

Independent Declarations: Attributions of Peoplehood in News Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the colonial and postcolonial history of Bougainville (North Solomons Province from 1975 to 2005, Autonomous Region of Bougainville thereafter) people have asserted their sovereignty against the Papua New Guinea (PNG) state in many different ways, from demands for land rights to unilateral declarations of independence. In the 1970s and 1980s, *Arawa Bulletin*, a community-owned nonprofit magazine, bore accidental witness to many of these struggles for recognition, including a clan's dispute over public use of its land in 1987 and the outbreak of a secessionist war in 1989. News narratives from this period apply a strategy for attribution of people's political claims in which provincial government officials are delegated a role as co-narrators of events. In the provincial officials' narratives, popular sovereignty has two faces—primordial and civil—which only local government can harmonize. The elite model promotes institutional reform but erases alternative modes of political consciousness.

In 1987, a community in the rural northern part of Bougainville began to agitate for a new agreement on the use of its land with the Papua New Guinea (PNG) central government. The community believed that its natural environment had been exploited throughout the colonial era. As a remedy, it demanded huge sums of money from the postcolonial state. From the distant capital of Port Moresby, the national government initially reacted with indifference. To gain attention, the community repeatedly sabotaged a microwave repeater station

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on its territory on the top of Mount Takaniat, cutting off telephone connections between Bougainville and the mainland. Finally, political leaders and officials came to the bargaining table, and the community and the national government made a new agreement for compensation for the mountaintop site.

As the controversy over Takaniat was resolved in 1988, a new dispute over another rural Bougainville community's land began. A slate of young activists was elected to lead an association representing the communities whose lands were mined by Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL), a joint venture of the PNG state and Conzinc Rio Tinto, a multinational corporation. The new executive of the Panguna Landowners' Association (PLA) had promised to seek a revised agreement between the landowners of the Panguna mine site, the central government, and BCL. They also argued that the landowners had been abused since the colonial era by an unfair agreement for compensation. Now, their lives, homes, and livelihoods were increasingly threatened by the mine's pollution. When the national government balked at reviewing the original agreement and BCL denied the extent of the damage caused by Panguna mine, the PLA said it would take direct action. After a meeting ended once again in deadlock, the secretary, Francis Ona, said that he and the PLA now wanted the mine to close permanently, for BCL to pay 10 billion kina for environmental damage, and for Bougainville to secede from PNG. A campaign of sabotage followed, leading to guerrilla attacks on the BCL, police, and civilian targets and then years of fighting between the PNG military and a rebel force who flocked to Ona's call for independence.

It seems obvious in hindsight that the former conflict was a typical case of a compensation demand by a rural PNG community and that the latter was a rebellion against the state. Yet in the early stages of each conflict, they were more alike than different. The political leaders of North Solomons Province (the official name of Bougainville and surrounding islands until 2005) initially advocated for both communities. More importantly, in each case, the protesters made claims to be a kind of people, a distinct political community whose collective autonomy deserved to be recognized. For Frank (2010), the claims over Takaniat and the demand for Bougainville's independence are "constituent moments." By taking back a mountain or fighting to expel the sovereign state, individuals claim to speak for a people whose right to self-determination has been denied. Yet the community who claimed Takaniat was always only known as the Motaha clan while Ona's supporters were known as insurrectionists, militants, secessionists, and terrorists. Why is it possible for a clan to challenge the sovereignty of the state when other kinds of people cannot? What legitimates a clan's peoplehood yet denies peoplehood claimed for Bougainville?

The exercise of the constituent power of peoplehood is always an act of communication. As such, these moments of constituency cannot bring a new socio-political entity—a people—into being on their own. Communicative acts only effectively construct a new social reality through their recontextualization by an audience.¹ Any revolutionary struggle, or any claim to autonomy, is by definition a rupture of an existing constitutional order and hence is unauthorized by definition. Yet when it succeeds, and a new people claims its own sovereignty, it is because legitimacy of its founding act has been conferred from the outside. It is only in hindsight that an origin of a particular political order, and a specific people, appears. When a new narrative of a people is established, the constituent moment is retroactively legitimated by this people's presumed natural sovereignty (Smith 2003; Bernal 2017).

Throughout Bougainville's colonial and postcolonial history, there are many examples of resistance to, and contestation of, forms of domination, as well as a long-standing and widespread desire for greater autonomy, including even a hope for secession from PNG as an independent state.² Many such examples are documented in the pages of *Arawa Bulletin*, a magazine published from the founding of the town of Arawa in 1972 until the abrupt pullout and blockade of Bougainville by the PNG defense forces in 1990. Although the *Bulletin* began as a simple club newsletter for the newly arrived residents of a town built for the employees of the Panguna mine, it nonetheless became an accidental witness to a number of local political projects of democratization and decentralization. By the 1980s, the amateur enterprise had matured into a professional weekly publication with a comprehensive news report of local affairs. During this period, the magazine is also characterized by a distinct strategy of incorporating various kinds of voices into its narratives.

Specifically, *Arawa Bulletin* news discourse attributes epistemic responsibility for political claims to different narratological figures who represent different types of sovereign peoples. These choices determine which social categories of person are identified as political agents in news events and what kind of legitimacy their actions possess. When acts of resistance by rural communities are narrated, the *Bulletin* voices at least some of its description of them as the reported speech of elite advocates for the communities, usually provincial politicians and officials. These speakers who appear in *Bulletin* accounts generally categorize the resistance in relation to the rurality of the communities. When

1. Arndt (2010); Graham (2011); Rutherford (2012); Slotta (2017, 2015).

2. Wesley-Smith and Ogan (1992); Griffin and Togolo (1997); Havini (1990); Griffin (2005); Regan (1998).

the narrative of a conflict is voiced as an elite advocate's view, it emphasizes the unruly yet righteous anger of oppressed and marginalized landowners. In the pages of *Arawa Bulletin*, so-called clans and other kinds of rural indigenous communities are reformulated a delimited kind of political agency, one that needs to be channeled and supplemented by the elite leaders who are positioned as brokers of legitimacy. Ona and his supporters, however, reject the subordinate position they are assigned in the *Bulletin* hierarchy of epistemic responsibility. Not only are their efforts to tell their own story illegible in the elite conceptual framework of politics, *Bulletin* news narratives effectively erase the illocutionary force of their constituent acts. In this article, I argue that what makes a constituent speech act effective is neither who possesses standing to speak nor how such speech acts are received. Instead I will show that perlocutionary effects of claims to peoplehood lie in the uptake they are given when they become part of other people's narratives about these claims. To wit, we should not assume that subalterns cannot speak because their audiences can only hear what is familiar and recognizable to them (cf. Spivak 1988; Rancière [1999] 2004). We should instead examine who passes along their speech, how it is represented and evaluated metapragmatically, and to what kind of person (or people) it is ultimately attributed.

