
Exploring the Role of Pasin-Lotu in the Peace Process in Bougainville

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Abstract: Some studies have revealed that the role of women and *pasin-tumbuna*¹ were important peace mechanisms in the Bougainville crisis. However, it is often forgotten that the women and peacemakers involved were active members of the Christian churches and that the Bougainville traditional customs were already blended with the Christian faith. It has been argued that little was said about the role of *Pasin-lotu*² in the *peace process*³, and the primary objective of this article is to bring this essential aspect of the journey to peace into view. An interpretive paradigm provided a theoretical framework for this study, and a qualitative approach was used to collect, analyse, and interpret data. Melanesian *tok-stori*⁴ and personal interviews were used for data collection. An inductive thematic analysis procedure guided the data interpretation. It was revealed that *Pasin-lotu* drove the spirit of confession and forgiveness, and reconnected the divided people. This faith enhanced the peace negotiations, added meaning to the reconciliation, and brought stability to the peace process. *Pasin-lotu* emerged from the findings as another essential driver of peace that helped to end the Bougainville Crisis.

Keywords: Pasin-lotu, Pasin-tumbuna, Peace process

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1. INTRODUCTION

The paper explores the role of Pasin-lotu in the peace process in Bougainville. The first subsections provide the scope of the study and the problem statement. The main section presents the literature review, the research methods and procedures and the major findings. The final section includes the overall conclusion followed by acknowledgments and list of references.

1.1 Scope of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of Pasin-lotu and see if it influenced aspects of the peace negotiation and reconciliation process that helped to end the Bougainville crisis. Guided by the key research question ‘What was the role of Pasin-lotu in the peace process?’, the author focused on six specific objectives; the motivation behind peace negotiations, the peacemakers’ sources of strength, the strategies in peace negotiation, the approach taken in the reconciliation process, the outcomes of the reconciliation and the views of the people about future peace for Bougainville.

The target population was individuals directly involved and those with a fair knowledge [Mertens, 2005] of the peace process. This study selected twelve participants from the target population as a sample frame.

¹ (Tok-Pisin) refers to traditional customs or indigenous cultures.

² (Tok-Pisin) refers to the Christian faith or ways of Christianity.

³ refers to the peace negotiation and reconciliation process.

⁴ (Tok-Pisin) refers to Indigenous storytelling or narrative.

1.2 Problem Statement

Some studies surrounding the Bougainville crisis established the role of women, their matrilineal cultures, and pasin-tumbuna as essential drivers of the peace process [Sirivi 2004]. However, [George, 2018] argued that these women and peacemakers at the forefront of the peace negotiations were members of the Christian church. Kabui [2005] claimed that the Bougainville traditions were blended with the Christian faith before the crisis and has been largely ignored. Little was said about the role of Pasin-lotu in the peace process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) in PNG was located North of the Solomon archipelago in the Pacific Region. From the prehistoric past until today, Bougainville has maintained some of its traditions and matrilineal cultures. The village elders and hereditary chiefs were customarily respected, and women were culturally recognized as mama-graun. When the first Europeans arrived, the Christian missionaries had contact with the people, and Christian faith blended with cultural traditions and was deeply embedded in contemporary societies.

2.1 The Role of Pasin-Tumbuna in Peacemaking

Bougainville's ancestral customs held traditional societies together in peace and harmony before the early missionary's contact. According to Oliver [1991] some critical elements in the traditional conflict, peace, and reconciliation processes were respecting women as clan leaders and using village elders and chiefs as peacemakers. In the context of this study, the ancestral traditions and practices are referred to as pasin-tumbuna, for example, the use of namel-marn as peacemakers, the bel-kol as cooling down payments, and bel-gut as compensations.

Village Elders and Chiefs as Middlemen. In peace negotiations, the conflicting parties would identify a namel-marn to facilitate the bel-kol as a token of understanding toward an open face-to-face reconciliation. Carl & Garasu [2002] confirmed that injuries would be communicated to both sides often by a neutral person or party as a peacemaker. The bel-kol as a cooling down payment would be passed through the namel-marn as a token of trust and the demonstration of the willingness of the offending party to admit guilt and pay compensation. Because traditional conflicts involve many groups, peace and reconciliation are achieved by involving the entire community.

Women as Mama-graun. In Bougainville's traditional society, women had an essential place in the family and a vital role in the life of a clan. Mama-graun means the land ownership and clan leadership descend through the matrilineal lines from a mother to a daughter [Hamnett, 1977]. Women tend to be seen as customary landowners and clan leaders and each person was identified according to their membership in their mother's clan. Most villages were matrilineal but, at the same time, tended to be quite patriarchal [O'Callaghan, 2002]. Within the matrilineal culture, men were looked upon as village elders and chiefs and, to some extent, were the custodians of the land.

