

LAND AND LIFE: SOME TERRAINS OF SOVEREIGNTY IN THE EASTERN HIGHLANDS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA¹

Is there a way for us to understand outbursts of violence that punctuate the postcolonial lives of states ranging from the Pacific to sub-Saharan Africa as something other than pathology? As dysfunction? As the symptoms of weak or failed states? Where people defy the dictates of a social field defined by ‘law and order’, might we imagine their actions as something other than ‘just’ lawlessness? ‘Resistance’ offers a key possibility: in myriad ways, the poor and the marginalized push back against forms of hegemony that disenfranchise them or that inveigle them in systems of control not of their own making. People marshal many forms of action—petitions, riots, sorcery—in attempts both to understand and to stop the machinations of modernity that dismantle their lives and indeed their bodies. Perhaps these constitute an implicit or inchoate manifestation of malcontent (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1993).

However, in an effort to capture the agency, vitality, and legitimacy of diverse attempts to efface forms of domination that enfold people on modernity’s margins, the analytics of ‘resistance’ possibly performs a final act of domination. Where contemporary cultural creativity is held to respond to inequalities of global and local varieties, is the meaning of such creativity then circumscribed by a functionalism of power (Sahlins 1999)? Do anthropologists assimilate the salient contexts of significance of

people’s actions to their own sense of justice and fairness, their own nostalgias for the cultural integrity of the peoples they study, their own desire to find points of contestation in an ever-more-efficient world-system?

This paper offers two perspectives. It is manifestly true that popular movements in countries such as Papua New Guinea often find motivating rationales in discontent with contemporary initiatives of ‘global governance’, such as those that go under the rubric of ‘structural adjustment’. At the same time, to analyze contemporary political dynamics in a place like highland Papua New Guinea requires imagining a social terrain that is not primarily governed by the terms given by a postcolonial order of nation-states. This invites understanding contestation as something other than domination and resistance.

Here I describe violent contestation in two locales, each brought together by relations that transect them. My goal is to make visible a relational field that is not circumscribed by a ‘state’, whether or not it is a weak one. While I think it would be naive to point to the kinds of violent contestation described below as resistance, or to make them simply case studies in an anthropological re-thinking of postcolonial sovereignty, it would also be short of the point not to ask what they say about how people wish to be governed and by whom they wish to be governed.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENTS: RELATIONS BETWEEN TOWN AND COUNTRY

In June 2001, students at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby held protests against a broad privatization initiative spearheaded by then Prime Minister Mekere Morauta. Privatization of public services, such as telecommunications, utilities, and the national airline (Air Niugini) was a priority of the Morauta government. In the national newspapers, Morauta argued that privately operated services would be more efficient, more cost effective, less corrupt, and more responsive to the needs of the citizenry than publicly held enterprises. He seldom emphasized that government restructuring was stipulated as a condition for multi-billion dollar loans from the International Monetary Fund. He rarely cast his political program as one of 'free market' reform, as of a piece with the post-cold-war neoliberal consensus that has dominated the policies of the IMF and the World Bank and that has produced international protest. His political opposition did however. Opposition leaders saw the privatization efforts as mitigating Papua New Guinean (PNG) sovereignty, among other things. On June 25, students attempted to present a petition opposing privatization to the Prime Minister. The protests grew unwieldy. In the subsequent rioting, four young men were killed by police forces.

In the upper Asaro valley where I conduct research (see Newman 1965; Sexton 1986), these events produced confusion and anger. I arrived from a field break just a week after they occurred and I witnessed many heated discussions about them. One of those killed in the unrest was a young man from Korfeo, a village at the headwaters of the Asaro river. The events in Port Moresby therefore touched

people in the Asaro not only as interested national citizens, but as kin.

While the University students' immediate concern was privatization,² in villages 'privatization' was perceived as another form of 'land mobilization'. For decades, proponents of development in PNG have considered various schemes for allowing traditional landowners to register their lands and to obtain title to them. Advocates argue that the only way for tribal peoples to secure the capital necessary for development is to rationalize land title. But for their part, villagers (and students) perceived privatization and other aspects of World Bank-induced 'structural adjustment' as of a piece with the wholesale registration and sale of customary lands. In their view, the very substance of a national patrimony was at stake, as was the vitality of their livelihoods (see especially Larmour 1991).

Above all, rural people feared that their lack of knowledge might lead to expropriation. They felt that broad policy reforms like privatization and land registration might exacerbate inequalities between educated urban elites and rural cash-croppers. My friend and informant Buno was explicit: he told me that privatization threatens equality. While Morauta was a *save man* (educated person), and therefore should have a say in the future of the country, villagers just could not be sure what he was up to, he said. Other villagers were especially angered by the police action. 'They killed the students as if they were foreigners. If those police came here, we would kill them and cut them up into pieces', one man told me. The students had a 'right' to protest. 'The police aren't God. They can't give and take away life.' Inevitably, the issue of financial compensation came to dominate discussion. Figures appeared: the government would compensate the families of those killed with 'one million kina' or 'K500,000'.

I spoke with those families, the agnates of Thomas Moruwo, the Korfeo youth killed in Port Moresby. They said: ‘We’re crazy (*longlong*). We’re shocked (*sok*). We didn’t know this would happen. We’re not sure if he was with the students when he was killed, or if he was just going around to see the protests.’ In their ‘shock’, these villagers were stunned, mortified, confused. In the Asaro Valley, any violent loss of human life must be compensated, and it is to the issue of compensation that their minds turned. People wanted to present a ‘dead body petition’ to the Prime Minister. Unfortunately, they also felt that they lacked the knowledge or skill to advance this claim. (They became disinterested in my queries when I told them there was little I thought I could do.) Though I imagined initially an inequality between ‘state’ and ‘tribe’ that prevented them from pursuing this plan, people in Korfeo themselves saw divisions among their own relations: fellow tribesmen live in Port Moresby, but their village relatives remain unsure if those in the city have any intention of helping those who remain at the ‘grassroots’.

