

# Assembling Resistance Against Large-Scale Land Deals: Challenges for Conflict Transformation in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea

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Responding to the academic void on the impact of socio-ecological conflicts on peace-building and conflict transformation, I turn to resistance against large-scale land acquisitions in post-war contexts. Promising in terms of reconstruction and economic prosperity, the recent rush on land may, however, entail risks for reconciliation processes and long-term peace prospects. With reference to post-war Bougainville – as yet an autonomous province of Papua New Guinea – the article aims to conceptualize the impact of resistance against large-scale land deals on conflict transformation processes. Applying assemblage theory thereby allows not only analyzing multilayered dynamics in post-conflict societies but also new perspectives on socio-ecological conflicts. The findings suggest increasing resistance against land deals and state territorialization in Bougainville with resemblances to pre-war contentious politics against Panguna mine. Yet, the lasting war trauma, a high weapon prevalence, and growing social friction add to destructive deterritorialization processes that are currently slowed down by the upcoming independence referendum.

**Keywords:** Assemblage; Conflict Transformation; Land Grabbing; Papua New Guinea; Resistance

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## INTRODUCTION

In times of climate change and a combined energy, food, and financial crisis (McMichael, 2013; Ross, 2014), access to and control over land and certain resources are increasingly contested (Hall et al., 2015, p. 467). Although far from being a new phenomenon, the nature of contemporary commercial land and resource acquisitions indicates a shift towards new spatial-temporal dimensions (Wily, 2012). Ever-larger tracts of land or forests are leased for 50 up to 99 years to corporations mainly from BRICS countries, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Most host governments offer a variety of economic and legal incentives, while investors, in turn, promise employment opportunities, infrastructure development, technological transfer, and contributions to local or national food security (Anseeuw et al., 2012; Bloomer, 2012). However, displacement, long-term environmental damage, and socio-cultural as well as political marginalization give rise to increasing resistance against large-scale land acquisitions

and land grabs<sup>1</sup> in the global South. Following the development in Sub-Saharan Africa (Hall, Scoones, & Tsikata, 2015), a large number of land transactions have taken place in Southeast Asia in recent years. Despite certain risks to acquire vast areas for agriculture, mining, or carbon offsetting purposes, profitable conditions increasingly attract investors in post-conflict countries (Tripathi, 2011).<sup>2</sup> Countries as diverse as Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Papua New Guinea, or the Philippines, while struggling to stabilize after years of violent conflict ranging from genocide to anti-regime and secession wars, face a contemporary rush on their lands, forests, and mineral resources (Land Matrix, 2015). At the surface, these developments may seem promising in terms of reconstruction and economic prosperity (Anseeuw et al., 2012; FAO, 2013; Locher & Müller-Boker, 2014). However, they may also entail risks for reconciliation processes and long-term peace prospects due to changing formal and informal land ownership and the often unjust distribution of negative externalities and benefits.

This article refers to the specific situation of reconciliation, land acquisitions, and resistance in post-war Bougainville. Selecting the case of Bougainville, as yet an autonomous province of Papua New Guinea (PNG), is interesting for two reasons. First, armed resistance against the negative socio-ecological impacts of the Panguna copper mine in Bougainville triggered a decade long civil war (1988-1998) – referred to in the earlier period of peace as the “world’s first successful eco-revolution” (Rotheroe, 2000). Second, the independent state of Bougainville (the referendum is expected to take place until 2020) will certainly depend on revenues from foreign direct investments (Kangsi & Damana, 2014, p. 14). Due to the worsening economic situation, the autonomous government is already under pressure to seek (external) financing opportunities such as in the mining or agricultural sector. Taking these recent developments in Bougainville into account, the article aims to conceptualize the impact of resistance against large-scale land deals on socio-economic and political conflict transformation dynamics.

Drawing on Deleuze’s and Guattari’s (1987) poststructuralist assemblage approach, I analyze territorialization processes (e.g., dynamics of land tenure shifts, displacements, and reconciliation) that strengthen or destabilize the identity and capacities of assemblages. Assemblage thinking takes socio-spatial relations into account and permits an expanded understanding for the processes and interactions on different levels and between heterogeneous actors and the environment. The article is organized as follows. I briefly review the existing literature on land deals, conflict transformation, (liberal) peacebuilding, and resistance. Building upon a brief introduction of the assemblage perspective, I develop the theoretical framework. Using the case of Bougainville, the conceptual framework will be further outlined by scrutinizing the issue of land acquisitions, territoriality, as well as the emergence and

1 Following the Tirana Declaration (2011), land grab indicates large-scale land deals associated with at least one of the following aspects: human rights violations, lacking participation, information or compensation of affected communities, or a lack of thorough environmental or social assessments. Whereas the terms land deals, land acquisitions or foreign direct investment generally refer to the commodification of land, they also subsume the predominant phenomenon of land grabbing (Cotula et al., 2014). I mainly use the terms land deals or acquisition, unless I want to highlight implications specifically related to land grabs.

