

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# SOVEREIGNTY, CIVIL CONFLICT AND ETHNICITY



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### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades the western Pacific has been the site of considerable violent conflict and instability. The region has played host to a ten-year secessionist struggle on Bougainville in Papua New Guinea (PNG), a five-year low-level civil war in neighbouring Solomon Islands, a resurgence of localised armed conflict in parts of the PNG highlands, and a number of less serious episodes of social unrest in Vanuatu and New Caledonia. These conflicts, along with those in Indonesia on the region's western edge and in Fiji at its eastern fringe, have given rise to depictions of the region as an 'arc of instability' inhabited by states at various stages of 'failure'.

Meanwhile, sovereignty, in the sense of constitutional independence and recognition by other states in the international Westphalian system of nation-states, remains much contested in various parts of contemporary Oceania (Firth 1989; Levine 2012). Indeed, the region hosts a bewildering range of 'asymmetrical' autonomy arrangements, almost all of which have been negotiated between metropolitan powers and their former colonial territories, reflecting both the extent to which island jurisdictions have provided 'rich breeding grounds for unique adaptations of governance' (Baldacchino and Milne 2009: 5) and the highly negotiated, contingent and relational nature of sovereignty practices in the contemporary world (Martin 2014).

In the case of the western Pacific, the culture area known as Melanesia, the quest for full sovereignty, or independence, has been most striking in Indonesian West Papua and in the French overseas territory of New Caledonia. The ongoing, and, at times, violent struggles for independence in these two cases have been, in large measure, struggles for ethnic liberation; and could, therefore, be seen as manifestations of a classic form of identity-based nationalism in the context of anti-colonial struggle.

However, important as these two cases are, the focus of this chapter is not upon the international/Westphalian dimensions of sovereignty. Nor is it concerned with the evolving relations between former colonial territories and the metropolitan powers with which they remain constitutionally connected. Rather, the geographical focus is upon *post-colonial* Melanesia and the conceptual focus is upon sovereignty defined in terms of the state's supreme authority over the entirety of its national territory; or, in other words, on 'internal' as opposed to 'external' sovereignty (Gregory *et al.* 2009: 706).

This form of sovereignty has been, and continues to be, deeply problematic across post-colonial Melanesia where ethno-nationalist, or ‘micro-nationalist’ (May 1982), agendas have loomed large in the panoply of political struggles, often of a violent nature, that have challenged the authority and legitimacy of the central state since the early days of colonial incursion. In this sense, then, my focus in this chapter is upon what we might call sub-national challenges to the territorial sovereignty of the post-colonial state in Melanesia and their intersections with ethnic identity and violent conflict. I will take as my primary focus the region known to geographers as the Solomons Group of islands consisting of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and the independent nation-state of Solomon Islands. These islands have played host to the two most serious armed conflicts that the western Pacific has witnessed since the Second World War, conflicts in which the scale of the island, as a sub-national level of governance (i.e. province), became a powerful, albeit problematic, platform for the mobilisation of ethnic identities in the pursuit of political objectives.

Given that tensions over land and extractive resource industries played a central role in both of these conflicts, I am also interested in examining the powerful nexus between extractive resource capitalism, ‘ethno-territorial’ (Hall, Hirsch and Li 2011: 174–180) agendas at different scales of social and political organisation, and violent conflict: a nexus that has been insightfully captured in Watts’ (2004) concept of ‘governable spaces’. Indeed, I will suggest that tensions over land and, especially, large-scale resource extraction appear to be a critical factor in explaining why ethnic mobilisation and collective violence have been associated with some of the region’s many sub-national socio-political movements and agendas, but not with others.

Conceptually, the chapter draws upon work in human geography and political ecology on the social production of space (Harvey 2006), ‘governable spaces’ (Watts 2004), and the ‘politics of scale’ (Smith 1990). Moreover, because these recent conflicts have occurred on Melanesian islands, I also engage with the sub-set of the burgeoning island studies literature that has concerned itself with the unique territorial properties of islands (Baldacchino 2013; Gillis 2004) and with the empirical association between sub-national autonomies of various types and sub-national island jurisdictions (Hepburn and Baldacchino, 2013; Baldacchino and Milne 2006). I will draw upon this literature to suggest that it is no accident that the region’s most serious armed conflicts in the post-colonial period have involved island provinces of nation-states. I will argue that islands have provided especially potent arenas, at particular moments and conjunctures, for the contentious political economic struggles that have attended colonialism and globalisation.