Thomas Moruwo was buried in an impressive mausoleum of concrete bricks, ornamented with multi-colored plastic flowers and wreaths. ‘We want people to know that he died for his country. He died for his country. He died because of privatization and land mobilization. He can’t stay underground. We want people to see this and know why he died. Later, this will become an ancestral story.’ My informant told me that such graves are reserved for big and important men, they are not for just anybody. The mausoleum will one day be finished with a plaque that narrates the details of Thomas’s death. This plaque will become the basis for a legend—as well as for TV or newspaper reports on the matter. If the body were buried underground, he said, there would

be no lasting consequence to his death. The memorial represented a concern for how people in the future would understand and come to know the events of their own past. Did it also question the sovereignty of the Papua New Guinean state?

I often heard a refrain in the Asaro valley: ‘The land is our life.’ One informant told me that there are two ‘roads’ for Papua New Guineans to follow. One is the road of the government, business, development, banks and loans. The other is the road of the land, and with the land in hand, there is no need of a government. Even as villagers disparage their lack of knowledge, they do not cast themselves as entirely helpless. They turn to relations close at hand, to those of family and clan, and to their rights to land, as sources of growth and power. Indeed, in the context of a faltering government, clans maintain their own sovereignty by sustaining regimes of collective property through violent conflicts that police and other government agencies are rarely able to suppress.

Insistence on collective claims to property represents a commitment to a reflexively-constituted ‘traditional’ order, even as in other domains of social life (e.g., religion), such an order is often demonized. Indeed, when I spoke with Thomas Moruwo’s brother, James, he explicitly rejected the idea that in the future individuals would one day be able to secure private bank loans through the collateral offered by registration of customary lands. He told me that he understood that this is how ‘whites’ did things, but that ‘blacks’ would fail properly to implement such a scheme. Whites are able to develop precisely because of their rules of private property, I suggested. He responded: ‘I know how you whites (*waitman*) are OK with it. But with us blacks (*blakskin*), it wouldn’t work.’ At the same time, however, he expressed uncertainty as to how things would develop

and what their consequences would be. 'I don't know what our relationship to the state is' (*Mi no save hau gavman i stap wantaim mipela*). 'I don't know what's going to happen.' To be safe, he suggested, land must continue to be held according to ancestral customs. Otherwise, it would be like land in town: something to buy.

Our discussion illustrates the reification of tradition vis-à-vis newer social and economic forms, as well as a self-disparaging attitude towards the present. For James, it would appear that land reforms are not in themselves bad or inimical; rather, Papua New Guineans would not be able properly to institute them. Why? On other occasions, people suggested to me that such reforms are opposed because they may enable forms of enduring inequality to emerge, an inequality inimical to the ostensibly egalitarian character of clanship as a form of social organization. Opposition to land and property reforms stems from the continuing operation of the principle of collective relationship—clan relations where co-clan members are ostensibly equally 'entitled' to the patrimony of the collectivity.

As this story illustrates, land in the highlands of PNG is valuable in both material and symbolic registers: its value is, indeed, constituted precisely through its symbolism, what it 'stands for'. Land is of course important in a narrowly economic sense: it is the source of money that people may use to buy stuff for sale in town or pay the school fees of their children. But to the extent that social reproduction depends upon the bounty that fertile ground affords, the value of land is a precipitate of its status as a source of life, as a conduit of the vital substance that flows through and animates people. People sustain the flow of substance between persons and clans through gifts of food and wealth that also have sources in the land; today they recognize the contributions they

make to each other's fertility with gifts of the cash that 'grows on the land'. People look to the white blossoms of coffee trees and say: 'That's money.'

It is important then to note that conflicts over land in the Asaro valley mobilize collectivities in a way that nothing else does in the present. For this reason, the land reifies collective relations and is an important 'mark' of a principle of collective sociality. As will become apparent, constructs of collectivity are importantly tethered to constructs of territoriality: the two are mutually-imbricated. Yet the fertility buzzing in the land, in birds and game and flowers and trees, is a source of reproductivity and rites and routines of matrimony and body catalyze and channel that reproductivity through the *particular* forms attached to lifecycle rituals as well as to everyday acts of growth and nurture. This relates land dynamically to another diacritic of collectivity, exogamy. Rules of exogamy articulate the *particular* relations of nurture with *collective* political relations of territoriality. Marks of collectivity might thus be summarized as those that pertain to territory, matrimony, and responsibility. Responsibility is the mediating term. It is given by the 'one body' (*okunde hamo*) agnates share, the 'one body' produced by the food that mothers grow on fathers' land.

RELEVANT RELATIONS

Tribes³ are defined by the normative prohibition on certain kinds of warfare within them. People in the upper Asaro maintain a distinction between two types of fighting, *rowo* and *hina*. *Rowo* is all-out war. In *rowo*, the goal of fighting is to destroy one's enemy. The goal is not so much to 'conquer' them, it is rather to eliminate them entirely. Today, *rowo* is conducted with guns. The war I describe below over the Leahy

plantation is an example. That war was also described to me as *hareke rowo*, ‘hidden war’, or perhaps ‘guerilla war’, in which tactics of any kind might be used and enemies do not face each other in the open, but rather raid each other from hidden positions. In contrast, *hina* is highly ritualized fighting. It appears to follow a script, warriors display themselves openly, and the goal is not to kill one’s opponent, but rather to make visible (and therefore mitigate) the agonism felt toward him. Thus, *hina* may also be described as *osto*, ‘open’. Unconcealed, *hina* takes place in full view, sometimes even with an audience of supporters watching it. Within tribes, *rowo* is normally forbidden. But in the example of the Korfena/Andaho conflict I describe below, the war would appear to be evidence of a process of fission occurring within what was previously a paired tribal confederation. Kenneth Read noted that this distinction, salient among the Gahuku-Gama with whom he worked, was between fighting conducted with bow-and-arrow (*rowo*) and fighting conducted with fists and sticks (*hina*). In the context of new military technologies (viz., guns), this distinction has shifted, so that *hina* today includes the relatively less deadly weaponry of spear and arrow, while *rowo* mobilizes newer and more dangerous tools.