2 Post-conflict situations are vulnerable political and economic transition phases. According to Badran (2014), “peace failure is likely at any time during the first two decades” (p. 213).

impact of resistance in fragile post-war contexts. In this regard, I draw parallels to historic developments, such as earlier resistance practices against Panguna mine on the verge of civil war.

### LAND DEALS, RESISTANCE, AND POST-CONFLICT CONTEXTS

Only recently taken up, resistance and conflicts related to large-scale land use changes and commercial land acquisitions still remain underexplored in scholarly debates (Brent, 2015; Hall et al., 2015). While recent studies dealing with the contemporary land rush are often limited to conflicts around displacement or marginalization (Cotula et al., 2014; Ince, 2014; Mittal, 2013), scant attention has been paid to the impact of emerging resistance and their implications for local or national stability.<sup>3</sup> When examining resistance, the land grabbing literature, as some scholars criticize, usually perceives peasants as victims, whose traditional livelihoods are threatened and who inherently oppose large-scale land deals (Schneider, 2011). Few exceptions challenge this generally accepted assumption, such as Mamonova's (2015) analysis of non-resistance of Ukrainian peasants. This said, most affected communities in some way or other, however, react from below against land deals and particularly land grabbing in various and complex ways (Hall et al., 2015). Local communities are thereby not passive victims but "powerful and potentially transformative agents" who frame their resistance by interpreting their own experiences of marginalization and injustices (Cavanagh & Benjaminsen, 2015, p. 730).

When dealing with resistance against land grabbing in the Global South, most scholars apply framing (Benford & Snow, 2000) and mobilization approaches (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004) or adopt Scott's (1985) concepts of everyday resistance and weapons of the weak (Adnan, 2013; Cavanagh & Benjaminsen, 2015; Malseed, 2008). For instance, Schneider (2011) scrutinizes the complex case of Cambodia and discusses the efficacy of (un-)organized resistance. Accordingly, three kinds of rural resistance can be distinguished: official politics within the respective authorities; everyday resistance which is rather unplanned and indirect; and direct, organized, mostly overt advocacy politics. Depending on external (mainly political) circumstances, resistance may easily transform from everyday resistance to advocacy politics or vice versa. Instances of extreme political repression, coercion, or marginalization can push peasants to "cross the threshold of fear and insecurity" (Adnan, 2007, p. 214). This either means that everyday resistance takes a backseat in favor of more confrontational overt forms of resistance or, conversely, peasants have to find all the more covert means of everyday politics. Referring to this literature, this article considers everyday resistance as well as advocacy politics and centers around the implication of resistance for conflict transformation processes. I refrain from a detailed analysis of resistance against large-scale land deals in Bougainville including framing strategies, organizational structures, and resource mobilization. Instead, the article explores the motivations and means of resisting groups and reveals implications for "(un)peaceful relations" (Menzel, 2015) in post-conflict contexts.

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3 The recent publication of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (Hall et al., 2015) on land grabbing and resistance is an overdue exciting exception.

War-torn societies, donors, and most governments would agree that rebuilding a country in the wake of violent conflict generally aims at establishing conditions that enable sustainable peace in the long run (Pugh, Cooper, & Turner, 2011).<sup>4</sup> Mostly external-driven peacebuilding interventions address four main pillars, each encountering various obstacles: security; justice and reconciliation; social and economic wellbeing; governance and participation (Jarstad & Sisk, 2008; Schneckener, 2005; Woodward, 2013). For years, donors and international organizations have favored the neoliberal approach to peacebuilding (Woodward, 2013, pp. 141-143). In contrast to institutional, security-centered, and civil society approaches, liberal peacebuilding comprises a set of economic and political measures that primarily promote democratization, early elections, and – most important – a free market economy (Campbell, Chandler, & Sabaratnam, 2011). Accordingly, corporations and liberal politicians continue to advocate for the stabilizing and long-term advantages of corporate peace (Haski-Leventhal & Shippa, 2013; Pugh, 2016) which, in turn, further legitimizes foreign direct investments. At the same time, the social dimensions of post-war development are often disregarded (Menzel, 2015), questioning the durable objective of peacebuilding. Likewise, little attention has been paid to the social and symbolic dimensions of land or natural resources in the wake of conflicts (Auweraert, 2013). Here, particularly Unruh's and Williams' (2013) work stands out. They show that contested access and control over land and natural resources not only encourages (armed) conflicts but that the (re-)distribution of land remains a key risk factor during conflict transformation. In a similar vein, UNEP and UNDP (2013) jointly analyzed the natural resource and demobilization, disarmament, reintegration (DDR) nexus with regard to conflict risks and long-term peace prospects to conclude that natural resources and access to land is key to economic recovery and successful reconciliation.