2.2 Introduction of Pasin-Lotu in Bougainville

Pasin-lotu as the Christian faith was introduced by early missionaries to the Bougainvilleans more than 80 years before the Bougainville crisis. Faith blended with customs and was embedded in the culture. Bougainvilleans embraced the Christian faith as they faced the new challenges of the modern world.

Cultural Assimilation and Blending. Acculturation occurred when the Christian faith, came into contact with indigenous traditions. Bougainvilleans accepted and incorporated the Christian faith with some aspects of their unique cultures and traditions. Laracy [1999] observed Missionaries had succeeded

to the point where Christian identity seemed almost to be coincident with Bougainville identity. The ability to forgive others and forget the past was much greater than vengeance, which was most common in traditional society. The aim of the missionaries being in Bougainville was to plant the Christian Church firmly among the people [Oliver, 1991]. Consequently, the Christian religion blended smoothly with indigenous customs and traditions.

2.3 Bougainville Crisis

The Bougainville crisis started in 1988 and was fought between the Papua New Guinea Defense Force (PNGDF), its ally, the Bougainville Resistance Force (BRF), and the Bougainville Revolution Army (BRA). The crisis started due to the Landowner's disagreement over resource exploitation and uneven distribution of Panguna copper mine benefits [Regan, 2018]. The people were divided, and the society was torn apart as men took up arms and joined the BRA, which opposed the Conzinc Riotinto Australia (CRA) and fought over the Panguna copper mine. With different views of what to achieve, Dorney, [2003] said, others joined BRF and stood with PNGDF to defend the national government's sovereignty over the mine.

Peace Challenges. Peace negotiations seemed complicated and challenging when the BRA could no longer listen to government and trust the CRA. Sadly, Sohia [2002] stated that the genuine offer by the national and provincial government to bring meaningful negotiations with the militant groups has not been accepted, even though provincial leaders gave their total support. In October 1994, the national government called a peace conference in Arawa, the capital. The BRA and the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG) leaders refused to attend. Still, it was significant to women's groups who had the opportunity to meet and air their views.

Pasin-tumbuna as a Peace Mechanism. Bougainville's pasin-tumbuna significantly drove aspects of the peace and reconciliation process in war-torn societies. According to Tanis [2002], the traditional spiritual beliefs of the people provided the underlying principles of Osikaiang, Sipungeta, and Me'ekamui. These conventional principles guided the efforts of the war and later became the basis of peace and reconciliation. The first step was for every Bougainvillean to recognize him or herself as Indigenous or Osikaiang and to understand that the only way to live together again in peace was to reconcile and reunite. Tanis said the process was Sipungeta, which demanded that holiness, peace, and reconciliation start from the roots, from one's inner self to the families, then to the clans, and later to the nation. Tanis added, the people must put the spirit of the dead to rest, and if this can be done, the homeland can indeed be me'ekamui – a holy place where the creator dwells amongst his people. In other words, this understanding was consistent with the Christian worldview. Bougainville's traditional beliefs compelled people to make peace.

Matrilineal Culture as a Peace Mechanism. In the midst of the Bougainville civil war, women stood together, initiated peace, and contributed to some aspects of the peace process. Women's peace effort was honored and respected because they were the landowners, the issue BRA fought to reclaim and defend. The women have always been the voice of sanity and peace and have been very instrumental in convincing their sons to get rid of the guns [Havini, 2004]. In other words, women played an important role in negotiating peace and driving common sense into the minds of the divided men.

Women as Peacemakers. As early as 1990, Bougainville women stood together during the war and played essential roles in initiating peace. Individual women used their authority as mothers of the land, matrilineal status as leaders in the family and the clan to negotiate peace with their communities. Women used their influence as a medium between warring factions to maintain constructive dialogue toward peace [Saovana-Spriggs, 2007]. When women went to the battlefields and talked to the young men, the effect was potent, Howley [2002] said there is a relationship between the mother and her son which is more powerful than between the boy and his father. Women successfully got their sons and husbands to

return to the villages. Howley said, “A woman has a position in the life of the young men which goes back to his childhood and carries respect and authority which they cannot ignore”.

Women and their Faith. Women marched and negotiated, and Garasu [2002] claimed that they prayed for peace. An indication that the faith contributed to the peace movement. After this, the women again organized an all-night peace vigil to protest silently against the war. An all-night peace vigil showed that the women were sacrificing their usual sleeping time to keep watch, pray, and fast at night, an indication that faith was vital to the peace process. It was not safe then, but Garasu said, “Women learned to have faith and trust each other again as they marched and sang Christian hymns of peace. All these are clear indication that Pasin-lotu was driving the peace effort.