People Declaring People

Beginning with Rousseau's contractualist theory of the state, the concept of popular sovereignty has presented a paradox: A democratic system of government acquires legitimacy from the will of the people, yet there is no people who can express this collective will until such a system is put into place. Following Arendt and Honig, Frank (2010) proposes that democratic sovereignty exists in the activity of people-making rather than a preexisting social or material community (see also Honig 1991). A recognizable "people" comes into being, first, when certain individuals claim to transcend one constitutional order that disenfranchises them and, second, when their claimed peoplehood, and hence the legitimacy of their previously illegitimate rupture of political order, is ratified as a new context for politics. For Frank, the retroactive recontextualization of an illegal act as an expression of popular self-determination is always partial. The legitimation of what Smith (2003) calls a "story of peoplehood" will entail casting off an unrecognized remainder of the same constituent power. Hence for Frank democracy must continually renew itself through an openness to other constituent moments and the enactment of new boundaries of the sovereign people.

In this light, any attempt to establish a new political order can be seen as an instance of a general problem of speech acts, and the inherently dialogical quality

of the symbolic construction of social reality. In his deconstruction of Austin's ([1962] 1975) theory of the performativity of speech acts, Derrida (1988) argues that all speech depends on its iterability in order to have meaning, including its practical effect as an act. An utterance's iterability is its capacity to be detached from the event of its production in a specific place and time as a text that can be compared to other possible texts in other places and times. What Austin would call the perlocutionary aspect of an utterance, or its effect, does not depend on any fixed, external set of conditions that are either conducive or not to the illocutionary force of the utterance. Rather, subsequent metadiscursive operations formulate relations of similarity to other possible or past utterances in different situations (Lee 1997). Derrida seems to have this in mind when he argues that the illocutionary force of an utterance lies in its "citationality." As a kind of speech act, a constituent moment invokes a people, but for Derrida this act in itself does not create that people. Rather the act "has to maintain within itself the signature" of an author (Derrida 1986, 8). How is the identity of a "people" maintained within the act?

One might initially consider this question in terms of Austin's sense of uptake or how a speaker secures recognition among an audience of the intended perlocutionary effect of a particular illocutionary act (Austin [1962] 1975, 116–18). Yet uptake is never entirely within the control of a speaker. Freadman (2002), for instance, restates Austin's argument in light of Bakhtin's concept of dialogue (Bakhtin 1987). In this perspective, no speech act exists in isolation. Performers of speech acts necessarily address these acts to certain recipients and anticipate their responses. The uptake of the speech act lies in the response from an audience, specifically a new speech act that represents the original as a particular kind of text, and thereby either extends its illocutionary force or frustrates it (Rutherford 2012; Slotta 2015). Hence Derrida's concepts of citationality and iterability are better conceived in terms of interdiscursivity. As Ball (2018, 156) writes, "Speakers may sense the continuity of discourse through time, but we need to recognize that this continuity is an achievement requiring semiotic labor that imposes order over individual moments of speech."

Acts of constituent power successfully bring a people into existence when this people as a discursive construct is taken up by others and retains some of its features across discourse. Most importantly, if a constituent speech act rests on the contributions of "semiotic labor" of others to create its interdiscursive continuity, then these acts are never accomplished in a single event, nor are their effects ever truly final, nor immune to reformulation. Their sociohistorical effect on the world emerges from the chains of texts that they elicit in response (see Agha 2011; Inoue

2011). Therefore, each act of constituent power is shaped by a clash of voices, both those that they anticipate as addressees and those that subsequently reinterpret it. As I argue, the “attributions of peoplehood” to a group shifts incrementally through this process.

News discourse in mass journalism consists of telling other people’s stories; that is, writing the news is the act of renarrating the speech acts of others. Every news narrative is a link in a chain of texts, and each link contains a clash of different voices. Therefore news narrative is a privileged site for examining the contest over the uptake of illocutionary acts. Indeed, the role of quotation is a question of long-standing concern for scholars concerned with news discourse.³ Tuchman (1972), for instance, argues that the selective voicing of certain narrated facts as the reported speech of others is a “ritual” by which reporters and their publications position themselves as neutral and objective (see also Wortham and Locher 2009). Moreover, it is often through the voicing of claims and views as quotations of specific kinds of figures—scientists, experts, or other respected authorities, for instance—that news discourse is able to express a particular point of view while maintaining a veneer of neutrality. In particular, as Wortham and Locher (1999) argue, news narratives will often attribute a characterization of the nature, value, and efficacy of one instance of communicative behavior to another voice in the narrative, thus embedding a narrator’s preferred metapragmatic categories in the reported speech of another.⁴ Such “embedded metapragmatics” draw attention to a specific uptake of a speech act over the original act itself.

Yet reported speech in news narratives does more than smuggle in the reporter’s preferred evaluations of specific events or persons in the narrative. A news narrative’s strategy for representing and attributing discourse to distinct voices determines the differential uptake of the speech acts of different actors in news events. Drawing on Bakhtin (1987) and Voloshinov (1986), Tannen (1989) argues that all so-called reported speech is better understood as constructed dialogue in a narrative. For Bakhtin, all speech is “shot through with intentions and accents” of other voices (1981, 293). Constructed dialogue intervenes in this polyphony to assign selected voices to specific persons, that is, types to which voices are attributed as realizations (338–39). A narrator’s attributions also assigns different kinds of

3. Dijk ([1988] 2013); Fairclough (1988); Caldas-Coulthard (1994); Wortham and Locher (2009); Arndt (2010); Graham (2011); Bednarek (2016); Xin and Gao (2021).

4. Wortham and Locher’s (1999) canonical example is a reporter’s statement that “[George] Bush claimed that [Bill] Clinton lied.” The reporter is narrating Bush’s illocutionary act of *claiming* but also incorporates Bush’s characterization of Clinton’s words as the perlocutionary act *lying* as part of the primary narrative. Hence the reporter avoids personally participating in a particular uptake of Clinton’s original statements, which would be seen as partial.

responsibility for events to these figures (Hill and Irvine 1993; Hill and Zepeda 1993). When, for instance, a narrator represents other people's discourse in meta-pragmatic expressions, they make them responsible for their acts as they are seen as described by an omniscient narrator, rather than how they are seen subjectively.

Rather than being the inclusion of another speaker's words, direct discourse, as Voloshinov (1986, 120–23) argues, reflects an ideology that values dogmatic authority and thus a preference for creating an effect of faithful transcription of an original text. When direct discourse is ideologically framed in this way, narrative discourse becomes a co-constructed dialogue. By employing direct discourse, journalists cede the floor to a specific person in the world they narrate (Scollon 1997). In personal narrative, one's narrated self also performatively positions oneself as speaker with respect to an audience (Wortham 2000). When a journalist's sources are narrators of themselves, they are likewise authorized to position themselves within the narrated world of the primary narrative, unlike those whose perlocutionary acts are narrated by the journalist. There are two important implications of this kind of delegation: First, when a voice is authorized to speak in this way, its otherwise unauthorized speech act can become constituent moment that transforms the extant political order. Second, when delegated narrators describe the speech acts of others, associate them with specific genres of action, and evaluate their efficacy, they constitute themselves as particular kinds of actors at the expense of the voices they interpret.