This being said, few scholars have explored the specific impact of large-scale land acquisitions in post-war countries despite potential risks to conflict transformation. Taking land use change, identity, and external interests into account, Gertel, Rottenburg, and Calkins (2014) offer a starting point with a profound analysis of multilayered conflict dynamics resulting from land and resource investments in Sudan. Millar (2015a, 2015b) reveals potential destabilizing effects of land grabbing, that is, increasing economic inequality, in post-conflict Sierra Leone. However, Millar does not consider communal coping strategies or potential synergies between war experiences and means of resistance. With that said, I particularly focus on contentious politics against land deals in Bougainville and aim to reveal resemblances to earlier forms of resistance against Panguna mine that eventually resulted into a full-scale war.

### CONCEPTUALIZING ASSEMBLAGE AND TERRITORIALITY

Assemblage concepts have become increasingly popular tools for expanding understanding of new social formations arising in consequence of the multiple crisis of capitalism and climate change (Larner, 2011). Inspired by the poststructuralist forest

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4 Reychler and Paffenholz (2001) refer to sustainable peace as a “situation characterized by the absence of physical violence; the elimination of unacceptable political, economic and cultural forms of discrimination; a high level of internal and external legitimacy or support; self-sustainability; and a propensity to enhance the constructive transformation of conflicts” (p. 12).

carbon and tenure literature, scholars started drawing attention to the concepts of assemblage and territorialization to explore the impacts and dynamics of large-scale land deals (McMichael, 2012; Sassen, 2013). Thus far largely applied in geography, sociology, and anthropology, assemblage can also add new perspectives to the field of peace and conflict studies, as demonstrated by Hoffman's (2011) differentiated analysis of "war machines" – about the role of young men in the Sierra Leonean and Liberian civil war.

Setting out constructivist accounts of socio-spatial relations and proposing a non-dualistic understanding of nature and society, assemblage theory provides an alternative approach to modernist thinking in terms of conceptualizing the social and natural world. Whereas it shares this critique of modernization theory with political ecology approaches, assemblage theory criticizes the structural (Marxist) thinking in political ecology that seeks to explore causal rather than emergent linkages and neglects the agency of nature (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987; Bryant, 1998; Neumann, 2015; Zimmerer & Bassett, 2003). In order to compensate for these shortcomings, political ecology scholars have increasingly turned to Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT). ANT can, however, only partly address these shortcomings (Braun, 2004; Mutersbaugh & Martin, 2012) as it leaves "little room for politics" (Loder, 2012) and hence, falls short in scrutinizing resistance against large-scale land deals in politically contested post-conflict settings.

In contrast to structural approaches, the strength of assemblage theory derives from its focus on the relationality of things and people (Ong, 2014) that "permits the researcher to speak of emergence, heterogeneity, the decentered and the ephemeral in nonetheless ordered social life" (Marcus & Saka, 2006, p. 101). The notion of assemblage entails a theory of practices and interaction since relations "are made and remade in practices" (Bueger, 2014, p. 62). Accordingly, assemblage thinking moves beyond anthropocentrism and proposes an approach to overcome the highly debated dichotomy between agency and structure (Anderson, Kearnes, McFarlane, & Swanton, 2012, p. 172). Instead of emphasizing the *being*, assemblage apprehends the *making* of socio-natures "whose intricate geographies form tangled webs of different length, density and duration, and whose consequences are experienced differently in different places" (Braun, 2006). This conceptual perspective enables a comprehensive understanding of emerging resistance against land acquisitions in complex conflict transformation situations. In the following, I outline key terms and characteristics of assemblages and develop a conceptual framework.

