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# STATE CRIME BY PROXY

## *Australia and the Bougainville Conflict*

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*For most of the 1990s, the island of Bougainville was the subject of a counterinsurgency campaign administered by the Papua New Guinea state. The denial of humanitarian aid, extra-judicial killings and forced displacement were just some of the egregious tactics employed. Papua New Guinea's main international benefactor, Australia, publicly remained aloof from the hostilities. However, in reality, the Australian state was covertly sponsoring Papua New Guinea's counterinsurgency operations. Drawing on interviews with senior Australian and Papua New Guinea state officials, this paper will offer the first scholarly account of Australia's proxy war. Employing a theoretical framework influenced by classical Marxism and Foucault, particular attention will be paid to the relationships, calculations and strategies that informed Australia's criminogenic response.*

Keywords: state crime, state terrorism, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Bougainville

### *Introduction*

For most of the 1990s, Bougainville was the subject of a protracted secessionist campaign organized by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). To quash the rebellion in its easternmost province, the Papua New Guinea (PNG) state used a variety of illicit counterinsurgency tactics, including forced displacement, extra-judicial killings, torture and the denial of humanitarian aid (see Amnesty International 1990; 1993; 1997; Gillespie 1992; Havini 1995; 1996).

To this day, PNG's former colonial power, Australia, maintains it had no direct involvement in the neighbouring dirty war. This article argues that the Hawke-Keating Government (1983–96) was in fact a central protagonist.[1] Not only did they frenetically lobby the PNG state to escalate its counterinsurgency efforts, but also a wide-ranging package of military support was covertly provided. It will be suggested that this assistance was supplied even though Australian state managers were well aware it would be used by the PNG Government to harass the civilian population on Bougainville.

To help explain Australia's criminogenic contribution, the author has drawn upon two distinct theoretical traditions, which have of late converged in sympathetic ways (Jessop 2007). The first tradition, classical Marxism, has developed a range of concepts for analysing international state practice, as part of a broader theory of imperialism.

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[1]These claims will be evidenced using data from interviews that were conducted with senior Australian and PNG state officials during 2006–07. Officials were selected on the basis of seniority and area of responsibility. In total, 20 Australian state officials and 13 PNG state officials were interviewed.



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Countering accusations of reductionism, scholars rooted in this tradition argue that 'the state system has distinctive properties', which *are not* simply a function of capital (Callinicos 2007: 542). As a result, it is claimed that classical Marxist analyses of international state practice must 'take into account the strategies, calculations and interactions of rival political elites in the state system' (i.e. geopolitical competition), albeit in 'context of the crisis tendencies and class conflicts constitutive of capitalism' (Callinicos 2007: 542–3). This general argument has received broad support from leading theorists of imperialism (see Gowan 2010; Harvey 2003).

The second, complimentary theoretical tradition that informs this paper is contained in Foucault's (2007; 2008) late work on governmentality. In these writings, Foucault develops a useful framework for dissecting and analysing the calculations and strategies of capitalist state managers. In short, Foucault argues that the transition to capitalism did not simply inspire a 'restructuration of the *relations of sovereignty*', as some Marxists have claimed (Lacher 2006: 97). Rather, he suggests, it engendered a set of power relations rooted in an entirely new organizing logic, which Foucault labels governmentality. Governmentalized states, in Foucault's account, treat the rule of capital in the private sphere as a *natural* reality; accordingly, the object of state power—the population—is seen to be guided by intrinsic processes that can be shaped and managed, but never altered. As a result of this dynamic, governmentalized states function by deploying 'mechanisms of incentive-regulation', which 'respect these natural processes, or at any rate to take them into account, get them to work, or to work with them' (Foucault 2007: 353–4). In so doing, Foucault argues governments can stimulate the circulation of people, assets, goods and money in a way that allows 'specific finalities' to be achieved at the level of population, such as the production of 'the greatest possible amount of wealth' and the provision of 'sufficient means of subsistence' (Foucault 2007: 99).

While the foregoing is an abbreviated summary, Foucault's approach—when read from a materialist perspective—extends and deepens the argument put forward by classical Marxism. That is, it allows the strategies, calculations and interactions of rival political elites (i.e. geopolitical competition) to be grounded within a historically specific modality of power. Geopolitical competition, therefore, is not about outweighing rivals, but rather governing more effectively than them.

With this synthesis as our theoretical backdrop, the following account of Australian state criminality will begin by examining the crisis that precipitated Australia's criminogenic actions. It will be argued that this crisis stemmed from a complex accumulation of antagonisms that were woven into the social fabric of Bougainville by the gradual commodification of 'traditional' relations. This accumulative process was given a sudden and catastrophic jolt by the injection of mining capital, which provoked an anti-capitalist movement that aimed to expropriate the mine's operator Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) and the local businessmen who had colluded with BCL. However, Australia's response will not be interpreted as a knee-jerk reaction to capital's expropriation. Instead, the author will focus on a distinct layer of geopolitical determination—constituted by the strategies, calculations and interactions of Australian and PNG state managers—which assumed dominance during the crisis. To this end, it will be suggested that the paramount strategic concern motivating Australia's criminogenic response was the potential reverberations this conflict could send through the rest of PNG, at a time when the country was deemed to be at risk of state failure.

This geopolitical assessment, however, did not occur in a vacuum. The perceived significance of PNG's state failure, it will be claimed, was pegged to a governmentalized foreign policy strategy. To flesh this point out, in the penultimate section of this paper, it will be argued that, during the 1980s, Australia's regional security role was being increasingly instrumentalized to rally key allies—most specifically the United States—behind international governance agendas that were critical to Australia's domestic neo-liberal reforms. As a result of this strategy, a crisis in a 'strategic backwater'—by souring relations with important international patrons—had the surprising ability to undermine the Australian government's capacity to calibrate key international regulatory milieus with its programme of reforms at home. This dynamic, it will be argued, gave state failure in PNG heightened significance, thus providing the Hawke-Keating Government with ample motivation to derogate from its human rights obligations.

