This article explores the politics of value in relation to Bougainville’s struggle to protect a unique culture. Bougainville has a history of social movements that have taken a pragmatic approach in dealing with political and economic change from a position of cultural and material strength that depended to a large extent on the ability to survive as a remote self-contained island society. As Bougainville moves towards the status of an independent state, political demands and social expectations will seriously challenge the cultural economy of Bougainville which is based on a matrilineal kinship system, land and negotiated alliances between traditional leaders. How useful are cultural economic approaches or socio-scientific analogies in understanding the challenges facing Bougainville today?

THEORETICAL PROBLEMATICS

The relationship between economics and culture is of particular importance in small island societies that have developed a sustainable way of life over thousands of years in spite of challenges by both human and natural incursions. The concepts of involution, entropy and innovation have been used by anthropologists to describe the dynamics of social change, especially in small-scale societies (Geertz 2005, Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002, Kahn 1985, Mosko and Damon 2005, Turner 1990, Whitehouse 1995). My intention here is to examine such theoretical concepts as well as the relatively new approach of cultural economics. Although their meaning is often less than precise, these metaphors of change characterise processes at work in any given society and may even be used to legitimate a variety of interventions. It is in their application that such concepts fray at the edges, especially when used in conjunction with what are assumed to be rational economic models. Finally, I will discuss the usefulness of such models in relation to the island of Bougainville.

Entropy is a turning inwards towards a closed system. In a cultural sense, entropy can be seen as “the dissolution of internal cultural boundaries” (Eriksen 1993: 141) in order to create a unified nation-state for example, or a process of nation-building which tends towards cultural homogeneity with a unitary education system, a uniform labour market and a common
language. Cultural variation may be tolerated but is made less effective in pursuit of a new, modern form seen to be in a sense mechanical and outside of culture—although it is, in truth, not outside of culture at all. Rather, this process is the means of privileging one culture over others. I will accept for the moment a common-place understanding of the concept of culture as a system of ideas, values, beliefs and behaviours shared by a people. In application this concept is however always complicated and imprecise. Culture functions in a dialectical relationship with social systems or social structures such as the institutions, roles and mechanisms that contribute to continuity and order within a certain demographic. These two ideas are necessarily taken for granted in any discussion of social equilibrium theory or entropy. A functionalist interpretation of equilibrium suggests a stability and order when the elements of culture and society are in harmony. A contrasting view is held by Kenneth Bailey in his discussion of 19th century social equilibrium theory. He said that true or ultimate equilibrium is synonymous with maximum entropy or systems death:

...although the second law of thermodynamics does apply to social systems (open systems), such systems are often able to offset the increase of internal entropy through the importation of energy from the environment. Thus, instead of facing ultimate dissolution through continued progress towards maximum entropy, systems can instead display a steady growth in complexity. (Bailey n.d.)

However, social systems may reach a point of stress where recovery is not possible. Dyer’s concept of punctuated entropy refers to the loss of “adaptive flexibility... due to the severity and cumulative impact of... disaster events” be they of natural or technological origin (Dyer 2002: 164). Repeated disasters followed by repeated efforts at recovery leads to the failure of “traditional adaptive strategies... the social fabric is deconstructed... existing patterns of culture disintegrate or are severely modified or replaced by altered systems (Dyer 2002: 165). Eventually “...there is no cultural solution to the ensuing disruption, and system collapse ensues” (Dyer 2002: 165).

Islands offer a material, as well as a cultural, context to explore these ideas. Entropy occurs when a system does not have enough energy from outside itself to sustain its internal needs. Small socio-economic systems held together by cultural solutions to common human problems of survival can in a sense go entropic. A perfectly isolated social system does not exist in that energy is ultimately from outside in the physical universe and local environmental conditions. Nevertheless, the conditions for socio-cultural continuity do require, in some sense, border controls. In his discussion of island metaphors
and images of self-sustaining societies, Eriksen has pointed out that as Lévi-Strauss once said, “...in order to realize its creative potential, every human society must discover its proper equilibrium between isolation and contact with others” (1993: 145). He then went on to say “...it is probably not too bold to suggest that most of the world’s aboriginal populations, to mention one example, would have fared better, had they been allowed to retain more of their insular characteristics” (Eriksen, 1993: 145). But a cultural system that turns inward, closes off, can risk a downward spiral that will eventually fail to utilise the energy available and, in the end, consume itself.