A tribe, then, is primarily constituted by the common territorial and defensive identity of its component clans. Yet clans divide this territory between them into discrete areas, and maintain their own collectively articulated rights in them. Clans occupy collectively-owned, inalienable territory, an inalienability constituted lexically in speech and idiomatically in constructs that tie the fortunes of the clan as a corporate group to the land it occupies. Territory is conceptually distinguished from mobile and disposable forms of wealth (*gwotu henini*)—it is ‘too important’ to be understood as a transferable form of value. Clan territory

is rather known as *embe* (place), where *embe* is set apart from simple ‘ground’ or ‘earth’ (*musumbo*). Designating ground as ‘one’s place’ (*embe’neve*) indicates a relation of ownership, but such ownership does not necessarily imply disposability. The relation between land and man is rather like that between child and father, and indeed, landowners are ‘fathers’ (*menebo*) of the ground on which they live.

Attempts to use clan land for collective or individual projects therefore require the permission of significant men: there must be group consensus as to the disposition of clan territory, for all male members of a clan are ‘fathers of the ground’. For example, when Benedict sought permission to use unoccupied and unused land in a place called Fonomia within the territories of Konobijufa for a potential sheep-scheme, he solicited the signature of several clan leaders on a letter describing the project. A new (in 2001) mini-plantation project required its initiator informally to ‘purchase’ land from all the members of the clan he sought to ‘alienate’ it from—‘informal’ because no ‘title’ was transferred. To secure rights in use, he needed permission both from the elders of the clan and from the spirits that dwell in the land he sought to make productive. Those spirits (*rani menebo, rani ieno*) required the sacrifice of a pig, whose blood they consumed as it was spread through the places they inhabit.

Clan names themselves encode an identity between land and clan. While the clan suffix *-juho* means ‘seed’, so that, for example, Kurefijufa and Konobijufa mean, respectively, ‘red seeds’ and ‘black seeds’, the alternate clan suffix *-ve* (being) is appended to place names, such as Ronofoguve (the people of Ronofogu). Both constructs formally imply a strong connection between groups and the ground they occupy, whether people are regarded as uniquely ‘of’ a place or whether they are idiomized as seeds

planted in its soil. People who are agnates might say of each other, 'We are planted together' (*leji minunejuho*). Clans are also referred to as 'big vines' (*nara' namba*), an image that complements that of seeds planted in the soil. Clans are, then, either the roots or the plants that grow from them.

ROWO: TRIBAL WAR TODAY

In 2000–01, tribal war was heavy on the minds of people in the upper Asaro and their visiting anthropologist. Shortly after I had established my home in Pikosa, fighting broke out in the area. The tribes Andaho and Korfena renewed a long-standing dispute between them over the abandoned plantation of Fred Leahy. Indeed, the two plantations in the vicinity of Pikosa that I have described, Leahy's and Ian Downs', have stood at the center of conflicts of varying kinds in each of the years that I have visited the upper Asaro. Many people in the upper Asaro take fighting over this land as an indication of their own incapacity for development. Since the upper Asaro experienced intense and impressive economic growth in the middle decades of the 20th century, people disparage themselves for destroying the resulting infrastructure. Sagging electricity wires and burned out coffee factories symbolize this frustration, like un-healed wounds.

But as much as tribal war causes frustration and even shame, it is also quite clearly something that enlivens men and women, something that sparks enthusiasm among them. Prior to colonial 'pacification', clans found themselves in a situation of endemic warfare. *Today* however, warfare erupts either as an unwanted remainder of a 'savage' past (and people sometimes use the term 'savage' to characterize customs associated with traditional enmity) or as an exciting mobilizer of people's energies. I do not

exaggerate: I still vividly remember the scenes of young men prancing through tall grass set ablaze, bow and arrow ready and drawn, smoke billowing into the blue sky all around them. I remember nightly gatherings and excited tales of battle, stories of lasting injuries and tactical trickery. I remember insults shouted across a ravine: 'You're cannibals. Why don't you come and eat this body we've killed?' I saw tribal fighting ripple across the valley like a clap of thunder after the flash of a lightning bolt. People were afraid of it, they condemned it, and yet they found themselves ineluctably drawn to it: its brightness drew their attention even as it portended disaster.

War was an opportunity for men to display their strength and to create themselves as modern warriors. Men in the Asaro are fascinated by images of contemporary soldiers, whether those they see in the video house or those of PNG's own 'Defense Force'. Men loved to talk about the Gulf War with me, and when the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, everyone said they looked for images of me in the battle scenes they saw on TV news reports. War, I believe, activates the recessive principle of collective sociality and its attendant forms, including aesthetic ones. Men sharpened bows, avoided women, created new men's houses, etc., in the context of instances of fighting. The fighting itself sometimes draws on avian imagery that runs through a number of cultural idioms in the Asaro valley. For example, when men fight with bow and arrow, they do a dance that mimics that of the Dimorphic Fantail or *girigore*. The dance, which involves skipping from foot to foot, helps a man to avoid being hit by an enemy arrow. Alternately, men relish the opportunity to display themselves in the accoutrements of war, including camouflage gear and guns.