## *The Origins of the Bougainville Conflict*

PNG is the largest and most populous country in the South Pacific. Its territory includes the eastern half of New Guinea, in addition to numerous satellite islands. Land, kinship and custom remain important to the country's mostly rural population who rely on agriculture for survival.[2] However, it is PNG's mineral, gas and oil reserves that offer the most immediate means for attracting international flows of capital—a courtship that has consumed successive national governments (Denoon 1985; Standish 2007). Landowner frustration over the sharing of benefits from these natural-resource operations has, on occasions, led to violent confrontation with the state and resource operators (Dinnen 2001). Nevertheless, while heated, such conflicts tend to remain localized affairs. The Bougainville crisis stands out as a notable exception to this rule. Rather astonishingly, within the space of a year, a landowner dispute in central Bougainville had transformed into a province-wide secessionist campaign. The depth and breadth of the hostilities took both the PNG and Australian Governments by surprise.

Indeed, Bougainville had been one of PNG's most prosperous and seemingly dynamic regions. The island, for instance, enjoyed a thriving cocoa and copra industry (Lummani 2005). Then, of course, there was the mine. Opened by BCL in 1972, it 'spawned a significant number of locally owned and operated companies' (Wesley-Smith 1990: 16). Foremost among them was the Bougainville Development Corporation, which had 'become a multi-million dollar enterprise, with interests in engineering, catering, airline operations, and limestone mining' (Wesley-Smith 1990: 16). However, there were other sides to this success story. For example, numerous ethnographies conducted on Bougainville during the 1960s and 1970s note the rise of wealthy peasant farmers who were expanding their smallholdings, employing labour and diversifying profits into business and trade, alongside poorer households, who often had to embark upon wage-labour to purchase household necessities (see Lasslett forthcoming). As this process of social differentiation intensified Tanis (2005) claims:

> . . . the people started seeing each other not as brothers and sisters and clan mates with common ownership of wealth, but more as business competitors, with only the fittest to survive. This contributed to inequality, to social gaps and to hatred. (Tanis 2005: 458)

[2]Land in PNG is administered through a system of customary tenure that allows clan lineages to retain ownership of this important productive resource.

In the mine-lease area, in which there was the extra variable of mining-related payments, tensions were more volatile. Villagers accused clan elders of having used their customary position to monopolize compensation, rents and business opportunities (Filer 1990; Regan 1996; 2003). During the 1980s, these tensions grew owing to post-war population growth rates, which gave rise to a voluminous generation of land-poor youth, who had few opportunities to gain employment or skills (Connell 1991; Ogan 1999; Oliver 1991). This generation of land-poor youth was particularly critical of local businessmen and the mining company. Both parties were accused of having monopolized the island's wealth, whilst a large mass of 'ordinary' households struggled to survive (see Applied Geology Associates 1989: Appendix II).

Two of the most vocal members of this generation were Francis Ona, a BCL truck driver, and his cousin Perpetua Serero, Bougainville's first female radio announcer (Oliver 1991). Ona (1989*a*) argued that 'the only significant development we have seen since independence is the widening gap between the few rich and the poor majority'. According to Ona and Serero, 'foreign capitalists', 'elite nationals', 'self centred traditional landlords', 'government officials', the PNG state (which 'is the instrument for the few rich to accumulate wealth') and 'the Australian government' were all agents who had fed this growing inequality (Bougainville Copper Limited 1988; Ona 1989*a*; 1990; Serero 1987). Of course, BCL was singled out for particular condemnation owing to the profits it had pocketed and the environmental harm its mine had caused (Applied Geology Associates 1989; Connell 1991).

For these aggrieved young landowners, the optimal method for reversing the island's social fragmentation and environmental degradation was to expropriate BCL and the local comprador class. This, they believed, would pave the way for a new egalitarian mode of development that would be sensitive to the needs of the rural poor (Ona 1999). In order to implement this social vision, Ona and Serero challenged the Panguna Landowners Association's (PLA) leadership to an election. Formed in 1980, the PLA had acted as a representative body for landowners from the mine-lease areas (Okole 1990). Ona and Serero aimed to infiltrate the PLA and invert its character, co-opting the political power that senior kin had used to extract rents and compensation, in order to expropriate BCL and the local elite.

Having successfully won election to the PLA's executive in August 1987, this new vanguard moved to operationalize its strategy. At a meeting in April 1988, the PLA handed BCL's management a letter; it stated: 'We the landowners demand that the Company pay for all the resources that you have destroyed on our land commencing in 1963 and up to 1988 in the sum of Ten Billion Kina [approximately US$12 billion]' (PLA 1988). The PLA followed up this demand with protests and roadblocks. Nevertheless, by November 1988, the PLA's campaign had failed to win much ground from BCL. The PLA's leaders, therefore, elected to escalate their anti-mine activities by initiating a campaign of industrial sabotage. When the Royal PNG Constabulary (RPNGC) launched a heavy-handed paramilitary operation in response, militant landowners formed the BRA (Dorney 2000). Following a second major RPNGC paramilitary operation during March–April 1989, which razed dozens of villages, the BRA formally rallied for Bougainville's independence. The BRA's leader, Francis Ona, wrote to PNG's Prime Minister, stating:

> Your security forces have passed the limits allowed in the international laws of justice and peace as stated in the Geneva Convention. . . . We are going to try to defend ourselves from your well equipped security forces. We will use whatever we have on hand. (Ona 1989*b*)

### *The Australian Government Reacts*

Since the nineteenth century, it has been an enduring ambition of Australian state officials to keep the South Pacific benign. At first, this ambition was linked to fears of a malevolent European or Asian power using the South Pacific as a foothold from which to harass Australian shores and sea lanes. By the late 1980s, these concerns had subsided, particularly as the Cold War came to a close. Nevertheless, the South Pacific continued to be an important priority for Australian foreign policy makers (Evans 1989). This was not only due to its geographic proximity; it was also a consequence of Australia's international strategy at the time. As a middle power with an activist foreign policy, state officials believed that Australia's growing role as regional hegemon accrued their government prestige with major allies, particularly the United States (Interview, DoD official A, 2006).[3] This prestige, in turn, permitted Australia to garner the support of these allies for international initiatives critical to the national interest, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation process (Beazley 2003). Consequently, Australia's leadership role in the South Pacific had an importance that went beyond regional security or private investment (this is discussed further in the penultimate section).