### **Assemblage and Power From a Socio-Spatial Perspective**

In this article, I largely draw on DeLanda's (2006, 2011) assemblage approach and ontology that builds on Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Following assemblage ontology, each entity can be understood as immanently historically produced; be it a city, a community network, or a nation state. The relation between component parts is contingent obligatory as "a historical result of their close coevolution" (DeLanda, 2006, p. 11). Assemblages do not form a seamless whole (DeLanda, 2011, p. 188; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 698), but imply emergence resultant from its interacting entities (Li, 2007, p. 264). During the process of emergence, component parts retain

their identity and autonomy and, once stabilized, can become component parts of another (larger) assemblage. While the emerging property or features of the larger assemblage may change, the identity of the respective component parts remains. The occurrence of emergent properties depends on interactions that are defined, more specifically, by the entities' capacities (DeLanda, 2011, p. 205). Entities are characterized by a mixture of material and virtual or expressive roles, whereby the latter includes linguistic, but also social expressions, such as solidarity, legitimacy, or prestige. For instance, the expression of identity through architecture or the symbolic relation to land can be regarded as virtual dimensions of a rural community assemblage while the material dimension concerns the physical neighborhood, infrastructure, village gatherings, fields, or forest, to name but a few.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 27), vertical relations are a feature of social space, whereby they understand power as a relation between forces, not between subjects. Force means "any capacity [be it physical, socio-economic, legal, mystical] to produce or change a 'becoming'" (Parr, 2011, p. 111). As a consequence, every event or phenomenon results from hierarchical interaction patterns between forces. Hence, power can be neither apprehended as central governing nor equally distributed but "as a plurality in transformation" (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011, p. 125). This means different and even contrary kinds of power, for example, resistance, domination, authority, manipulation or inducement (Allen, 2004), emerge and operate simultaneously and thus, go beyond commonly applied global-local or state-civil society divisions (McFarlane, 2009, p. 565). Power is also an integral part of territoriality. Often reduced to socially or institutionally occupied space, territory rather encompasses interactions of social life and power. Territory encompasses more than physical tangible land. Rather, it emerges from claims to land (Gertel et al., 2014; Sassen, 2006; Scott, 1998) and is characterized by the dimensions of identity, authority, and economic efficiency. According to Sack (1986), territoriality is an attempt to control or influence people, phenomena, and relations by asserting control over a certain geographic area (pp. 387-388). Notably, nation states apply this logic (Hassner, 1997; Vandergeest & Peluso, 1995) but territoriality also matters in armed conflicts when control over a certain area is established or expanded. However, territoriality cannot be reduced to those who assert control as it may be contested or resisted (Scott, 1998). Politics are in a never-ending state of becoming since a "political assemblage [is] continually made anew, continually reinvented" (Hardt, 1993, p. 121). Thereby, new assemblages representing new interests and organizational structures (e.g., resisting groups) seek to increase their capacities in order to alter contemporary hierarchical patterns.

### **Assembling the Land Grabbing, Resistance, and Conflict Transformation Nexus**

Assemblages are determined along two axes; namely, the processes of territorialization and coding. Between these two processes heterogeneous entities come together and fall apart (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011). Territorialization concerns the internal homogeneity of an assemblage and can be differentiated threefold – although each entity of an assemblage may be involved in all processes simultaneously (DeLanda,

2006, pp. 13-14, 123; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 703-705). Analyses along territorialization and coding processes allow revealing spatial and material features of territories whilst taking social relations into account. In the following, I illustrate and discuss both territorialization and coding processes with regard to resistance against large-scale land deals in post-war societies.

Territorialization stabilizes the identity of an assemblage by strengthening the internal homogeneity and defining its (spatial) boundaries; usually facilitated by the state that “distinguishes the legal from the illegal, the legitimate from the illegitimate, the licit from the illicit” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 8). In this way, the state not only regulates access rights to territory and resources, but also expands control over its population, what Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) critically refer to as “property rights over people” (p. 394). Accordingly, state territorialization implies the exclusion of certain social groups and the monopolization of economic benefits through resource control. This being said, reactions from below can be differentiated threefold: Either communities accept, ignore, or oppose state territorialization efforts (Berry, 2009, p. 24). Although not inevitably linked, large-scale land acquisitions can in most cases be understood as an act of state territorialization that goes beyond the mere material appropriation of land and commodities. Rather, it is an act of gaining control over social, cultural, and economic resources which is sometimes closely associated with elite capture (Dina & Sato, 2014; Hall, 2013). In the case of the Panguna mine, the central government of PNG in Port Moresby not only failed to facilitate a constructive dialogue, but also deliberately promoted labor migration from other parts of the country, thereby further disadvantaging and alienating Bougainville’s communities. Generally, the government’s willingness or commitment to address claims against land grabbing to guarantee free prior and informed consent or compensation for affected communities can be regarded as the virtual or expressive role of the authorities (DeLanda, 2006, p. 57). While land deals may be an act of state territorialization, they are the more if resistance against these practices is suppressed. Opposing groups may be pushed to assemble their forces and strengthen their identity which contributes to territorialization processes *within* resisting communities. In this respect, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) is a case in point. While the government of PNG ignored local claims, acts of everyday resistance and related advocacy politics strengthened the movement’s identity that has been closely intertwined with Panguna.

