CONFLICT IN MELANESIA: THEMES AND LESSONS

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Overview

This case study examines contemporary experiences of conflict in four contexts: Papua New Guinea, with particular reference to the island of Bougainville and the Highlands region; Solomon Islands; and Vanuatu. We find common themes in these experiences, despite the region’s famous socio-linguistic diversity, fragmented geography and varied experience of globalisation. Melanesia offers distinctive lessons about how conflict may be understood, promoted and avoided. The paper is organized in two broad parts.

The first part is contextual. It provides a brief account of conflict and violence in social life before and after colonization. It then tracks, largely chronologically, through the local, national and transnational dimensions of contemporary conflict, how it was avoided, how it has changed, and how it has been managed in different contexts. Particular attention is given to global and regional influences, and to how governments, local people, and external security, development and commercial actors, have worked to mitigate and, at times, exacerbate conflict.

The second part of the case study is more analytical. It steps back from the particulars to address themes and propositions in the overall conceptual framing of WDR 2011 about the nature of conflict, and the underlying stresses and interests that may render it more likely. Part II draws lessons from the histories and contexts discussed in Part I. We organize these around three themes that reflect views shared with us by people during consultations. The first highlights the need to recognize conflict as an inherent part of social change and thus the need to distinguish between socially generative social contest, and forms of conflict that are corrosive and destructive. The second examines how the way people ‘see’ and understand the world directly shapes systems of regulation and ‘the rules of the game’ and thus directly affect responses to conflict. The third theme argues that capable and legitimate institutions to regulate social contest requires not just capable state institutions, but as much, relationships with local and international agents and organizations operating below and above the state.
Introduction

PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu lie in what anthropologists refer to loosely as the Melanesian culture area.¹ The population is socially, linguistically and geographically diverse. Around 20 percent of the world’s languages are found in Melanesia, with over 800 language groups in PNG alone.² Population sizes range from an estimated 6.3 million in PNG, 540,000 in Solomon Islands, to around 240,000 in Vanuatu. People live predominantly in rural communities dispersed across a range of landscapes, from sparsely populated coral atolls through coastal lowlands to densely settled, fertile highland valleys.³

Traditional Melanesian societies were typically small-scale, relatively egalitarian (at least, among men) and lacked centralized institutions. Leadership status was ascribed in some places, inherited in others, and often acquired through a combination of both. The strategic manipulation of social relations through acts of distribution and exchange was key to sustaining leadership standing and social equilibrium more generally.⁴ Disputation and conflict within socially prescribed boundaries were normal features of social life, as were peacemaking and reconciliation. Disputes were managed pragmatically, and often involving protracted negotiations. Settlements were rarely final, with emphasis on the management of disputation rather than its erasure.⁵ Instead of being antithetical to social order, cyclical patterns of conflict and peacemaking were integral to local sociality.

Melanesia was one of the last parts of the globe to experience European colonization. ⁶ Local responses varied across time and space, ranging from violent resistance to enthusiastic accommodation at opposite ends of a broad continuum. Resistance was violently suppressed by colonial authorities, as was inter-group conflict. Although from the late nineteenth century through to the Second World War there was some land alienation and plantation development, much of the commercial interaction involved trade. The impacts of colonial administration in the larger territories were experienced unevenly spatially and temporally, with highlands’ communities coming under government control much later than coastal and island areas. Christian missions tended to have more uniform and enduring social impacts on local peoples throughout the region.

Colonial penetration by patrols and through the establishment of government stations had important implications for conflict and how it was mediated. Authorities were more interested in maintaining a semblance of order than in radically transforming local societies and building elaborate systems of governance. While tribal warfare was successfully suppressed,⁷ customary approaches to conflict management persisted in most areas. Administrative officials, police and courts, provided an additional layer of institutional forms but limited resources in these Melanesian outposts prompted a range of hybrid governing accommodations with indigenous systems, including through the multi-functional kiap in PNG, and ‘native councils’ and ples men in Solomon Islands.⁸

In the decades before independence systems of ‘native administration’ began to be replaced by centralized bureaucratic forms of governance. Standardised Western models of justice, administration and representation were imported for this purpose. For local people, many aspects of these new systems were viewed as less relevant and accessible than those they replaced. Insofar as kastom norms were recognized in the constitutions of the newly independent Melanesian nations,
this was within a framework of state law. *Kastom* was recognized provided it did not conflict with other sources of written or unwritten law, such as statutory law and inherited common law. This was consistent with colonial approaches that viewed legal pluralism as a transitory stage on the way towards a unitary national legal system and ensured that the role of *kastom* in state legal processes was limited. The practice of everyday regulation and dispute resolution at village level remained largely beyond the remit of state law.

The pace of change accelerated throughout Melanesia following the Pacific War. Colonial policy – Australian in the case of PNG, British in Solomon Islands and a condominium of France and Britain in the then New Hebrides (Vanuatu from 1980) – became more concerned with ensuring that economic development benefited local populations. With growing international pressure to decolonize, metropolitan policies on the preconditions and timing of independence remained ambiguous. More effort was made to stimulate foreign investment and small holder cash-cropping, while limiting land alienation and increasing expenditure on health, education and transport infrastructure. With the notable exception of Bougainville, where the development of the Panguna mine was viewed as pivotal to PNG’s economic future as an independent state, little thought was given to the possibility of mining or industrialization. Despite population growth rates, before and after independence (PNG - 1975, Solomon Islands - 1978 and Vanuatu - 1980), being among the highest in the world, most people have continued to be rural-based and dependent on subsistence agriculture and cash cropping.

The manner in which Melanesian people related to external market and political forces changed rapidly over time. Not long after independence international partners were expressing doubts that Melanesian leaders had the capacity or the willingness to ‘do’ development in ways that would advantage their citizens. Vanuatu is today regarded as ‘doing well’ – for which Australia and New Zealand take a measure of credit. However, elsewhere the poor development performance of the post-colonial Melanesian states has been understood by international actors through a succession of broad explanatory lenses that, most recently, have highlighted underlying problems of state fragility, political instability and insecurity as the critical inhibitors to growth and development.

**Part I: Contemporary Experiences of Conflict**

**Vanuatu**

Relative to its neighbors, Vanuatu is now a strong economic performer and is governed through a uniquely hybrid set of arrangements linking local and national levels. These attributes are often cited as the reasons why it has managed to avoid the levels of conflict and violence experienced in PNG or Solomon Islands. Vanuatu’s current performance is all the more impressive given its earlier experience of economic stagnation and political instability from the mid-80s to the mid-90s. The Santo rebellion at Independence in 1980 was suppressed with military assistance from PNG. Vanuatu’s early openness to dialogue with eastern bloc powers was viewed in Australia and New Zealand through a Cold War lens as ill-advised aspirations to ‘Melanesian socialism’. Riots in the capital Port Vila in 1988 and 1998, and the brief kidnapping of the President in 1996 by members of the paramilitary police appeared to confirm the likelihood that Vanuatu would follow a similar trajectory to that of its northern neighbours. Incidents of conflict have continued though on a lesser
scale than in any of the other contexts considered here. These have included tensions between the regular police force (VPF) and its paramilitary wing (VMF), the 2007 conflict between people from Tanna and Ambrym living in Port Vila, along with grievances around land, public sector pay claims, rising urban crime, police violence and prison escapes, and clashes between different island groups fueled by urbanization and high unemployment, particularly among the rapidly growing youth constituency.

Vanuatu is nevertheless regarded as a positive example of the conventions of post-independence development policy at work, one that “dispels the myth that the Pacific island economies cannot grow”. Its GDP grew at an annual average rate of 6.6 percent between 2003 and 2008. This growth has been attributed to the government’s support for tourism, active land markets, deregulation of the airlines and telecoms, liberal tax provisions, and a reputation for maintaining macro-fiscal stability, using aid well and ensuring positive metropolitan relationships. While recognizing that Vanuatu’s rapid change generates social stresses, many feel that long term prospects are good, and that contemporary ill-ease, widespread though it may be, about land alienation, patronage politics and the uneven distribution of social and economic benefits, will be overcome by the country’s healthy mix of modern and traditional regulatory arrangements. Indeed, the role of ‘traditional’ institutions in Vanuatu has been regarded by those holding a positive outlook on the future as crucial in its ability to ‘beat the odds.’

More particularly, ‘hybrid’ institutional arrangements are said to have enabled ni-Vanuatu to reaffirm local identity and kastom whilst pursuing economic and political liberalization in ways that have so far eluded their northern neighbors. Vanuatu’s leaders, both government and chiefs, have worked together effectively. The Malvatumauri, for example, created by a provision of the country’s Constitution, was tasked with ‘protecting’ and ‘conserving’ kastom and, although they have no formal powers in this regard, have played a significant role in resolving disputes in ways not possible through singular reliance on a Westminster style of government and justice. Experimentation with hybridity has recently gone further with the establishment of the Kastom Ekonomi and Kastom Bank projects, implemented through the National Cultural Center (NCC). These initiatives sought to build bridges between the non-monetised and modern cash economies in a manner that would validate ‘traditional’ transactions, promote self-reliance and shield ni-Vanuatu from the destructive impacts of globalization. The government was supportive and designated both 2007 and 2008 as the ‘Year of the Traditional Economy’.

Recognition by the Vanuatu Constitution that “All land in the Republic of Vanuatu belongs to the indigenous custom owners and their descendants” has been coupled with land lease arrangements that have so far proven favorable to many foreign and local investors in tourism and service sector industries, particularly on Efate. Elsewhere, the perception that windfall gains can be achieved by trading land has led to a proliferation of disputes amongst kastom landholder claimants. The escalation of disputes has so far been contained by multiple traditional and civil dispute resolution institutions and the protracted negotiations these involve. But there are growing concerns that link recent patterns of land leasing, involving strata title developments, particularly on the main island of Efate, to future conflict. Grievances around the speculative nature of these developments, coupled with lease provisions requiring landowners to compensate leaseholders for any improvements on expiry of the lease, are becoming more pronounced.
Box: The Vanuatu National Council of Chiefs – called the Malvatumauri since 1978 - was founded in 1977, as part of the lead-up to independence (1980). The Malvatumauri comprises chiefs who are elected every four years from every region in Vanuatu and meets twice a year. Its role under the constitution is limited. It has ‘a general competence to discuss all matters relating to custom and tradition’ and also it ‘may make recommendations for the preservation and promotion of ni-Vanuatu culture and languages’. In recent years, it has been involved in establishing structures for chiefly councils and procedures for registering chiefly titles. It has also been vocal in expressing dissatisfaction with the powers of chiefs in general, arguing that there should be legislation for chiefly powers in relation to conflict management. Chiefs are the primary community leaders in both rural and urban areas and are seen as having a special role and responsibility to preserve and promote kastom. Their acceptance as community leaders and representation in the structures of government helps connect local and national levels, as well as providing an avenue for those not educated in western systems to participate in modern government. 21

Some critics are convinced that this is likely to result in the permanent alienation of land and the dispossession of large numbers of ni-Vanuatu from their primary source of identity, security and livelihood. The potential for destructive cycles of violence to become embedded if such a trajectory is followed is self-evident. Against this background, the Melanesian Indigenous Land Defence Alliance (MILDA), in concert with the NCC and endorsed by the Malvatumauri, has recently called on Melanesian political leaders to stop the alienation of customary land through sales or leases. 22 This resistance to ‘development’ can be viewed more positively as an example of proactive preventive measures to avoid the divisions that are anticipated to lead to major future conflict.

