. As I have argued elsewhere, a man and his grown sons are the effective resource exploitation unit in Foi society (Weiner 1986).

In the mid 1990s, communiques within and between both Chevron and the Department of Petroleum and Energy evince frustration that landowning Incorporated Land Groups (ILG) within the Foi-Fasu area are rapidly breaking down into what appears to be "family" units, but which are most likely these extended lineage-like *ira*. The point I am making is that the Foi local clan traditionally had only a weakly developed form of corporate identity: those of its members who asserted control over particular tracts of land through long-term habitancy

and use were its effective owners. Other clan members could dispute these effective owners' decisions concerning disposal of land, but my point is that the bigger the local clan the less successful it was in reaching clan-wide agreement as to the disposition of its resources and the more likely it was that individual men and/or sets of brothers would arrogate to themselves effective power of disposal.

Further, men kept their land-using activities if not exactly secret then certainly private. Men of the same clan were never certain as to what tracts of land or sites specific men had asserted claims to. It was a father's responsibility to take his sons around and show them all the spots where they had planted permanent tree crops, sago and where they had set traps, so that the sons could know what spots their father had a legitimate claim to as against other men of the clan. The only time when this total catalogue of inhabited and utilised places was made public was in the public poetic recitation of place names associated with a man after his death (see Weiner 1991).

I make these points if only to suggest that caution should be exercised in assuming that the clan is by definition a corporate group and that it recognises or acts upon a commonality of interest. Clansmen were obligated to each other to provide support in bridewealth, ceremonial exchange and disputes, but the assumption of a commonality of interest is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for this sense of obligation. The obligations had more to do with blood kinship and affinity rather than clanship as such.

Recent Petroleum Politics

Historically, a good number of Foi local clans throughout the Lake Kutubu and Upper Mubi River region can trace their origin to Fasu. Typically, in the time before colonial control, warfare, homicide, sorcery accusations and the like ultimately resulted in the departure of clans or other groups of people to new homes, sometimes outside of their linguistic territory altogether. Many Foi clans of Lake Kutubu are also connected to the Fasu through more historically proximal affinal and resulting maternal connections. Warfare and a generalised social aesthetic of compensation ensured that movement between villages and regions was a constant feature of interior Papua New Guinea life. Migration and incorporation into a host domain, including the granting of rights in territory, were normal features of local organisation throughout this broad region.

Many of the disputes over landowner status among local groups in the wider petroleum project area revolve around a consideration of just these historical factors of movement and re-settlement.

Before the discovery of petroleum, the Foi and Fasu were not only jointly administered from Pimaga Patrol Post (as they continue to be today) but also participated (at least nominally in the case of the Fasu) in the Foe-Fasu Progress Association¹, a non-official organisation designed broadly to promote the development interests of the region, particularly at the Provincial level, where they maintained an office in Mendi. Shortly after the petroleum was discovered in Fasu territory, the Fasu abandoned the Foe-Fasu Progress Association and formed their own Namu'aporo Association, which also had as an associated organisation the Namu'aporo Landowners Association, the official representative body of the Fasu petroleum land owners. By and large, the two associations were coterminous, since virtually all Fasu local clans were landowners in this sense. The Foe Association was left to represent the Foi alone though in this case, there were many more non-landowning groups than there were landowning ones. These landowning clans are in receipt of a regular payment deriving from petroleum revenues. Their income is bitterly resented by those clans with the misfortune to own neither type of land and who do not share in these payments. The major problem facing all local leaders is how to arrive at a distributive agreement that provides some participation by all local groups in the receipt of profit from the Petroleum project.

We are witnessing new, putatively representative organisations such as the Foe Association becoming transmuted into more traditional forms of oppositional and fragmentational social life, because the Incorporated Land Group Act enshrines the oppositional culture of clan fragmentation in its own constitution. What this has led to in the Kutubu Oil Project Area is the percolation of landowner values and loyalties into local and regional politics on a much wider scale than was previously the case in this area.

What might be more desirable, however, is the encapsulation and limitation of landowner custom so as to allow new forms of democratic, representative culture to fill the expanding political domain. A hypothesis worth pursuing is that more contemporary, representative organisations such as political and landowner associations are not as subject to fragmentation as more traditional land- and genealogical-based social units such as clans. This is because such associations are founded on a commonality of interest. The clan, however, is not a unit in which commonality of interest is a political underpinning. Its conventions of association are, as I have suggested earlier, only tacit, and are subject to the oppositional manoeuvres of its members.