The chapter will situate the two case studies in the context of the social and political production of the island as a scale of political economic struggle during successive phases of globalisation, from the introduction of capitalist social relations under colonialism to the current era of globalised extractive resource capitalism and ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2006). These cases will be used to argue that sub-national ethno-nationalist challenges to the authority of the post-colonial state in Melanesia are likely to intensify in the context of the region’s ‘resource boom’ but will continue to be pitted against a national-level political order that is strongly invested in national unity and the maintenance of the constitutional status quo.

Moreover, sub-national ethno-nationalist agendas will continue to be problematised by the cultural, ethno-linguistic and socio-economic heterogeneity of the scales at

which they are deployed (for example ‘Bougainville’ or ‘Guadalcanal’) as well as by competing ethno-territorial agendas at lower scales of socio-political organisation, especially at the scale of ‘customary landownership’ (Filer 1997). In the absence of genuine concessions on the part of national political elites, such as those that enabled the distinctive political settlement that has emerged (and continues to unfold) in the wake of the Bougainville conflict, these inherently scalar tensions are likely to continue to produce violence and instability. Sovereignty, in the sense of the state’s supreme authority over its national territory, will remain a highly contested domain in post-colonial Melanesia, arguably more so in cases where ‘islandness’ and large-scale resource extraction are also part of the equation.

## DEFINING TERMS

### Sovereignty

In the wake of the wave of decolonisation that swept through the global South during the decades following the Second World War, and in the current era of globalisation, understandings of sovereignty have necessarily had to shift away from Westphalian notions of the territorially bounded, constitutionally independent, nation-state that enjoys recognition by other nation-states and occupies a space in the global jigsaw puzzle of territorial sovereignties. There is growing appreciation among social scientists of the highly contingent, relational and negotiated nature of sovereignty in the contemporary world, giving rise to a lexicon that includes terms such as ‘asymmetrical sovereignty’ and ‘non-sovereignty’ (Baldacchino and Milne 2009).

These terms and others are used to grapple with the diverse array of autonomy arrangements that have been negotiated by former colonial territories that did not gain independence during the era of decolonisation and the metropolitan powers to which they remain constitutionally connected. Most sub-national jurisdictions of this type are islands or archipelagos (Baldacchino and Milne 2006; Hepburn and Baldacchino 2013), several of which are in Oceania, predominantly in Micronesia and Polynesia, with the exception of the French overseas territory of New Caledonia that is part of Melanesia (Firth 1989; Levine 2012).

Another important distinction that is made in the literature on sovereignty is between external sovereignty, defined as mutual recognition from other nation-states in the international system, and internal sovereignty, which refers to a state’s authority over the entirety of its territory (Gregory *et al.* 2009: 706). While the quest for external sovereignty characterised the era of decolonisation, processes of globalisation, in conjunction with enduring civil conflict and instability in many parts of the post-colonial world, have given rise to a pressing set of contemporary questions around internal sovereignty. And while external sovereignty remains a salient issue in some parts of Melanesia, most notably in West Papua and in New Caledonia, the focus of this chapter is upon what we might term the crisis of internal sovereignty in post-colonial Melanesia in the context of globalisation – especially extractive resource capitalism – and the enduring legacies of colonisation, not least of which is the creation of artificial political territories in defiance of the region’s renowned cultural and ethno-linguistic diversity.

Moreover, while the central focus of the literature on sub-national island jurisdictions has been upon the ever-evolving governance arrangements between ex-colonial powers and their former offshore colonial territories, sub-national island governance structures – island-provinces – have proven to be especially troublesome for the post-colonial states of Melanesia. In this manner, the literature on island autonomies/non-sovereignties appears to offer some important insights for understanding the dynamics of sub-national island governance in PNG and Solomon Islands, especially with regard to the contingency and fluidity of governance arrangements that it highlights. Indeed, referring specifically to the case of Bougainville (see below), Baldacchino and Milne write: ‘The issue of renegotiation in these cases may be fractious: the terms of the relationship may be the subject of civil strife, guerrilla movements or other forms of internal warfare and diplomatic tension’ (2009: 6).