Fighting between Andaho and Korfena dominated many aspects of social life in

the early months of my fieldwork. To my consternation (and, a little bit, my excitement) it impacted on everything about my fieldwork, from my research practices and priorities, to the availability of transportation to town. I listened to gun shots from my garden, and I was told that Pikosa would be abandoned—that we'd have to escape to Simbu province. When gun fights broke out, many people from Nomba brought their things (pots and pans) to Pikosa, staying with their relatives for fear that their own village would be attacked. I would learn over the course of the following weeks why Nombans would be more threatened by the war than Pikosans were. The fighting activated collective relations that previously I was unable to see.

PROPERTY VIS-À-VIS COFFEE

Where people view the products of their work as extensions of themselves, legal title to land runs up against the history of persons who have put that land into productive use. The proposition that work creates identity, as when a woman in the upper Asaro claims her sweet potatoes will not grow unless they know her 'smell' (*unowo*, see below), might contradict the actions of the (post)colonial state to realize itself as a productive entity. In the Asaro valley, state objectives took the form of various agricultural endeavors, from tobacco growing, to cattle projects, to the establishment of large multi-hectare plantations 'owned' and operated by white planters. But modernist (*viz.*, capitalist) ideologies of growth depended on international markets, whose fluctuations subjected (and continue to subject) the value of agricultural efforts in the Asaro valley to forces as far away as Brazil and Vietnam, contemporary international centers of coffee production (see Sinclair 1995; Stewart 1992). Over the course of the 1980s, the international coffee market plummeted due

in part to increased production in Southeast Asia and advances in productivity elsewhere. Even the very high quality coffee produced in the Asaro valley was soon devalued, and white planters found themselves bleeding money.

Of course, their profits had always been padded and subsidized by a subsistence economy in which labor was relatively cheap and plentiful (Gregory 1982), and workers had never been remunerated for their efforts at a level required to sustain themselves in a full market economy. Their sense that they were under-compensated for their labor and land contributed to the resentment that led to widespread theft of plantation coffee and tools. Unable to pay higher security costs from lower coffee prices, many expatriate planters fled, leaving behind large tracts of land planted with still-productive coffee trees. Though documents pertaining to the ownership of these plantations were retained in provincial lands offices, the legal status of much of this land has remained ambiguous and contested, in large part because the Papua New Guinean state is exceedingly weak. During fieldwork, I documented both the effective execution of property law, as when David Orimari officially purchased portions of Downs' plantation and turned them into his private operation, *Sibereni* (rubbish man) Limited, and the complete evasion of such law, as when people routinely disparaged the need for land title, saying that the 'paper' is unimportant and that what matters are the ancestral claims to particular parcels of land. People told me not infrequently, and with anger, that the government does not support traditional claims to land because only large corporate plantations benefit the state remuneratively, not small-holders in villages.

When the planters left, Papua New Guinean men seized the opportunity to expand their own cash cropping efforts by sitting on the

open tracts, fencing off portions, and claiming them for their own. Because nurture/work on the land creates a claim to it, those who have tended to these re-claimed coffee gardens for the last several years, these sitters, are sometimes at odds with those who claim ancestral rights to land that was alienated in the colonial period. All the plantation land was alienated from unused tribal lands that were the subject of disputes as to rights in use. Downs and others thought they were *excising* this land from the dynamics of tribal war and contest. In fact, they 'froze' such conflicts at the cusp of colonial contact. When Downs and Leahy left the area, the *détente* thawed, passions flared, and conflicts heated up. Conflict today occurs both between collective social entities, as between the tribal groups Korfena and Andaho, or between individuals. It is informed by notions of ownership, work, wealth, property, person, and the symbolism of place. As I noted above, people routinely argue that the land is their life. The statement is not just a felicitous aphorism. As I have intimated and will describe further, land itself is held to contain the fertility or life-force that enables social reproduction.

At the very least, sitters claim that they 'own' the coffee trees, if not the land underneath, but of course it is the coffee that holds the sought-after value, and it is the coffee that today demonstrates men's reproductive efficacy. The implications of 'owning' these trees are ambiguous. On the one hand, coffee trees may be seen as a sort of permanent improvement to the land, and such improvements can be construed as enabling enduring territorial property rights. Thus, planted trees of any kind, and especially planted cordyline, may stake a claim to property, as when a new garden is customarily carved out of regrowth, fenced in, and marked with significant cordyline borders. Yet, in contrast to such gardens, no permanent

claim is made on the ground beneath coffee gardens or reclaimed tracts of plantation, which retain their (potentially contested) status as the territory of a particular tribe or clan. As Sexton notes: 'People may lay claim to coffee trees they planted and tended on someone else's land, but such a claim is tenuous and usually does not prevail over the landowner's title' (Sexton 1986: 62). In general, against any individual claims, some argue that the plantations are 'state land' because of the circumstances of their establishment (99-year leasing arrangements).

In 1963, Fred Leahy, nephew of the famous Leahy brothers, acquired a 50 acre plantation in an area known as Foinda, which is south of Pikosa, on the west side of the Asaro valley. Like his uncles, Leahy had tried his hand at various adventurous endeavors, not least of which was gold mining in Bulolo. The Foinda plantation, purchased from the Australian Graham Gilmore, had been established in 1955, after the end of the short-lived Goroka 'land rush' (Finney 1973). Benediktsson details the profound influence Leahy has had in the upper Asaro valley, and in particular in relation to economic development (Benediktsson 2002: 160–171). Economic enterprises at Foinda included tobacco drying, vegetable production, a lumber mill, and, of course, large scale coffee growing and processing.