It is important to understand that the landowning ILGs have interests which are distinct from that of their villages, as politico-residential units. Each village sends a *komiti*, to the Foe Association, but it is the landowning ILGs and not the villages per se, which are represented by Nixon Mira's Foe Landowners' Association. Only two of the men who attended the Foe Association as representatives of their villages also signed their names to Nixon Mira's petition of incorporation for the Foe Landowners' Association as ILG representatives. It is important to consider that members of the revenue-receiving ILG's may feel that they have a stake in both organisations and feel that there is room for both in the total landscape of political functions in the Kutubu Oil Project Area. Company and Government encouragement in this direction might prove to have some surprising results.

¹ Officially, the Foi spell their name "Foe", which was the original spelling employed by Murray Rule, the linguist/missionary who first transcribed their language by way of English orthography. I therefore use the term "Foi" to refer to the culturally distinct language group I have been studying since 1979, and "Foe" in all the contexts which the Foi themselves use this term as official self-designation.

MELANESIAN CONFLICTS

Charles Yala

Within the broader framework of Melanesian conflicts, in this section I focus upon conflicts and tribal warfare in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Discussions presented here are based upon personal experiences, with specific examples being drawn from the Enga and Southern Highlands Provinces. The discussion focuses upon aspects of conflict, consequences and conflict resolution strategies within two time periods; traditional and modern.

Traditional Times: Aspects of conflict and warfare

The main cause of conflict during traditional times was competition over the ownership, access and use of resources, particularly land, women and pigs. Conflicts were seen as an inevitable part of life and a higher authority capable of exerting and enforcing power and authority across tribes, regions, and cultural groups was absent. In the absence of external and overarching authority, the use of physical violence was an acceptable means of punishment, with violence being the ultimate form of punishment dealt to repeat offenders. In this context, an individual, a group within a clan or a tribe may constitute an offending party. Mistrust and suspicion were integral to the survival of individuals, families and tribes and with the exception of blood relatives, all others were seen and classified as potential enemies. Young men were told and trained to trust only their blood relatives and they were expected to be alert, vigilant and fully armed at all times. Long-term solutions to conflicts were rare, with all peace settlements being temporary compromises. Old wounds were therefore expected to re-emerge at any time in the form of new conflicts.

Conflict settlement strategies

Conflict settlement involved the community and was achieved via consensus building amongst stakeholders. Community involvement was integral to the process for various reasons. First, it preserves collective memory, placing problems and decisions on record. Second, for decisions to have meaning, value and strength, the presence and participation by key community figures was important.

The actual process of traditional conflict resolution resembled modern court hearings, with the entire community acting as jurors and the presiding judge being the village or community elder. Where necessary, witnesses were called upon to assist community elders in making their final decision, which was backed by community consensus. In some cases, in order to assist in peaceful conflict resolution, community leaders may have had to plead with the accused to accept liability.

If a conflict involved two different tribes, village peace negotiators, with highly developed oratorical skills mediated on behalf of their respective tribes, with arguments being carefully constructed so as to reach a win-win outcome. Each tribe aimed not to compromise their security, while at the same time ensuring that the problem did not escalate into warfare. In order to ensure that the safety of both tribes was not compromised, negotiation occurred at a carefully agreed upon site. In extreme cases, peace mediators from neighbouring tribes volunteer to facilitate communication, however sometimes such facilitators deliberately twist information with the intention of further promoting violence, and warring tribes may deliberately misguide peace negotiators so as to inflict greater casualties on the enemy tribe.

Consequences

Traditional warfare was usually destructive. However, strict rules and norms governed the conduct of warriors, who were expected to respect and abide by these rules. Amongst the most important rules were not to kill rich people (those who had many pigs), women and children, with the mutilation of dead bodies being similarly prohibited. While the aim of warfare was to kill warriors from enemy tribes, warring tribes also engaged in the destruction of homes, gardens, and trees. In addition, psychological trauma and fear impacted severely on men, women, and children.

Modern Times: Causes of conflict and warfare

Causes of conflict in modern times are numerous in quantity and complex in nature, for while the traditional causes of conflict remain intact, new causes of conflict have also emerged. These include contemporary politics, uneven service provision, criminal gangs, envy and jealousy, alcohol and indiscriminate attacks, each of which I discuss below.