In what follows, I examine two cases in which *Arawa Bulletin* responds to acts of grassroots people making by taking up the evaluations of peoplehood made by elites. By the 1980s, Bougainville had a provincial government and *Arawa Bulletin* had become a community-owned magazine overseen by a board of trustees who represented the province and its people (Layton 1992). With a mandate to serve the community and the province, the *Bulletin* gradually expanded its news coverage and recruited a number of reporters (Layton 1990). By the 1980s, *Arawa Bulletin* was more attuned to the political attitudes and efforts of rural communities than it was at the time of its founding as a club newsletter (Layton 1992). Its news reporting also exerted greater epistemic control over the interpretation of rural protest. Specifically, *Bulletin* news narratives of rural and landowner protests delegate epistemic responsibility to key officials in the provincial government, who in turn narrate the communicative behavior of people they identify as indigenous landowners. By delegating authorship to these speakers, the *Bulletin* allows them to constitute themselves as the people's representatives at the expense of alternative claims to peoplehood. Each news narrative consists of representations of discourse that in turn represents the discourse of less powerful

agents. These nested levels of voices trace a model of split sovereignty in which both rural landowners and elected leaders have competing yet equally legitimate and interdependent forms of authority. While this attribution strategy comprehensively accounts for the Takaniat controversy, the model of split sovereignty cannot be sustained when applied to the case of Ona's revolt.

Voices in the Wilderness

In late 1987, a rural community near Tinputz in the north of Bougainville won recognition of its customary ownership of the land of Mount Takaniat in a court decision (*Arawa Bulletin* 1987). The community then began to press for a new lease agreement from the Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (PTC), a state-owned agency that operated a repeater station on the mountaintop. In its new role as a community-owned news publication, *Arawa Bulletin* often reported on these kinds of rural politics. Its journalists oriented their news narratives with reference to the dominant construction of reality that is reflected in official information. The owners of Mount Takaniat, for instance, are consistently identified as the "Motaha clan," which is one among many other clans in the area that each have "traditional" ownership of different territories. In this respect, *Bulletin* news narratives rely on officials as "authorized knowers" of facts and, hence, reflect the same kinds of institutional bias of other mass news media (Fishman 1978, 96). Yet in another equally important respect, *Bulletin* news discourse also authorizes specific people's self-knowledge. Mass journalism often treats some statements by officials as not only highly credible but self-verifying because it assumes they are efficacious speech acts (Fishman 1978, 96–97). A public official's comment describing a policy can be reported as fact because by being uttered to a reporter it is performatively enacted as fact. Likewise, *Bulletin* news discourse grants the role of self-knower to specific figures in its primary narrative. It attributes a subsidiary narrative of events to these speakers and so endorses their self-positioning in the primary news narrative (Wortham 2000).

Given this, an important element of these articles' attribution strategy is the "embedded metapragmatics" of a narrative speech act that is reported as discourse in the primary news narrative (Wortham and Locher 1999). For example, consider the following passage from a report (*Arawa Bulletin* 1987) on the Takaniat dispute following sabotage by Motaha:⁵

5. In this and other transcripts, I use boldface type to indicate portions of the text that are framed as quotations. I use small capitals to highlight direct discourse and roman type to indicate other kinds of quotation including indirect discourse and partial, or "slipping," quotation (Bednarek 2016, 35). Phrases are also underlined to indicate that they are metapragmatic expressions that characterize or evaluate discourse as an action. In important respects, my markup of texts is incomplete because there is, first, a cline between direct and indirect

Transcript 1

- 1 Mr Tsiamalili says **it is now up to PTC in North Solomons to talk to their headquarters to see what positive steps can be taken to top up the existing payments.**
 - 2 Mr Tsiamalili feels that **the people are now running out of patience with negotiators and that some kind of compromise is necessary.**
 - 3 Mr Ray Clatworthy of PTC in Arawa would not comment on the matter.
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Peter Tsiamalili is the chief secretary to the provincial government. He appears prominently in this and other reports on the controversy as an attributed source and principal actor. This article, for instance, highlights a direct negotiation between himself and the clan to stop its interference with the repeater station, but only mentions the previous damage and disruption to phone service in passing. Here we see that the journalist as primary narrator attributes statements to Tsiamalili that characterize other communicative behavior by other actors: according to Tsiamalili, the Motaha clan's actions are a sign of their impatience (line 2). In so doing, the article incorporates Tsiamalili's own narrative self-positioning into the primary narrative. His relative objectivity in the primary narrative is a side effect of his own narrative description of his interactions with Motaha people. Motaha appears as a stereotypical instance of angry landowners because of the metapragmatic categories applied to their communication. By contrast, the article's typification of Tsiamalili as a distinct person mirrors the performed self in his narration.

More importantly, Tsiamalili's view of Motaha is a component of his unrealistic narrative of the situation in which he attributes future, desired communicative behavior to representatives of the local PTC office, the national headquarters, and Motaha (line 1). Tsiamalili's description of the current situation includes a model of how the conflict should be resolved. This is, furthermore, a prescriptive metanarrative that models the relationship among categories of actors as components of the state. In this metanarrative, when a landowning clan demands compensation for the public use of its land, the central government should be willing to negotiate, and both parties should be willing to compromise. Tsiamalili is also positioning himself in this model as a representative of the provincial government, which plays the role of intermediary. The article also attributes an absence of speech to the local manager of the PTC (line 3). That is, the main narrative adopts the embedded prescriptive metanarrative as a formula for attributing what other figures in the narrative do not say.

discourse, and second, an overall metapragmatic function of narrative generally (i.e., a narrator's reporting verbs are also metapragmatic expressions). My intent here is merely to illustrate how certain voices within a narrative are granted space to speak about other voices rather than exhaustively analyze the representation of discourse across a text.

Taking all of its articles on Takaniat together, the cumulative *Bulletin* narrative delegates the narrator role to two main types of speaker. The first and most important are provincial officials and leaders, including the provincial premier, the provincial secretary, and the local member of Parliament. These people all act as intermediaries, asking Motaha people either to refrain from sabotage or to allow access to the station for repairs. When they are quoted, they will generally advocate for Motaha. The articles also report these speakers' narrative reports of Motaha people's intentions and attitudes. Another group are officials in central government departments, who mainly appear to respond to questions from *Bulletin* reporters about whether they will meet Motaha people or negotiate with them. Finally, but to a much lesser extent, Motaha itself and its designated "spokesmen" appear as a distinct narrating voice as well but only in a few articles that appear late in the controversy. Predominantly the reporter and the two main co-narrators will apply their own metapragmatic classifications to Motaha communicative behavior.