The plantation was not meant to end up in ruins nor was it intended to provoke conflict. Indeed, it had in fact been incorporated in the 1970s as part of a rural development corporation that was intended to benefit the whole upper Asaro valley. Like other late colonial development projects, it was meant to be a cooperative endeavor explicitly for collective benefit. The subsequent failure of those projects to benefit *groups* (as opposed to individual elites who did very much benefit) is a source of constant complaint in the upper Asaro. Rarely

were colonial projects organized in a manner that would ensure the 'democratic' distribution of profit. Indeed, agricultural development efforts were not infrequently expressly anti-collectivist in their orientation (Stewart 1992). Nevertheless, Leahy felt, as did others, that forms of co-operative business enterprise would 'bring up' the native, teach him or her to work, and ultimately yield a growing economy.

To that end, Leahy founded the Asaro-Watabung Rural Development Corporation (AWRDC, accounts of which are available in Benediktsson 2002; Gerritsen 1979; Donaldson and Good 1978). The AWRDC was somewhat unlike other prominent eastern highlands development organizations, such as Gouna and Bena (Finney 1973; Sexton 1982): it was organized legally as a trust principally in order to channel funds not into the hands of shareholders but into further development schemes. Leahy endorsed the values espoused by Downs through the Highlands Farmers and Settlers Association: the active and ostensibly egalitarian participation of Papua New Guineans in expatriate enterprise. Gerritsen and Donaldson & Good suggest, however, that the AWRDC, like other similar efforts, merely aligned the interests of an emergent indigenous elite with those of expatriate planters. Far from distributing development democratically, such corporations enabled and then exacerbated incipient inequalities. As Benediktsson writes of the AWRDC: 'A list of those who worked with Fred in the AWRDC, and who were amongst the chief beneficiaries of this novel initiative, includes many of the individuals who still dominate economic and political life in the Asaro Valley today' (Benediktsson 2002: 168). Important national politicians took an interest in the project as a possible model for those elsewhere in the country, and the Foinda

plantation was visited by such historical Papua New Guinean figures as Michael Somare (PNG's first Prime Minister), Iambakey Okuk (member of parliament and initiator of the highlands highway), and Julius Chan (Prime Minister and Governor General).

I quote Benediktsson's account of the subsequent decline of the plantation at length, as my own findings differ from his in important ways:

In 1984, a group of landowners from the Kofena [sic] and the Kanosa tribe claimed compensation for the land on which the plantation had been established 30 years earlier. Simultaneously, suspicions arose that the Local Government Council, which had representatives on the board of AWRDC, had been taken for a ride... The Council pressured Fred into selling the plantation to a landowner group, headed by Paul Bayango, one of the directors of AWRDC. The AWRDC kept the factory, but the corporation was turned into a 'conventional' private company of shareholders. The factory was then leased to the landowner group. Storm clouds soon gathered... Paul's claim to landowner status was contested by other local groups. His father-had been a luluai, whose name appeared on the original documents relating to the land sale. But old Bayango was of the Gambiangwi clan (Kofena tribe), whereas the land he was selling had long been subject to a claim by the Kanosa tribe. Although the Kofena and the Kanosa had joined in buying the plantation, the latter became extremely unhappy with what they saw as Paul's subsequent appropriation of the whole business (Benediktsson 2002: 169)

The story takes us into the intricacies of the quasi-segmentary structure of upper Asaro tribes and its intersection with colonial development projects. We read of agonistic relations between Korfena and Kanosa, of the allegiances of Gambiangwi, of contested claims to land. I add, however, that none of Benediktsson's sources for the above narrative were principles in the conflict. His story is largely based on second-hand reports. I was able to gain access to the major disputants and to rival insider accounts of the battle for Leahy's plantation. Paul Bayango, the leader of Korfena/Andaho, was my classificatory maternal uncle (*omonobo*). His kin and his allies referred to me as their nephew (*nobo*). On a number of occasions, I traveled to their villages and spoke with them. I drew on my close relations with them to understand the conflict, even as I also tried to maintain a neutral ethnographic stance.

I first knew something was brewing in 2000 when I heard gun shots while I was weeding my garden and sprinkling the seeds of cucumber here and there between sweet potato mounds. My companions in the garden told me that we would soon be run off our land, out of our village, and into neighboring Simbu. I imagined a panicked phone call to my advisor, before attributing the comments to a hyperbole or sarcasm characteristic of talk about warfare. Later that day, a village leader told me about the beginnings of battle as he encountered them:

I came from Lae Saturday morning at around half past two. Pikosa and Komuni were nowhere to be found around the Market. I didn't see anyone I recognized. But I didn't have any money for a bus fare. A young Komuni man gave me 20 toea to buy bus fare to 6 Mile, where I checked things out. Why was no one down in Goroka? At 6 Mile they said that

there's a big fight and people can't come and go to Goroka. There was no transport. Just papa Moses [Moses Takai] brought people to and from the village. But Patrick [proprietor of a large coffee operation at 5 mile] said: 'You're too important [*bigpela man tumas*], if you go in someone else's car, they'll kill you: come in my car.' Some young Korfena men said that one Korfena man had been killed. We got in the car and came up to Asaro station. Just above the station, a man had blocked the road by parking his Dyna across it. I told Patrick: 'They're blocking the road, we should go back.' But Patrick says: 'Don't worry too much. We'll go. We're God's children.' So we continue, and as we approach the roadblock they surrounded the car. The young men were holding guns, an M-16, three .22s, an SRA., a pistol, a *kompas* gun, shot gun. They held us up [*bansapim*]. Patrick stopped at the road block. Korfena men, blocking the road, got up and said: 'We trust you folks, but we don't want you giving our enemies food or weapons, so we're inspecting you.' We continued on up the road, where we ran into Rindima and Kanosa. They were burning a smoky fire. Rindima people were burning the fire to honor a man who had just been killed. But we were confused, and we went back to the road block. There, a Korfena man said: 'In 1992, 8 years ago, you all chased us away. We went out into every province. We had children, and they learned many different languages [*kainkain tok ples*]. Just in this 8 years. And we Parents worried about all these languages our children were learning. You Rindima, you didn't let us come up along this main road. Nor did you give us our ground or our coffee back. You won the fight. Now, we're going to fight again, we're

starting up this war again. you two [Meson and his companion Patrick] you are of another line and may pass. But we have this worry, and we're starting the war. This plantation of Fred Leahy's, they can have it. But we want our ground, road, and villages back.' He said that. They also reminded me that I had in the past fought alongside their enemies, to which I replied: 'I'm not joining this fight. Those who say otherwise are lying. You can't block this road: we have to go to town to get food. Before, yes I helped them with 250 blankets, 90 rice bags, some beer, some cartons of meat. We gave them 3 pigs. But that was 1992. We are tired of looking after the Kanosa and Rindima folks. It's your fight. We are separate. We won't help them.'