First, contemporary politics differ from traditional politics. Traditional forms of leadership were earned, with traditional

leadership responsibilities and honours being bestowed on the basis of performance. There were three distinct leadership responsibilities in traditional times, with warriors providing leadership during periods of tribal warfare, public orators taking control of public meetings and peace negotiations on behalf of their tribe, and rich men providing leadership during feast ceremonies, trade and compensation payments. Warrior leadership was recognised on the basis of performances in battle, public orators and negotiators were recognised during public speeches and peace negotiation ceremonies, and rich man leadership emerged from the number of pigs one raised, slaughtered or traded. The community recognised and bestowed the respective leadership responsibilities upon qualified leaders.

In modern politics, financial wealth and education are the main determining factors of success in leadership. Thus, in addition to leadership claimed on the basis of fighting prowess, oratorical skills and 'traditional' wealth, leadership may now be claimed on the basis of education or monetary wealth gained through the exploitation of business opportunities. A typical modern day community therefore faces serious difficulties in identifying and choosing the right political leaders from what has now become five different source of leadership.

Traditional tribal rivalries and alliances continue to play a significant role in making political leadership choices. The struggle for political leadership has further intensified because there is a perception that substantial wealth may be generated from being a politician. All politicians receive political support and power from clans and tribes in their regions. Businessmen and educated elites are looked upon to provide leadership despite their lack of leadership ability and credibility. Unlike the traditional leadership roles that were earned and bestowed upon leaders by the community, modern political leadership roles are gained through election. All these factors make politics a major source of violence and conflict.

Second, the uneven provision of services (eg. health, education, transport, and other infrastructure) has led to strong rivalry between tribes and clans, as the ownership of projects is seen to enhance the status and bargaining power of tribes. Ownership of these services is more important than access to services. Neighbouring tribes can be denied services by those that host these services, thereby marginalising weaker tribes by the use of threats of service deprivation. Enemy tribes can also

aim to destroy these services in retaliation for denying access to services. The location of services may therefore destabilise the power balance and also serve as a catalyst for new conflicts and violent warfare. The following example from Kompiam district in Enga illustrates this point.

A rural health centre was earmarked for Yamanda village by the then Premier for Enga Province in 1990, however no project eventuated because the incumbent premier lost the 1991 provincial election. After the 1992 national election, the member for Kompiam-Ambum planned to construct a health centre in a neighbouring village called Maramb. As the first construction materials were being transported during December of 1995 to Maramb, villagers from Yamanda stopped and threatened to kill the driver, arguing that the health centre was earmarked for Yamanda in 1990. Although no one was injured in the incident, a fight broke out the next morning between the driver's tribe and tribesmen from Yamanda village. The fight lasted five years. About 30 young men were killed and more than 50 men, women and children died from indirect causes such as curable diseases and malnutrition.

Third, criminal gangs are now abundant, and villagers living near service centres have been raped, robbed, and forced to pay illegal charges for service use by other villagers. Continued abuse of this nature is usually a catalyst for violent attack and warfare.

Fourth, envy and jealousy are rife as only some (often educated) people have access to services, modern homes and equipment including vehicles, and business (shops, transport and coffee plantations). Thus, while the publicly acknowledged reasons for initiating warfare may not be envy and jealousy, such feelings are often the underlying causes of destructive warfare.

Fifth, alcohol has become a major cause of social problems in PNG, including rape, vandalism and physical abuse perpetrated by males (usually young) under the influence of alcohol. This is one of the major causes of increasing conflict and violence.

Sixth, modern day payback attacks are often indiscriminate and occur in response to ethnic and regional tensions. This results from the high mobility of people between

provinces, towns, and villages, as illustrated by the following incident involving illegal gold diggers from the Porgera gold mine.

Recently, illegal gold diggers from Laiagam district (Enga) died when a rock fell on them at a Porgera mine site. Relatives of the deceased men suspected that PJV securities were responsible for the deaths and thus killed someone from Paila (a separate ethnic group from the Lagaip-Porgera district) who was wearing a PJV security uniform (not a company employee) at Laiagam. In retaliation, Paila relatives mistakenly killed a man from Tari (Southern Highlands) and a man from Wabag district who intervened to prevent the attack on the Tari man at Porgera. Later two men from Porgera and two more men from Laiagam were killed by men from Paiyala at Porgera. The Paiyala also ambushed a guesthouse at Wali Creek (some kilometres from the Porgera mine site) and killed seven men from different parts of Enga, including one from Kandep district. Kandep relatives of the deceased retaliated and killed a man who was of mixed parentage from Porgera and Paiyala. While these killings were occurring in Porgera, men from Laiagam killed two men from Paiyala in Mt. Hagen (Western Highlands Province). So far nineteen in total (including the two mine victims) are dead and the problem has now become an issue of Paiyala vs any Engan, irrespective of district origin.