### Ethnicity

The concept of ethnicity is much debated by social scientists, having been characterised as ‘elusive’ (May 1990: 1) and ‘notoriously slippery’ (Reilly 2008: 14). At one end of the conceptual continuum, ethnicity is regarded as primordial or essential: ‘It exists in nature, outside time’ (Smith 1991: 20). This perspective is frequently employed in the rhetoric of nationalist discourses. At the other extreme, ethnicity is seen as situational or constructed, with its boundaries and cultural contents regarded as mutable and fluid: ‘varying with the particular situation of the subject’ (Smith 1991: 20). The latter perspective allows ethnicity to be used instrumentally, as a resource or tool for elites seeking to further their objectives (Smith 1991). Following Smith (1991), we might adopt an approach that lies between these two extremes and emphasises the historical, symbolic and cultural attributes of ethnic identity.

Another form of identity that is pertinent here – in light of the longstanding demands of the ‘indigenous people of Guadalcanal’ (in Solomon Islands) that are discussed later in the chapter – is ‘indigeneity’. This form of identity differs from ethnicity in its foregrounding of connections to place: ‘*Indigeneity* is taken to imply first-order connections (usually at small scale) between group and locality’ (Merlan 2009: 304). Following Li, it is important to recognise that indigeneity is not a pre-given, natural or inevitable identity, but rather a positioning that draws upon aspects of territory, culture and history, and emerges through particular trajectories of struggle and engagement (Li 2000: 151). Importantly, both indigenous and ethnic identities are also, according to Anderson’s classical formulation, dependent upon the construction of difference (Anderson 1983). They depend as much upon the construction of difference from and opposition to others as upon putative sameness and unity with one’s own kind.

Linguistic diversity is frequently employed as a proxy for ethnic diversity, by which measure Melanesia is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous places on earth. However, for most of the region’s inhabitants, primary identities and loyalties continue to reside with what can be variously described as kinship groups, clans and tribes. Identity remains indefatigably local in nature. That said, ethnic identity can also transcend linguistic and cultural heterogeneity to be nested or deployed at higher scales, including those associated with regions (for example, ‘highlanders’, ‘Sepiks’ and ‘Papuan’ in the case of PNG) and, as we shall see, islands (for example,

‘Bougainvillean’, ‘Malaitan’, etc.). This phenomenon of island-scale identity construction is discussed in a later section of the chapter on the historical production of Melanesian islands, where it is situated in the context of the introduction of capitalist social relations and the territorialisation of islands into sub-national administrative units, both of which occurred under colonialism.

It is important to note here that the phenomenon of island-scale ethnic identities goes some way to explaining an apparent paradox in conventional understandings of the relationship between ethnic diversity and civil conflict when applied to the particular case of post-colonial Melanesia (see Reilly 2004). These theories postulate that extreme ethnic diversity is antithetical to civil conflict, whereas a situation of ethnic polarisation is the most dangerous in terms of the potential for conflict. Reilly is essentially correct in arguing that historical processes of ‘identity construction’ in the post-colonial Melanesian nations have seen the emergence of wider identity groups such that ethnic fragmentation has, at times, given way to ethnic polarisation (2004: 486). However, Reilly falls short of explicitly linking these historical processes to the particular territorial properties of islands or to the contentious politics of scale that have attended successive waves of globalisation, taking the form, most recently, of extractive resource capitalism (at least in the cases of PNG and Solomon Islands). These ideas are developed further in the next section.

### **The politics of scale, territoriality, islandness and governable spaces**

An important development in human geography over the past two decades or so has been the reconceptualisation of geographical scale. Previously seen as consisting of a fixed hierarchy of bounded spaces of differing size (as in local, national, regional, global) in which social processes occur, there is now considerable support for the proposition that geographical scale is itself socially and politically constructed (Delaney and Leitner 1997; Brenner 2001; Smith 1990; Swyngedouw 1997). In this conceptualisation, scale is not fixed but constantly reconfigured through socio-political struggle. In this ‘politics of scale’, the relevant domain of action (national, local, global, etc.) and the actors, resources, responsibilities and so on, appropriate to it, are contested. The scales that are thus constructed in turn shape and constitute social, economic and political processes. Scale theorists also see relationality and hierarchy as key defining qualities of the politics of scale and emphasise its strategic dimensions: scalar politics are deployed strategically by a range of actors in political power struggles (Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto 2008: 159–160, Swyngedouw 2004: 34).