Without accepting that there is one “proper equilibrium”, the factors of distance, ecology and coherence are important issues that I will consider when I turn to a specific discussion of the Bougainville case below.

*Involution* as used by Clifford Geertz, referred not only to agriculture in Java, but to social life as well. In *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (1963), Geertz attributed the term *involution* to Alexander Goldenweiser, an American anthropologist “who devised it to describe culture patterns which, like Gothic architecture or Maori carving, having reached a definitive form, continued nonetheless to develop by becoming internally more complicated” (1963: 80-81). Geertz applied this model in the Indonesian case to Java that, at the time of his study, was populated by two-thirds of the people of Indonesia while comprising only nine percent of Indonesia’s land area. The practice of terraced wet rice agriculture was able to sustain production for an increasing population “by a wide range of tenurial, technological, and work organizational developments, and by extensive reworkings of traditional peasant culture and social structure” (Geertz 1984: 514). However, diversification into cash crops, which Geertz describes as a Dutch imposition, accelerated this process, “creating a (relatively) capital intensive enclave economy within the peasant economy, the connections between the two being generally symbiotic though hardly symmetrically beneficial. The ultimate result... was, on the peasant side, ‘involution’” (1984: 514). In his 1984 critique of the ways in which his work on socio-economic change in Java had been used, Geertz particularly bemoaned the scant attention that has been paid to his “call to situate the general inquiry in its cultural context”, that is, “beyond the analysis of ecological and economic processes to an investigation into the nation’s political, social and cultural dynamics” (Geertz 1984: 515). Geertz was concerned that by leaving aside or downplaying culture, all that was left of his notion of *involution* was “economism” and the view that society “runs on the energies of want” (1984: 516). I will return to Geertz’s argument later in my discussion of Bougainville and the struggle between various concepts of economic viability and the desire of Bougainvilleans for independence.
Innovation or Invention seems to me a significant aspect of change and was a major concept in early 20th century anthropology as an argument against the idea of diffusionism. Diffusionism held that cultural practices were not independently developed but rather spread from one group to another; in an extreme form, this denies the inherent inventiveness of human beings. (There is also the patronising attitude that only certain “advanced” cultures come up with new technology or sophisticated social experiments and such ideas in tribal subsistence societies must have been imported.) Diffusionism also seems to require that we see cultural traits as specific enough in themselves that we can isolate them as something like cultural genes passed on from one group to another. Anthropologists now accept that culture should be understood as a constantly changing, creative process rather than a bounded consistent system that can change only through the importation of ideas from outside or indeed from within through a singularly new idea or practice that springs from the unique imagination of a charismatic individual. Roy Wagner’s highly influential and controversial book, The Invention of Culture, describes anthropology as “the study of man ‘as if’ there were culture” (1975: 10). His argument was that anthropologists invent cultures, but also, cultures invent themselves. So invention is the default position—it is a normal process rather than a diagnostic of progressive change.

Change of all kinds is related to values. Whether revered traditional values, added value, values that no longer have currency, any and all of these attitudes can influence the direction of change or a general resistance to change. In another, but not unrelated sense, value is a basic economic concept. What is valued is closely linked to values in general. Values are “the criteria by which people judge which desires they consider legitimate and worthwhile and which they do not” (Graeber 2001: 3) and this leads naturally into the economic sphere in that the satisfaction of people’s desires (leaving aside any distinction for the moment between desire and need) is inevitably entangled with the material world and negotiations over resources. This leads us to a consideration of not only political economy, but also to cultural economics or what we might consider more broadly as “the comparative study of practical philosophies of life” (Graeber 2001: 5).