Over the next four months, I heard many stories like these. Indeed, I myself was 'checked' on one occasion as I tried to make my way from Pikosa to town. For weeks, the road to town was blocked by both sides, people told stories about skirmishes and dead bodies, I heard the reports of gunfire echo up the valley, Nindereve moved their belongings to Pikosa for fear of attack, and young men wandered the roads openly displaying their weapons. I collected many detailed and sometimes conflicting stories about what was happening, as I tried myself to understand it.

Where *was* 'the state'? As illustrated in Meson's story, access to roads was an important aspect of the conflict. The road is not just an important conduit of things and people, it is also highly symbolic. It was a constant source of contestation in 2000, in part because some people claimed that the road is 'state land', neutral territory and should not be subject to tribal war restrictions and dynamics. Others argued precisely the opposite. Because both

local and national governments are rarely able to enforce the law when tribal war is involved, the perspective of those who see the road as a legitimate component of tribal war easily prevails. In this respect, it is the warring parties who therefore divide 'sovereignty' in the valley between them—between the parties to the conflict, those groups whose names kept shifting, but also between the belligerents and the other tribes in the valley who may or may not be confederated with them, such as Pikosa. This is one aspect of the principle of collective sociality: collectivities stand in equal relation to each other. They are each 'sovereign' units of a sort.

As elsewhere in the highlands, the 'state', by which I mean institutions of governance and law enforcement administered at both provincial and national levels, was seen by most participants in the war (although not all) less as an encompassing social entity than as a competing equivalent interest (Dinnen 1997). Certainly, it lacked a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Frustrated individuals often said things like, 'We should leave Goroka and join Simbu', as though the Eastern Highlands Provincial government was an ally with whom they were affiliated. Rumors flared that the reluctance on the part of the provincial police force to put down the war was related to connections between Paul Bayango and the governor of the province at the time, Peti Lefanama.

In the story above, Meson pleads neutrality: let me pass, he says, we are separate. But Meson's rhetoric was largely self-serving: the language of neutrality was meant to enable his own free passage. Such a claim of neutrality was later rejected collectively, when death threats were issued against him because of his role as a recognized leader of Pikosa village, historically allied with Korfena, as he noted. This indicates

a further aspect of tribal ‘sovereignty’: tribal affiliation is not something that one can disavow. Indeed, though men sometimes attempted to maintain neutrality, they were much more frequently treated as representatives of their natal clans. This is a further differentiating characteristic between *hina* and *rowo*. As I have suggested, *hina* is subject to much more variation in the allegiances of individuals. That variation usually follows lines of relationship established through women. People explained to me that during *hina*, men may follow the *kandere sistem* (matrilateral kin system) to ally themselves with people outside their own clan. In contrast, *rowo* binds individuals to enduring structures of relationship, whether those individuals like it or not: their agnatic heritage cannot be overcome in the context of all-out war.

As corollary of this normative affiliation is that individuals who are members of clans or tribes may be held responsible for the actions of their clan/tribal brethren. Indeed, this was powerfully illustrated when Kiripo’s son King Size raided an Andaho village along with Korfena men, and stole a coffee pulping machine. King Size, though resident on his mother’s land in Nomba village, was a Pikosan. Pikosans, when they heard what he had done, were livid. Meson confronted King Size soon thereafter on the road between Nomba and Pikosa, arguing that he must return the coffee machine, lest Pikosans and their village be made vulnerable to attack. Meson sought to maintain the neutrality he above described, although Pikosans more generally, because of historically supportive relations with Korfena, themselves assumed they would be attacked if they showed their faces outside of the protected zone of their own territory. In any case, King Size, for his part, argued that he was ‘*independen*’ (independent); that his actions did not affect others. The notion was publicly mocked however, and people

groused about it. ‘Independent!’ they muttered when he used the word. King Size argued that he had attained something of value (the pulping machine) and why should he give it up, if he was ‘independent’? Meson, in response, balled up a K50 note into his fist, and punched King Size in the chest, dropping the money to the ground. ‘Money is unimportant’, he said.

I learned more about these dynamics from the leader of Korfena. *Komando* (Commando) was the ‘boss’ of the fighters based at Rindima; he referred to himself as their ‘leader’ or ‘overall commander’. He had trained his fighters in methods he learned as a policeman in Port Moresby: how to shoot a rifle, for example. After serving on the police force, he worked in security for Post and Telecommunications. This, he said, gave him a ‘little knowledge’ (*liklik save*). He ‘voluntarily’ returned to the highlands so that he could marshal the village efforts to the fight at hand, telling me: ‘They don’t have knowledge. I came up here [to the highlands from Port Moresby] to control the people. You know, they are simple people. They don’t know how to talk to the government and such. They don’t have knowledge. But I have a little knowledge, as an ex-policeman. I know a little about dealing with the statutory bodies of the government. So I’ve come to lead and defend my people.’ He continued, by telling the story that Benediktsson summarizes above:

[*So why are you fighting?*]

Komando: This plantation in Foinda. The Australian, James ‘Fred’ Leahy. He operated it, planted coffee, ran the plantation, the factory, everything. But the actual ground [*graun tru tru*], it is ours. The actual ground is ours. Paul is not the rightful owner. It doesn’t matter if he has the title or not. He is not the rightful owner. Everyone owns it. The Daulo electorate owns it. But that’s

just the coffee and the buildings. But the land itself, I'm the father. I'm the father of the land. It doesn't matter, whether there is coffee on it or a flower or whatever, that's just decoration! The soil is mine. I'm the father of the soil ['father of the soil'].