Deterritorialized assemblages, on the other hand, are rather unstable, heterogeneous, show fuzzy boundaries, and can be distinguished as relative or absolute deterritorialization (Braun, 2008). The former, *reterritorialization*, refers to destabilizing processes opening assemblages up to change which may yield an alternative identity (DeLanda, 2006), for instance, when state-owned land is transferred to an indigenous administration or resistance movements succeed (Braun, 2008; Woods, Anderson, Guilbert, & Watkin, 2013). In contrast, the process of absolute *deterritorialization* shows rather destructive tendencies and involves a much more radical identity change, for instance caused by violence or a severe loss of livelihoods. Both deterritorialization processes can occur simultaneously in the wake of large-scale land deals. The top-down exclusive commodification of land, forests, and minerals destabilizes an assemblage since the former is contingent upon the separation of land from social meanings and its transformation into valorized capital (Gertel et al., 2014; Sassen,

2006). Hence, the range of interactions between the land and its former owners or utilizers inevitably changes and is replaced by a primarily economically motivated relation which often holds resemblances to exploitative patterns. Confronted with eviction and dispossession, communities need to find coping strategies that are often related to certain means of contestation. If (non-violent) resistance succeeds, alternative coping mechanisms do not harm other communities or the environment or in cases where new negotiation opportunities open up, one can speak of reterritorialization. By contrast, in cases of extreme repression or coercion – often (in)directly supported by investors or donors through controversial infrastructure or land governance projects (Fairhead, Leach, & Scoones, 2012; Mousseau & Moore, 2013; Neef, Touch, & Chiengthong, 2013) – communities may be pushed to engage in more confrontational and riskier forms of resistance (Kerkvliet, 2009) as in Bougainville during the 1980s. Accordingly, violence easily escalates and undermines state authority which further accelerates absolute deterritorialization. This may entail destructive long-term impacts, disrupt peace and reconciliation processes, or even promote new armed conflicts (Hoffman, 2011, p. 9).

Complementing territorialization, coding sharpens and maintains the identity of assemblages and is often facilitated by the media. Type and acknowledgement of legitimate authority plays a key role for (de-)coding processes. Highly coded assemblages usually occur in very formal environments, such as hierarchically organized societies in which authority is uncontested. If formal governance or legitimate authority are weakened, for instance as a result of war, assemblages can be referred to as decoded. However, many social assemblages are neither highly coded nor territorialized (DeLanda, 2006, p. 15). Interactions of resistance are regarded as not yet coded. Referred to as “non-place” in spatial terms, resistance suddenly emerges “within historical arrangement(s) of power relations” (Lambert, 2006, pp. 143-144) on the margins of an assemblage. Created at the edge, where the “entity experiences an outside” (Sutton & Martin-Jones, 2011), resistance may transform the whole assemblage. The success of resistance again is closely related to the response of the addressed legitimate authority; be it negotiation, coercion, or disregard.

#### **ASSEMBLING REACTIONS FROM BELOW IN POST-CONFLICT BOUGAINVILLE**

In the following, embedded into historical trajectories I give a brief overview on current land-related developments in Bougainville that became an autonomous province of PNG in the aftermath of the civil war in 2000. In doing so, I seek to uncover resemblances between former and contemporary resistance dynamics against state territorialization through land and resource commodification. PNG ranks among the top ten target countries of large-scale land deals. So far, more than 5.2 million ha of land have been leased, mostly to foreign investors (Land Matrix, 2015) covering roughly 12% of the total surface. Affected communities were left largely uninformed and excluded from negotiation or participation (Global Witness, 2014). Investors are not only interested in PNG’s rich mineral resources but also in commercially untouched rainforest areas that are suitable for agro-industrial plantations. Meanwhile, the government faces various challenges that are (in)directly linked to the land rush, such as illegal logging, massive soil and water degradation, community displacement,

and increasing food insecurity (Mousseau, 2013). In mid-2014, a court decision revoked one third of the Special Agricultural Business Leases (SABL) due to ongoing discrepancies with existing community land tenure. Notwithstanding, the judicial review of the other SABL is still pending while the federal court stopped the implementation of the court decision in early 2015 (Kalebe, 2015).