Bougainville

Bougainville has been viewed as a case study of success and failure, and then success again. The drivers of the conflict that emerged from the late 1980s were specific to Bougainville, but were echoed in later conflicts elsewhere in PNG and Solomon Islands. Deep historical grievances associated with the island’s colonial experience contributed to a strong sense of Bougainvillian identity and tradition of resistance to colonial and other forms of external intervention.23 Nonetheless, before the conflict Bougainville’s provincial government was regarded as the most capable and effective in PNG, while corruption and crime were also less evident than in other provinces.24 There had been local resistance to the construction of the mine in the late 1960s as well as in opposition among local elites to incorporation into the new state of PNG in the early 1970s.25 Grievances over the distribution of benefits from the Panguna mine provided the immediate catalyst for the conflict. Reflecting generational shifts, younger landowners dissatisfied with benefits sharing arrangements became confrontational in pursuit of their claims. Local mineworkers also resented the opportunities accruing to non-Bougainvillians. New tensions were associated with growing inequalities between and within indigenous communities, as well as over environmental and other social impacts of the mine.

Destruction of mine property in late 1988 was met by a heavy-handed ‘law and order’ response from the PNG security forces. This escalated a local dispute into a wider secessionist rebellion against the PNG state. A bloody and indecisive conflict was waged between the Bougainville Resistance Army (BRA) and the PNG military, with serious human rights abuses on all sides. Following the departure of PNG forces in 1990 and a blockade of the island, flows of goods and revenues ceased, as did most health and education services. A semi-anarchic situation developed. Conflict between secessionist
and integrationist factions, unrelated localized disputes and opportunistic violence resulted in an increasingly militarized and ungoverned society. Efforts by the PNG military failed to suppress the rebellion. While supportive of PNG’s efforts to regain control of Bougainville and critical of local rebels, Australia - as PNG’s biggest supporter in the region - was uncomfortable with the actions of the PNG Defense Force. A growing war-weariness became evident in Bougainville, while informal peace-making efforts in which local women played a prominent role gained momentum in some areas. The Chan-led PNG government was nevertheless intent on securing a military victory and in 1997 entered into an agreement with an international military contractor, Sandline, to help its struggling defence force. This move was strongly condemned by Australia and other regional neighbours. However, elements of the PNG Defence Force under General Singirok rebelled and evicted the private military forces.\(^\text{26}\) The ensuing political crisis culminated in the fall of the Chan government and the new Prime Minister, Bill Skate, seized the opportunity to initiate peace talks with Bougainvillean parties.

Peace negotiations between PNG and Bougainvillean parties commenced in mid-1997 at the initiative of parties to the conflict. Australia was not able to take a more proactive role due to sensitivities about its former status as colonial administrator responsible for establishing the mine and its subsequent support of PNG’s Defence Force. The role of external actors - initially led by New Zealand - in the Bougainville peace process is particular in a number of respects. First, the process was initiated and largely controlled by local actors, with a major role played by women, church and community leaders. Given that it was a multi-party, rather than bilateral, conflict, there was a special need to build trust and confidence, and the early focus was more on process than outcomes. Peacemaking was prioritized over state-building. Protracted meetings over two years culminated in the Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001. As well as arrangements for demilitarization, this included a political settlement involving autonomy for Bougainville and a deferred referendum on independence. The formal peace process built on the informal reconciliation efforts led by women, church and community leaders.

Second, the process was supported by a light international intervention. It involved an unarmed regional monitoring force, as well as a small but highly effective United Nations observer mission provided through the Department of Political Affairs rather than the DPKO. Officials from New Zealand and Australia had extensive experience in Bougainville, and there was a clear division of responsibilities. The Bougainville intervention was ‘particularist’ with its close attention to the nuances of local context, sensitivities around the role of external actors and need for local ownership, as well as its grasp of the significance of relationships in both the generation and management of Melanesian conflicts.

Another critical aspect of the Bougainville peace process was the crafting of a durable post-conflict political settlement. This entailed lengthy negotiations between the various local factions, as well as between Bougainvillean representatives and the PNG state. These talks aimed to define Bougainville’s political structures in a way that addressed the grievances that contributed to the conflict. They included the nature of Bougainville’s future relations with PNG and the international community, as well as with the mining industry. In these deliberations of ‘over the horizon’ issues space was created to consider a more inclusive public role for women, as vigorously promoted by local women’s leaders, in Bougainville’s political structures.
**Papua New Guinea Highlands**

Many years after the Bougainville conflict, the Highlands of PNG faces similar issues of violent conflict around resource extraction, as well as extremely low human development indicators. Unlike Bougainville, however, the effectiveness of provincial governments in the Highlands has been decidedly mixed. The revival of tribal fighting in the late 1960s was linked by some observers to the dismantling of the old colonial system of government by patrol. This system, where policing, judicial and government powers were combined in the office of patrol officer or *kiap*, ensured that the state then had a more effective security presence in many rural areas than it does now. The presence and reach of the post-colonial state has been most tenuous in the Highlands, while the hybrid political culture of ‘bigman-ship’ has been most marked, contributing to highly uneven and inefficient patterns of politician-led development. The ineffectiveness of state security and justice services has meant people continue to rely upon local methods for managing disputes and maintaining security. These methods, in turn, have been increasingly overwhelmed by the pace of change and the difficulties in re-establishing balance in relationships ruptured by conflict. Inter-generational change, with older men losing their authority over male youth, exacerbated by high levels of alcohol and substance abuse, have also contributed to the escalation of conflict in many parts of the Highlands. The widespread availability of small arms, many stolen from the security services or supplied by business and political leaders, has completely altered the tactics and outcomes of violent conflict. The advent of mercenaries or ‘hire men’ and guerilla tactics has dramatically altered the ground rules of tribal fighting and has fueled escalating cycles of conflict that are difficult to resolve through traditional means. Higher numbers of casualties associated with new technologies make it harder to achieve the equivalence that was integral to traditional peacemaking.

This overwhelming of local capacity has nevertheless prompted diverse and often quite innovative responses in some areas that draw on a mix of state and non-state resources with a premium on prevention and reduction. Some have achieved promising results. One recent example is the District Peace Management Teams (DPMTs) in the Eastern Highlands province (EHP). DPMTs comprise provincial and district officials, police, village court officers, and community and church leaders. Trained in non-violent conflict resolution, they mediate between conflicting parties, broker ceasefires and help negotiate the terms of written peace agreements and resolve the underlying causes of conflict. Breaches of these agreements can be reported to the police and offending parties penalized. The results have been spectacular. Reported tribal fights in EHP have dropped from a peak of 84 fights prior to the establishment of the DPMTs to only 4 fights in 2010. While reaffirming the value of local mechanisms, DPMTs also illustrate forms of networked governance - linking together different levels and agencies of government and the village courts, as well as donors and civil society actors at different levels – that are becoming more common in the region. An expatriate adviser to the PNG/Australia Law and Justice Partnership, with long experience in PNG and the Highlands, has also been as an important factor in the development of these mechanisms.

Another example comes from Enga province which, since before independence has been viewed as one of the most conflict-prone regions of PNG. A significant reduction in the levels of violence has occurred in recent years. The number of wars has increased due to growing social inequalities and
jealousies, road blocks, beer, marijuana, election politics and breakdown in traditional marriages among other things. But the average number of deaths per war has decreased steadily from nineteen in 1991-95 to five in 2006-09.\textsuperscript{36} The decline is attributed to successful efforts of tribal leaders to contain violence and initiatives by church leaders to instill new norms and values. Other factors have been the deaths of prominent mercenary/gang leaders, the rejection by a new generation of youths of the costs of warfare and a desire to spend household money on expenses other than war compensation, particularly school fees.

As state capacity has been overwhelmed, there has also been a flourishing of non-state security providers. These range from informal community self-policing initiatives through various gradations of security organizations and facilities in the private sector. By the 1990s, private security had become one of the fastest growing industries in PNG.\textsuperscript{37} This growth is most visible in the towns and cities, where private operators service government facilities, commercial and business premises and the homes of the wealthy. Companies vary in size, organization and services provided, and include both local and international providers. While some maintain relatively high standards, concerns are regularly aired about ‘cowboy’ elements operating in a largely unregulated industry.\textsuperscript{38} Private providers have always been prominent among the minerals, petroleum and other extractive industries. To maintain stability in their operating environments, they have also been involved in the provision of essential infrastructure, scholarships for local students and community development schemes. This has been facilitated by a tax credit scheme whereby government forgoes tax in return for the developers providing certain services. In addition to their own security capacities, developers have often worked closely with state police, including in a capacity building role. For example, the mining industry was instrumental in persuading the government to contract with a private British security provider in the early 1990s to train a special unit of the RPNG – the Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU) – to provide security at mining and petroleum projects in the Highlands.\textsuperscript{39} The most dramatic example of private security intervention in PNG was the government-initiated Sandline Affair in 1997 as noted earlier. Security concerns around the current LNG project and the extensive pipeline from the Southern Highlands to the Papuan coast is already leading to a further expansion in the private security sector and is likely to denude state security capacity further as police and defence force personnel are drawn into better paid employment with private operators.

Rising concerns with ‘law and order’ in the post-independence period were initially focused on violent urban crime, in particular, in Port Moresby, attributed to the predatory activities of criminal or raskol gangs comprising un/underemployed male youth. This type of crime was linked to limited opportunities to enter the cash economy and the highly visible inequalities in urban communities. Government responses, supported by Australian aid, included institutional strengthening of the police and related criminal justice agencies, culminating in the adoption of a sector-wide approach to law and justice in 2003. Periodic outbreaks of tribal fighting in the Highlands were responded to by militaristic policing operations. These were reminiscent of the violent pacification strategies of colonial times, entailing punitive police raids and other coercive forays aimed at taming and punishing recalcitrant local communities.\textsuperscript{40} While temporarily suppressing disorder, such strategies inevitably generate further grievance, compensation claims and potential conflict.

Following almost sixteen years of development assistance from AusAID to the RPNGC (1989-2005), the Australian and PNG governments signed a treaty in mid-2004 establishing the Enhanced
Cooperation Program (ECP). Influenced by the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), the ECP was an elaborate bilateral package comprising substantially increased assistance for the PNG police, other parts of the law and justice sector, border protection, as well as for financial and public sector management. The centerpiece was to be the secondment of up to 230 Australian police officers to work alongside the RPNGC in the three largest towns, along the Highlands Highway (linking the resource-rich Highlands provinces to the port city of Lae), as well as in post-conflict Bougainville. The cost of the policing component was estimated at A$800 million over a five year period and was to be in addition to the existing A$350 million a year Australian aid program which already included a substantial law and justice sector program. Despite formal agreement being reached between the two governments, considerable political opposition to the ECP arose. In part, this reflected nationalist sentiments aroused by the prospect of a foreign police presence, sensitivity to the demand for immunity and the aspersions this cast on PNG’s judicial system, self-interest on the part of those with something to hide, as well as strong resentment among the national elite at the larger framing of PNG as a potentially failing state. In the event, a successful constitutional challenge was mounted in PNG in 2005 against the immunity provisions and the Australian government withdrew its policing personnel, while other ECP officials remained as advisors rather than as in-line officials.