Conflict settlement strategies

The traditional conflict settlement framework remains intact and introduced dispute settlement systems operate within the context of this framework. As one moves from the centre (capital cities/towns) to the periphery (local remote areas) however, the application and enforcement of modern laws diminishes. Modern court and legal systems are therefore concentrated and effective only in the urban centres, while the traditional system remains intact and applicable in the rural areas.

Due to the abundance of arms in the rural Highlands of PNG, it is important that violent conflicts are rapidly negotiated and settled. Negotiators comprise leaders from neighbouring tribes, government representatives, the police, local businessmen, and politicians, with the type of negotiator used depending upon the nature

and complexity of the conflict.

It is however, important to point out that the use of firearms has complicated conflict resolution strategies. For example, a recent Southern Highlands tribal fight in Mendi was solved with the signing of a peace agreement involving businessmen from other parts of the province and the police mobile squad from Port Moresby. A notable issue in this case was the non-surrender of firearms to the police as part of the peace plan, a practice that has been used in some parts of the Highlands. Importantly however, even when guns are surrendered to the police, the gesture is largely symbolic, with tribal groups surrendering only a portion of their armoury and typically only those weapons that are not powerful.

Warring tribes are normally given grace periods to fight before initiating conflict resolution strategies in order to allow them to release their anger and tension. This means that fights may persist for months or years before meaningful dialogues for peace are initiated. The initiative to settle conflicts peacefully falls upon both parties to the conflict, thus no peace mission could proceed without the agreement of the warring parties. Police and state authorities therefore remain bystanders until invited to mediate.

Educated elites from warring tribes are influential in the decision making process because they are the main suppliers of guns and ammunition. They supply arms in response to social pressure, expectations, and obligations to their tribesmen. An educated person who fails to support their tribe during tribal warfare loses face and should they harbour political ambitions, their prospects for political success are diminished. People listen to and respect such educated people largely because their tribes depend upon them for arms.

Consequences

The traditional rules and norms governing tribal warfare no longer apply in modern warfare. For example, women and children are no longer protected and anyone suspected of belonging to one regional or ethnic grouping has become a target (refer to the Porgera example mentioned earlier). This has restricted inter and intra regional or cultural group trading and communication. Educated elites and local business entrepreneurs are prime targets of attacks and no educated person is safe to move about freely. There have been incidents of local tribal enemies attacking enemies in Port Moresby. Generally, the majority of the murders

committed in urban centres, including Port Moresby, are reported as criminal gang attacks. This may be misleading because many murders may actually be related to tribal warfare.

The impacts of tribal warfare on women and children are poorly understood by the authorities. First, today women and children are targets of attack. Second, women and children suffer indirect impacts such as fear, curable diseases, and starvation. In terms of starvation, during times of warfare, warring parties depended entirely upon their extended family network for food and shelter. Shortage of food is a serious problem because the subsistence agricultural system is unable to support a sudden increase in population that is concentrated in a particular location. Third, there is a long-term impact on children and mothers from the death of fathers and husbands from warfare. Although the tribe looks upon the deceased as heroes, the everyday task of raising orphan children becomes the sole responsibility of mothers. The women and children become more vulnerable and remain with both emotional and physical hardships throughout their lives, even after the fights are over. This is the saddest part of tribal warfare. Fourth, during tribal fights women's responsibilities immensely increase. They become the sole providers of food and care for children. In addition to finding and providing food for their own families, they must also provide for warriors and hired mercenaries who come to help from other tribes. Fifth, the hiring of mercenaries from other tribes and regions is an emerging problem, with mercenaries being primarily ex-servicemen (soldiers, police and correctional service personnel) and talented warriors who possess high-powered arms. They are usually paid with women, pigs and money. Sixth, children grow out of school age, which is bad for their future.

The destruction of homes, businesses, schools, health centres, all forms of infrastructure, gardens, and economic trees is a typical consequence of tribal warfare, resulting in the wasting of resources and retardation of development. The increased use of modern and high-powered guns is a national problem and virtually every tribe in the Highlands of PNG has access to high-powered arms. Educated elites, including members of the armed forces and external arms traders are involved in the illegal arms trade. Because there is a strong underlying demand for arms, this problem is similar to the global drug trade problem.