As the largest nation in this critical region, PNG was a particularly important priority for Australia. A senior Australian diplomat explains:

> I often try to think of a relationship anywhere else in the world that was like that [with PNG], for example . . . [where a country has] a primary strategic interest; a major economic role, those days close to 30 to 40 percent of their [PNG's] budget was our budget support, and the trade was massive, so there was trade dependency; education [connections] w[ere] still quite strong. Where [else do] you have those connections, with the ex-colonial thing wrapped into geographic proximity, where else? (Interview, HC official A, 2006)

Nevertheless, despite this close relationship, the Hawke-Keating Government was left flat-footed by the sudden eruption of violence on Bougainville. It had not predicted the troubles, nor was there much intelligence to hand on the key protagonists (Interview, HC official B, 2006). A senior Defence official recalls that 'it was as if a bunch of kids who didn't like the school headmaster had gone back to the school and trashed it' (Interview, DoD official B, 2006). Given Australia's significant regional interests, it was incumbent upon the Australian High Commission in Port Moresby to get its officials onto the island in order to gather more concrete data and advise resident expatriates.[4]

Initially, Australia faced some resistance in this respect, owing to a personal feud between Australia's High Commissioner and PNG's Foreign Secretary (Interview, HC official B, 2006). However, the replacement of Australia's High Commissioner in April 1989 soothed tensions. The new High Commissioner, Allan Taylor, proved an adept hand at managing relations with the PNG Government. Under Taylor's stewardship, the Australian High Commission was able to set up a mini-office on Bougainville and place intelligence operatives on the island. There were also dozens of Australian Defence

[3]All interviewees have been given anonymous titles in order to protect their identity. For the purposes of referencing organizational affiliation, the following acronyms will be employed: Australian Department of Defence (DoD), Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australian High Commission (HC), Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC).

[4]Australia's diplomatic presence in PNG at the time was large. Evans and Grant (1991: 69) observe that 'Port Moresby is one of Australia's biggest missions, about the size of our embassy in Beijing and only slightly smaller than the Tokyo and Jakarta missions'.

Force (ADF) officers on loan with the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) and stationed in the High Commission, closely monitoring the situation. A senior RPNGC officer recalls that 'their intelligence was better than ours. Their intelligence was much better and efficient' (Interview, RPNGC official, 2006).

As these intelligence networks began to produce a more focused picture, it became apparent that the uprising on Bougainville posed a serious challenge to an underprepared PNG state (Interview, ADF official, 2006; Rogers 2002). Indeed, while the BRA may have started as a 'rag tag' militia, during 1989, their numbers swelled as landowners, disgruntled mine workers and marginalized youth joined their ranks (Regan 1996; Tanis 2005; Thompson and MacWilliam 1992). The BRA's ranks were also bolstered by a number of Bougainvillean soldiers who abandoned their post at the PNGDF and joined the rebels. One of these soldiers, Sam Kauona, who joined the BRA after his cousin was killed by the RPNGC in March 1989, was a Recruit Training Officer and an Ammunitions Technical Officer (Liria 1993). He thus brought considerable military expertise to the rebel movement, and soon became commander of their military faction (Liria 1993).

Under Kauona's leadership, the BRA was able to expand its arsenal by capturing arms from the PNGDF/RPNGC and through resurrecting stockpiles of weapons left on the island after the Second World War (Liria 1993; Regan 2003; Rogers 2002). With a growing weapons cache, the rebels used hit-and-run tactics, employing the region's steep, narrow ridgelines and thick foliage as cover (Liria 1993). These guerrilla tactics were enhanced by the BRA's civilian support base, which grew as evidence of security-force atrocities began to circulate throughout the island.

Amplifying the BRA threat was the PNGDF's lack of preparation for such a contingency. Indeed, a process of rapid localization (following independence), consistent budget shortfalls, the politicization of its commanding ranks, a lowering in training standards, a gruelling schedule of law-and-order operations and a manifest failure to properly upkeep equipment, all meant that the PNGDF was in a poor state of readiness (May 1993; PNG Department of Defence 1989; Rogers 2002). A senior PNGDF officer explains:

> Bougainville was a test to the government, to the nation, to the defence force, and we were not trained, we were not prepared, both in training and in our modus operandi. We didn't have the logistics to go in, but when you have a call out, and the national government wants you to go, what do you do? You have to go. (Interview, PNGDF official, 2006)

Faced with a rebel force that was progressively growing stronger, the PNGDF was at serious risk of being out-manoeuvred. A Minister from the Namaliu Government (1988–92) recalls:

> So after they [PNG security forces] got there, within a few months [we thought] 'oh shit now they are over there we better bloody find money to feed them, pay their allowance, pay for the fuel'. We looked around and said 'shit we could be fighting these buggers for years, and we don't have enough men'. So it dawned on the defence force Commander and his people that we didn't have enough. (Interview, PNG Minister, 2006)

As a result, the Minister argues, 'we had to look towards Australia, we did not know where else to go for help, in terms of arming our people, getting our defence force better prepared, training our soldiers for combat' (Interview, PNG Minister, 2006). Of

course, Australia was the natural place for PNG to turn. Since independence (1975), the Australian Government had provided PNG with around $A500 million in defence aid (approximately US$355 million), which included an extensive training and personnel loan/exchange programme (Rogers 2002: 144). Furthermore, apart 'from two landing craft . . . and three Avara transport aircraft' Australia had 'provided the PNGDF with all its major items of equipment' (Bullock 1991: 3).