An article that appeared in January 8, 1988 (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988d) serves as a complete illustration of this attribution strategy:

Transcript 2

- 1 "PAY UP OR ELSE"—that's the message from the Motaha clan to PTC
- 2 The Motaha clan in the Tinputz area have issued an ultimatum to the Post and Telecommunication Corporation—**EITHER PAY US MORE MONEY FOR USE OF OUR TRADITIONAL LAND OR WE WILL DESTROY YOUR TELECOMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT!**
- 3 The equipment in question is the Mt. Takaniat repeater station. The landowners have given PTC until 31 January to respond to their '**compensation**' demands.
- 4 Three spokesmen from the clan met on Wednesday last week with acting premier, Mr Aloysius Nake, administrative secretary, Mr Peter Tsiamalili, provincial secretary, Mr John Siau, Teop/Tinputz member, Mr Joe Pais and PTC's Mr Ray Clatworthy to discuss the dispute over the land on which stands the Mt. Takaniat repeater station.
- 5 Because of recent threats by landowners to destroy the equipment, which would effectively cut off phone, radio, telex and fax links with the rest of the country and the world, a number of policemen from Arawa were deployed on Monday, 28 December to man the station for seven days.
- 6 The people are asking for compensation for use of the site and also for the current land rental of K7 a month to be reviewed. Their suggestion is for a payment of K3,000 per month, to be backdated to the time when the station was first commissioned into operation in October 1977.
- 7 No alternative uses for the land on which the repeater station stands have been made public. Neither is it known on what basis the demand for K3,000 is made.
- 8 Mr Nake said, "**THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT REGARDS THE MATTER AS A VERY SERIOUS ONE WHICH MUST BE RESOLVED SOON TO AVOID ANY FURTHER INCONVENIENCE. PTC SHOULD COME OUT AND NEGOTIATE WITH THE PEOPLE AND ADDRESS THE PROBLEM.**"
- 9 "**THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DEMANDS THAT PTC AND THE LANDS DEPARTMENT ARRANGE WITH THEIR SENIOR MANagements AT HEADQUARTERS LEVEL TO COME AND RESOLVE THE MATTER**
- 10 PTC, however, continually refuse to enter into negotiations with the landowners because they say **the problem should be taken up with the Lands Department.**

Transcript 2 (continued)

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- 11 But, said Mr Pais, “WE WANT PTC TO COME DOWN AND HAVE CONCRETE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PEOPLE INSTEAD OF PASSING THE BUCK TO THE LANDS DEPARTMENT.”
- 12 “IT IS NOT THE LANDS DEPARTMENT WHO WILL BE AFFECTED BY PLANNED ACTIONS.”
- 13 The provincial government also says that **if the Lands Department is the authority concerned, then PTC should take the initiative and negotiate with them to preserve their repeater station as the landowners have run out of patience.**
- 14 In the meeting last week, the Motaha clan spokesmen agreed to Mr Nake’s appeal for the ultimatum to be extended to 31 January.
- 15 “WE HAVE DONE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO KEEP THE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL, AND THAT MEANS CONVINCING THE PEOPLE TO CALM DOWN WHILE NEGOTIATIONS ARE PROGRESSING.”
- 16 “WE’D LIKE TO WARN PTC THAT THE SITUATION IS SERIOUS. THE PEOPLE HAVE NOW LOST THEIR PATIENCE BECAUSE PTC HASN’T COME FORWARD WITH ANY FIRM, DEFINITE AND POSITIVE RESPONSE,” concluded Mr Nake.
- 17 PTC’s Arawa boss, Mr Clatworthy will not comment.
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A gross analysis of the attributions of represented discourse would seem to suggest that this article does indeed center on Motaha people and their perspective. The Motaha clan as a corporate entity features prominently in the primary narrated event. Its narrative attributes communication to “Motaha spokesmen,” among other sources. The headline even includes direct discourse attributed to the clan itself, as does the lead paragraph. Yet this is somewhat deceptive. The headline and lead paragraph are constructed quotations that impute an aggressive posture to Motaha. The article also does not attribute a subsidiary narrative event to the so-called spokesmen in which they describe or report a statement from the clan they represent. In fact the spokesmen are not quoted at all. Instead the article applies two metapragmatic expressions to their communication in the primary narrated event (line 6). The article also offers two negative, irrealis descriptions of the Motaha clan and its spokesmen’s communication (line 7), including a mention of the clan’s demand for a surprisingly high monthly rent for the site. By juxtaposing its narrative account of Motaha people’s communication with descriptions of what they did not say or do, the article highlights the clan’s deviance from a tacit model of this type of dispute as a news event.

By contrast, Aloysius Nake is not only quoted at length but is even allowed to narrate his own involvement in the situation. Like Tsiamalili, the article uncritically ratifies the self that Nake performs in his narrative speech act. For instance, he attributes his own words to the “provincial government” collectively (lines 8–9, 15–16). In both this corporate voice and when speaking for himself, he comments on Motaha’s actions and intentions and attributes realis and irrealis quotations and speech acts to other figures who also appear in the primary narrative event. Joe Pais, a local representative in the national parliament, similarly embeds his

own positive characterization of Motaha's communicative behavior in a narrative frame in which PTC should behave and communicate constructively to resolve the problem (lines 11–12). These two figures in the news narrative are the true spokesmen for Motaha in a double sense. They speak for Motaha to the reporter, and they offer the reporter a complete narrative picture of the situation that controls the uptake of Motaha people's actions. Whatever their actual intentions, Motaha appears only as belligerents who are barely restrained by their advocates.

The central position of provincial advocates like Nake and Pais points to the influence of a more elaborate version of Tsiamalili's prescriptive metanarrative. As delegated narrators, provincial advocates treat the situation as a conflict between an aloof, negligent central government bureaucracy and a group of increasingly frustrated and angry traditional landowners. For instance, Nake attributes discourse in an obligative mood to PTC and the lands department, that is, what these two agencies should be doing for or saying to the Motaha clan (lines 8–9). The reporter attributes one statement to the PTC, but it is embedded as a dependent clause within the reporter's metapragmatic description saying that the agency "continually refuse[s]" to negotiate with Motaha directly, a judgment that echoes the narrative of Nake and Pais. The reporter effectively affirms their narrative framing by mentioning in the last sentence that Ray Clatworthy would (once again) not comment on the matter (line 17).

In addition to this article, other articles accept the premise of advocates that the central government and PTC in particular have exploited Motaha land, and hence the current arrangements for use of the mountain top are a legacy of colonial government in which customary ownership was only nominally recognized by token payments; in this case, PTC paid only K7 per month, which readers would consider laughably low (line 6).⁶ Finally, many of the advocates emphasize the traditional or customary basis of ownership, particularly the provincial premier Joseph Kabui when he is quoted in one article. In the direct quotation provided, Kabui gives fulsome support for the Motaha demands and describes them as representative of a general category of indigenous society: "Land is a very valuable asset to our people. They are attached to it. Man without land is nobody. Therefore, there should be respect for the owner of the land" (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988b).