Finally, the humanitarian implications are enormous. Dead people have been chopped into pieces. This is highly barbaric and in contravention of all human rights conventions. Some of these atrocities in my mind are far more than those committed by Milosevic in Yugoslavia. The emotional scars left behind by these barbaric acts remain and reinforce or precipitate new conflicts after many years have passed. The key point is that these chopped pieces are collected and buried but the story is passed on.

CONFLICT: PERSPECTIVES FROM SIMBU

Abby McLeod

Despite the renowned cultural diversity of Papua New Guinea, a comparative reading of Weiner and Yala attests the existence of continuities in approaches to conflict between the peoples of Southern Highlands and Enga provinces respectively. Unlike Southern Highlands and Enga however, Simbu Province is yet to host major resource extraction operations, rendering Simbu conflicts less conspicuous to foreign observers. In the absence of such operations, conflict features prominently in Simbu lives, with concerns over the oft-cited trio of women, pigs and land being directly encapsulated within larger battles pertaining to politics and the distribution of modern material wealth.

In considering conflict in Simbu Province, I engage primarily with Weiner's discussion of 'social rules' in Papua New Guinea, drawing upon fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork among the Bari tribe of Kerowagi district. While I agree with Yala's observation that the 'traditional' rules governing tribal warfare have eroded dramatically, my observations of small-scale inter-personal conflicts suggest that such interactions continue to be governed largely by locally agreed upon rules. Given that much law and order discourse associates the contemporary law and order 'crisis' with the weakness of the Papua New Guinean state, acknowledging the persistence of local rules is of great significance to policy development, and is in keeping with global trends towards community crime control.

In direct contrast to Western constructions of social order, which are predicated upon a homeostatic view of society, the Simbu view dispute and conflict as inevitable facts of daily life, rather than indices of social dysfunction. Disputation is a daily occurrence, with the majority of disputes occurring within the local residential group over issues including marital disharmony (adultery, polygyny, spousal violence), theft (garden produce, coffee), witchcraft accusations and failed obligations (monetary and ceremonial). Typically, minor disputes are addressed via bilateral negotiation and compensation. Should negotiation fail, grievances are aired before male local leaders, or more formally before the village court. As highlighted by Yala, local mediation

processes remain largely intact, with 'traditional' mediation being the primary means through which the Bari address dispute. In the event that appeal to state structures may result in greater financial reward, the Bari pragmatically take their grievances before the village court and less frequently, the Kundiawa district court.

Of greatest concern to outside observers of conflict in Papua New Guinea is the prevalence of violence, be it tribal warfare, armed hold ups or domestic violence, all of which feature prominently in national and international media. Alarmist representations of violence in Papua New Guinea portray such violence as random and uncontrolled, reinforcing Western stereotypes of violence as irrational and indicative of social dysfunction. In some instances, such representations are valid. However, amongst the Bari, as throughout Papua New Guinea, violence is also one of many remedies that may be legitimately employed in response to grievance. That is, the Bari possess a broad variety of remedy options ranging from negotiation, mediation and compensation through to threat and violent self-redress. Typically, violent remedy options are employed when 'talk procedures' have failed or compensation payments have been inadequate, with violent self-redress being highly subject to community legitimization on the basis of locally accepted 'rules' and conventions.

As highlighted by Weiner, in the absence of codified rules in a written form, it is often difficult for us (outsiders) to understand the degree to which the social life of indigenous peoples is governed by rules and conventions, a fact that has led colonizers throughout the globe to declare indigenous peoples devoid of 'law'. The Bari however, do possess codified rules known as *kitn kaman*. The term *kitn kaman* does not translate easily into English and is referred to as both *skul* (school) and *tumbuna to* (law) in pidgin. In times past, the male initiation process, *nembar*, and the seclusion of women in menstrual huts, *apai ikil*, provided institutionalized learning experiences in which the transfer of teachings (*kitn kaman*) occurred. Formalized *kitn kaman* was also given to young men and women on the evening preceding their marriage ceremony. *Kitn kaman* embraces Simbu notions of that which is right and wrong, it instils youth with an understanding of behavioural expectations and the consequences of deviance, and is among the primary mechanisms of gender socialization. In the contemporary absence of male initiation and female seclusion upon the onset of menses,

kitn kaman is transferred to youth in non-institutionalized settings by their parents. While elders deplore the decreasing knowledge of *kitn kaman* possessed by today's youth, *tumbuna to* (ancestral law) continues to play an important role in the resolution of dispute, with 'traditional' normative rules being frequently recited during community attempts to resolve disputes.