But this enemy of ours, their chief Paul Bayango, his father had been a tultul or a luluai, in the early days, the colonial days, and he said, 'It's my ground.' Now, the colonial officer recorded that the ground belonged to Paul Bayango's father. But truly, it is our ground. At that time, our parents had gone to stay in the bush. But Paul Bayango's father was there, and he said, 'The ground belongs to me.' You know? He claimed it was his. But truly, it wasn't his. After that, after the kiap had come along, and Fred Leahy had come along to run the operation, OK, Paul Bayango—my enemy—he was based there, in his father's name. So they planted the plantation, and there were shareholders who got involved. And this plantation, many people owned it—the Asaro-Watabung Local Government Council Trust, they were involved with it. They were shareholders too. And there were individual shareholders from Australia as well. But Paul Bayango, he got angry I think that others had a share. And so he worked at upsetting Fred Leahy. And Fred Leahy got tired of it and ran away. He ran away. But he didn't hand it over good. He didn't investigate: who were the true landowners [*papa bilong graun*]. It's Fred Leahy's fault too. Now many lives have been lost. He was supposed to investigate who were the true landowners. But Fred Leahy he just left it, he ran away. He was afraid of Paul and he ran away. And so now Paul took over. He took over, and

he put a pistol to the heads of the other shareholders and the Asaro Government Council and said: 'You won't say anything. Me myself will operate this.' So everyone was afraid of him. There wasn't one man who would fight against him, you know? Because nobody can challenge him or fight against him.

OK, so then he wanted to evict us from Rindima. He took home-mades and factory made guns, Winchester, shot gun, and fired at us. We were angry and said: 'Agh! This is our ground. Why does he want to push us off it?' So now we hunted around for our own guns. We found guns here and there and said: 'you know, we are the landowners [*papa bilong graun*]' . Now [making a bow and arrow gesture], we fired back. Now, he saw that our fire power was high, enough to get rid of him and his folks. And he too left. He too ran away, and all of his people. They fled. They ran away, all over. And we took back what was ours. We took back our ground. So they ran away and searched for guns and bullets, and they've come back to 'reverse' the situation.

The second time we fought, I think they were short of bullets. Many times the Police Commissioner came, the Minister came, lots of folks came. I told them: 'My explanation is right. My talk is true. I'm Christian. I'm the rightful owner of this land.' And people believed me, but they didn't believe Paul. Because I was the true 'father of the ground'. That's how it was. But he still tried, and he still lost. We had plenty of bullets. I'm Christian, and so are my people, and we believe in God. God looks after us. It didn't matter that we were outnumbered, because God was watching over us...

[What will happen next?]

We'll keep fighting. Unless Paul dies. If he is dead, then everything, everything will finish. If he is still alive, we will fight yet. I told the Police Commissioner. I told him: 'If Paul dies, the fight will finish. If Paul doesn't die, the fight will continue.' So before, one Police Commissioner came and I said, 'Please no investigation on my firearms, no prosecution, unless Paul is dead.'

Komando's story, like Meson's, links a number of important topics. Here I note that Komando attributes sources of the present conflict to the mismanagement of indigenous affairs by colonial authorities. He accuses Fred Leahy of improperly turning over ancestral lands to Paul Bayango. Further, he strongly associates the war with the tribal leaders who encourage it, including himself. This illustrates the way in which social structure is reproduced in and through the men who marshal structural principles to their interests. Thus, Komando quite rightly observed that the fighting was instigated by Paul Bayango and predicted a peace in the event of Bayango's death. He would not have to wait long.

Bayango was killed in June of 2000 on the main feeder road leading into the upper Asaro valley. Reports of his death were greeted with astonishment, as people tried to determine why he would have been driving in a dangerously open area. Indeed, rumors in 2003 implied that Bayango had been killed not by his enemies, but by his own kin, who were tired of being drawn into the deadly war. My own sources denied this rumor, however. In any case, after Bayango's death, the fighting ceased. Today, there appears to be an uneasy truce between the sides.⁴

Jimmy Rende argues that the ascendancy of Korfena as a prominent and regionally recognized name pertains specifically to the

linguistic context of colonialism. Agreeing with Komando that the colonial officers 'did not do their research well' (*kiap no wokim research bilong en gut*), Jimmy extends the critique to the usage of tribal and place names in institutional contexts. Jimmy argues that whites had trouble hearing and transliterating the phonemes of Dano. He argues that while names like Andaiwaijufa confused kiaps, Korfena was easy to pronounce. For this reason, they extended the use of Korfena beyond its proper parameters, according to Jimmy. He points out that the legally-incorporated name of Downs' Nomba plantation is actually the Korfena plantation. Yet, the territories of Korfena begin south of Nomba at Rindima and run up a river into the valley on the other side of the mountains from Nomba. With respect to pronunciation, Jimmy points out that the pidginized Korfena might also be rendered Gwoheni, and he offers a further example: Pikosa is a transformation of what had been called Fikese or Hikese.