For many Highlanders, living on the margins of the modern state and formal economy, natural resource projects provide the only real prospect for individual advancement and local ‘development’. Fuelled by government and industry rhetoric, local expectations have always been unrealistic. These have also been influenced by earlier events in Bougainville, including in relation to the instrumental role of violence and disruption as a means of negotiating with both government and developer. It is not unusual for local grievances around current LNG developments or the Ramu Nico project in Madang to evoke the threat of “another Bougainville”. Whilst commercial investors selectively report deteriorating ‘law and order’ as threatening the long term viability of their investments in mining, efforts to soothe worried shareholders sit uneasily alongside other accounts concluding that parts of the PNG Highlands are “more dangerous for its residents ... than Iraq at the height of the civil war and [another part is], according to experts sent to the area, a virtually ungovernable place”.

Perceptions of relative deprivation related to lack of infrastructure and services, distance from the national capital, and the use of local resources to promote ‘national development’ have also contributed to local dissatisfaction in the Highlands, as they did earlier in Bougainville. Likewise, these projects prompt local efforts to negotiate more advantageous local/national relations. One example is the re-imagining of local societies, such as the revitalization of traditional authority. At the larger political level, negotiating for advantage may involve the embrace of more encompassing identities, such as Bougainville nationalism, or demanding administrative inscription as new districts or provinces, as has occurred with the newly designated province of Hela in PNG’s Highlands.

It would nevertheless be misleading to over-draw causal lines between natural resource extraction projects and violent conflict. There are some instances where large scale mining has been accompanied by durable and beneficial agreements with resource owners and an absence of violent contestation as, for example, in the case of the now closed Misima mine in Milne Bay province.
Likewise the causal links between poverty and crime are by no means straightforward. The areas of greatest conflict in PNG are those with highest population density. Towns and areas of large-scale resource development, in particular, have attracted high rates of in-migration by people in search of better economic opportunities or access to services. It is this fact of population density rather than poverty or natural resource projects per se that is most closely correlated with conflict. This is particularly marked with large development projects given how they dramatically intensify local competition for resources.

The experiences of conflict associated with these developments have been exported to other areas. An example would be when inter-group conflicts originating in rural parts of the Highlands subsequently manifest as ‘ethnic tensions’ in urban settlements in cities like Lae or Port Moresby. A different example would be the way in which forms of inter-group conflict more usually associated with the Highlands recently appeared in peri-urban Port Moresby among Papuan communities in relation to competing claims to benefits from the LNG project. However, just as conflict can be exported in these ways, there are also examples of conflict management capabilities being transferred from one area to another.46

By the late 1990s, political and economic drivers of conflict in Bougainville and in PNG’s highlands and crime in urban areas were increasingly appreciated by policy makers in government and internationally. Two somewhat contradictory trends are evident over this period. First, there is no dispute about the need to carefully tailor interventions to local particularities, and to support rather than overwhelm local solutions in highly diverse situations. This thinking is evident across the spectrum of official and non-governmental aid, diplomacy and commercial interactions. For instance, a review of the PNG-Australia Development Cooperation Treaty in 201047 called for reduced reliance on technical assistance and more aid-funded in-line positions with lines of reporting to the PNG government. The review sought a closer alignment between Australian aid and PNG government budget priorities, more engagement with sub-national levels of government, and increased support to good performing non-state actors, such as churches and NGOs.

Second, over the same period, international events were driving a shift away “from a particularist and developmental lens to a global and security lens in viewing Pacific developments”.48 This shift took particular hold in Australia where the lack of tangible outcomes from a substantial aid program, and poor progress with implementing the ‘good governance’ agenda that emerged after the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis had already led to concern among Australian politicians with the potential for state failure in Melanesia. Further, the rising concern with transnational crime and global security49 in the wake of 9/11 and the role Australia strove to play in changing global alliances arguably led to a re-framing of the region in security and stability terms. Melanesia was compared in some quarters with the grim spectre of the ‘coming anarchy’ in sub-Saharan Africa50, and viewed as a potentially threatening ‘arc of instability’ extending around Australia’s northern and eastern shores.51

The concern was no longer simply that Melanesian states were unwilling or unable to make good use of aid, deliver public goods and services, or enable private sector markets, but that these failings could have ‘spill-over’ effects, regionally and ‘at home’. As a result, efforts to ensure that policy
responses to conflict in Melanesia reflected complex local realities were to a large extent displaced by the more compelling imperatives of global and national security.

Australia has become a pioneer in the field of security-led, whole-of-government responses to conflict. This has entailed significant - in some cases rapid - shifts in policy towards a more proactive engagement. Increasing collaboration has occurred between government agencies including both the traditional ‘foreign policy’ agencies (aid, military, foreign affairs) and those that previously had a predominantly domestic role (treasury, attorney general, police). These new forms of regional engagement acknowledged Australia’s special responsibilities as the leading regional power, as well as demonstrating its alignment with a new global security doctrine that viewed state fragility as a potential threat to international security. The positioning of the Solomon Islands conflict within this doctrine was most clearly articulated in a report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute which identified the archipelagic nation as a failing state whose internal difficulties were likely to have regional repercussions if prompt action was not taken. The report proposed a “sustained and comprehensive multinational effort” undertaken with the consent of the Solomon Islands’ government to help restore law and order and to “build new political structures and security institutions and address underlying social and economic problems”.

Using similar arguments, an Australian-led regional mission under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum was deployed in July 2003 following an earlier request from the Solomon Islands’ Prime Minister.

Solomon Islands

What became known as ‘the tensions’ in Solomon Islands commenced in late 1998, when young Guadalcanal militants began a violent campaign of harassment leading to the displacement of around 35,000, mainly Malaitan, settlers from their homes in rural Guadalcanal and areas surrounding the national capital, Honiara. Longstanding Guadalcanal grievances were formally expressed in a submission – Demands by the Bona Fide and Indigenous People of Guadalcanal – in January 1999. These related to issues of uneven development and relative deprivation, resentment at the centralization of political power in Honiara, issues of respect for local culture and longstanding land disputes. Although presented as Guale grievances, they were shared in varying degrees among rural people across Solomon Islands. The keynote demand was for state government for Guadalcanal under a federal system, a demand that had previously been put to the national government in 1988 following demonstrations in Honiara.

Early peace-making efforts by the government oscillated between attempts to mollify Guadalcanal grievances and reactive policing strategies to suppress the growing rebellion. The Commonwealth Secretariat brokered several agreements including the Honiara Peace Accord and the Panatina Agreement. However, the militants were not parties to these talks and they failed to stem growing militancy. Divided loyalties were becoming increasingly evident in the police force and many Malaitan officers were sympathetic to a new militia – the Malaitan Eagle Force – that emerged in response to the government’s inability to curb Guadalcanal militancy. The MEF, with support from elements of the police, mounted a ‘coup’ in Honiara in June 2000, leading to the forced resignation of the elected Prime Minister.

Various non-state organisations and individuals sought to defuse the tensions. The Melanesian Brothers and Red Cross played important roles as mediators when skirmishes broke out between
rival militias. Women’s groups such as the Honiara Women for Peace and the Malaita Women for Peace also played a critical role, talking regularly with young militants and communicating across divided communities. The Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA), through its Peace Office, also sought to provide a voice for non-combatants and promote peaceful resolution of the conflict.

| Box: Compensation and ‘the manipulation of custom’. The exchange of traditional items of wealth between parties to a dispute or conflict was a familiar instrument of peacemaking in many Melanesian societies, including parts of Solomon Islands. Over the years, ‘compensation’ has become detached from its traditional social moorings and extended to a variety of newer contexts, including claims against the state and corporate actors. It has also become increasingly commercialised with monetary compensation replacing traditional forms of wealth and more symbolic exchanges. While its legitimacy rests on ‘tradition’, its contemporary usage often bears little relation to older practices. It has sometimes become little more than a pretext for demanding or extorting money from those with the capacity to pay. Solomon Islands’ governments have also used compensation as a socially appropriate way of responding to a range of local disputes and grievances. Compensation became a key instrument of redress under the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA). The frenzied and sometimes violent competition between claimants – including those with genuine claims, as well as opportunistic elements with access to guns or political power – contributed to the progressive criminalisation of the Solomon Islands state following the TPA. The manner in which compensation demands founded in appeals to kastom were instrumentalised for criminal or political purposes during this period has led some external analysts to identify the manipulation of kastom as a key dynamic of disorder during this period. |

Despite regular appeals by senior Solomon Islands ministers, Australian and New Zealand governments were reluctant to intervene directly in a potential civil war situation. Both governments facilitated negotiations between the two main militia groups culminating in the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) in October 2000. As well as disarmament and demobilization provisions, the TPA called for constitutional reform to allow for greater provincial autonomy; measures aimed at developing Malaita; investigation of land acquisition and property claims on Guadalcanal; compensation for lost and damaged property resulting from the tensions. While helping to avert all-out ethnic war, the TPA was based on unrealistic assumptions about the capacity of the Solomon Islands government to implement its provisions – an issue discussed further in the second part of this paper. The period between the TPA and eventual deployment of RAMSI in 2003 witnessed an escalation of lawlessness, principally in Honiara and the Weather Coast, as well as the progressive paralysis of government as former militants and corrupt elements competed to extract funds from the state in the name of compensation.

Previous experience in international peacekeeping operations contributed to Australian confidence that it could undertake such an intervention, and was reflected in the design of RAMSI, although it had its own distinct characteristics. Consistent with the growing role of civilian policing in such operations and the earlier call by the Brahimi Report for UN member states to prepare pools of trained police for international missions, the Australian government established the International Deployment Group in 2004. The IDG is an arm of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) dedicated to training and supplying Australian officers for international peacekeeping and capacity development missions. It was the police, rather than the military, that led the initial stabilization phase of RAMSI, with around 330 officers drawn mainly from the AFP but also including members from Australian state forces, New Zealand and Pacific Islands Forum member states. The regional basis of the mission added to its legitimacy, while Australian leadership and control of resources has avoided the fragmentation and under-funding associated with many multilateral interventions. Another source of legitimacy is its “cooperative” character, entailing the legal consent of the Solomon Islands
government and participating states from the Pacific Islands Forum. Retrospective approval was also provided by the UN. The broad mandate was to restore law and order, stabilize government finances, promote economic recovery and rebuild the machinery of government. Early successes attracted international praise. Reflecting international thinking on how best to engage with post-conflict and fragile states, RAMSI employs a ‘whole-of-government’ approach in the execution of its mandate. The longer-term state-building and economic recovery work is organized around three pillars: law and justice, economic governance, and machinery of government. In-country coordination is provided by the RAMSI Special Co-ordinator, a senior Australian diplomat. While RAMSI provides the clearest example of Australia’s more robust and securitised engagement in the region, similar influences are evident in subsequent interventions in, for example, Nauru and in PNG with the ECP.

Part II: Themes and Lessons

This Part draws lessons from the histories and contexts discussed in Part 1. We organize these lessons around three themes, trying where possible to reflect views shared with us by people as part of the consultation process.

1. Conflict and Social Change

Conflict is part of history; when managed well, it can be socially generative. As in other parts of the world, certain types of conflict, along with mechanisms for managing contest and maintaining peace, have always been part of Melanesian social orders. In some areas, practices raids and tribal warfare were integral to social relations between and within groups - building individual and collective status, fulfilling alliance obligations, male initiation processes and defining relationships to land. At the same time, some of the traditional mechanisms for containing contestation have become distorted or detached from their social contexts and conventional restraints in recent times, and can themselves contribute to conflict escalation, while new or adapted institutions are unable to fill the void.