Nevertheless, despite the fact that a principal ally and dependant was facing a challenge that threatened to overwhelm its armed forces, Australian officials in Canberra curiously adopted an aloof public posture. For instance, the head of DFAT's[5] Pacific, Africa and Middle East Division claimed in 1990 that 'Our guiding principle . . . has been that the dispute is an internal matter for PNG, one that the Papua New Guinea Government should resolve for itself without outside involvement' (Smith 1990: 69). He continued, 'the Australian Government has made it absolutely clear that it would not intervene in the dispute, and has not been asked to do so' (Smith 1990: 69). Australia's Foreign Minister and Prime Minister echoed this claim in numerous public statements (see, e.g. Australian Senate, Record of Proceedings, 8 November 1990; Australian Senate, Record of Proceedings, 23 November 1993).

However, what would strike any student of Australian foreign policy as odd about these statements is that they were made at a time when the Australian Government was beginning to assume a more direct role in PNG's internal affairs following a period of 'benign neglect'. This new policy direction was clearly signposted in 1989 when the Australian Government announced its intention to shift PNG's aid programme from untied budgetary aid to project aid (Evans 1990: 6). AIDAB's[6] Director General claimed this shift would permit 'Australia to have a more direct role in the policy decisions that affect growth and development in Papua New Guinea than is possible through budget support' (Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Record of Proceedings, 22 October 1990). Given this interventionist agenda, public efforts to disassociate Australia from the Bougainville conflict fundamentally lacked credibility. Indeed, at the time, anti-war activists raised serious doubts over Australia's position. As we will now see, they were right to do so.

### *The Australian Government Responds*

Despite the faux declarations that distanced Australia from the crisis to its north, the uprising on Bougainville in reality became an important focus for the Australian state. A senior Defence official recalls that 'when the shit hit the fan in 1989 it [Bougainville] was a fairly big part of one's life for a while there' (Interview, DoD official C, 2006). Inside the Australian High Commission, Bougainville's significance was even more pronounced: 'a huge amount of my time, and a huge amount of the High Commission's time [was devoted to Bougainville]. It was almost twenty-four hours a day' (Interview, HC official A, 2006). Acutely aware that the PNGDF was struggling to cope with the situation, these officials had to determine the precise threat posed by the BRA and the appropriate balance of measures that Australia could deploy in response.

[5]Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
[6]The Australian International Development Assistance Bureau.

To that end, it was the potential strain the uprising could place on PNG's fragile state apparatus that was judged to be the most immediate and palpable threat to Australian interests. A senior defence official explains:

[Would] the country tear itself to pieces in frustration at not being able to deal with the Bougainville problem? Would the army break? We were really worried about that. Would morale totally collapse? It certainly went through some low points. Would there be mutinies? There were a couple of little ones, but not really big and well organised ones. Would the army fight the police, and vice versa? (Interview, DoD official A, 2006)

According to this official, such questions 'became more important than Bougainville itself, because the rest of the country was infected with this virus transmitted through Bougainville' (Interview, DoD official A, 2006).

Were the PNG state to indeed collapse, it was feared that 'the logic of a region in turmoil . . . would apply' (Interview, DFAT official A, 2006). Most immediately, this would pose a significant threat to resident expatriates and Australian investment,[7] which stood at around A$1.8 billion (approximately US$1.3 billion) (Evans 1990: 7). More generally, Australia's regional leadership aspirations would be seriously compromised. As a result, state officials 'never doubted that we [Australia] had pretty strong interests in the situation' (Interview, DoD official C, 2006). Nevertheless, for a number of reasons, ADF intervention was deemed inappropriate:

That was seriously discussed, but dismissed because we took the view that it would be incredibly costly in people, and it would put us in some very complex and ambiguous situations of shooting Bougainvilleans without really knowing whether we were shooting the right Bougainvilleans or not. This was 1990 and not 2006, and we were still very cautious about deployments, you know the post-Vietnam reluctance to deploy forces overseas was very high. (Interview, DoD official C, 2006)

However, as the rebels were unwilling to negotiate over their demand for independence and the mine's closure—which was a necessary presupposition for any mediated settlement with the PNG state—Australia's interest did warrant a large investment in a PNGDF-led counterinsurgency campaign.

Accordingly, during 1989, the Hawke-Keating Government put considerable pressure on the PNG state to ratchet up its counterinsurgency operations on Bougainville. A senior High Commission official recalls that 'We were certainly pushing them . . . to get more troops over there and that sort of thing. Ben Sabumei was the [Defence] Minister, and I used to see him all the time saying, "get your people over there", (Interview, HC official A, 2006). The Australian Government had a variety of levers available to it to ensure that this advice was taken seriously.[8] However, PNG's cabinet was coming around to Australia's point of view by its own volition. Indeed, while the PNG Government was initially reluctant to deploy extreme force, the economic consequences of the mine's closure,[9]

[7]Australian capital was primary invested in PNG's minerals industry.

[8]During this period, Australia strategically used its extensive diplomatic presence, line personnel and civil/defence aid to shape PNG's domestic policy. The Australian Government was also actively organizing IMF finance for PNG, in the hope that loan conditionalities would push through more delicate policy agendas that could not be pushed from Canberra.

[9]PNG's Prime Minister recalls that 'virtually overnight, a massive slice of the whole economy—a third of exports, and a quarter of revenue—was taken away' (Namaliu 1995: 61).

a major cabinet reshuffle,[10] the BRA's stubbornness and the existing security force contingent's weakness as a whole ensured that, by June 1989, political momentum was beginning to favour increasing the PNGDF's presence on Bougainville. Accordingly, between June 1989 and January 1990, security force numbers on the island almost doubled from around 640 to 1,060.[11] Additionally, in October 1989, the head of the Bougainville security operations, Colonel Lima Dotaona, was replaced by Colonel Leo Nuia, 'a hardliner with little sympathy for the secessionists' (Rogers 2002: 238).