### Increasing State Territorialization

The autonomous status of Bougainville exempts the island's resources from SABL regulations but nonetheless the island increasingly attracts investors. In the wake of the secession war (1988-1998), a debate on (sustainable) mining and alternative ways of foreign direct investments was initiated in the early 2000s. After seven years of negotiation, the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG)<sup>5</sup> passed a new interim mining act in August 2014 to address Bougainville's specific needs. According to the new bill, minerals are now owned by traditional landowners who also have veto power over exploration licenses, while the ABG owns minerals of non-customary land (PNG Mine Watch, 2014). However, critics claim the new law paves the way for the long contested Panguna mine<sup>6</sup> to re-open without landowner consent and, moreover, privileges former operator BCL in negotiating new mining licenses in the area. Amid this controversial discussion on long-term sustainable investments, conflict transformation<sup>7</sup>, and low financial capacities, the Bougainville Inward Investment Bureau (BIIB) was recently established. Aiming to attract responsible investment that meets Bougainville's specific context and needs, the BIIB developed ethical principles and identified four key investment sectors including agriculture, tourism, fisheries, and mining (BIIB, 2014). Still, the BIIB needs to prove its commitment and involve Bougainvilleans a lot more into the negotiation process of utilizing the country's resources. The pending re-opening of Panguna mine, the allocation of further exploration licenses, and increasing agro-industrial acquisitions suggest that a contrary development is underway. President Momis has always supported large-scale mining and advocates for its (mainly financial) advantages (Kangsi & Damana, 2014, p. 14). Moreover, corruption undermines a constructive debate on the pros and cons of large-scale mining and thus helps to mobilize pro-land and resource investment forces within the ABG and the elite. In addition to internal power dynamics, external pressure due to financial dependencies mainly from Australia, PNG (see Cochrane, 2016, on PNG's ambitions to buy Rio Tinto's Panguna shares), and particularly China encourages the ABG to sell off its land, forests, and minerals (Roka, 2014). These de-

5 Following the peace agreement between the government of PNG and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), the ABG was established in 2000. Regarded as one of PNG's great elder statesman, president Grand Chief Dr. John Lawrence Momis was re-elected in 2015. During the 1970s, he co-drafted the constitution of PNG but also helped to establish secessionist movements in the North Solomons (which includes Bougainville). Taken hostage by the BRA in 1997, he nevertheless continued advocating for reconciliation between ex-BRA combatants and the Papua New Guinea Defense Force whilst preparing for the independence referendum (Radio New Zealand, 2015).

6 See Vernon (2005) for more detailed information on the socio-ecological impact of the Panguna copper mine.

7 For further information on the peacebuilding process see Regan (2002) and Braithwaite, Charlesworth, Reddy, and Dunn (2010).

velopments point to increasing state territorialization that is closely linked to broader dynamics of Bougainville's state formation and consolidation (Corson, 2011; see Cavanagh & Benjaminsen, 2015, on similar dynamics in Uganda).

### **Contested Land Deals and the Risk of Re-Opening Panguna**

Recently, there has been growing discontent and public resistance against the allocation of land to investors and commodity commercialization. For instance, affected communities in Tinputz that have occupied the plantations since the end of the war continuously oppose the unjust allocation of land to foreign investors (Laukai, 2009). Since 2011, a number of protests, for example, against the Torokina palm oil plantation and related cases of corruption, have been reported (Ambros, 2014). These and other examples reveal that rural resistance in post-war Bougainville is fairly well organized despite decentralized and weak political structures (Simili & Chand, 2013). Since autonomous Bougainville can be referred to as neither highly coded nor territorialized, it enables overt and public forms of resistance. As such, opposing groups address their claims directly to responsible authorities by means of advocacy politics like demonstrations, sit-ins, or through legal means.

The current forms of resistance indicate processes of non-violent reterritorialization that may alter the whole assemblage. However, Bougainville's history and the outbreak of civil war shows that contentious politics may easily turn into armed resistance. Back then, mingling with the idea of secession, initial protest against the socio-ecological impacts of Panguna copper mine (e.g., contamination-related health risks, increasing conflicts with labor migrants, and social differentiation) turned into a full armed conflict. Certainly, the roots of war are much more complex but the legacy of the conflict and particularly Panguna mine grievances are still present and influence contemporary politics (Ipp & Cooper, 2013). Shortly after the war, affected communities claimed for redistributive justice concerning still pending compensation payments by legal means. In 2000, a group of affected Panguna residents filed a human rights suit in the US against Panguna mine operator RioTinto/BCL but lost the case in 2013. Panguna remains a symbol of social injustices in Bougainville and the envisaged re-opening, eagerly promoted by president John Momis (PNG Mine Watch, 2015), is highly contested. It has been argued that the ABG provokes a new armed conflict if it continues to ignore the grievances and growing frustration of the population (Kangsi & Damana, 2014, p. 15). The ABG consultation process (2010-2014) on the future of the mine adds to this and has led to growing mistrust in the government. Communities have criticized that the consultation was neither fully inclusive nor transparent; many felt misrepresented going along with suspicions of local elite bribery or manipulation of the public opinion (Kangsi & Damana, 2014, p. 34). Yet, it seems that affected communities would agree to re-open Panguna mine under certain conditions: after independence; under local ownership/control; after compensation, reparation and reconciliation; and after alternative options for economic development have been explored (Kangsi & Damana, 2014, p. 32). As it is unlikely that BCL will agree to these terms, the re-opening remains highly disputed.