Capitalism has been seen as the primary animator of the production of scale as its logic of constant expansion continually produces new, or reconfigures existing, scales for accumulation, regulation and resistance. In this manner, a quintessential example of the social construction of scale is ‘globalisation’, which, in recent decades, has been characterised by both the rapid expansion of financial markets that transcend nationally scaled regulatory systems and the emergence of sub-national urbanised mega-regions (for example, London, Tokyo or Paris) where surplus value is created and extracted; in other words, the production of scales, and corresponding ways of envisaging and representing social processes, above and below that of the nation-state (Brenner 1999). Other much cited examples of the contested social and political construction of scale include the ‘making and remaking of the European Union’

(Swyngedouw 2004: 34) and, more broadly, processes of state devolution, decentralisation and federalism (Delaney and Leitner 1997).

Territory is another, related, concept that is pertinent to the arguments presented in this chapter. It has become widely accepted that actors other than the state can engage in processes of territorialisation – defined as the enclosure and control of geographical space (Sack 1986) – and that these processes can occur at the sub-national level (Brenner 1999; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). The communication of boundaries is central to territoriality (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995): indeed boundaries and boundedness have always been central to the Westphalian ideal of the territorial nation-state. Steinberg, for example, notes ‘the cartographic construction of the territorial state was made easier when the “naturalness” of such a unit could be supported by pointing to an evident geographical feature’ (2005: 255).

In this manner, the idea of the island as the paradigmatic setting for the nation-state has enjoyed considerable currency among scholars of islands. Baldacchino, for example, writes: ‘Islands represent quintessential platforms for nation states: they are delineated spaces and discrete bounded territories ... Such a finite and self-evident island geography smoothens the nurturing of a sense of identity that is contiguous with territory’ (Baldacchino 2013: 3; also see Gillis 2004: 114).

A strand of the island studies literature has also paid attention to the empirical association between sub-national autonomies of various types and sub-national island jurisdictions (Hepburn and Baldacchino 2013; Baldacchino and Milne 2006). Again emphasis is given to the unique territorial properties of islands, which are said to facilitate a sense of identity that finds expression in ‘infra-nationalism’ defined as ‘a political and institutional structure beyond the constitution, a *de facto* island (or sub-island) state apparatus existing in taunting defiance of the main state, with which relations are *not* harmonious’ (Baldacchino and Milne 2009: 6, original emphasis). While this sense of island identity, expressed in terms of cultural, linguistic and ethnic difference, is seen as an important animator of agendas for island self-determination, this literature is also attentive to the role of economic and security motivations on the part of both island elites and central or metropolitan governments.

An important perspective on both territoriality and the politics of scale comes from research on the geography of globalisation and urbanisation that has drawn attention to the ‘spatial fixes’ that characterise capitalist accumulation in the current round of globalisation (Brenner 1999; Swyngedouw 1997, 2004). In articulating his theory of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, Harvey singles out resource-rich sites as important sites of capitalism’s ‘spatial strategies’ (2006: 91–92); while other scholars have demonstrated that struggles over mineral-resource extraction are, quintessentially, struggles over scale – ‘the scale of ownership and the scale of distributional costs and benefits’ (Huber and Emel 2009: 371). These spatial strategies, which have both territorial and scalar dimensions, are pertinent to our analysis of the conflicts in Bougainville and Solomon Islands because of the central importance of extractive resource industries in both cases.

### Governable spaces

I have previously suggested (Allen 2013b) that the relationship between resource extraction and violence in PNG, Bougainville and Solomon Islands can be usefully understood

in terms of the interactions between and within three ‘governable spaces’ (Watts 2004): the spaces of landownership (see Filer 1997), indigeneity and the nation. Following Watts, these governable spaces are conceived as hierarchically scaled fields of power (landownership is encompassed by indigeneity, which is ‘smaller’ than the nation), with each characterised by ideologies that link particular identities to particular territories as powerful actors attempt to capture the economic benefits – rents, royalties and compensation – that flow from extractive industries such as mining, oil and gas, and logging.