For Kabui, Motaha people are acting in defense of their "rights" as landowners (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988b). In the advocates' metanarrative, the status of landowner also blends into that of citizen. In this way, the hierarchy of nested voices positions Motaha agitation in a narrated context in which the central government is

6. From 1980 to 1989, the PNG kina was at or above parity with the US dollar.

conspicuously absent. Indeed, after several no-comment unrealistic quotations of him, Clatworthy seems to have become aware of the perlocutionary effects of the silence attributed to him. In one article from April 1988, he is directly quoted as saying “I am not allowed to comment on this matter” (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988a).

At the same time, the subsidiary narration of the Motaha claims also attributes to them a specific attitude. Kabui’s supportive comment above appears in an article with the headline “Motaha Clan Getting Restless” (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988b). Kabui and other provincial advocates generally reinforce this frame. They describe their own role in the situation as a rational, calming presence that seeks a fair compromise between the parties in conflict. By contrast, they and the journalist tend to use emotionally charged words to characterize the Motaha, even when they are supportive of their claims. Motaha people are, for instance, “frustrated” (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988b) and “losing patience” (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988a) with the central government’s delays. Motaha people may have a valid claim in Kabui’s eyes, but the article also states that Kabui is acting to prevent them from “taking the law into their own hands” (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988b). So both the reporter and Kabui appeal to stereotypes of rural societies to configure the overall narrative frame of the controversy. Specifically, in their accounts of Motaha people’s actions, provincial advocates present themselves as channeling emotions into legitimate political action, turning the desire for violence and destruction into constructive negotiations. Thus, while Kabui appears to be bolstering the support for Motaha people’s case and putting more pressure on the central government, he is also enacting a framework of containment. His position in the primary narrative has a payoff beyond the epistemic authority delegated to the provincial advocates as authorized knowers. When advocates are said to characterize the Motaha people’s demands as emotional threats, they also present their own supporting claims as timely warnings.

In three of the articles that appear late in the controversy, Motaha people’s voices are not subordinated to their advocates. They nonetheless remain aligned with the role already defined by their advocates. For instance, one article attributes “warnings” to the central government to both provincial government and Motaha in a choral citation, as if they spoke simultaneously (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988a; see Tannen 1989, 113). Another relies on direct quotations of a named Motaha spokesman, Ezekiel Simet, who is said to play to type as well. He “blasts” the central government, threatens destruction, and throws down an ultimatum (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988c). The province-Motaha relationship can be read as a kind of mutual hostage taking. The provincial advocates describe themselves as effective intermediaries who maintain peace by relaying Motaha demands to the central

government. Yet they have captured the Motaha protests because they have sole authority to interpret them. Delegated narrators typify Motaha resistance as a symptom of the central government's failures to incorporate a rural community into a system of rights. By reinterpreting the claims that it relays, the province attributes to itself the role of the good government that listens and responds to its citizens. As noted, *Bulletin* articles continue to mirror the advocates' self-typifications in the types of persons they identify in their news narratives.

Attribution is a kind of metapragmatic capital that affords political power to those it delegates epistemic authority. When statements by provincial officials are used to represent rural protests like Takaniat, these provincial officials acquire an indispensable role in channeling grassroots anger into democratic decision making. Indeed, the attribution strategy employed in the articles on Takaniat supports a role for provincial government in the decolonization of PNG itself. It posits two separate and incompatible domains of politics, a sphere controlled by elites and another occupied by indigenous communities who have historically been excluded from the former sphere (cf. Ekeh 1975, 1990). When these news narratives assign the task of translating subaltern voices, they contribute to enacting a new political process in which these two modes of politics can coexist. Their narrative account of one process of conflict resolution provides a model that can be applied to other conflicts. In that sense, the framing of the Takaniat dispute to center on the brokerage role of the provincial government is a constitutive metaphor for rural citizenship: By submitting to provincial leaders' proposed solution of negotiation and compromise, the state and its rural citizens replace a colonial relationship of exploitation and neglect for one of recognition and respect. It assumes above all that a specific delegation of powers within the postcolonial state will lead to a greater unity among the whole nation because it will foster true equity for all its members. Those who would reject this theory of PNG's postcolonial politics, though, will always remain silenced. Their grievances as citizens will only ever be represented as demands for compensation as landowners, thus making them constituents of provincial representatives rather than authorized knowers of themselves and their aims. The next crisis in Bougainville would shine a harsh light on this.

Break-Up Letters

While the provincial government mediated the Takaniat dispute in 1988, the new, more activist leaders of the Panguna Landowners' Association (PLA) campaigned for a new agreement between their communities, the central government, and Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) to address the environmental

damage caused by the Panguna copper mine on their lands. Their initial demand for compensation was K10 billion, a figure several times larger than the mine's total revenue since 1972 (Manning 1994, 21). After a series of meetings with mine executives and government officials, the PLA broke off negotiations. Ona, their secretary, was interviewed on the local radio station of the national broadcaster around November 18, in which he said his group would now shut down the mine (Manning 1994, app. 7). The interview ends with his call for independence for Bougainville:

Tok Pisin

Na firstpela samting yumi mas achievim em yumi mas sanapim gavman bilong yumi yet. Sapos yumi hangamap long Papua New Guinea gavman bai dispela samting ol corrup dealings ol dispela samting bai continue. Mi yet mi save olsem ol pipol bilong yumi ol lida bilong yumi ol kompani i bagarapim ol.

English

But the first thing we(incl.) must achieve is for us(incl.) to establish a government of our our(incl.) own. If we depend on the Papua New Guinea state, then these sorts of corrupt dealings will continue. I know for certain that the company has spoiled our(incl.) people and our(incl.) leaders.

A campaign of sabotage and arson at the mine facilities began within days, and Ona went into hiding with some of his supporters. Copycat attacks and other acts of destruction against the mine, government facilities, and civilians followed. The violence escalated throughout 1989, particularly when the central state responded first with special riot squads and then the PNG defense forces (PNGDF). By the time the PNGDF withdrew and established a blockade in March 1990, it was fighting a war of secession in many parts of the island.