Socially destructive forms of conflict tend to increase when people’s ability to adapt or socially embed institutions for the management of conflict are overwhelmed by the pace, scale and asymmetry of social and economic change. However, the view that all conflict is inherently pathological - “a problem that should and can be fixed”- can lead to responses that fail to address underlying societal stresses and may in fact stymie constructive change processes. Melanesians recognize more clearly than most that conflict and disputes are part of the ebb and flow of everyday political and social life. Further, while the familiar interpretations of the drivers of conflict – for example, of greed, opportunity, grievance – may provide some useful insights for broad comparative work, it is clear that mechanisms and institutions for successfully managing conflict need to respond to local understanding of what conflict is and what drives it. In Melanesia, it is vital to understand the types of conflict that arise out of the distribution of rights and resources inherent in any development process, and to support mechanisms for resolving such contests in non-violent and
locally legitimate ways. Rather than suppress all conflict, the emphasis should be upon channeling grievances and disputes into institutions that are adequately resourced and widely supported by local stakeholders.

**Forms of conflict change over time and are experienced in different ways.**

Linear understandings of ‘conflict’ that overplay contrasts with ‘peace’ fail to recognize the dynamic and evolving nature of conflict, and rarely engage with how people actually experience it. The Melanesian cases highlight how conflict morphs over time, and how one form of conflict can trigger or influence other types of conflict including those experienced elsewhere. In Bougainville, for example, the initial heavy handed police intervention contributed to the escalation of a dispute between local landowners and a mining company into a full-scale secessionist struggle, before folding into an internecine conflict between a wide range of local Bougainville groups. The Bougainville experience has also influenced expectations around resource-led development in other parts of the country, notably the Highlands, while current developments around the Ramu-Nico project in Madang have, in turn, been influenced by the Highlands.

Conflict may be linked to past events, or even be triggered by anticipated future events in ways that evolve over time. Corrosive behavior in one sphere can trigger different kinds of conflict at other levels. For example, in parts of the Papua New Guinea highlands, the withdrawal of government services in response to tribal fighting has led to new forms of conflict fueled by grievances about state neglect. Similarly, while a relative peace now prevails in the public sphere in Bougainville and Solomon Islands, heightened levels of violence against women and children are viewed by many, including gender activists, NGOs and everyday people, as a legacy of these recent conflicts.

Violence against women has facilitated the spread of HIV/AIDS in PNG which, in turn, has contributed to a significant increase in sorcery related violence, particularly in the Highlands, which is typically directed at women accused of being witches. Gender violence is in this sense both an expression and consequence of stresses and dislocations triggered by internal migration, economic inequalities and frustration, and of identity conflicts at clan and higher scales.

Interventions that focus predominantly on the outward signs of conflict and on their suppression in one sphere may fail to address the underlying drivers, which may simply manifest themselves in different forms. The policing associated with the RAMSI intervention, for instance, has been widely seen as spectacularly successful in restoring law and order. But seven years into the intervention, survey results show a decline over the past two years in the share of people “rating their community as safe and peaceful”. During the WDR team’s discussions around Honiara, women in particular conveyed a palpable sense of insecurity. According to one woman in Balasuna, near Honiara, “We feel on tender-hooks when we visit the market. You’ve got to be ready to get out quick because small problems can blow up quick”. RAMSI’s 2009 Peoples Survey finds that twice as many individuals are concerned about law and order problems – petty crimes, extortion and physical violence - in Honiara, where the bulk of the mission’s policing and justice resources are concentrated, than in the rest of the country.
The changing nature of conflict in Melanesia

In Melanesia, people often attribute the apparent growth in socially destructive conflict to ‘big changes’ occurring ‘in the background’ that have impacted on their ability to prevent or stop conflict escalating. They highlight three features of these historical changes: the technology and organization of violence; public norms and expectations; and the volume and asymmetry of flows of money and economic opportunity, people, goods and services.

The technology of violence

In Papua New Guinea, the introduction of high-powered weapons, guerrilla tactics and ‘hire-men’ has effectively escalated conflict. The capability to contain and settle tribal fights based on norms of retribution and equivalence has been seriously undermined by the scale of fatalities, injuries and destruction caused by the new technologies of violence. Coupled with the breakdown in traditional systems of restraint and widespread antipathy towards the police, these developments have fueled an arms race in some areas.

Changes in public norms and expectations are significant features of historical change

Changes in public perceptions of rights and entitlements put pressure on inter-personal relations, on time-honored ways of social ordering, and on the already fragile capabilities of the modern state. The spread of liberal human rights norms challenge prevailing norms. For example, when women and international actors assert globally prescribed rights, changes in gender relations are implied that may provoke resentment or violence by men who feel threatened.75 In a similar way, changes in public expectations about entitlements for health or education or anticipated benefits from resource developments – as are often promoted through national policy, donor projects or benefit sharing agreements – can cause a decline in confidence or heighten grievances when these expectations go unrealized. As will be discussed shortly, excessive expectations by local and external actors, and perceptions of repeated failure to deliver, are a significant source of weakened state legitimacy and effectiveness.

From asymmetric development to asymmetric conflict

Marked inequalities in how the benefits and costs of development are distributed, contrasted with a relatively egalitarian past, feature in perceptions of the drivers of violent conflict in the region. As market economies have become more prominent in people’s lives, disparities in access to jobs, services and trade, along with high rates of population growth and internal migration have led to widely appreciated differences. It would be misleading to over-draw causal lines between poverty outcomes, natural resource extraction projects and conflict, as noted in Part 1. There are instances where large scale mining has been accompanied by durable and beneficial agreements with resource owners and an absence of violent conflict. Nonetheless, Melanesian people strongly associate large scale resource projects with increasing social problems – alcoholism, prostitution, HIV/AIDS, vagrancy, gambling, and violence. Further, it has been widely suggested that the unprecedented flows of people and the unequal distribution of ‘resource rents’ to and within communities accentuate underlying divisions, generate new inequalities, and weaken the will to engage in productive business or employment. All of this can heighten social conflict. In turn, these changes further ramp up people’s demands on authorities nominally responsible to redistribute wealth,
regulate business, resolve disputes and enforce outcomes and agreements. Thus, people are acutely aware that these kinds of investment, their scale and episodic, windfall nature, can fundamentally change local social landscapes.

At the same time, simple hierarchies that categorise conflict as global, national, or local, can create artificial distinctions between people as ‘local’ or ‘external’ and attribute to them views according to these categories. Such distinctions obscure the critical connections between the local and the global. Key local actors in mining conflicts for instance, have achieved international recognition of their work, and have learnt to project their interests in global ‘environmental’ or ‘human rights’ fora in ways that self-consciously recasts local disputes in global terms.76

**Changing Conflict Requires Changing Agents and Institutions**

Many external interventions tend to focus on ‘post-conflict moments’ and technologies to ‘stop’ or prevent destructive contestation. This belies the continually changing nature of conflict highlighted above, and can distract attention from the need for institutions that can manage the evolving nature of social contestation. Again, this is not pathology, but an inherent part of any changing society; modern institutions- from budget processes to the formal judicial system- are set up precisely to manage and regulate a range of everyday social contests. As these contests change, the institutional responses need to change.

As noted above, a problem arises when the nature of social contests evolves at such a rate - for example, from ritualized tribal warfare through urban gang violence to unrestrained armed conflict - that the regulatory framework is overwhelmed. People in different parts of Melanesia gave two interconnected explanations of why their communities are unable to address or contain violence conflict in certain contexts. One explanation highlights personal agency and responsibility - often characterized as a ‘lack of leadership, while the second focuses on institutions being overwhelmed and thus failing to regulate behavior.

**Agents and Agency**

The need for effective and ‘principled’ leaders is echoed across the region. People highlight the use of violence by political leaders to secure constituencies and resources on the one hand, and the denial of personal responsibility for resultant social breakdown and the permutations of ongoing conflict on the other. As noted in Part 1, some analysts have argued that the manipulation of kastom, notably through the exploitation of compensation - by governments, politicians and militia leaders, was a major driver of the recent disorder in Solomon Islands. Violent conflict can also be a ‘weapon of the weak’, a means of claiming attention and forcing negotiations in the face of continuing failure by other more powerful people – be they government, investors or indigenous leaders – to respond in locally acceptable ways. And the frenetic contestation around constituency funds – as in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands - illustrates how conflict can occur when ‘traditional’ notions of social obligations and entitlement mutate with the politics of fragile state institutions.

The denial of agency at many different levels was a recurring sentiment expressed during our consultations across the region. At the community level, it was the government or the corporations that were seen as lacking or corrupt. At the national level, government officials displaced their own
responsibility, instead implicating disorganised communities for their unrealistic expectations, or the
failure of corporations to fulfill their social and economic obligations or their propensity to act in
ways that the government cannot control. To company officials, it is the government that fails in its
responsibility to regulate resources and distribute benefits, and the communities who should learn
how to responsibly manage the resources they receive. For international donors, it is the
government that needs to take the lead, coordinate its disparate activities, drive the reform process
and regulate the flow of capital and resources.

Interestingly, for international players—whether individuals, donors or corporate entities—concepts
of sovereignty and local ownership are frequently used in ways that denies their own roles in
contributing to the conditions that disempower local leadership and responsibility. What’s often
missing is an appreciation of the clear imbalance of power in these relationships.

Evolving Institutions

Conflict is as often seen in terms of institutional failure. Institutions in this context refer to the rules
of the game, shared values and their implementation through particular organizations. Whether
described as modern or traditional, institutions are being overwhelmed by the pace, scale and
asymmetry of change in the region. Where institutions are overwhelmed, they are less able to enroll
people in ways that effectively regulates individual conduct—whether this requires disarming them,
dealing with criminal activity, or controlling corruption. For instance, people have firm views about
what triggered ‘the tensions’ in Solomon Islands. A Guale ex-combatant told us that “The main spark
wasn’t land, or the lack of action on the list of bone fide claims, but” he emphasized “it was that 25
people had been killed and there was neither police action nor customary compensation”. This,
agreed a church leader, was “what was burning in the hearts, everything else came later”. But this
applies equally to non-state institutions. The loss of restraint, formal or social, reflects people’s
appreciation of what anthropologist Colin Filer terms the ‘social disintegration’ effects of rapid
change—where traditional forms of social ordering are unable to deal with disputes and conflict
within families and communities.77

Further, where institutions are overwhelmed, societies are unable to respond proactively to glaring
and persistent ‘background problems’ of the kind noted above. A Guale church leader remarked to
us that “We had too many eggs in one basket. The Weather Coast is just on the other side of (the
island of Guadalcanal) where the palm oil plantation, the gold mine, and Honiara is; yet they are a
forgotten people in terms of infrastructure that will enable them to access the benefits from
development”. Festering resentment about the uneven outcomes of change is widespread. It is
evident in the Highlands, owing to lack of services and infrastructure, coupled with resentment that
Highlands resources are being used to promote ‘national development’ whilst neglecting local
needs, as they were earlier in Bougainville. Neither the government, nor the voters to whom they
respond have proven capable of sustaining the kinds of collective action needed over time to resist
changes they perceive not to be in their interests, to mitigate the unevenness of economic change,
to redistribute revenue to places and services that might address grievances, or to connect people to
places favored by economic opportunities.