3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

An interpretive paradigm provided a theoretical framework for this research. A qualitative approach was used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation [Creswell, 2004]. Melanesian tok-stori and personal interviews were procedures for data collection. A purposive sampling was used to select the participants who were believed to be the key informants who could provide precise information about the peace process. A total of twelve participants were involved in this study. An inductive thematic analysis procedure [Yin, 2009] guided the data interpretation.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Motivation behind peace negotiations

The peacemakers, motivated by their love for children, negotiated peace to protect children from inheriting the spirit of war and protect their future against the rise of spiritism. Data sources revealed a growing sympathy to protect children from the negative influence of the war, discourage children recruitment, and protect them against the rise of natural healing powers and ritual practices in the crisis. If the war were prolonged, ritual practices and healing powers would divert people away from their Christian faith and destroy the future of their children.

The peacemakers were also motivated to negotiate peace because they wanted to restore moral values in the war-torn society. Data sources revealed that there was a growing concern to stop the rise of killings and murder cases, stop the increase in rape, and stop the destruction of churches in the Bougainville crisis. Peacemakers saw the need to negotiate peace because thousands of innocent lives were lost, relatives rose against relatives, many young women were forced raped, and churches that stood as the pillars of change, faith, and peace were burnt to the ground.

4.2 Peacemakers’ sources of strength

The neutral position of the churches determined church leaders’ role as peacemakers and became the basis of unity. The unity of the churches created mutual trust and understanding between different armed factions, gave confidence to the peacemakers, and sustained them throughout the peace negotiation process. The peacemakers’ prayer and fasting guided and directed their path toward restoring peace. Peacemakers used God’s word to strengthen themselves, and their answered prayers sustained them in enduring the challenges of peace negotiations.

These results showed that the neutrality and unity of the churches provided moral strength, and the word of God and peacemakers’ faith provided spiritual strength in the peace negotiation process.

4.3 Strategies in peace negotiation

The results showed that the church network provided access to the opposing armed camps, and faith reconnected the divided men. The peacemakers used church networks to walk through different warring factions, and they used their faith connections to drive the message of peace and reconnect the divided people. Faith was a driver

of peace between the peacemakers and the divided factions. These findings revealed that the Christian faith was essential in influencing aspects of the peace negotiation process.

4.4 Approach taken in the reconciliation process

The findings revealed an integrative approach to the reconciliation process. The peacemakers used faith-oriented counseling to enhance the bel-kol process before face-to-face reconciliation. Many sensitive cases between different parties were settled by integrating customs and Christian faith. The integration of faith drove the spirit of confession and forgiveness and added meaning to the reconciliation process. These findings showed that the Christian faith influenced some aspects of the reconciliation process.

4.5 Outcomes of the reconciliation

This study showed that the ability to forgive and confess in the reconciliation process brought restoration. The war victims' willingness to forgive others brought healing to their trauma, wounds, and brokenness. Others were revived from their shame and a feeling of unworthiness. The perpetrators' genuine confession of their war crimes brought a sense of peace. The perpetrators were relieved from their war guilt, and murderers recovered from their haunted feelings of taking human lives. Reconciliation reconnected the divided people, reunited families, and mended the disintegrated clans and tribes. These findings revealed that faith was essential in influencing some aspects of the reconciliation process.

Contrary to the above results, it was also revealed that some people who were not part of the reconciliation process ignored justice, and some sacrificed their healing for peace. Young people traded their futures for homebrew, drugs, and negative behaviors.

4.6 People's views about future peace

The results revealed that a new covenant and government-church partnership are the people's views. The new covenant rectified by the spilled blood of those who were killed and murdered in the crisis shows that some people have a spiritual worldview about independence aspirations and future peace for Bougainville. The government-church partnership to provide Christian education and faith-based healthcare indicates that Pasin-lotu, as the Christian faith, has an essential influence on the people's views about their development aspirations and the future peace for Bougainville.

5. CONCLUSION

Finally, Pasin-lotu emerged from the findings as an essential peace mechanism and another driver of the peace negotiation and reconciliation process that helped to end the Bougainville Crisis. Christian faith drove the spirit of confession and forgiveness, and reconnected the divided people. This faith added meaning to the reconciliation and brought stability to the peace process. Thus, this paper highlights this important aspect of the peace process.

6. RECOMMENDATION

In the course of undertaking this study, the researcher discovered a number of areas that would benefit from further investigation. The following five have been identified for their importance in contributing to further knowledge.

- 1) Specific research studies on puripuri and galas-marn could be conducted to obtain in-depth knowledge of their sources and effectiveness in the crisis.
- 2) More research studies should be conducted into the unresolved cases not included in the reconciliation process to assess their implication on social problems.
- 3) Conduct research into the level of Christian faith during and after the crisis.
- 4) Conduct more research into how the Christian faith shaped the people's views about the independence aspirations of the people.

- 5) More research studies could be conducted into the connections between herbal plants and Indigenous healing powers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledged God for His strength given so that I could continue to write. I want to acknowledge the School of Research and Postgraduate Studies and the School of Humanities, Education and Theology (SoHET), PAU, for financial assistance towards this research and my travel to the 6th PIURN conference.

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