### Early Resistance, Emerging War, and Bougainville's Reterritorialization

Contemporary means of non-violent resistance against land acquisitions, such as demonstrations, sit-ins, petitions, or public media campaigns, resemble advocacy politics and mobilization efforts from the 1960s to the 1980s, prior to the outbreak of armed conflict (EJOLT, 2014; May, 2004). From an assemblage point of view, years of resistance politics 'on the margins' successfully transformed, and in this case de- and reterritorialized, the whole assemblage. Analyzing the early years of opposition, it becomes clear that Port Moresby's disregard and the continuing marginalization of indigenous and peasant populations largely contributed to transform advocacy politics into more confrontational violent resistance and, hence, slowly facilitated deterritorialization. During the exploration phase, confronted with claims of the Panguna Landowners Association (PLA) the PNG government offered compensation and an unpopular revenue sharing scheme (Ipp & Cooper, 2013). However, the promised payments never materialized. At the same time, the emergence of a relatively wealthy local elite encouraged the intensification of social frictions which also involved long-standing family or village disputes over access to land (Kangsi & Damana, 2014, p. 8). Growing concern over the health-related consequences of mining which came to light after the environmental assessment was published in late 1988 eventually triggered the shift from protest to armed resistance (Kangsi & Damana, 2014; May, 1990).

Francis Ona, leader of the militant PLA wing and former BCL employee, adopted the post-colonial and anti-missionary critique of the Bougainvillean Hahali and Dameng movements<sup>8</sup> in order to mobilize and legitimize violent dissidence within the population (Regan, 2002). In sharp contrast to the common assumption that Bougainvilleans are "a united people, resisting colonialism, mines, and, later, Papua New Guinea" (Regan, 2002), opinions on grievances, means of resistance, or separatism vary widely depending on the socio-economic status and the colonial experience of individuals or on community level. During the course of war, this led to separations within the resistance movement and new conflict lines between rivaling groups. Francis Ona realized the importance of unity and a strong internal identity (one could speak of highly territorialized and relatively coded resistance) for the movement's success and, thus, linked the struggle against Panguna mine to claims for independence: "We are not part of your country any more. . . . We belong to the Republic of Bougainville and we are defending our island from foreign exploitation" (Francis Ona, 12 April 1989, cited in May, 2004, pp. 274-275).

The early territorialization of the resistance movement manifested the wish for sovereignty in Bougainville which was, at that time, only expressed by few less influential groups. Supported by mining operator BCL, Port Moresby's (para-)military answer to the uprisings and a nine month embargo of the Panguna area strengthened local solidarity and, hence, internal territorialization of the, by then, armed resistance movement. In turn, this facilitated socio-political reterritorialization dynamics in the province of Bougainville, which continue to this day. Access to power and the

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8 The Dameng have supported the armed struggle since 1989 while criticizing Panguna mine in three respects: the degradation of land that is key to all social relations, the negative impact of money that was introduced as means of payment in a previously egalitarian society, and the scale of labor migration. For more information on post-colonial movements and resistance in Bougainville, see Griffin (2005).

distribution of resources in the emerging national state remain continuously negotiated and contested. Moreover, as a consequence of the war, the mode of coding changed in favor of traditional authorities (e.g., the council of elders<sup>9</sup> and the community auxiliary police) that filled the institutional void after PNG's state authority withdrew. Ever since then, traditional authorities have once again become key institutions in communal decision making and conflict resolution processes (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Regan, 2002). Despite a patriarchal tendency resulting from colonial influence, the political representation of women has a long history in Bougainville and women played a pivotal and recognized role in the peace talks (Quay, 2012).<sup>10</sup>

### **Deterritorialization Dynamics: Reconciliation Under Threat?**

Against this backdrop, large-scale land deals seem to be an all the more sensitive issue in contemporary Bougainville and the threshold to take up violent everyday means of resistance is relatively low. Reasons for the potential of (violent) conflict are manifold and include a generally high readiness to stand up for one's rights, the frustration about the lost Rio Tinto/BCL trial, and the overall difficult socio-economic situation in Bougainville (Ipp & Cooper, 2013; Jennings & Claxton, 2013). Moreover, the disarmament process led by the UN peacekeeping mission was not successful, that is, a large number of weapons still remain in circulation (Ipp & Cooper, 2013; Spark & Bailey, 2005). Some villagers, ex-combatants, and gangs kept their weapons to guarantee self-protection in case of anew land or resource grabs facilitated by the (ignorant) state and powerful corporations (PNG Mine Watch, 2015). While similar narratives are also common in other post-war disarmament contexts, the experience of a successful uprising against operator BCL and Port Moresby reinforces the self-defense discourse in Bougainville. This being said, Panguna mine is still under the control of former BRA rebels who claim control and access to the mine and stop any further explorations.