That institutions are overwhelmed is not equivalent to a ‘failed state’ story. At no point in the past
were modern state institutions ‘fully formed’ in Melanesia and hence in a position to ‘fail’. Further,
while both time-honored and modern institutions are seen to be overwhelmed in certain contexts, Melanesian people understandably bridle at remarks that blanket all state and non-state institutions with uniform failure; resilience among both individuals and local institutions remains an important and seriously neglected part of the picture. As noted in Part 1, some state institutions are justifiably respected – as in Papua New Guinea’s Ombudsman, the Solomons’ Office of Auditor General, the Central Bank, and the superior judiciary – and across the region, the role of churches, community leaders and specific local initiatives continue to play a significant and positive role in everyday social regulation.

2. Unpacking the rules of the game: from ways of seeing to ways of regulating

While it seems trite to state that ‘ways of seeing’ shape how people interpret, experience and order the world - including how they manage everyday conflict- this basic social fact continues to complicate and stymie development efforts all over the world. As is clear in Part 1, this is no less the experience in Melanesia. Effective institutions require capabilities (including skills and resources required to enact agreed ways of ordering the world), legitimacy (based on a degree of shared values and understanding), and authority and accountability (dependent on the incentives and values that motivate people to act in certain ways).

When reflecting on these aspects of institutions, what Melanesian people say resonates with scholarly accounts. The exhortation that “our political institutions don’t fit our needs” is common throughout the region. State institutions as currently constituted are perceived by many as a foreign form. They have been grafted into constitutions and given an organizational form, but they remain incomplete with a sizeable gulf between their promise and reality. A contrast is often drawn between Melanesian and external ways of seeing. As we will reflect, this risks producing simplistic and dichotomized images that mask more complex realities. We illustrate these perspectives below, and consider their implications for managing conflict.

Melanesian people have a formidable capacity to forgive and reconcile, even following acts of grievous violence. The power of prayer and religious fellowship to underwrite personal reconciliation amongst former adversaries is evident in Papua New Guinea (including Bougainville) and Solomon Islands. At the same time, a number of elements of public discourse in Melanesia were highlighted during consultations. Some felt these reconciliatory qualities and practices were constraining long term institutional responses to the underpinnings of conflict.

The difficulty or appropriateness of speaking publically about conflict and social disintegration is evident in many contexts. During discussions with NGOs involved in post-conflict trauma counseling and reconciliation in Solomon Islands, and members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a spokesperson said “I was struck by the inability of people to have open talks about their concerns and worries. For instance there is a real difficulty for politicians to talk about these things.” It was further remarked that “there is no discourse, that is, among people where they may have different points of view – they don’t express these differences”. This observation must be taken cautiously. For instance, even in the sensitive domains of sexuality and HIV/AIDS there are many examples to the contrary. It is challenging in any context to speak across divides and nurture forums where all voices can be heard. Moreover, as is evident in Papua New Guinea, an understandable desire to
push back on international perceptions of the country and people as ‘ungoverned and ungovernable’ has led to a reticence to talk about conflict concerns with outsiders. At both elite and community levels there is an understanding that perceptions around conflict and security can threaten investment and development - an understanding that is used in some contexts as political capital, as noted above.

Nevertheless, caricatures of people, issues and places in public discourse can powerfully shape ways people deal with conflict. This can have several implications. As mentioned above, firm views are held about the culpability of others - ‘corrupt political leaders’, ‘greedy international entrepreneurs’, or the alleged aggression or dishonesty of a particular tribal or regional group. Preconceptions about culpability make it difficult for people to speak openly across divides on a collective basis and in some cases help avoid any sense of local responsibility – support can be withdrawn from some institutions because they “are undermined by powerful external players” (Ex militant, Honiara). These players may be given a face (this or that foreign businessman or politician), but often remain anonymous and opaque, as in perceptions of corrupt influences of ‘foreign business interests’ associated with the Ramu Nico development in PNG or processes of post-election government formation in Solomon Islands, or the ill conceived efforts by ‘donors’ to shape state institutions in particular ways. Our informants also made clear how patronage politics can dissuade people from tackling important issues. Foreign visitors may offend local sensibilities but the prospect that they may also bear cargo may lead people to demure. People measure the risks; it takes courage to name names, whistle blow or point fingers at corrupt officials, particularly in close-knit communities where anonymity is all but impossible. Complaints may not be pressed to the police because those making them fear an attack on themselves or their families. Police officers may not follow through on complaints because they worry their families might be victimized or future relations with a suspect and her relatives be jeopardised.

Together these factors are seen to seriously affect people’s ability to discuss innovations that might address fundamental collective action issues of relevance to conflict. For instance, to varying degrees across Melanesia there is a strong ambivalence about the accelerated movement of people to urban areas. Whereas rural areas are most often portrayed in idyllic terms - the site of identity and a place of refuge - urban areas are often talked about as undesirable ‘hot spots’, places of immorality and negativity. In some contexts, leaders actively disparage movements to and between rural and urban areas. According to one Guale politician “We have to control people’s movements”, and more generally, public policy is often directed to keeping people in the village. These kinds of ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ distinctions can over-ride reality and make it difficult to consider strategic choices that might be in the public interest. High rates of urban migration and circulation between rural areas and centres of economic opportunities and services belie these dichotomies. And public sector investments in improved urban administration and services, along with improved connections with more productive rural enterprise, might be one of the few options to stimulate domestic economic activity of a kind that would have wider social benefits.

Where different outlooks are brought into public discourse, however, the effects can be politically generative. In Bougainville, the prominent role of women in peace building has contributed to their empowerment in post conflict politics. This has introduced new perspectives, affiliations, networks and, above all, new possibilities in shaping the future direction of social and political change.
Box: Women and the changing face of politics

The prominent role of women as peacemakers in both Bougainville and Solomon Islands has been widely acclaimed. In both cases, women and church groups played a leading role in persuading the predominantly male combatants to abandon violent conflict in favour of negotiation, settlement and reconciliation. In Solomon Islands, for example, women’s groups brought food to young militants manning the bunkers on both sides of the MEF/IFM divide, engaged them in conversation and prayer, as well regularly crossing militia lines to meet with women on the other side. These courageous and low-profile interventions played an important role in changing attitudes and creating openings for other peacemaking efforts and, in Bougainville, to the possibility of political change. Women have occupied senior office in the new governance structures created as part of the larger political settlement in Bougainville. By contrast, there have been few tangible signs of these political flow-on effects in Solomon Islands. Attempts to enact provisions for women representatives in Parliament failed to attract the necessary support among the exclusively male membership. One major difference between these two cases is the transformative political settlement that occurred on Bougainville, in terms of the reshaping of governance structures, and the active role that local actors, including women, played in shaping this outcome. In Solomon Islands there were similar aspirations for an enduring and transformative political settlement (as evident in discussion around decentralisation and federalism). But these were to a large extent overshadowed by the focus on apprehending and punishing agents of conflict in the initial stages of the intervention, followed by the emphasis on restorative state-building as the basis of post-conflict peace-building. Several informants believe that has made the pathway from peacemaking to enhanced political participation more difficult for women in Solomon Islands.

Seeing like a state

In many respects, the ways in which external players view Melanesian contexts affects their responses to conflict in the region. Melanesians commonly remark that ‘foreigners’ miss their diversity. This tends to overplay some features and in so doing often misconstrues Melanesian needs and aspirations for durable solutions to conflict. There are, of course, many instances where external players have been able to ‘see’ and act across institutional divides, and where local actors have inventively drawn state authority and/or the legitimacy associated with international norms. Nevertheless, there are at least four reasons why international agencies find it hard to ‘see’ and engage effectively with local context. Each has direct consequences for external responses to conflict in different contexts.

First, external actors, and often domestic elites, are prone to what Jim Scott calls ‘seeing like a state’ and are less able to recognize, or be sensitive to the possibilities of other ways of ordering the world and managing social relations. Given the incomplete and disfigured nature of many state institutions in Melanesia, this means that gaps, weaknesses and corruptions of state institutions are brought to the fore. As measured against ideal state models, Melanesian public sectors will always be seen as deficient, fragile, lacking capability, or, at worst, presenting ‘nothing to work with’. Consequently, prescriptions shift too readily toward the need for ‘wholesale reform’. Such a view supports the use of parallel modalities to deliver security or other essential services. This view may be warranted where a systemic collapse has occurred in local institutions. However these situations are far fewer than implied by the regular default to parallel project modalities in Melanesia.
Once in place, it is hard to transit from these modalities to more durable and effective solutions. They tend to undermine efforts to create more coherent public finance management. They can create perverse incentives - the sinecures, allowances and opportunities to travel and study abroad - that divert politicians and administrators from building accountable domestic institutions. Domestic institutions inevitably compare unfavorably with the well-resourced and professionally managed ‘shadow’ programs. This plays into the fragmentation of local politics, as well as creating larger moral hazards for the intervenors.

Third, external agencies are typically operating at a high level of scale. Donor programming tends to encompass an entire country or sector, (or sectors as in ‘whole-of-government’ approaches), and sometimes even several countries at the same time. Local nuances and contextual differences will be missed or viewed as inconvenient ‘exceptions’. This is especially so where there is premium on quick responses and rapid results. Clarity of purpose is essential for focusing resources but can result in important lacunae in responses, as well as falsely inflating expectations of what can be achieved or sustained over time.

RAMSI officials recognize that the imperative to avoid ‘mission creep’ led to the comparative neglect of key aspects of long term reconciliation and nation-building. Similarly, the mission’s focus on ‘restoring’ state institutions, following the restoration of law and order, has arguably led to the neglect of two aspects of conflict management that are essential for the capability and legitimacy of state institutions. The first is the alleged failure to address the strong local desire to restructure the state to deal with the ‘federalism debate’, that is, the territorial assignment of functions and resources to sub-national authorities (province, district, ward). The second is the neglect, in contrast with Bougainville, of serious consideration about the ways in which non-state institutions engage with formal state structures in the areas of service delivery or local regulation.

Arguably these gaps in the RAMSI mission have limited the durability of efforts to improve the functioning of the formal state, while important opportunities have been missed to contribute to debates that may prove crucial to long term reconciliation or nation building.

An opposing tendency, ‘programmatic over-reach’, is also evident. In other contexts this has been called the ‘state expectations dilemma’. The mismatch between expectations and likely future realities is a feature of state-society relations everywhere. Public aspirations and official policies tend to ‘over-reach’, while the everyday reality is that public institutions ‘under-reach’ in what they

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**Box: O1 and O2 systems in Solomon Islands.** In describing the impact of parallel modalities on policing, people referred to the popular expression of ‘O1 and O2 systems’. These originally denoted the country’s first and second police patrol boat numbers, the old and the new. As was explained, “They both have the same functions, but the newer one is more attractive, is more effective, better resourced ... rather like the first wife and the second wife”. O1 and O2 were used to illustrate a point about ‘donor parallel systems’. O2 can have “big impacts on O1 over time, O2 can create a shadow on O1”. In fact, “nothing much is expected from O1 so long as O2 is there, and soon O1 loses the need to try”. Said a police officer from Munda, “If RAMSI police is there; everything stops. If RAMSI police are not there, then RSIPF makes no difference at all. They (people, criminals) just go on, do what they like. I wish I had a house like the PPF one. I wish I had a blanket like the PPF one. I wish I could have respect like this. As long as they are there, I think it might be hard to get any of this”. 


actually deliver. While Melanesian states, in this respect, might be seen as an exaggerated form of what occurs elsewhere, it is now widely acknowledged that unrealistic expectations can have adverse implications for future conflict. Real concerns are now openly expressed in official exchanges in the Solomons that expectations of the public service, donors and political elites regarding service delivery standards are simply beyond what may be sustained given the country’s challenging geography, demographic profile, limited economic prospects and a projected long term decline in per capita aid flows. When public sector organizations are shaped to deliver these expectations it creates a ‘fiscal overload’. This is common in other post-conflict settings. But when it plays out in a Melanesian culture of reciprocal exchange, local actors will feel significantly aggrieved where the state is perceived to be failing to meet its obligations. The cost is at once continuing external dependence to finance a state that is misaligned with its domestic context, and at the same time further corrosion of state legitimacy.