These territorialising agendas have seen the three spaces work against and contradict one another as each attempts to claim control over land and natural resource wealth to the exclusion of the others; or, in other words, their interaction has been characterised by a contentious politics of scale. Moreover, the three governable spaces are also characterised by internal contradictions and tensions that can work to render them ‘ungovernable’. These tensions have been especially stark within the space of landownership as powerful local actors, invariably senior men, have excluded other members of their landowning groups from accessing economic benefits, a process that has been profoundly corrosive in the context of Melanesian social relations based on obligation, reciprocity and distribution. That said, exclusionary indigenous or ethnic claims to resource-rich territories have nevertheless been an important and analytically distinct feature of resource-related violence in Melanesia. This appears to be especially true when the territory, space or scale in question also happens to be a relatively large island.

## THE CONFLICTS IN BOUGAINVILLE AND SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Solomons Group of islands possesses the extraordinary ethno-linguistic diversity that is characteristic of Melanesia, with 25 languages spoken by Bougainville’s estimated population of between 300,000 and 350,000, and 80 languages spoken by Solomon Islands population of around 650,000 (see Rumsey, this volume). Most of the inhabitants of these islands continue to live in rural areas where contemporary forms of ‘community’ are based on kinship and exchange relations, neo-traditional governance structures, membership of Christian churches, and myriad claims to customary land of which genealogical descent is only one. As mentioned above, the Solomons chain has hosted the region’s two most serious armed conflicts since the Second World War. These conflicts are now briefly discussed.

### Bougainville

A violent conflict, commonly known as the ‘Crisis’, took place on Bougainville between 1988 and 1998 causing thousands of deaths. Despite its internal ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity, a distinctive ‘Bougainville’ identity that had its origins in colonial and economic history (see below) became increasingly politicised as a consequence of the commencement of mineral exploration in the 1960s and the subsequent development of the giant Panguna mine that began production in 1972. It was one of the world’s largest copper and gold mines and critical to PNG’s economic viability as it prepared for independence from Australia in 1975. Up until the mine’s closure in 1989 as a direct consequence of militant activity – at which time it still had

an estimated 20-year life – it had contributed 17% of PNG government revenues and 36% of gross export earnings. Moreover, immediately prior to its closure, around 20,000 people were living in the mining towns of Panguna, Arawa and Kieta, most of whom were non-Bougainvillean Papua New Guineans (Oliver 1991: 160, 171).

A raft of impacts and grievances associated with the mine – not least of which concerned the sharing of royalties and other economic benefits between different stakeholders at different scales – were fundamental to the origins of the conflict. Indeed, most informed commentators agree that the Crisis would not have occurred were it not for the injustices associated with the Panguna mine (Banks 2008; Filer 1990; Lasslett 2014; Regan 1998, 2014; cf. Griffin 1990).

Complaints associated with the Panguna benefit-sharing arrangements were a critical factor in Bougainville's attempted secession from PNG on the eve of the latter's independence. The PNG government placated these demands by introducing constitutionally enshrined decentralization arrangements for PNG's 19 provinces. However, from the mid-1980s, benefit-sharing tensions intensified, as did the negative social impacts of the economic benefits themselves (Filer 1990). The grievances found voice in a rival mine-lease landowners' association, led by a younger generation of landowners, that challenged the authority of the existing association (Lasslett 2014: 51–72). Its leaders formed a coalition with young Bougainvillean mineworkers who had their own set of claims against Bougainville Copper Limited, as well as with 'pressure groups' from socio-economically disadvantaged areas of southern Bougainville (Regan 2014). In late 1988, some of these young men set about sabotaging the mine's power supply. Their objectives at this stage were the negotiation of a greater share of economic benefits from the mine and improved conditions for Bougainvillean mine workers.

The heavy-handed response of PNG security forces led to a rapid intensification of the conflict, and, by mid-1989, branches of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) had been established throughout Bougainville. The continued escalation of the conflict saw it become increasingly secessionist in character, culminating in a unilateral declaration of Bougainville independence by BRA leader Francis Ona in May 1990 (see Cox, this volume).

Cleavages within the BRA intensified as the conflict progressed and a rival militant group emerged during 1992–93 (the Bougainville Resistance Force) with the backing of the PNG Defence Force. Internal conflicts ensued that were often highly localised in nature, involving longstanding disputes over issues such as land (Regan 2014: 24). A peace process that commenced in 1997 culminated in the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001. The settlement granted autonomy to Bougainville, but deferred the question of full independence to a future referendum that must be held between 2015 and 2020 and is currently scheduled for 2019.