In the early phase of the conflict, *Arawa Bulletin* appears to have responded in much the same way that it did to the Takaniat dispute. In an article published in early December 1988, after the first attacks, the provincial premier Joseph Kabui is interviewed at length (*Arawa Bulletin* 1988e):

Transcript 3

- 1 Premier Kabui calls for **'Melanesian'** approach to settle Panguna crisis
- 2 North Solomons Premier, Mr Joseph Kabui has called for a **'Melanesian'** approach in a bid to settle the current crisis in Panguna.
- 3 Premier Kabui said that **he is confident that the current situation can be settled through open dialogue and consultation in the Melanesian way without using strong arm tactics.**
- 4 According to Mr Kabui, who has been assigned to establish dialogue with the leaders of the Panguna landowners, **"THERE ARE POSITIVE SIGNS OF, COMING TO SOME SORT OF COMPROMISE AND JUSTIFIED COMPENSATION."**
- 5 However, Mr Kabui's optimism that last Friday's destruction of an electricity tower was a one-off and done only to obtain some attention from the authorities has proved wrong. Several attacks on property belonging to BCL and BDC have occurred in the past week

Transcript 3 (continued)

-
- 6 Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Akoka Doi, has appealed to the Panguna landowners and Bougainville Copper Limited to remain calm while negotiations to solve the current wave of violence are continuing.
- 7 Mr Doi, who has been assigned by Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu as leader of the special Ministerial Committee, has announced that **progress has been made towards contacting the radical elements who are behind the current acts of destruction to mining installations.**
- 8 [One of two pictures accompanying the article appear here, each showing damaged BCL facilities, and captioned "The aftermath of destruction. Thousands of kina up in smoke."]
- 9 The Committee tried in vain on Tuesday to hold talks with the landowners and have now assigned North Solomons Premier, Joseph Kabui, and Regional Member for Bougainville, Fr John Momis, to establish dialogue with the landowners and appeal to the good sense of the radical elements to refrain from further lawless activities.
- 10 On Tuesday, Premier Kabui and Fr Momis successfully convinced some of the landowners who are affiliated with the radical elements that no effective solution can be achieved unless peace and good order is established
- 11 Further talks were attempted on Wednesday and, according to the Premier, most of the 'new' Panguna Landowner's Association executive were present.
- 12 A notable exception was Francis Ona, who did not attend the meeting. Further talks were scheduled for yesterday but the outcome of these was not available at press time.
- 13 Premier Kabui said that **people are taking advantage of this situation to air frustrations on a lot of related issues.**
- 14 "THE K10 BILLION DEMANDED AS COMPENSATION PAYMENT BY THE LANDOWNERS IS A SHOW OF FRUSTRATIONS AND TOTAL LOSS BUILT UP OVER THE YEARS AS A RESULT OF BCL'S MINING OPERATION," he said.
- 15 "THE JABA WAS ONCE A BEAUTIFUL, CRYSTAL CLEAR RIVER WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF MARINE LIFE COMPARED TO ITS CURRENT STATE NOW—IT CANNOT BE REPLACED."
- 16 Premier Kabui also said **the landowners have been left with no water supplies, electricity, schools or infrastructure developments.**
- 17 "WHY CAN'T BCL CATER FOR THIS?," he asked,
- 18 The Premier expressed disappointment at the role of the BCL's Village Relations section, branding it as just 'window dressing'
- 19 He said the division was set-up to cater for the needs of villagers and has failed to do its job.
- 20 [The second of the two pictures appears here.]
- 21 "THE COMPANY SHOULD HAVE A MORE CONSCIOUS AND HUMANITARIAN APPROACH TO THESE DEMANDS AND NOT JUST BE INTERESTED IN MAKING PROFITS."
- 22 A landowner, Mr Patrick Bano of Mariga village in the Boku district, said that **his people are fed up and frustrated for appropriate authorities to settle their demands.**
- 23 Mr Bano said **the Opposition leader Mr Paias Wingti, should not comment on the current crisis as he was unable to attend to their demands during his term as Prime Minister.**
- 24 Mr Bano also blasted other Bougainvillean politicians for not pursuing the matter with the national government.
- 25 Mr Wingti was not alone in condemning the actions taken by the saboteurs. A host of Parliamentarians, from the Prime Minister down, have deplored the terrorist acts which will damage the country's image both domestically and internationally.
-

As in the articles on Takaniat, this article voices the metapragmatic evaluation of PLA, BCL, and the central government's communication through discourse attributed to Kabui as part of a larger prescriptive metanarrative of conflict (lines 3–4, 21). For instance, the central government, in this subsidiary narrative are using “strong arm tactics” as opposed to the “dialogue” and compromise that Kabui desires (lines 3–4).⁷ Importantly, Kabui is reported to make no mention of Ona or his call for independence. Instead he is quoted as describing only the demand for K10 billion in compensation, and he attributes it to landowners. He interprets this specific demand as “a show of frustration” with BCL (line 14). As Kabui goes on to say, the Jaba River, whose pollution was an important part of the PLA's complaints, “cannot be replaced” (line 15). In this way, the narrative of the conflict attributed to Kabui frames the K10 billion figure as a symbol of the loss of a priceless ecosystem, not an actual claim. Indeed, the article quotes Kabui's own alternative claims against BCL: a new water supply, electricity, schools, and infrastructure—none of which had been requested by the PLA.

The primary narrative in transcript 3 parallels Kabui's explicit model of negotiations in the actors it identifies. In Kabui's model, landowner threats are legitimate political actions. Their legitimacy is limited, and derives specifically from the rurality, deprivation, and indigeneity of landowner communities. They can raise important political problems but, for Kabui, the problems can only be resolved through direct negotiations. Hence his model assumes violence, destruction, sabotage, and any other uncivil actions are the beginning of a sequence that ends in a negotiated restoration of a shared civil order. Likewise, *Bulletin* narratives anticipate that the situation will progress to a resolution when the parties in a dispute meet on a middle ground, both literally and figuratively. Transcript 3 is principally a narrative of Kabui's progress toward establishing a dialogue. In several other later articles, the news narratives posit “contact” and “face to face contact” between the radical elements of PLA and the government as a telos (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989e, 1989h; N'Druin 1989; Seneka 1989). This focus on making contact reinforces the uptake of Kabui's narrative act, including his self-positioning, in two main ways. First, what Kabui states is his preferred goal becomes a criterion of importance and relevance of news narratives. Second, the narrative frame of transcript 3 also delegitimizes other, alternative accounts of the situation. For instance, when this article describes a successful meeting between

7. An example of what he appears to mean occurs in another article on the opposite page. That article reports that riot squads deployed at Panguna had “shoot to kill” orders and quotes their commander saying, “We will not bow down to terrorists” (Seneka 1988).

Kabui and “landowners” that gave Kabui optimism, it also remarks: “A notable exception was Francis Ona, who did not attend the meeting” (lines 10, 12). In the primary narrative frame, Ona is one of the landowners, and thus was expected to be present. In fact, Ona was not seeking this kind of contact. His stated aims were fundamentally contrary to Kabui’s model and the Takaniat-type attribution strategy that reinforced it.

In his radio interview, Ona had already rejected a role for provincial officials as brokers of a compromise compensation payment when he accused them and the central government of corruption. Yet because transcript 3 adopts Kabui’s metanarrative, Ona is an aggrieved indigenous landowner who needs to be included in civil society. Hence, he can only be described as absent to mark an anticipated future resolution. Ona was regularly seeking to communicate with several other people to explain his actions and propose his own model of the situation and its future direction. Besides the radio interview, he wrote several letters from hiding to supporters, other politicians, and the media, including *Arawa Bulletin*. His supporters call themselves the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), an overtly secessionist and nationalist self-description, from a very early stage in the conflict.⁸ Ona was never really absent; his presence was erased because his various communications with his enemies were silenced, minimized, or epistemologically problematized. Articles on later developments systematically delegitimize the pragmatics of his communication as part of the overall Takaniat-type attribution strategy that centers on the provincial government as a peacemaker.