In addition to *kitn kaman*, a plethora of rules governing Bari sociality are embedded in social interaction, and are neither explicit nor codified. The following incident, which occurred while I was in the field, illustrates this point.

Late one afternoon, Mary's pig destroyed the garden of Cameron's wife Georgina. In a fit of rage, Cameron speared the pig, which consequently bled to death. Upon finding Mary's pig dying, Mary's brother Michael badly beat Cameron (one of his classificatory fathers), leaving him with a cracked rib. When discussing the incident with an elderly man, I asked him to explain to me the various 'wrongs' committed during the incident. He began by listing a number of rules including 'one must always tether one's pig', 'one must get a village court order before killing a pig found destroying one's garden' and 'one must never physically fight with one's brothers and fathers'. He then said '*Michael wokim rong blo wanem em i bin abrusim wara na kalapim bikpela mountain na paitim papa blo em*' (Michael did the wrong thing because he crossed a river and went over a big mountain to fight his father).

After protracted discussion, it became clear that the man was referring to the fact that Michael did not simply lose his temper and attack his father, but he had planned and premeditated attacking Cameron, severely increasing the gravity of his wrongdoing. While when articulating specified rules the elderly man did not state 'one must not plan to attack within the men's house group', the Bari clearly possess 'rules' pertaining to the premeditation of wrongdoing. However, given that the assessment of wrongdoing is primarily dependent upon the nature of the relationship and the shared history of disputants, many Bari 'wrongs' do not lend themselves to codification. For example, while it is unacceptable to premeditate attacking a member of one's men's house group, the premeditation of attacks against members

of enemy tribes is acceptable and in certain circumstances obligatory. Therefore, amongst the Bari, as elsewhere in Papua New Guinea (Epstein 1973; Strathern, M. 1975; Scaglione 1976; Westermarck 1981; Banks 1993; Podolefsky 1992), the social distance between disputants is the primary factor impinging upon the assessment of wrongdoing.

Bari rules pertaining to premeditation were gradually explicated via public discussion over many weeks. During community discussions, it became clear that physical violence was not considered a viable remedy among the male members of a men's house group and that intra-tribal violence was considered excessive if blood was drawn or medical treatment necessitated. In this case, the young man's violence against his father was deemed illegitimate and a number of sanctions including severe public shaming and compensation orders were invoked. In addition, as in all instances of public dispute, Bari villagers sought to delineate the root cause of the dispute. In this instance, while concerns over the damaged garden were subsumed by the unacceptability of physical violence within the men's house group, the pig owner Mary (who was living on her father's land with her husband) was labelled *kura mapr*, or *ass trabel* (the root of the problem) and exiled from the men's house group.

This incident illustrates that while violence may be legitimately employed in response to grievance by the Bari, there are cases in which violent self-redress is considered illegitimate should it transgress community norms sanctioning its usage. Furthermore, 'traditional' community sanctions against the excessive (and illegitimate) use of inter-personal violence continue to operate. This does not suggest an absence of cases in which such sanctions fail. However, there are lessons to be learned by examining the intersection between state and local notions of violence as rupture, as it is from this point that mutually meaningful responses to problems of law and order may best proceed.

AUTHOR NOTE

James Weiner (PhD, ANU 1988) carried out ethnographic and linguistic research among the Foi of the SHP of PNG for over three years since 1979. He has authored four books on the Foi and over seventy articles, and is the co-editor, with Alan Rumsey, of the book *Emplaced Myth: Space, Narrative and Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia and Papua New Guinea*. A Visiting Fellow with RMAP, he now works as an independent consultant in the field of Aboriginal native title.

Abby McLeod has recently completed her PhD in anthropology. Her thesis, entitled *Contesting violence: State and Simbu approaches to law and order in contemporary Papua New Guinea* examines continuities and disjunctions between state and local approaches to social order in PNG. She has undertaken nearly two years of fieldwork in rural Simbu and is currently working for the SSGM Project, ANU.

Charles Yala is currently on study leave from the National Research Institute in Papua New Guinea, undertaking PhD studies at the National Centre for Development Studies, The Australian National University. His PhD research topic is *The Cost of Capital and its Impact on Financial Intermediation and Growth in Papua New Guinea*.

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The State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) Project was launched in 1996 in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. Funded by the ANU with financial assistance from the Australian Government through AusAID, it comprises three Fellows (Dr Bronwen Douglas, Mr Anthony Regan and Dr Sinclair Dinnen), a Convenor (Mr David Hegarty, on secondment from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) and an Administrator (Ms Jeanette Regan).

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