## Solomon Islands

Between 1998 and 2003 Solomon Islands experienced a period of violence and unrest known locally as the 'Ethnic Tension' or simply the 'Tension'. While the number of conflict-related fatalities was low (with estimates of up to 200 lives lost), around 10% of the population was displaced, the primary commodity-dependent economy collapsed and government service provision ground to a halt. The conflict was centred on the island of Guadalcanal, which hosts the capital Honiara, and saw the

mobilisation of two of the archipelagic nation's largest island-wide ethnicities, those of Guadalcanal and the neighbouring island of Malaita.<sup>1</sup>

The Tension commenced in late 1998, when Guale (meaning a person 'indigenous' to Guadalcanal) militants set about a violent campaign of harassment that led to the eviction of around 35,000 migrant settlers from rural areas of north Guadalcanal, most of whom were first-, second- and even third-generation settlers from the island of Malaita. A rival Malaitan militant group emerged, joined with the Malaitan dominated paramilitary Police Field Force, and staged a *coup d'état* in June 2000. The open conflict between militant groups ended with the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000. However, the country remained militarised and there was significant in-fighting among the formerly united Guale militants, especially on the southern or Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. The violence continued until the deployment of the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands in July 2003, which brought about a rapid restoration of law and order.

The conflict was complex and reflected a range of factors (Naitoro 2000; Kabutaulaka 2001; Fraenkel 2004; Moore 2004; Hameiri 2009; Allen 2013a): longstanding patterns of uneven economic development and corollary processes of internal migration and settlement; a gradual breakdown in government service provision during the post-colonial period; a very young age structure coupled with poor education outcomes and a dearth of formal employment opportunities; localised intra-group conflict in northern Guadalcanal over access to and control over land and the economic benefits of resource industries including the Gold Ridge mine and the nation's only commercial oil palm operation; the socio-economic marginalisation of the Weather Coast, home to most of the Guale militant leaders; and longstanding calls for greater autonomy for Guadalcanal Province under a new federal constitution, driven in large part by the desire to capture a 'fairer share' of the island's natural resource wealth. The immediate trigger for the conflict was the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis, and subsequent structural adjustment reforms, on patronage networks including those associated with the notoriously corrupt logging industry which has been the mainstay of the economy since the 1980s.

## THE HISTORICAL PRODUCTION OF MELANESIAN ISLANDS

Island-scale identities in the Solomons Group have been produced and reproduced through historical processes including the colonial delineation of administrative boundaries that were mostly coterminous with large islands, missionary activities, and the introduction of capitalist labour relations in the form of the international labour trade of the nineteenth century (so-called 'black-birding') and, later, a domestic plantation economy focused on copra and cocoa production. Above all it was the milieu of the plantation economy that provided the first impetus for the formation of island-scale identities as people from different places were brought together in unprecedented numbers. In this sense, the introduction of capitalist social relations under colonialism contributed, in significant ways, to the production of the island as a scale of identity, and, as we shall see below, as a scale of struggle and resistance.

A paradigmatic example of the historical and political economic production of islandness in Melanesia is the island of Malaita. Before the advent of Solomons Pijin

(pidgin) on the sugar cane plantations of Queensland and Fiji, people at one end of the island, speakers of one of its 13 languages, had no way to communicate with those at the other. Prior to the interaction with people from other islands that was afforded by the indentured labour experience, Malaitans had no way of knowing the extent that their world views were broadly shared across their island, but different to those of other islands. The exploitative labour practices of the British colonial administration, coupled with its clumsy attempts to institutionalise ‘native’ governance practices, saw the emergence of the Maasina Rule movement immediately after the Second World War, the most remarkable island-scale political resistance movement the region has witnessed (Akin 2013).

The introduction of capitalist social relations had a similar impact on Bougainville. A distinct pan-Bougainville identity developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as Bougainvilleans interacted more intensively with other Papua New Guineans in the colonial plantation economy (Nash and Ogan 1990). The very dark skin colour of most Bougainvilleans became the key marker of this distinctive ethnic identity, with the quintessential ‘other’ being the comparatively light skinned PNG highlanders who were referred to, pejoratively, as ‘redskins’ (Nash and Ogan 1990). Similarly on Guadalcanal, island-scale ethnic identities emerged in the milieu of the plantation economy from the early twentieth century and solidified in the context of post-Second World War migration, especially of Malaitans, to Honiara and to the peri-urban and rural areas to its west and, particularly, its east (Allen 2013a).