Articles from early 1989 generally attribute discourse to Ona as it is reported by others, much as the Motaha clan and its spokesmen are channeled through the reported subsidiary narratives of provincial officials. When these news articles report on efforts by various actors to contact Ona, they will present direct discourse of these actors that includes their proposals for resolving the conflict, and so attribute communicative acts to Ona in an obligative mood. Many of these quotations of proposals take the form of a numbered or bulleted list over several paragraphs that gives them a complete and self-contained textual form and, hence, a much greater degree of metapragmatic autonomy within the news narrative to prospectively narrate the conflict (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989c, 1989f; Seneka 1989). Other reports describe the successful contact made by individuals to reach

8. The earliest use of the name Bougainville Revolutionary Army appears as a self-description in a February 3, 1989, letter to *Arawa Bulletin*, which is discussed below (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989b). In a January 27, 1989, *Bulletin* article, Ona is mentioned in passing to be “in hiding with his ‘army,’” which may suggest that a self-description as an army was already in circulation (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989c).

Ona. They delegate to them a space in which to narrate Ona's responses to their offers (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989e, 1989h; N'Druin 1989).

One article (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989d) appears to be an exception in that it quotes Ona directly:

Transcript 4

- 1 Ona accuses youths of 'rascalism'
 - 2 Rebel Panguna landowner, Francis Ona, disassociated himself and his group from the activities that have been taking place in the villages of Pakia and Parakake.
 - 3 He instructed that **if youths of these villages are found engaged in incidents as violating curfew laws they should be referred to general police operation immediately.** He sounded this warning to a gathering of his committee men and women somewhere near Guava village.
 - 4 The youth of Pakia and Parakake villages which are along the Loloho-Panguna highway have been terrorizing innocent people since the present crises took effect late November 1988.
 - 5 Mr Ona has blamed the youths in the area for damage that has been done along this portion of the Port-Mine access road to two high rise power line structures and a market place belonging to Siredonsi villagers.
 - 6 The two towers were blown up last November-December while the roadside market was destructed early February.
 - 7 Mr Ona has clarified that **what he and his supporters were doing was no way in line with the activities the youths of these villages were engaged in.** He termed the activities of Pakia-Parakake youth as pure rascalism and **"the people responsible should be brought to police."**
 - 8 In a separate letter Mr Ona also warned the ring leader of the Pakia-Parakake villages youth Oscar Ampaoi not to take advantage of his (Mr Ona's) group's struggle over genuine issues with this rascalism in the area.
-

In a meeting with supporters at his secret camp, Ona is reported to make remarks on the violence that echo Kabui's prescriptive metanarrative. Unlike other articles on "contact" with Ona, which usually credit a single individual who spoke to him, the sources here are opaque. It seems to be based on testimony by at least one unnamed attendee at the meeting to a staff reporter if not based on the reporter's firsthand witness. In this account of his remarks, Ona orders his supporters to reject certain others with whom they have been confused. When he labels these "youths" as criminals (if not strictly disavowing violence himself), he appears in something close to the role of landowner that Kabui and the *Bulletin* have previously tried to attribute to him, albeit still a recalcitrant one.⁹

Nonetheless, Ona's statements are not really being reported in the same way that provincial officials are. While his characterization of the violence is accepted without qualification, most of his speech is reported as either metapragmatic

9. Indeed, this article attributes to Ona a view previously attributed to Kabui in transcript 3, line 13; cf. transcript 4, line 8.

description of his intentions or indirect discourse that is embedded in reporting clauses that use metapragmatic verbs of interpersonal ascription (*accuse, instruct, warn, blame, clarify, term*) rather than neutral verbs (**say, *state, *assert*): the actions that the report attributes to Ona are specified by the reporter's metapragmatic frame, not by Ona's utterances. The one instance of direct discourse attributed to him is telling because it is coupled with a metapragmatic description of his statement (line 7). Even if we assume that the reporter accidentally omitted a reporting verb to introduce the direct discourse in quotation marks in the second sentence, it still seems necessary to read this sentence as a series of slipped quotations inserted into the reporter's metapragmatic description. (The headline also attributes the word *rascalism* to Ona in a slipped quotation, so it seems fair to read the first clause of this sentence in the same way even without any quotation marks.) The reporter's description highlights only specific words that Ona uses rather than his stated intent or the overall effect of his speech as a rhetorical text. Hence, this quotation of Ona presents him as if he is concerned only with classifying different kinds of violent action in moral and legal terms. In this light, Ona seems to share at least some of the same evaluations of violence as government officials. Yet when provincial officials call upon landowners to be reasonable, to submit to the law, and to calm down, they are often quoted in direct discourse in depth.

We can speculate on a possible counterfactual framing. What if Ona did say, "the people responsible should be brought to police," but it was not really a clarification of his view? What if this was read as a threat to rivals, as Layton (1992) suggests was Ona's real implication? What if it was an invitation that specified the conditions of joining with Ona: "You can be my supporter, but only if you don't act like a rascal"? Indeed, a later article on an attack on a BCL-sponsored commercial farm project seems to support this alternative reading (Pamolak 1989). It says that Ona's militants, who had by then come to identify themselves as the BRA, intervened to stop looting. This article also says that its sources told the reporter that the BRA was also negotiating with *raskol* (criminal) gangs in its territory to stop their independent attacks. The man mentioned as a *raskol* leader in Ona's letter was in fact a relative of one of Ona's chief opponents in the PLA, as Layton (1992) notes. It seems reasonable to conclude then that this *Bulletin* article misrepresents the real effects of Ona's statements. They are an assertion of authority by Ona over other landowners and potential co-belligerents rather than a moral condemnation of their tactics or choice of targets. Ona's voice is only heard in this article insofar as it appears to align him with Kabui's model of the conflict as a struggle over land. He and the *Bulletin* could not conceive of it as an insurrection.

Arawa Bulletin was aware of the letters sent by Ona and his supporters and even received some of them as did other news media. The description of these contacts initiated by Ona in its news reports, however, reinforces the distribution of metapragmatic authority accomplished by a Takaniat-type strategy by either treating them as ciphers or by conflating their claims with the voices of trusted provincial leaders. For instance, the *Bulletin* received a letter signed “Concerned Pawpaw Squad, Bougainville Revolutionary Army” (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989b).¹⁰ It takes the form of a letter to the editor and responds to a police commander interviewed by the *Arawa Bulletin* (1989i). The letter says, “We are not criminals as you have stated, but we are Bougainvillians by birth and this is our Traditional land. We are fighting for the good and right of our and the future generation.”

Here and elsewhere the letter echoes many of Ona’s own public statements. Like Ona, the letter writers speak of “traditional land” in the sense of a separate homeland rather than land under customary ownership by indigenous communities (which presumes integration with the PNG state). *Arawa Bulletin* quotes the entire letter verbatim but places the article text alongside a miniature photographic reproduction of the handwritten letter, including the tattered and dog-eared edges of the paper and a “Received” date stamp. In this way, its visual qualities become part of the reporting context of the reported discourse of the letter. They undermine the letter’s internal entextualization and instead link it to the genres of anonymous threats, ransom notes, and the cryptic manifestos of serial killers.