Fourth, the mission creep referred to above may be difficult to avoid when there is a fifteen partner coalition involved in a particular intervention. Clearly different perceptions of conflict and appropriate ways of managing it can become more pronounced when articulated through multi-national/multi-agency interventions. Despite the tendency of local actors to see engagements such as RAMSI or the ECP as monolithic entities and the admirable hopes of ‘whole-of-government’ approaches adopted by interveners, these missions are often highly fragmented with practical challenges of inter-operability between different agencies and organisational cultures, especially if home-based inter-agency rivalries are carried over to countries of intervention. Lack of alignment between intervening agencies and between them and their local counterparts can threaten both their own policy coherence and that of the governments they engage with.

Beyond dichotomies

The challenge for policy makers is that institutions are rarely the product of, or fit neatly into one world view or ‘way of seeing’. State institutions emerge out of a synergy between local institutions and international regulatory frameworks. Similarly, discussion of ‘the Melanesian Way’ that originated in the post-colonial and nationalist discourses of independence leaders, perpetuates a dichotomy between Melanesia/non-Melanesia that obscures the complex, dynamic and globalised character of contemporary social, political and economic relations in the region. While it is clear that such processes reflect unequal relations of power, most institutions embody a level of compromise or political settlement. Such institutions are, in other words, innately hybrid.

3. Regulating Social Contest: within and beyond state borders

Experience in Melanesia is consistent with international understanding: that legitimate and durable institutions emerge out of social and political bargaining and compromise. These ‘good struggles’, as they are sometimes referred to, create institutional vehicles through which ongoing social contests are managed. Their cultivation requires far more than a ‘state restoration’ agenda; capable states drawn on multiple sources of legitimacy, authority and effectiveness. While narratives about Melanesia have often highlighted risk, endemic conflict and institutional decay, any balanced account would include an impressive array of determined local efforts to create new institutional arrangements to respond directly to violent conflict, the trauma of its aftermath, and to manage social contest in non-violent ways over time.
At all levels, we see the strength of traditional or *kastom* systems of governance. However what this shows is not *kastom* or tradition working unsullied by foreign ideas or contemporary institutional arrangements. What is evident is a gregarious importing of ideas from wider networks to forge principles and processes that work in a given context. These approaches also belie the conventional polarities drawn between local, foreign or global, traditional or modern. In fact most innovations in conflict management are immediately recognizable in global terms – the plethora of women’s groups for peace and reconciliation, the enduring role of the churches, or the similar profile of domestic NGOs, often working in global partnerships, or bilateral aid programs dedicated to supporting civil society. While these organizations and initiatives may be more or less durable, all may be seen as ‘containers’ in which individuals and groups can debate different interests and views, and reach working agreements.

**Box: Kup Women for Peace.** KWP was established by a group of local women activists in early 2000 in the Kup sub-district of Simbu province in the PNG Highlands. With a population of around 18,000 people, many of its villages are inaccessible by road and have limited access to government services. KWP was a response to longstanding problems of violent conflict and lawlessness. It embarked on long-term peacebuilding work including conflict mediation, dialogue forums and the promotion of community education, health and sustainable livelihoods. Considerable success has been achieved in reducing conflict and facilitating community regeneration in the sub-district KWP has progressively linked into provincial, national and international networks. These linkages include different levels of government, local and international NGOs, and sources of funding and other support in the donor community.

Melanesia has many examples of hybrid institutions operating at local levels that draw imaginatively on multiple sources of legitimacy (see boxes immediately above and below). However these often have limited spatial influence. Disputes involving foreign investors are more difficult to resolve at this level. Not only is the legitimacy of local responses open to constant challenge, they often lack organizational capabilities and material resources, and can become quickly overwhelmed by the sheer weight of local expectations.

**Box: Building confidence and trust:** The Panatina Valley Community in Honiara has a chief and leadership committee that works together with the community to ensure the environment is clean and there is social harmony within the community. They have built a community hall where the residents hold meetings and social functions and play indoor sports. Assistance towards the hall’s construction was also provided by Save the Children under their Crime Prevention Program. The committee has a register of all residents in the valley and all are encouraged to pay membership fees, and take part in the monthly clean up around the valley, fundraising initiatives, and committee meetings. As part of a neighborhood watch each household is encouraged to buy a whistle from the valley co-op and when there is suspicion of trouble the whistle is blown and the neighbors will come to help. They valley has also passed a list of community by-laws to govern people’s behavior in the community. They valley also has a cooperative shop where residents can buy shares and each time they purchase goods the amount is recorded under their membership number and from this they receive a dividend when it is due.
Beyond borders: reshaping individual, corporate and national responsibilities

Two kinds of ‘over the border’ engagements are becoming more common in the region and in different ways these have the potential to add new dimensions to how non-violent social contest is managed. The first concerns international commercial actors, while the second suggests new forms of engagement among sovereign states in the region.

Multinational corporations have featured prominently in the political economy of conflict in the region. Their presence benefits some local actors at the expense of others, thereby accentuating existing divisions and creating new ones. The distribution of resources entailed in the conduct of their operations can provide the means for conflict to continue. Conflict can also be triggered by claims of rights, or denials of obligations, in relation to certain resources, such as over the use of land or the discharge of pollutants into water. International commercial actors can also be more directly involved in the generation of conflict – as when they contract ill-disciplined private security companies or provide material support to a violent police force. Though nominally responsible to regulate these activities, governments rarely have the capacity or, in some cases, the political will to do so.

Non-state and commercial actors have become active in alternative regulatory arrangements at the local, national and international levels. Locally, development forums bring together government, landowners and investors to discuss the diverse impacts of particular projects. The region also has several examples of international corporate social responsibility regimes, special purpose bodies to finance and deliver services, and development authorities. While still evolving and by no means comprehensive, these arrangements create new spaces for channeling social contest that could bring global, national and local players to account in creative ways. The new communications technology also facilitates regulatory opportunities by, for example, enabling the continuous scrutiny of large-scale extractive operations in distant locations by international NGOs operating through local and regional networks. The level of this scrutiny becomes all the more significant in regulatory terms when parliaments in metropolitan countries, such as Canada, introduce domestic legislation to hold locally registered corporations legally liable for breaches of international human rights standards in the foreign jurisdictions where they operate.

A second development relates to changing relationships between nations and the emergence of transnational governance arrangements as an alternative to traditional forms of international post-conflict engagement. These were typically modeled on the increasingly discredited ‘secure, hold, restore, and exit’ approaches of post-Cold war engagements and were often constrained by time, mandates, and lack of resources. While raising issues of considerable political sensitivity, the evolution of transnational arrangements holds out the prospect of shifting thinking beyond short ‘post-conflict moments’ and concerns with exit strategies to the contemplation of more enduring arrangements for the prevention and management of conflict.

If it is recognized that conflict management is inseparable from on-going processes of development, then thinking about conflict management is usefully informed by the realization that aid is likely to be a significant part of Melanesian economies for the foreseeable future. In Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Bougainville and elsewhere in PNG, the financing and actual delivery of social services and
capital infrastructure is highly dependent on concessional financing and aid flows. Aside from a few niche markets – such as natural resources and tourism – the lack of economies of scale and distance from main markets prevent small island economies from competing globally. This suggests, at least for Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, that unless they are able to ‘beat the odds’ on a sustained basis, the form, size and scope of state responsibilities will likely continue to be fiscally unsustainable. Aid has fueled this mismatch, and created moral hazards on both sides of the relationship. But there are good signs that governments in the region are now prepared to go beyond unimaginative efforts to plumb ‘optimal levels’ for aid. There is now active debate about how the functioning of Melanesian states could be achieved through shared service agreements through different kinds of association that may be mutually beneficial and legitimate whilst also highlighting hybridity, innovative adaptation and ingenuity.

**Conclusions**

Responses to conflict are particular and contingent; they depend on time and place. But contemporary responses to violent conflict in the region are not well understood if seen only in terms of the actions of one government or another, or communities and individuals operating on national, global or local stages as if they were isolated events or operating alone. As made evident throughout this paper, they need also to be understood as expressions of the important transformations that are underway in global ordering, in economies, and in the nature of statehood and collective and individual identity.

These transformations do not play out uniformly in terms of their impacts on individuals, communities, countries or regions. They occur in the context of particular geographies, resource endowments, social and gender relations, institutional settings, and power configurations. The changes they herald can be empowering and open up new opportunities for individual and social advancement. They can also dislocate social and political relations. As the longer history of intervention in this region shows, they are likely to generate local responses ranging from outright rejection in some places to enthusiastic accommodation in others, with many points in between.

In light of the overarching themes of this paper, these transformations will inevitably be accompanied by heightened contestation as new sets of winners and losers appear. New levels and forms of contestation can overwhelm the capacities of existing local and national systems to manage, mediate and regulate effectively. This can open up a vacuum that can be quickly filled by more malevolent actors and destructive processes. They can also, as we have seen, lead to innovative and positive developments in the regulation of conflict. Their influence however can be socially and spatially circumscribed and may not be readily exported from one place to another.

One important feature of these transformations is that both by design and default many of the functions and responsibilities once imagined as the exclusive province of sovereign states have been disaggregated and reassigned. This has occurred ‘vertically’ (to institutions operating both above and below the nation state) and ‘horizontally’ (where functions are shared or deployed to non-government, commercial and civil society actors). We have observed the significant involvement of non-state actors in dispute resolution, and, in particular, in the regulation of social contestation.
around how land and natural resources are governed and services delivered. Important policy, service and regulatory arrangements now operate at regional level, as embodied in the role of the Pacific Islands Forum. Whilst sometimes viewed as ineffective ‘talk shops’, or at best bold aspirations, a range of special purpose regional forums exist in areas including statistics and audit, fisheries and customs, justice and security. Regional proclamations issued by these organizations are concerned with governance, political leadership and accountability, while others focus on matters directly related to conflict, around land, or corporate social responsibility.