Of course, even with greater numbers on Bougainville, and a more aggressive commander, Australian officials doubted that the PNGDF could completely neutralize the BRA. Nevertheless, it was hoped that the extra military pressure might create the sort of strategic environment in which an acceptable political settlement could be reached, namely one short of independence and the permanent closure of the mine (Interview, DoD official A, 2006; Interview, HC official A, 2006). To that end, the Australian Government also backed PNG's decision to install a military blockade around the island (Interview, HC official A, 2006). The blockade included an embargo on all humanitarian supplies. A senior DFAT official explains:

> Every effort was being made to make it plain to Ona and co that they were not viable, that they needed the rest of Papua New Guinea as their support. . . . With secession, looking practically at it, Ona would have had to have thought, 'where will I get my supplies from, my guns and bullets, who is going to help me', and the answer is 'nobody, you will be totally on your own', and Australia was using its diplomatic leverage to ensure that nobody would come in there to do it. (Interview, DFAT official A, 2006)

However, given that the PNGDF was facing systemic organizational problems, state officials were aware that, if the BRA were to be brought to heal, Australia would need to assume a more active role in resourcing and coordinating the military effort. Consequently, in June 1989, the Hawke-Keating Government sent a jet up to Port Moresby and flew PNG's Defence Minister to Australia so that a support package could be discussed (Interview, PNG Minister, 2006).[12]

While PNG's Defence Minister was eager to receive this assistance, Australian officials were mindful that their growing role still had to be tactfully arranged. A senior ADF officer explains:

> I have been involved with PNG for 10 or 15 years, and we did have some bureaucrats who were, perhaps heavy handed is the wrong word, but who were a little bit dictatorial. And that does build resentment. Particularly with some Papua New Guineans. I mean its natural, you don't want to be told what to do. (Interview, ADF official, 2006)

Consequently, when negotiating the assistance package, a Socratic method was used:

> You would sit down, if you were with Ben [Sabumei the Defence Minister], you'd say 'gee things aren't going too well in Bougainville tell me about the problems'. 'Well we have been looking at that too. We wondered whether maybe a bit of extra training here [would help], and we noticed you have a limitation in equipment, would you think some extra this and that would help enhance your capability'. So

[10] This reshuffle occurred during May 1989, and it gave rise to an influential hawk faction that included the new Minister of State, Defence Minister, Police Minister, senior ranks of the RPNGC/PNGDF and, by September 1989, the Justice Minister and Foreign Minister (Lasslett forthcoming).

[11] This claim is based on data supplied by the PNG Government (Lasslett forthcoming).

[12] The symbolism of this act (being flown to Australia) was emphasized by my ministerial respondent (Interview, PNG Minister, 2006).

you know you'd go through that, and by the time you had finished the discussions over a couple of days of gentle probing, you'd come up with a list and you could say at the end of it, 'well I reckon Ben that were we to do this, and contribute this, and make this happen, you'd probably be more comfortable about your ability to handle the Bougainville situation, is that right?' 'Yes'. 'Oh ok what do you reckon we try and organise a meeting between Ministers'. (Interview, DoD official B, 2006)

As a result of these bilateral discussions, a substantial package of military assistance was indeed arranged during 1989. A senior ADF officer recalls:

I mean the logistic support that we supplied to the PNGDF during that time was very large and significant, without our support they couldn't have done what they did. . . . We'd be training them at training camps, we'd be supplying them with weapons, we'd be supplying them with uniforms, everything. And then we'd say these companies are now fit to be used, lets send them now to Bougainville. We'd even fly them to Bougainville for god's sake, so we would facilitate everything. (Interview, ADF official, 2006)

Naturally, spending on Australia's Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) with PNG rose substantially during 1989–91.[13] For example, in 1988–89, the Australian Government spent $A27.4 million (US$21 million) on military assistance to PNG; this rose to $A37.9 million (US$29 million) in 1989–90 and $A52.1 million (US$41 million) in 1990–91 (Australian Department of Defence 1995: Appendix H). 'Oh yeah it [DCP] was ramped up,' recalls the aforementioned ADF officer, 'oh yeah we put a lot more money into it, we put a lot more advisors in there to train the companies, the logistic support was just sort of flowing over' (Interview, ADF official, 2006). Admittedly, not all this extra expenditure was earmarked for the Bougainville operations. Nevertheless, a large part of it *was*. For instance, the increase helped to fund the delivery and maintenance of four Iroquois helicopters (including privately contracted Australian pilots); the training of 450 new PNGDF recruits (by the ADF); the replenishment of the PNGDF's exhausted arms/ammunition stock; and the provision of extra ADF personnel to help relieve the strain that Bougainville was placing on the defence forces' administrative/logistic systems. A key PNG Minister from the period argues that 'without the DCP, Papua New Guinea was not in the position to effectively carry out the war on Bougainville' (Interview, PNG Minister, 2006).

As a result of Australia's support, the PNGDF had the resources and equipment to launch a series of increasingly more aggressive counterinsurgency offensives during 1989–91. These offensives included some of the worst atrocities committed during the war.[14] Flying in Australian-supplied helicopters, Rogers (2002: 233) writes that 'soldiers fired machine guns attached by rope, and grenades from grenade launchers (M203/M79) or simply dropped grenades into villages'. Civilian areas were also battered with 81-mm mortars, which included white phosphorous rounds (Rogers 2002: 228–9). Some of the displaced fled into the bush and lived under the jungle canopy. Others were placed into detention camps that were ignominiously labelled 'care centres' by the PNG Government. Often squalid places, 'care centres' were routine sites of torture, sexual assault and executions (Amnesty International 1997; Interview, Royal PNG Constabulary official, 2006). A senior PNGDF officer acknowledges that 'we reached a situation Kristian, we reached a situation where it was survival of the fittest. We just

[13]The DCP facilitates 'cooperative activities between the Australian Defence Force and regional security forces' (Department of Defence 1995: Chapter 2, page 2). Between 1975 and 1990, defence cooperation with PNG consumed around half the DCP budget.