Growing friction between the ABG and most Bougainvilleans – mainly resulting from the government's contemporary land and resource investment policy – adds to decreasing trust in state authorities and hence, to slow deterritorialization and decoding in the autonomous province. While the government seeks revenues, many Bougainvilleans advocate for a people-centered development. They demand alternatives to intensive mining, such as subsistence horticulture, animal farming, alluvial gold panning, or fishing and prawn farming (Kangsi & Damana, 2014, p. 43). The allocation of land to influential investors from China, PNG, or Australia will, hence, remain among the core challenges to Bougainville's future. Threats to access to and control of land may have far reaching socio-cultural implications and could easily escalate local conflicts that are often legacies from colonial times aggravated through the war (Ipp & Cooper, 2013). Whether the destructive impact of deterritorialization materializes will depend on the government's response to current claims of groups

9 The council of elders facilitates a "symbiotic relationship between customary authority and state authority" (Braithwaite et al., 2010). Elected or based on heredity, elders could also be church, women, or youth leaders.

10 Clan membership is mainly determined by matrilineal lines and in many parts of Bougainville land is owned by women (Kangsi & Damana, 2014).

resisting land deals and the consideration of the lasting Panguna trauma. Even more important, the government's willingness to enter into a genuine dialogue with concerned communities will influence whether resisting groups pursue currently applied advocacy strategies or shift to everyday resistance including violent means. For the time being, the immanent independence from Port Moresby seems to be of higher priority and a catalyst for a united peaceful Bougainville, thus slowing down deterritorialization. Nonetheless, critiques concerning the continuing land allocation to investors and the re-opening of Panguna mine which can severely undermine the peace and reconciliation process abound (Ipp & Cooper, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

The developed framework and the explorative approach of this article are a first attempt to conceptualize the nexus of resistance, land acquisitions, and conflict transformation by using the case of Bougainville. Embedded in the global land grabbing discussion, the article illustrates the fertility of assemblage thinking for analyzing socio-ecological conflicts and linking various academic fields, such as peace and conflict studies, political ecology, and agrarian studies. The assemblage approach enables new perspectives on post-war state territorialization efforts, related conflict transformation, and peacebuilding obstacles and reveals potential conflict dynamics. The analysis exemplifies how early resistance against the Panguna mine emerged on the margins and eventually transformed the whole assemblage. The success of the resistance movement, the victory of BRA, and Bougainville's path to independence can be understood as a perpetuation of these dynamics. This said, applying assemblage theory offers insights into the transformative power of (successful) resistance struggles and their socio-economic and political impact on various levels.

Exemplifying the developed framework with reference to the case of Bougainville also gave insights into its possible shortcomings and strengths. Albeit every theory sooner or later fails to do justice to the complexity of the world, assemblage is able to grapple with a fair share of complex and ever-changing realities. Applying this perspective unveiled co-occurring and partly contrary territorialization processes with regard to Bougainville's path towards independence, ongoing conflict transformation processes, and more specifically local resistance against land and resource commodification. This multilayered focus may complicate the analysis but allows a thorough snapshot of contemporary issues and dynamics around land deals, questions of (sustainable) development, and contentious politics. It became apparent that Bougainville's continuing reterritorialization process goes back to earlier post-colonial movements and contentious politics against Panguna mine. Yet, concurrently large-scale land deals add to deterritorialization tendencies that have gained strength although decelerated by the struggle towards independence and the reconsideration of traditional authorities. In recent years, Bougainville's governmental authority has gained increasing legitimacy which indicates a gradual development towards a more coded assemblage. Whether deterritorialization may challenge the newly independent nation depends on the government's willingness and ability to implement its sustainable development policy. Non-consensus based agro-industrial projects or mining may offend local communities and pose a threat to Bougainville's very identity which

is closely intertwined with (ancestral) land, the trauma of Panguna, and the civil war. Additionally, the dwindling threshold to take up violent means combined with a high weapon prevalence may cause serious harm to reconciliation and conflict transformation. Finally, the findings reveal the complexity of contestation on the one hand and land acquisition dynamics in post-conflict societies on the other hand. Certainly, more research needs to be done on interlinkages between war experiences and applied means of resistance.



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