Moreover, Jimmy argues that present political allegiances in the valley in part derive precisely from the official or institutional recognition afforded some tribal names over and above others. Elaborating his emphasis on the variations in appellations, Jimmy suggests that current alliances are largely an effect of the deployment of recognizable names in an areal or regional context. Thus, people from Nomba or Pikosa rarely use their true place name in Goroka: no one knows those names there. But because of the 'Korfena' plantation, that name is recognized and so people use it in institutional contexts: at banks, schools, hospital, etc. Jimmy says that this is a 'problem of the office folks and the white man' (*problem bilong ol opis lain na ol white man*). His suggestion, which I offer here as a possibility worth considering, is that these usages have a structural impact because people internalize and align themselves with

the names that have recognition in 'town', viz. in business and government. He suggests that their propensity to seek recognition in institutional and broader regional contexts inveigles Pikosans into an alliance with Korfena that they may not otherwise wish to pursue (cf. Urban 1996: 29–65 on Amazonia).

INTRICACIES OF THE SOVEREIGN

How best to analyze these conflicts? My aim has been largely descriptive. The tangle of relations, of points of contestation, of conflicted sovereignties, of failed government, and of symbolic value would only dimly be captured by a language of domination and resistance. Above all, the relevant relational contexts far exceed the contemporary fashions of 'governmentality' to describe them (see especially Siikala 2001). Anthropologists have long been concerned with the political. An earlier anthropology of the political found analogies for government and for law in, among other things, the structures of authority evinced in kinship-oriented styles of social organization (Fortes 1953). We have quite rightly corrected the relatively ahistorical nature of such studies by drawing attention to the (post)colonial conditions that enabled them, including the conditions created through states' administrative apparatuses. I simply wish to remember here what those earlier studies achieved: ways of thinking about the political that did not take for granted the familiar categories of states, citizens, law, rights, and the like.

Even if people mimic the mantle of state authority in the act of disobeying it, as in the figure of Commando regimenting his troops so as to secure sovereign control over his clan's territory, they also remake the realm that such authority regulates. Together, these stories of

collective contestation over territory invite us to question the degree to which those we might see acting in opposition to a state in fact have the state in view as a salient context for their own actions. I suggest these Papua New Guineans are finding the modes and means through which to govern themselves. Whether or not these modes and means fit within a picture of efficient or fair liberal governance is largely irrelevant. It is not at all clear that the principal actors in these stories wish to be so governed.

NOTES

- 1 The article was originally published in 2006 in *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 31 (3–4): 37–52.
- 2 A commission of inquiry was established to look into the events in June 2001. Transcripts of the inquiry are currently available at: <http://www.pm.gov.pg>. <no longer available>
- 3 My usage of the term 'tribe' here accords with that of Newman (1965).
- 4 According to Benediktsson's version of events, Bayango was a member of Kambianggu (Benediktsson's 'Gambianggwi') clan. To the contrary: Kambianggu is the clan name of those that live in Rindima, the avowed *enemies* of Bayango, as Komando makes clear above. I am now in a position to explain the confusingly-varied usage of the name 'Korfena' in the context of this war. A full account of the structural configuration of the groups contesting the Leahy plantation reveals a tribal confederation rending itself apart just as the colonial social order was established. Having discussed the state, collective responsibility and leadership, I turn now to the internal structuring of tribes.

Andaho men largely verified the stories told to me about the pre-colonial arrangement of Korfena clans by people like Komando and Jimmy Rende. Korfena men had told me that their ancestors did not reside on the lands that were alienated for the Foinda plantation. They failed, however, to mention that those ancestors had in fact been driven off those lands by the Andaho clans with whom they routinely battled.

Although I refer here to Andaho clans, this is something of an anachronism. Andaho is, I believe, the tribal name resulting from the dissolution of a confederation known as Korfena-Kanosa, those groups whom Newman states were living directly south of 'Fikese-Gururumba' (Pikosa and Kururumba) in 1959–1960 (Newman 1965). By 2000, the name Kanosa, like the name Kururumba, had become virtually moribund. I almost never heard it mentioned. Korfena was 'traditionally' composed of several clans (much like Pikosa is composed of Konobijufa and Kurefijufa). They were: Kambianggu and Nindereve—an exogamous unit; Aserijufa, Andaiwaijufa, Kofejufa, Kefingukave, and Kambiya—another exogamous unit; Kambusukave—an exogamous unit; and Koneboda—an exogamous unit. Kanosa was composed of Foindave, Nokondisijufa, and Nosave. Now traditionally these various clans had battled with each other, and aligned in a particular fashion. The Korfena clans of Andaiwaijufa, Kambasukave, Aserijufa, Kofejufa, Kefingukave, Kambiya, and Koneboda joined the Kanosa clans Foindave and Nosave to fight Kambianggu and Nokondisijufa. In other words, segments of Korfena and Kanosa realigned, outside their position in the segmentary order, to form an emergent configuration. It is this configuration that survives today. The clans that have taken the name 'Andaho' are those that oppose Kambianggu and Nokondisijufa, which are now referred to as 'Korfena'. I add that I believe this process of reconfiguration was dynamically occurring over the course of my fieldwork, and that this accounts for the confusing and contradictory usage of the name Korfena, as I indicated above. Andaho represents a lexical transformation of Andaiwaijufa—deleting the clan suffix *-jufa* (seed) and thereby rendering the name equivalent to other higher order appellations, like Korfena or Pikosa. According to my sources, Paul Bayango and his father were of the Andaiwaijufa clan. This suggests that through Bayango's leadership, Andaho emerged as a tribe in its own right. But whereas the name Korfena has been retained in everyday and in political discourse, Kanosa has largely disappeared. This can probably be attributed both to the larger population of Korfena vis-à-vis Kanosa and to the peculiarities of contact with colonial authorities, who seemed to latch onto Korfena for their censusing and

commercial purposes. I have already mentioned Ian Downs' calling his plantation by the name 'Korfena'. The people of Korfena themselves have given some thought to the matter.

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