[14]For example, the shelling of villages, forced displacement, extra-judicial killings (civilians and prisoners of war), the torture of 'suspected' rebels, the rape of village women (a particular form of torture) and the denial of essential humanitarian aid.

didn't trust anybody, and no Bougainvillean trusted us' (Interview, PNGDF official, 2006).

In light of these atrocities, a small but growing anti-war movement in Australia—which had the ear of the Australian Greens and the independent MP Ted Mac—raised questions over the sudden doubling of defence assistance to PNG. The Foreign Minister, in response, claimed that there was no causal relationship between this increase and the Bougainville war. Indeed, the Foreign Minister insisted that 'the [Australian] Government has always supported a peaceful resolution to the Bougainville conflict' (Australian Senate, Record of Proceedings, 21 September 1994). Consequently, any assistance that had been given to the PNG security forces was of a general nature 'provided under long established arrangements' and not directly related to the war on Bougainville (Smith 1990: 71; see also Defence Minister, Australian Senate, Record of Proceedings, 18 August 1992; Foreign Minister, Australian Senate, Record of Proceedings, 23 November 1993). When further questions were raised over the presence of Australian serviceman on Bougainville, the government still refused to acknowledge any untoward activity:

> Visits [to Bougainville] by ADF personnel on loan or exchange with the PNGDF have been restricted to those occasions in which the personnel were required to *perform technical functions for the PNGDF* which it was unable to carry out for itself. There has been *no direct ADF involvement in mounting or participating in PNGDF operations on Bougainville*. (Minister of Defence, Australian Senate, Record of Proceedings, 18 August 1992, emphasis added)

This claim, however, was at odds with reality on the ground in Bougainville.

Indeed, while, at first, ADF officers stationed in PNG were reluctant to assume a more direct role in the conflict—especially in light of security forces atrocities—nonetheless, by early 1990, operational reality on Bougainville was starting to force their hand. A letter written to PNG's Prime Minister by BCL's Chairman captures the mood on the island during this period:

> As I mentioned to you on the phone, I am alarmed at the rate at which the situation in Bougainville has deteriorated in the last month [January]. To the best of my knowledge the militants now appear to be in control of virtually the entire Province with the principal exception of the area around Arawa, Panguna, Kieta and Aropa. (Carruthers 1990)

PNG's cabinet was despondent; even with Australia's assistance, it appeared the PNGDF was not making any headway on Bougainville: 'I think we had to face the reality that the situation was getting out of our control, we could not control it anymore' (Interview, PNG Minister, 2006).

Consequently, during March 1990, the PNG Government elected to withdraw its forces from the island. Following the PNGDF's retreat, the aforementioned military blockade was formally placed around Bougainville (with Australian backing). Recognizing that Australia could no longer afford to play a hands-off role on the ground, ADF officers came to the fore during this bleak period in order to win back territory from the BRA.

At the time, the ADF presence in PNG was still relatively significant. Indeed, Australia's Foreign Minister acknowledged:

> There are currently 103 ADF personnel in PNG, comprising 85 personnel in loan or exchange positions, formed units or project teams; 4 Diplomatically Accredited personnel at the Australian High

Commission, Port Moresby; [and] 14 non-Diplomatic personnel attached to the Australian High Commission. (Australian Senate, Record of Proceedings, 27 November 1990)

However, what this data does not reveal is the important positions held by a number of ADF officers on loan to the PNGDF. Indeed, one senior Australian Defence official suggests that the PNGDF's Australian (ADF) Director of Air Operations 'was really the commander of the PNGDF. . . . He was wonderfully smart, knew a lot, very effective . . . he ran the show, but he did it in a very tactful way' (Interview, DoD official A, 2006). While this comment probably exaggerates matters, it nevertheless evidences the sway of ADF officers inside the PNGDF.

It was these ADF officers—on loan and stationed within the Australian High Commission—who took charge of matters following the PNGDF retreat and constructed a plan to retake Bougainville. One of the officers involved in this effort claims:

I don't think it is stretching the point too much to say that XXXX [ADF Officer on loan to the PNGDF] and a few others, and we were included in this [ADF staff at the Australian High Commission], started to devise an operation to win back Bougainville. Which was to start by getting back Buka,[[15]] getting Buka, and then working to expand your bases, thereby winning it [Bougainville] back in a military sense, when it was in total darkness, the case was totally hopeless. (Interview, ADF official, 2006)

When asked how ADF officers managed to become so active in a military operation ostensibly under PNGDF command, the respondent observed:

Well that is always the difficult part, but look with any idea its an ownership thing, they have got to feel ownership, they have to be comfortable with it. So we realised, we stepped back from the fact it was our idea, you have to organise the whole thing so its like the PNGDF have thought it, otherwise it is not going to work. If people don't have ownership of an approach they are not going to do it. You can see it in everyday life, if you say to your children you know I want you to do it this way, they're not going to do it. It is only when they have ownership of it that they'll do it. (Interview, ADF official, 2006)

The retake strategy engineered by the ADF was a moderate success from Australia's perspective. That is, it at least allowed the PNGDF to have a presence on the island. However, this presence came at a substantial human cost. For example, numerous allegations of torture and extra-judicial killings were reported to the Australian Barrister Rosemary Gillespie, who covertly visited the island in June 1992. One witness informed Gillespie that:

The Papua New Guinea army has tortured and killed people on Buka island . . . [for example] Papua New Guinea armed forces poured petrol on Chief Joshua Sevo and burned him to death. They also shot Chief William Torohin and his wife Agnes. . . . They control everything, what you say, what you do and where you go. (Gillespie 1992: 14)

Publicly, Australian officials rejected or downplayed allegations of atrocities. Nevertheless, in reality:

. . . the ADF, we had people in positions in both the constabulary and the PNGDF, so we knew very well what was going on. Lets not be too cute or naive about it, that's the reality about life. So we had good knowledge about what was going on. (Interview, ADF official, 2006)

[15]A small but densely populated island that lies off Bougainville's northern tip.