These shifts in the shape and character of governance are evident internationally, as transnational arrangements acquire growing prominence. In Melanesia this process is distinctive in a number of respects. Elsewhere these changes have tended to occur once states have already consolidated their territorial presence, powers and capacities. In Melanesia, however, these moves are increasingly a direct response to the apparent inability of its post-colonial states to do so. Where such capacity is absent or only partially developed, the application of these norms, standards and principles can have particular effects on the internal arrangements of Melanesian states and how they relate to their societies. Distinctive in this regard are the ways that ideas and representations of risk have been mobilized and been insinuated into particular policies and priorities for Melanesian states and societies. Through a range of projects, programs and, as in RAMSI, through multi-country regional efforts that do not formally displace national sovereignty, they aspire to impact on how they manage public finances, the ways they regulate business activities, land and natural resources and indeed, how they are structured at sub-national levels, to decentralize power or formally engage variously conceived ‘traditional’ or non-state authorities in the delivery of services or regulation of disputes. Not surprisingly, given history and the currency of the ideal of the sovereign nation-state, many people and, in particular, political leaders can be expected to resist what they perceive as an imposition or an effort to usurp sovereignty. At worst, where particularly ill-advised or ill-timed, these engagements can have calamitous consequences for their economies or stability. They can also, paradoxically, lead to increased levels of practical dependency on international and transnational support instead of the ‘independence’ and ‘self-reliance’ promised in the rhetoric of contemporary state-building.

The different ways in which the new forms of regulating state-society relationships are occurring has a number of implications. We close with five implications we find evident in the Melanesian contexts discussed here which we believe have a wider currency.

First, given the range of ways and levels at which social contestation is being regulated in this part of the world, external interventions explicitly concerned to manage conflict appear to be seriously lagging behind our growing knowledge about the complexity and dynamism of conflict and the most promising ways of ameliorating its destructive outcomes. External conceptions tend too often to equate the causes of violent conflict with ‘state fragility’ and be overly focused on restoring its ‘capacity’. The propensity for external parties to ‘see like a state’, as we noted is a hang-over from the idea that the state is the sole provider – and principal embodiment - of the ‘social compact’. Where the state fails to effectively deliver services, the compact is broken, its legitimacy deteriorates, and conflict is unable to be effectively contained. In this thinking, the ‘weak capacity’ of the state is the problem, and building its capacity – through enacting laws, creating new institutions and training individuals in their myriad ways, norms and technologies – becomes the solution.
The fact remains, however, that state building is complex, difficult to implement and evaluate, and, frankly, a most imprecise undertaking. Results of these efforts routinely fall short of even their more modest expectations. Disproportionate attention to state building seriously misconceives the problem and thus has a high opportunity cost. It also diverts attention, and resources, from other arenas and wider networks of actors where support to capacity, legitimacy and authority is needed. This is particularly marked in Melanesia given the range of global, regional, national and local actors engaged in security, service delivery and dispute resolution.

While the nation-state has been dramatically transformed in practice through the re-assignment and sharing of key responsibilities with a wide array of private, non-state and transnational entities, our assumptions about the centrality of state as the ‘natural’ container for territorial governance and regulation remain largely unchanged. This is an indicator of the growing gulf between longstanding political ideals and values and contemporary practice. Other examples include the fixation on custom, the romanticizing of tradition and more dogmatic versions of the ‘melanesian way’. It is not simply that these institutional forms are hard to find on the ground; rather it is the way that in all these countries state and non-state institutions have become inextricably enmeshed. Thus the continuing prevalence of narrow state-centric thinking, as with the tendency to see tradition or kastom or civil society as entirely separate from the state, reinforces a focus on symptoms of dysfunction in artificially discrete domains. This can neglect the many positive and mutually transformative interactions between them and the prospect these offer for a more profound reimagining of regulatory and governance practice entailing multiple actors.

Second, responses to conflict need to draw on multiple sources for their effectiveness, legitimacy and authority and this is particularly marked in Melanesia for reasons of history, geography and social diversity. In such a pluralistic environment, this also means that the legitimacy of different sources of authority will be actively contested. People will draw selectively and in apparently contradictory ways on formal justice institutions where they can, as well as on kastom, NGOs, donor programs and patronage systems. Given the existence of multiple providers, it is important not to bifurcate responses by dealing with civil society organizations, state institutions, churches, etc., as if they are stand-alone entities not enmeshed within wider relationship networks.

Third, conflict is heightened because of the asymmetries of power accompanying economic change. It is widely recognized that weak state capacity has ramifications for commercial activities in terms of the security of contracts, assets and personnel. Similarly, the conflict potential of enclave market-led development is well appreciated. If anything, the line of causality between particular kinds of economic development and conflict is often overdrawn. However, the default remedy should not automatically be the building of state capacity to mitigate the inevitable social disruptions that such changes bring. Sometimes, it may be judged that the asymmetries of power entailed in these developments – between, for example, powerful transnational mining companies and poorly equipped governments and resource owners – are such that they cannot be ameliorated by temporary measures to tip the scales toward the weaker parties. Where practical ways cannot be found to shield people from the most destructive consequences of these forms of development, the appropriate course of action may well be to determine not to proceed or to postpone until such ways are devised. The Bougainville experience is a sobering example of the potential consequences
of moving ahead of capacity to regulate disputes with a misplaced optimism they will ‘work themselves out’ at some future date.

Fourth, the pace and scale of economic change means that any institution - whether state or non-state, national or local will struggle to contain social contests, regulate disputes, and enforce agreements. We may expect that they will continue to fall short on distributing costs and benefits in equitable and thus legitimate ways. The strong lesson from Melanesia is that the most successful interventions in conflict are those that deliberately create space for local participation and leadership, and that empower weaker parties to actively engage, express their preferences and achieve greater control. Weaker parties, those most likely to be adversely affected, may of course misjudge what’s best or what is likely to work. Strong desires for equity and fairness nevertheless underpin most grievances in Melanesia, as they do protests about unbridled greed. The principal metric for any intervention should be to assess how it impacts on the inevitable imbalances of power and thus the distribution of benefits and costs of change between winners and losers.

Fifth, just as it is important to move beyond a state-centred framework, it also needs to be recognized that there are few cases where solutions to conflict are achieved by local actors alone. Their relationships with external parties are crucial in determining whether they are durable, whether they are heard in other jurisdictions when needed, and are appropriately resourced and backed by political alliances or administrative arrangements at higher scales. The point here is that the larger architecture of how conflict is managed needs to be explicitly part of responses to violent social contestation. Many of the potentially most important processes are occurring at sub-national and trans-national levels, as noted earlier.

The structure of relationships between village and central authorities and how they relate to transnational actors – alliances of NGOs, the corporate world of investors, foreign officials, academics, professional groups and so on - are an indispensable aspect of effective responses to conflict. Giving special attention to sub-national processes is not simply a call for decentralization; rather it recognizes the vitality of what is already occurring beyond the institutions of the state. It also recognizes the constraints of Melanesian geography which create great distances between

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Box: PNG moving on a ‘fast forward mode’

West New Britain Provincial Administrator Steven Raphael has said he believed that his country was moving on “fast forward mode”.

“I often ask myself, do we really need to open all these mines, do we really need LNG now. REDD and CDB are already upon us. Does anyone know what they mean? Do we need this reform or do we need that reform. It is truly amazing how we turn to reform without fully implementing or proper diagnostics tests” he said. He said there were too many projects for a country that was only 35 years old. Mr Raphael was speaking during independence anniversary celebrations in Kimbe. “In the last 10 to 15 years, we have gone through a bloody insurgency in Bougainville, one which is taking people and the Government a very long time to get over. We have experienced an attempted coup on the Government in 1997. … Most recently we have opened up mines all over the country. We now have introduced LNG on fast forward mode and we have Vision 2050 to top it all off” he said. Mr Raphael said a simple villager was still struggling to obtain appropriate health care and send children to school.

“If we as a Government and as a country, stopped for one moment and asked our people what they really need instead of second guessing what they want, we will find that we have left them so far behind with our rhetoric that there are not interested in us anymore. Maybe we should reduce the speed to pause and reflect on the past and then move forward more slowly” he said.

Source: from Post Courier, 17 September 2010. Papua New Guinea
citizens and formally representative and adjudicative structures. But most important, the wide variety of local institutions seen in this paper need to be taken seriously, not as some form of ‘second best’ or ‘good enough’ governance. These are not throw-backs or regressions, but inventive and potentially formidable political responses to present realities and future aspirations. It is important to understand these networks and alliances, the multiple sources of legitimacy they draw upon and how these have developed. Then, it may become possible to strategically nurture links amongst them, with a view to developing an alternative ‘governance of conflict’ that creatively combines existing sources of strength and resilience at local, national and global levels while minimising their respective weaknesses.

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1 The term Melanesia is usually taken to include the region extending from the Indonesian province of Papua in the west through to the Fiji islands in the east, and is used to denote a broad culture area distinct from that of Micronesia to the north and Polynesia to the east.


3 PNG comprises the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and has a total land area of 463,000 square kilometres. There are also a number of smaller islands to the east of the mainland, the largest of which are Bougainville, New Britain and New Ireland. PNG shares a land border with Indonesia to the west and sea borders with Australia to the south and Solomon Islands to the east. Solomon Islands is an archipelago consisting of a double chain of six large islands and several hundred smaller ones with a total land area of 28,370 square kilometres. It is situated about 1,796 kilometres northeast of Australia, with Bougainville to its northwest and Vanuatu to its southeast. Vanuatu is also an archipelago of around 80 islands with a land mass of approximately 12,200 square kilometres. It lies about 400 kilometres east-northeast of New Caledonia and about 800 kilometres southeast of Solomon Islands.

4 In an influential article, Sahlins distinguished the competitive and egalitarian political structures of Melanesia from the stratified chiefdoms of Polynesia. The latter were characterised as ones in which power and authority were ascribed and inherited, while in the former any man could attain power through personal achievement and successful competition with other men. Marshall Sahlins, ‘Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia’, Comparative Studies in Society and History 5(3) 1963, pp.285-303. While remaining influential, his typology has been criticised for obfuscating important differentiation and variation within each cultural area, particularly Melanesia.


6 Pacific islanders were travelling around the islands long before their contact from the late 1500s with European explorers, traders, missionaries, beachcombers and later colonial governments. Pacific Islanders became part of the global economy by trading goods and their labor both in the Pacific and beyond. Melanesians, for example, provided labor for the sugar cane plantations in Fiji and Queensland, and the coconut plantations in Samoa. Christian missions had the most lasting and profound impacts on Pacific peoples through their inexorable quest to convert ‘heathen’ islanders. By the late 1800s, most of the Pacific Islands had
been colonized and Christianized. For a history of these earlier interventions, see: K.R. Howe, 1984, *Where the Waves Fall – A new South Sea Islands history from first settlement to colonial rule* (Sydney & London: George Allen & Unwin); John Garrett, 1982 *To live among the stars: Christian origins in Oceania* (Geneva and Suva:World Council of Churches in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1982.) For the early labour trade, see: Peter Corris, 1973, *Passage, Port and Plantation: A History of Solomon Islands Labour Migration 1870-1914* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press)

7 Wiessner, P, A Tumu, W Tumu, N Pupu 2007. Warfare in Enga Province: from pre-history until modern times,

8 For a review of some of these hybrid governing experiments by colonial authorities in Solomon Islands, see: Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, ‘Westminster meets Solomons in the Honiara riots’, in Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth (eds), *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands* (Canberra: ANU E Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2008), pp.96-118.


14 Howes S and N Soni ‘Fast Growth in the Pacific is Possible – look at Vanuatu’ Pacific Institute of Public Policy, Briefing Paper 10, 2009


17 The Vanuatu Cultural Centre is the national cultural centre of Vanuatu and located in Port Vila. It works to record and promote the country’s diverse cultures in their various aspects including oral traditions, languages and contemporary arts and music. The centre is an umbrella organization that includes the National Museum, National Library, National Film and Sound Unit and the Vanuatu Cultural and Historical Site Survey.