Recent anthropological research in Solomon Islands has highlighted the growing significance of the island scale. Writing about the Arosi speakers of the island-province of Makira, Scott employs the term ‘ethnogenesis’ to explain the emergence of oppositional island-scale ethnic identities in the context of the Euro-American ‘Cartesian mandate to classify ... to map, Christianize, exploit, govern, and assist’ (Scott 2016: 483; also see Dureau 1998). Within this context, and in the wake of the Tension, Scott describes how Arosi identity discourses are being increasingly deployed at the scale of the island of Makira.

The emergence of ethno-political agendas associated with island-scale identities – described in the case of Vanuatu as ‘islandism’ (Wittersheim 2003) – also has much to do with the legacy of colonial cartographies. Individual colonial ‘possessions’ were typically split up into administrative units, often on the basis of geographical features. In the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, for example, large islands and clusters of smaller ones became districts for the purposes of colonial administration and later became provinces within the unitary nation-state of Solomon Islands (see Keesing 1989). Through colonialism, then, Melanesian islands have been territorialised into sub-national jurisdictions. But through the introduction of capitalist social relations, islands have also been produced and deployed, at particular junctures and moments, as a scale of struggle and resistance, with sometimes violent results.

## ISLANDS AND THE POLITICS OF SCALE IN RECENT RESOURCE CONFLICTS

Island-scale identities have also been deployed in more recent scalar struggles over extractive industries, most explicitly in the case of Guadalcanal where there have been longstanding appeals to the ‘bone fide’ grievances of the ‘indigenous people of

Guadalcanal’ (Allen 2013a). During the Tension, Guadalcanal militants ‘performed’ indigeneity in a number of ways: by wearing the *kabilato*, the traditional dress of the Gaena’alu Movement (formerly known as the Moro Movement which has its stronghold on the Weather Coast); by claiming ‘Isatabu’ as a pre-contact name for the island of Guadalcanal; and by invoking *kastom* and ancestral connections to land (see Kabutaulaka 2001).

Tensions between settlers and landowners on north Guadalcanal over access to land and livelihood opportunities were mobilised to the larger project of autonomy for Guadalcanal, driven, in large part, by a desire to capture a ‘fairer’ share of the benefits that flow from the island’s resource industries (see Allen 2013a: 112–118). It is in this arena that the Guale identity narrative has been cast most strongly in terms of indigeneity as it seeks to exclude outsiders, including the national government. Thus we see the mobilisation of indigeneity as a territorialising strategy in a politics of scale, pitting the *island* of Guadalcanal against the Solomon Islands state.

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

## CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS FOR PEACEFUL EXTRACTIVE FUTURES?

Taking as my point of departure the concept of internal sovereignty and, in particular, sub-national challenges to the authority and legitimacy of the post-colonial state in Melanesia, I have argued in this chapter that the most violent of these challenges have occurred at the interstices of ethnic identity, tensions over land and extractive resource industries, and islandness. This is not to deny that similar processes are occurring on ‘mainland’ PNG, where indeed they are. We see this most clearly in the conflict-ridden southern part of the highlands region. Here, Huli-speakers have long been marginalised from the lucrative oil, gas and mining projects that lie just beyond the outskirts of their territory. They have seized the opportunity presented by Exxon Mobil’s giant Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project, much of which is located on their land, to successfully claim a new province of their own – Hela Province – based on claims of ‘sacred geography’ (Ballard and Banks 2003; Haley 2007; Banks 2008).

However, it is on resource-rich Melanesian islands that the claims for greater autonomy, even independence in the particular case of Bougainville, have been pursued with the greatest force and where the ensuing armed conflicts have taken on an undeniable ethnic character. I have suggested that this is because of the unique territorial properties of islands. Islands, as ‘quintessential platforms for nation states’ (Baldacchino 2013: 3) are particularly potent arenas for the contentious politics of scale between states, sub-national regions and global extractive resource industries.