Australian concerns and anxieties over the abuses were, on occasions, related to the PNG Government by Australia's Foreign Minister. A PNG Minister recalls that 'He [the Foreign Minister] was quite sensitive about heavy criticism thrown at him in Australia'. Nevertheless, in practice, there was little Australia could do to prevent the atrocities, without endangering their own strategic aims in PNG. For example, were the Hawke-Keating Government to censure the PNGDF by suspending the DCP, there was a real risk that their PNG counterparts would either expose Australia's active role in the conflict or turn to Indonesia for support. Consequently, Australian protests remained discrete and largely symbolic; meanwhile, the Hawke-Keating Government persisted with its comprehensive package of direct military support.

Thus far, it has been argued that the Bougainville crisis initially took the Australian Government by surprise. Nevertheless, employing its intelligence apparatus, Australia was able to swiftly measure the BRA threat. In response to this threat, the Hawke-Keating Government lobbied the PNG state to intensify its counterinsurgency campaign. Additionally, extensive efforts were made through the DCP to prop up an underprepared PNGDF. To this end, ADF officers were deployed to help PNG's security forces retake the island in 1990. It has also been suggested that, without Australian support, the PNGDF would have been unable to operate on Bougainville or harass villagers. This latter fact was well known by senior Australian diplomats, soldiers, bureaucrats and politicians; nevertheless, they chose to walk a tolerant line. Consequently, it is justifiable to conclude that the Australian Government consciously bulwarked a military campaign that targeted civilians on a mass scale.

For a state that claimed that its 'commitment to upholding human rights is absolutely universal in its application' (Foreign Minister, Australian Senate, Record of Proceedings, 23 November 1993), the consequences of exposure were significant. Indeed, even without evidence of Australian involvement in Bougainville, the Hawke-Keating Government faced considerable resistance from the Australian public:

> We got more correspondence, more ministerial correspondence, complaining about the brutality of the PNGDF on Bougainville, than we did complaining about the US–Australia joint facilities, and in the 1980s the joint facility had been the big issue we had to manage publicly. (Interview, DoD official C, 2006)

Accordingly, it would seem appropriate to ask at this stage why the Australian Government would risk serious domestic and international censure by continuing to support a military campaign marked by mass atrocities. In order to formulate an adequate answer to this question, we must examine more closely how Bougainville came to intersect with an ambitious political strategy that underpinned the Australian Government's domestic and international agenda during this period.

### *Australia's Middle-Power Foreign Policy and the Bougainville War*

When the Australian Labour Party (ALP) came to power in 1983, certain enduring features of Australia's political economy were being brought into question following an extended period of economic decline (see, e.g. Fairbrother *et al.* 1997; Mediansky 1992). In response, the ALP Government implemented a radical programme of neo-liberal reforms typified by deregulation, privatization, new public management techniques, wage restraints, large tariff/quota reductions, subsidies for big business and a relaxation

of foreign ownership rules. This wide-ranging programme of domestic reforms was coupled to an ambitious foreign policy agenda, which reached its apex under the leadership of Gareth Evans, who assumed control of the Foreign Affairs portfolio in 1988. While conscious of Australia's middle-power status, Evans nonetheless believed his government could have a disproportionate impact on global and regional governance regimes by targeting priority areas using an innovative range of tactics (Evans 1997: 18). Foremost among these tactics was 'coalition building with "like-minded" countries' (Evans 1993). 'The goal is constant,' Evans claimed, 'maximising the influence that can be brought to bear by Australia and those countries which share interests with us' (Evans 1993).

Owing to its economic dynamism and geographical proximity, the Asia-Pacific region was a primary target of the Foreign Minister's particular brand of middle-power diplomacy. One of the ALP government's most trumpeted achievements in this respect was the creation of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) process in 1989. The Foreign Minister argued that APEC would facilitate:

> Very practical issues like common technical standards, mutual recognition of qualifications, customs harmonisation, removal of non-tariff barriers to trade, and achievement of significant commonality in investment rules, all within the framework of intellectual commitment to 'open regionalism' (that is, regionally based economic cooperation, trade facilitation and liberalisation—but pursued in the context of a larger commitment to a free and open global trade and investment environment). (Evans 1993)

As this remark suggests, international initiatives such as APEC were closely calibrated to the domestic reforms being pushed through by the ALP at home.

An important force that underpinned Australia's growing punch during this period of international activism was the special relationship it shared with the United States. Former Deputy Director of Defence, Paul Dibb (2007), explains:

> Australia's alliance with the United States in many ways underpins its status as an Asia-Pacific power. Without the alliance, Australia would be seen as a smallish country of 20 million people tucked down at the bottom end of Southeast Asia. (Dibb 2007: 33)

One of the more cerebral ministers from the Hawke-Keating era, Kim Beazley, concurs:

> The key to understanding the Hawke Government's foreign affairs and defence policies lies in its handling of American alliance issue. The alliance was a reference point in the formulation of regional policies, and of its global agenda, particularly arms control, and a presence in the defence strategy of self-reliance. Even the efforts to link domestic economic reforms with reform of the international trading system saw the relationship utilised in some key initiatives, including a willingness to cite the valuable role Australia performed in the Western alliance in arguments with the United States over its farm support legislation as Australia began to assert leadership in the campaign for international free trade under the Cairns group. American involvement was an important part of the major Hawke initiative in the Asia/Pacific, for the creation of APEC, which combined overtly regional trade liberalisation policy and, more subliminally, a regional security objective. (Beazley 2003: 350)