In a later report on a letter received from Ona, the *Bulletin* likewise explicitly distinguishes between the letter as a textual object and Ona the person, suggesting that some or all of his letters might have been written by another person while also noting that this letter has a similar handwriting as Ona’s (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989g). In fact, Ona often delegated the task of drafting his letters to some of his assistants. His directions on their content could be very general, and the assistants were permitted to embellish and elaborate in their own words (Regan 2017, 374; e-mail communication, July 30, 2021). Still, in all of his public statements, Ona is always in some way speaking on behalf of his movement as a collective actor, which is itself suggested to be an expression of a collective will of the people of Bougainville. The framing of his statements as objects of a forensic analysis of their individual authorship, even when this seems to confirm their

10. Besides commenting on articles from previous issues as this letter does, it is common for letters to the editor in the *Bulletin* to use tongue-in-cheek pseudonyms (with a name supplied to the editor) and for these pseudonyms to use the word *concerned* (e.g., “Concerned Bougainvillian”). Whether intended or not, the letter’s apparent self-deprecatory irony appears to be lame: The *Bulletin* reports the receipt of the letter as a freak news event rather than placing it among other commentary from readers.

authenticity, denies the statements a capacity to include their own signature as the voice of a people.

After PNGDF moved to capture Ona, efforts to contact him largely stopped. In April 1989, another of Ona's letters was widely reported in the PNG media because it made an explicit declaration of independence of Bougainville (even though this was always one of his stated aims).¹¹ While national media framed this letter as yet another sign of a deepening crisis, *Arawa Bulletin* again assigns epistemic authority to provincial leaders to reinterpret Ona's demands. In this case, however, they do not position Ona as a landowner. As the reporter says, "Prominent Bougainvillean leaders have expressed the view that the compensation claim for K10 billion was a blessing in disguise and the heart of the real problem is Bougainville independence" (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989a).

Not only does this framing elide Ona's earlier calls for secession, it still manages to position Ona as a source of political energies that the provincial leadership must channel and modulate. The article goes on to quote in direct discourse several of the calls for secession in Ona's recent letters. Yet when it does, the *Bulletin* article's narrative partners him with other leaders. Then, in a second part of the same article, the article describes the results of a "survey" among people of Bougainville. It states that a majority of the people interviewed supported independence for Bougainville and then goes on to quote several people directly, most of whom say that they support Ona. Each of these interviewees is quoted at some length, speaking in a personal voice declaring their stand (and in one case in a *we* voice on behalf of "the young people" of a specific village). The reporter attributes these statements to individuals but notes only their home villages and not their names. Separately and together they stand in for a mass public of citizens, their individual expression of opinions aligning with the reporter's typification of their voices as positive "feelings for secession" and "tremendous support [for Ona's struggles]" (*Arawa Bulletin* 1989a). Ona's actions and calls for secession, in this light, are positioned as symptom of a broader shift in popular opinion. This shift, as *Arawa Bulletin* identifies it, is the moment of constituent power rather than Ona's declarations.

Conclusion: Speak for Yourself

Arawa Bulletin's reportage of the Takaniat dispute and the Bougainville crisis differ only in their uptake of the claim of peoplehood at the center of each controversy and specifically in who is authorized to narrate the claims of the Motaha

11. In a February 10, 1989 letter to David Sisito, a sympathetic provincial legislator, Ona also refers to himself as "Father of Nation" (Manning 1994, app. 11).

clan and Ona's secessionists and, thereby, to determine the perlocutionary effects of their respective declarations of sovereignty. The events they describe are two instances among many when activists in Bougainville contested their relative lack of political power under the constitutional system of PNG by performing acts of civil disobedience, if not of outright illegality, in the name of a higher source of democratic legitimacy. Yet at the time of these events, the "people" on whose behalf they acted still remained to be named in order for these acts to be legitimate. The acts that these activists animate as a community's representatives needed to elicit an uptake in which a distinct, sovereign "people" assumes responsibility for them. *Arawa Bulletin* news narratives provide a different uptake of each act. Specifically, it is the *Bulletin* news narrative strategy for separating different voices, ranking their relative authority, and most importantly orchestrating their responses to each other that determines the peoplehood performed in both controversies.

When Motaha people demand recognition of their sovereignty over territory, the North Solomons provincial government officials supply a sociological metalanguage that gives form to their peoplehood (Cordero 2019). It names them as an indigenous landowning clan with an intrinsic collective tie to the rural landscape. This recontextualization of protest has a double effect: it grants political legitimacy of one kind to Motaha while also enabling the provincial government to transcend its own constitutional role as a creature of the central PNG government. Arguably this is itself a unique response to a specific form of the dilemma of constituency faced by postcolonial states. In the sociological framework of European empires, self-rule can be granted only when a society demonstrates the empirical level of political development necessary for legitimate government of itself (Sultan 2020, 2022). In a sense, the PNG state's system of provincial government reproduces this politics of decolonization internally when it conditionally delegates powers to provinces rather than constitutionally guarantees them. The *Arawa Bulletin* attribution strategy of 1980s news narratives parallels provincial elites' prescriptive model of landowner disputes in which provincial government plays an indispensable role. This discursive alignment creates a conception of peoplehood in which North Solomons Province is a legitimate voice of its people, particularly its rural people, because it can channel what it sees as primordality into rational democratic participation. North Solomons officials create a kind of practical federalism within a formally unitary state. Yet in transforming itself in this way, the provincial government also shifts the nature of its local sovereignty from the will of a single Bougainville people to the rational management of indigenous conflict over land. The *Bulletin* narratives of conflict perform semiotic labor that benefits provincial leadership at the expense of local claims of self-government.

Its news discourse creates an interdiscursive continuity of a sovereign province by transforming the political discourse of sovereignty of grassroots communities. For Ona, I believe, the interposition of brokers were precisely the “corrupt dealings” and “mafia tactics” that his movement opposed (Manning 1994, apps. 7, 11). His rebellion exploits the dependence of provincial political authority on brokering rural protest to create a new constituent moment and a renewed imagination of the people of Bougainville.

Whether a reimagined people of Bougainville is eventually granted sovereignty over its own state remains to be seen. In any event, it will take place only when a new narrative of its peoplehood is embedded in other people’s narratives. The ultimate capacity for the people of Bougainville to tell a new story of itself lies in the “dynamic interrelationship of reported and reporting speech” (Voloshinov 1986, 123). What *Arawa Bulletin* reports of contested sovereignties show us is that this relationship is more than merely the evaluative stance of a reporter. Rather, journalists formulate personae of different degrees of epistemic authority. Selected speakers appear in news narratives as co-narrators in which they translate other people’s self-knowledge into an empirical entity that can be governed.

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