That said, Melanesian islands are also an extremely fragile and problematic scale for collective political action. This is not only because of their cultural and ethno-linguistic heterogeneity, but also because of their internal patterns of uneven development and, critically, tensions between the space of customary landownership and the space of indigeneity/islandism (see Allen 2017). Moreover, islands such as Bougainville and Guadalcanal host a variety of socio-political movements, some of which are strongly territorialised. The most prominent examples are on Bougainville and include Noah Musingku's 'Kingdom of Papala' in southern Bougainville and the Me'ekamui Government of Unity's 'no-go-zone' around the abandoned Panguna mine site. The Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) and its agents are excluded from these areas, its internal territorial sovereignty effectively compromised.

Shifting to a more panoramic view of the nexus between resource extraction, ethnic identity, violence and internal sovereignty in contemporary post-colonial Melanesia, the evidence to date would suggest that extractive resource capitalism will continue to animate a contentious politics of scale, a key dimension of which will be the intensification of territorialising projects and agendas at various sub-national scales of socio-political organisation. The extent to which these sub-national claims – be they for a new province, greater autonomy under a new federal compact or full independence – may lead to civil conflict will depend largely upon the willingness of central governments to accommodate them and the types of institutional arrangements in place to manage the distribution of the economic benefits that flow from extractive projects.

In the case of Bougainville, the conflict was only settled when the PNG government agreed to both asymmetrical sovereignty and a deferred referendum on the question of independence (Ghai and Regan 2009: 102). However, Bougainville's sovereignty has, in practice been highly problematic. The PNG government has been slow to transfer powers to the ABG, there have been intense disputes between the two governments over funding, and the ABG remains overwhelmingly dependent on PNG and donors to meet its operating costs and development needs (Regan 2014; Wallis 2012). Moreover, the Bougainville Peace Agreement deferred the question of how the revenue from any future large-scale mining operations on Bougainville would be shared between the governments of Bougainville and PNG (Regan 2014), and, in the lead up to the referendum scheduled for 2019, the future of the Panguna mine continues to loom large in tensions between the two governments (see Allen 2017). In this sense, Bougainville's sovereignty remains highly contingent and negotiated, as is the case with so many island sovereignty arrangements (Baldacchino and Milne 2009), and its mineral wealth continues to take centre-stage in the unfolding negotiations.

In the case of Solomon Islands, the Townsville Peace Agreement of 2000 committed the national government to take immediate steps toward the introduction of a new federal constitution under which existing provinces would become states with additional powers devolved from the centre. This has been a longstanding demand of the 'indigenous' people of Guadalcanal, driven, in large part, by a desire to capture a greater or 'fairer' share of the island's resource wealth. In the context of an anticipated shift in the economy from logging to mining, and a recent review of national mining policy, other mineral-rich island provinces, such as Choiseul and Isabel, have also been calling for greater powers for provincial governments both in relation to large-scale mining and more broadly (see Allen 2017). However, while a constitutional review process has been taking place since the early 2000s, progress has

been tortuously slow with seemingly endless rounds of drafting and consultation. Moreover, given that any changes to the constitution would require the support of two-thirds of national members of parliament (MPs), many observers are extremely sceptical about the likelihood of Solomon Islands ever moving to a federal system.

Indeed, these inherently scalar dynamics are set against another sort of politics of scale that has intensified rather dramatically in both PNG and Solomon Islands in recent decades: the rapid expansion of so-called constituency development funds (see Firth, this volume) – over which national MPs have considerable discretion – and the corollary evisceration and immiseration of provincial governments. In some respects this politics of scale has also been driven by the economies of resource extraction. This is particularly evident in PNG where a significant proportion of the proceeds from the recent commodity price boom was channelled into discretionary funds, which have increased dramatically as a result (Howes 2016). Regardless of how these funds are resourced, the now well-established trend of the increasing concentration of power and resources directly into the hands of national MPs does not augur well for the types of concessions, negotiations and settlements that will be needed to peacefully manage the ongoing encounter between globalised extractive resource capitalism and Melanesian histories, identities and social relations.

## NOTE

- 1 Portrayals of the Tension in terms of ethnic tension – especially the journalistic imagery of ‘ancient ethnic hatreds’ – have been extensively critiqued (for example, Naitoro 2000; Kabutaulaka 2001). That said, most commentators would agree that ethnicity cannot be entirely dismissed or glossed over because ultimately the Tension could be described as a ‘civil war mostly between Guadalcanal and Malaitan people’ (Bennett 2002: 1).

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