As Beazley suggests, US patronage was not given freely; it depended upon Australia playing a productive role in the Western alliance. This role had a number of dimensions. One of the more central dimensions was Australia's willingness to assume its fair share of the global security burden. 'Australia's patch', as it was colloquially known, was delineated in the 1987 Defence White Paper:

This area stretches over 7000 kilometres from the Cocos Islands to New Zealand and the islands of the South-West Pacific, and over 5000 kilometres from the archipelago and island chain in the north to the Southern Ocean. It constitutes about 10 per cent of the earth's surface' (Australian Department of Defence 1987: 2)

In a series of policy statements, the Hawke-Keating Government made clear to its international allies that Australia was prepared to bear the burden of underwriting security in this expansive region. Indeed, they even went so far as to declare Australia's willingness to deploy the ADF in response to domestic crises within the region. The Foreign Minister explained that 'Australia's interest will continue to lie not in resisting change [within its region] but in seeking to ensure that it takes place by peaceful means and within a framework of essentially, democratic political systems' (Evans 1989: 45). According to a senior defence official, this considerable regional undertaking:

. . . was a major talking point with the Americans . . . and certainly in talking with the Americans we always made a big thing about our security support activities in Papua New Guinea and the rest of the South Pacific. We are looking after our patch, we are on the job. (Interview, DoD official A, 2006)

It was in this specific strategic light that the South Pacific assumed renewed importance for Australian foreign policy makers during the late 1980s. However, it was a particularly challenging time for Australia to assume an enhanced regional role. Indeed, with civil unrest in Vanuatu, Fiji, New Caledonia, Palau and PNG being punctuated by a number of diplomatic advances by the Soviet Union and Libya, 'the United States was . . . looking over Australia's shoulder' (Fry 1992: 177). Consequently, when Gareth Evans assumed control of the Foreign Affairs portfolio in 1988, the South Pacific became a significant priority. Evans adopted:

. . . an approach in terms of concentric circles, that is, if Australia was a) to be doing its jobs, and b) to have international credibility, including with the Americans, it had to know its own region absolutely intimately, and had to be capable of responding to any situation, be it a developmental crisis or anything more alarming than that. (Interview, DFAT official B, 2007)

Accordingly, when the Bougainville conflict began to escalate during 1989–90, its importance became greater than the sum of Australia's direct geopolitical and economic interests in PNG. A senior official from the Prime Minister's Department explains:

Certainly there were concerns that this [crisis] might detrimentally impact on Australian citizens and capital, but once again this was a security concern, it was not going to break the Australian economy. What appeared significant was the fact that the South Pacific was Australia's patch, and a barometer of its credibility as an international force. (Interview, PMC official, 2006)

A senior DFAT official concurs:

This was our primary area of responsibility, and primary area of perceived responsibility. So if we were going to have credibility in the conduct of our foreign policy elsewhere, we pretty well had to have strong credibility to begin within our own neighbourhood, in terms of having good policy, applied in a coherent and effective way, that won the respect of the locals and demonstrated a capacity on our part to deal with a situation that might arise, and not to require outside assistance to do so. That was that. (Interview, DFAT official B, 2007)

Consequently, as the PNGDF employed increasingly more punitive tactics to end the uprising on Bougainville, more was at stake than the island's independence.

Accordingly, while Australian officials may have felt some personal discomfort at what was going on in Bougainville, they may have even made this discomfort known discretely to colleagues in the PNG state; nevertheless, they were not going to risk placing a serious question mark over Australia's competency as a regional power by taking the sort of decisive actions needed to *prevent* further mass atrocities. The government's instrumentalization of Australia's regional role to advance state interest in a variety of international forums ensured that too much was at play, especially in light of how closely calibrated these international initiatives were with the ALP's domestic reforms. Of course, the effect of Bougainville's capitulation on Australia's international status would not have been catastrophic or permanent. Nevertheless, it would have generated uncomfortable discussions for Australian diplomats in the nerve centres of international power (principally Washington). This, I would suggest, was enough reason to justify derogating from the government's 'universal commitment' to human rights, while Australian capital, Australian citizens and regional security were compelling ancillary considerations.

## *Conclusion*

The Bougainville conflict rates as one of the darkest episodes in Australian state history. However, as the Hawke-Keating Government prosecuted its interests by proxy, the crimes on Bougainville were inherently deniable. Indeed, to this day, Australia's involvement in the hostilities rarely earns more than a sanitized footnote in foreign policy textbooks, let alone criminological compilations. On the other hand, Australia's contribution to the Bougainville peace process has been given detailed treatment in a number of volumes (see Adams 2001; Wehner and Denoon 2001). Nevertheless, the data presented in this paper suggest that the Australian state shares substantial responsibility for the thousands of civilians killed during the conflict, and the tens of thousands displaced.

In a historical twist, the Foreign Minister who presided over this period of Australian state criminality has now become a prolific commentator on mass atrocities (following an extended period of work with the International Crisis Group). In the introduction to his book, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocities Once and for All*, Evans (2008) observes that:

> For all of us in the policy world for whom the responsibility to protect concept has been more than just a matter of abstract, intellectual commitment, there has invariably been some personal experience that has touched us deeply. . . . For me, as I have indicated, it was my visit to Cambodia in the late 1960s, just before the genocidal slaughter that killed up to a quarter of its people. [Nevertheless] one of the things that has most sustained me over forty years of public life, more than twenty of them working in international affairs, is a fairly unquenchable sense of optimism: a belief that . . . good people, good governments, and good governance will eventually prevail over bad. (Evans 2008: 6–7)

Despite the best efforts of an anti-war movement that rose up in opposition to Australian state criminality—a movement that was maligned and marginalized by the Hawke-Keating Government—'good people, good governments, and good governance' did not prevail over bad during the Bougainville conflict. As a result, the social fabric of this Melanesian island has been acutely stained by the events of the 1990s. These effects will linger for decades to come.

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