18 In some rural areas, parents have been able to pay school fees using traditional items of wealth such as pig tusks or shells. See ‘Paying in pig tusks in Vanuatu, BBC News Online, 4 July 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6266274.stm (accessed 26 August 2010)

19 *Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu*, Section 73.


MILDA also called for a complete overhauling of the existing land administration systems in Melanesia to eradicate corrupt land dealings and fraudulent titling.


30 Wiessner, et al p.16


32 Talking about the impact of firearms on tribal fighting in the PNG Highlands, Burton remarks “that these weapons have swept the bowmen off the battlefield as surely as the Panzers brushed aside the valiant Polish cavalrymen on the North European Plain in September 1939”. John Burton, ‘Tribal fighting – the scandal of inaction’, Research in Melanesia, 14, 1990, pp.31-40.

in post-conflict Bougainville. His deep knowledge of the Highlands and ability to communicate with local people has greatly enhanced his effectiveness and the regard in which he is held locally. See: ‘Peace monitoring teams find success in PNG highlands’ <http://www.abc.net.au/ra/pacbeat/stories/201009/s3005669.htm> (accessed on 9 September 2010)


36 The percentage of wars settled early after 1-5 deaths has risen from a mere 22% in 1991-95 to 75% in 2006-09. The number of wars with 11-300 deaths has declined significantly during the same period.


38 Legislation to regulate the industry was introduced in 2004 but has yet to be fully enforced. See Sinclair Dinnen and Abby Mcleod, ‘Policing Melanesia – international expectations and local realities’, Policing & Society, 2009, 19(4), 333-353.

39 This ultimately shortlived scheme was largely funded by the mining industry. See Sinclair Dinnen, “Militaristic solutions in a weak state: internal security, private contractors and political leadership in Papua New Guinea’, Contemporary Pacific, 1999, 11(2), 279-303.


42 John Burton, “Corporate Social Responsibility, resource conflict, and the concept of ‘materiality’ in Papua New Guinea extractive industry reports” (article under review, 2010)

43 Anthony Regan has discussed this phenomenon in respect of the establishment of councils of chiefs and councils of elders in Bougainville, see Anthony J. Regan, “‘Traditional’ leaders and conflict resolution in Bougainville: reforming the present by re-writing the past?” in Sinclair Dinnen and Allison Ley (eds.) Reflections on Violence in Melanesia. Sydney: Hawkins Press/Asia Pacific Press, 2000, 290-304. See also, R.J. May, ‘(Re?)Discovering Chiefs: Traditional Authority and the Restructuring of Local-Level Government in Papua New Guinea’, Canberra: Australian National University, Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific, Discussion Paper 18, 1997, 1-36.


46 Anthropologist Nicole Haley, working in the Southern Highlands, has also noted the value of mobile phones in exporting conflict mediation strategies and skills beyond their place of origin. She relates how a couple of key local mediators from the Kopiago area in the Southern Highland are regularly called by mobile phone to travel to the city of Lae to mediate disputes involving Kopiago’s working there. Nicole Haley, personal communication 18/8/10


51 See, for example, Robert Ayson, ‘The ‘arc of instability’ and Australia’s strategic policy’, Australian Journal of International Affairs 61(2), June 2007, pp.215-231.

52 Australia’s longstanding reluctance to interfere in neighbors’ conflicts was reiterated as late as January 2003 when the then Foreign Minister dismissed the option of armed intervention in Solomon Islands as “folly in the extreme” (Alexander Downer, ‘Neighbours Cannot Be Recolonised”, Australian 8 January 2003). A month later, a Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper further highlighted the constraints of sovereignty and the practical difficulties facing interveners in complex local social contexts. The White Paper stated, “When problems are so tightly bound to complex cultural traditions and ethnic loyalties, only local communities can find workable solutions”. See Advancing the National Interest: Australia’s Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper. (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2003), p.93.


56 Others included: a review of the Constitution and the Lands and Titles Act; reform of the Electoral Act; the payment of rental to traditional landowners for the use of Honiara and relocation of the national capital to another province; a call for 50 per cent of revenue on the island and for shares in the Solomon Islands Plantation Limited (SIPL) owned by the national government to be handed over to the Guadalcanal provincial government; payment of compensation for murdered Guadalcanal citizens; and an end to police harassment of Guadalcanal people. See: Jon Fraenkel, The Manipulation of Custom (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004), pp.44-52; 197-203.

57 For details of these early peacemaking efforts, see: Iris Wielders, ‘Conflict Resolution and Governance in Solomon Islands’, University of Sydney, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies.

58 For an account of the peace work of the Melanesian Brothers, including the tragic murder of seven of their members, see: Richard Anthony Carter, In Search of the Lost – the death and life of seven peacemakers of the Melanesian Brotherhood. Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2006.


This was the thesis advanced by Jon Fraenkel in The Manipulation of Custom – From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer coined the phrase ‘co-operative intervention’ to describe the legal basis of the mission. See, Alexander Downer “Our failing neighbour: Australia and the future of Solomon Islands”. Speech at the launch of the Australian Strategic Policy Institutereport, Sydney, 10 June 2003.

On June 30th Forum Foreign Ministers endorsed a package of ‘strengthened assistance’ drafted by Australia and agreed to by Solomon Islands, and an agreement relating to the operations of the police, military and other regional personnel was signed by the participating states on July 24th, the first day of the deployment. A formal request for regional assistance had been made by Solomon Islands’ Governor-General on July 4th, while its parliament unanimously passed the Facilitation of International Assistance Act (FIA) 2003, setting out the powers and immunities of mission personnel.

The Security Council President, Fayssal Mekdad, expressed hope “that this important regional initiative will quickly lead to the restoration of normalcy and national harmony in Solomon Islands” (UN security Council, “Press Statement on Solomon Islands by Security Council President”, Press Release SC/7853, 26 August 2003.

This was summarised recently by the Foreign Relations Committee of the Solomon Islands Parliament, Inquiry into the Facilitation of International Assistance Notice 2003 and RAMSI Intervention. Foreign Relations Committee, National Parliament of Solomon Islands, 2009, p.24.

See, for example, the OECDs ‘Principles for Good international Engagement in Fragile States & Situations, April 2007’. Accessible online at: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/45/38368714.pdf (accessed 18 May 2010). Principle 5 includes the statement that: “Within donor governments, a ‘whole of government’ approach is needed, involving those responsible for security, political and economic affairs, as well as those responsible for development aid and humanitarian assistance”.

Constraints tended to operate in ritualised warfare in Melanesia that, for example, served to limit the number of people killed or restrict the parties against whom violence could be used. The International Committee of the Red Cross compare these ‘traditional’ constraints over the use of violence to those pertaining in modern international humanitarian law. See, for example, Under the Protection of the Palm – Wars of Dignity in the Pacific (Suva, Fiji: International Committee of the Red Cross, May 2009).

Where commentators have observed that ‘finality’ of disputes is not part of customary law (Zorn, J. & Corrin Care, J., Proving Customary Law in the Common Law Courts of the South Pacific (2002) 61.) ‘Decided’ matters are relitigated over and over when the time and circumstances are right. Conflict is suppressed but never truly disappears. Glenn Banks observes of the Huli people in PNG how disputes may lay dormant until such time as a strategically significant dispute arose, allowing claimants to ‘activate’ past unresolved disputes in a sequenced set of claims. Disputes were always ‘multiple-claim’ affairs. It was never the case that a ‘conflictless’


74 Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), People’s Survey 2009, pp34-35

75 See, for example, ‘Contextualising sexual violence: rape and carnal knowledge in Papua New Guinea’ in Sinclair Dinnen and Allison Ley (eds), Reflections on Violence in Melanesia (Sydney & Canberra: Hawkins Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2000), 83-104. See also; Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor – Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches (Canberra: AusAID, Office of D Effectiveness, 2008)


78 A notable instance of this feeling is at http://www.stinkyjournalism.org/latest-journalism-news-updates-170-keyword-sillitoe

79 UNDP and its partners have pioneered a methodology for nurturing and supporting social change in countries characterized by high levels of social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. The Community Conversations Approach is now being used in over forty countries in Africa, Asia and elsewhere and, in particular, in relation to addressing the driving forces behind the spread of HIV. This approach has also been used in parts of PNG to encourage rural communities to strengthen their capacity to talk about shared problems and devise locally appropriate remedial strategies. It is in this context that considerable success has been noted in getting villagers – men, women, young and old, leaders and non-leaders – to talk directly about highly sensitive issues that would normally be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to discuss in open forums ,


82 There are a number of dimensions to this. One is the personification of politics. People – in the Highlands in particular - relating to individual members as the ‘state’ or ‘government’. Their expectations of him are similar to that held of a big-man. That is, performance-based. If he fails to deliver, they will switch allegiance to another up-and-coming political big-man. The political big-man is expected to ‘take care’ of his supporters/voters. Under the first past- the- post system, the member was relatively clear of who his
supporters were. Not so under the new limited preferential voting system where it is much harder to see/read the preferential voting patterns. Yet the voters know where their preferential votes go and have taken to the system with considerable enthusiasm. There is greater scope for grievance because a member is no longer able to ascertain who a significant number of his voters are and ‘gift’ accordingly. Another point: When a sitting member is defeated it is not uncommon for his voting base to destroy property/facilities (eg aid posts, schools etc.) that he has ‘gifted’ during his tenure. Reason: because he gifted it to them personally in return for their support and now he is no longer a member those who didn’t vote for him should not be allowed to enjoy these ‘gifts’. Most election-related conflict is post-election conflict and is about punishing those who have voted the ‘wrong’ way. More generically, people get frustrated/angry when their ‘contributions’ are not recognized and rewarded. Also a lot of relative deprivation mixed up in this. Case of Hela grievance and struggle to create their own province. Recently landowners forcibly closed the Tari airport which is the main Highlands portal to the LNG. Everything to do with LNG goes through there – people supplies and heavy equipment. Complain that they have not been suitably compensated for use of their land for airport while benefits and royalties flow only to landowners in areas where mining or the pipeline is located.


84 Adler D., Sage C., Woolcock M., 2009, 'Interim Institutions and the Development Process: Opening Spaces for Reform in Cambodia and Indonesia', Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK


88 For example, see The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights ; Kathryn McPhail, *How Oil, Gas, and Mining Projects can Contribute to Development* 37(4) FIN. & DEV'T 46, 47-8 (December 2000); In PNG, this trend is aided by a tax credit scheme. In return for tax credits from the national government, companies deliver infrastructure in the form of roads, school buildings and health clinics, although such provision is often undermined by government failure to ensure road maintenance and the provision of teachers and health workers.

89 A Winters and P Martin, ‘When comparative advantage is not enough: business costs in small remote economies’, *World Trade Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2004, pp. 347–83. This wedge is manifest in the costs of
production vis world prices in manufacturing and services and cannot be overcome. Clearly this thesis is more complex on a closer look- with smaller and isolated economies like Samoa performing much better than places like PNG, which arguably could achieve economies of scale, and is located closer to the Asian markets than any of its Pacific Island neighbours.


95 As one international observer puts it, “The dirty little secret of nation-building is that no one knows how to do it”. See, James L. Payne, ‘Does Nation-Building Work?’, Independent Review 10(4) 2006, 599-610.