Values also influence the way in which the viability of any society can be measured. Many small island societies have the advantage of self-contained local economies that are still viable enough to resist outside control if they have the will to do so and agreement on what is valued. In the next section I want to consider the example of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. The indigenous Melanesian people who occupy the entire Solomon Islands chain share a long history of trade and intermarriage in spite of colonial divisions that separated them politically.
Prior to the colonial boundary separation, the people of Bougainville and the Solomons freely traded with each other, married across tribal groupings and owned land in Bougainville and in the Solomons. Once the political boundary was created the social interaction that existed along clan and tribal groupings was discouraged. However, “traditional border crossing rights” still allow the people of Bougainville and the Solomons to visit relatives and trade with each other across the international border today. (Havini 2000: 4/27)

The values that are shared remain a currency that allows for negotiation across borders while at the same time each island treasures its distinct identity, and the resources that sustain it.

BOUGAINVILLE: HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

The island of Bougainville is some 500km off the northeastern coast of Papua New Guinea, 1000km from its capital Port Moresby and one of PNG’s northernmost provinces. Geographically and culturally, however, Bougainville is at the western end of the Solomon Island chain.

It is only in the last couple of hundred years that foreign powers have laid claim to the island and assumed control over the lives of the people compared to the 29,000 years archaeologists say there has been human habitation on the island (Spriggs 2005: 1). Aware of the depth of their culture and attachment to place, Bougainvilleans have always insisted that they have never ceded their territory to anyone.

In Bougainville’s society of inherited leadership, every person in the society is accorded value and status.... Society norms and rules were developed to protect the survival of each clan, which predicates peace, harmony and tranquility across the society and the wider region. Our oral history records that during the early period of migration and settlement, there were clan wars and skirmishes over territory and land ownership. This led to separate periods of conflict in two stages of tribal expansion called Polaruhu and Polaihan. The society that developed out of the tribal consultations flourished into a cultural period of harmony and achievements that are valued by generations of Bougainvilleans.... To enjoy peace, society had to provide for the basic needs of its members in terms of land rights and usage, shelter, food and safety from harm and external threats. These were and are still the basic factors that each family unit requires for the pleasure of not only enjoying peace and living within its own boundaries but also across tribal and clan boundaries. (Havini 2000: 3/27)

Havini is from the Haku area of Buka, but his account of oral history is not just the story of his island, but of the whole of Bougainville “and further south into what is now the Western Province of the Solomon Islands”
My purpose here is to reinforce the idea that there is a sense of their cultural history that extends far into the past and is part of the Bougainvillean sensibility. As in all societies, conflict, vested interest and common human frailty vex the desire for peace and harmony. But it would be presumptuous to assume it was only the missionaries who brought peace to Bougainville. “There were elders whose job was solely to maintain tribal law and order; and where redress was meted out to those who had breached society rules” (Havini 2000: 3/27).

In 1768 the French explorer, Bougainville, gave the island its European name. In the 1800s many men were taken (as slaves or in some cases “more or less willingly” as indentured labour) from the island to work on plantations in Samoa, Fiji, and Queensland (Regan 2005: 418). Germany proclaimed a protectorate over Northwest New Guinea and the Marshall Islands in 1884. A struggle over which imperial power would claim the Pacific islands was resolved for this region in 1898 by the Anglo-German settlement. The outcome for Bougainville was that Britain administered the Solomon Islands, and the Germans administered Bougainville. In 1921, after the First World War, Australia won a League of Nations mandate over German New Guinea, including Bougainville. Another foreign war came to Bougainville’s shores in 1942 when Japanese forces occupied the island. There was fierce fighting between the Japanese and the allied troops. Many Bougainvilleans were tortured and killed by the Japanese who suspected them of supporting the Allies. ² The Allies eventually won the Pacific war and Australia again administered Papua New Guinea, this time as a United Nations trusteeship. However, the freewheeling age of colonialism was coming to an end. The United Nations policy was for former colonies to be gradually prepared for independence and, consequently, the Australian Administration made such preparations, setting up local village councils and village courts, developing cash crops and systems of governance with Port Moresby on the mainland as the centre of administration. Bougainvilleans protested against Australian Administration in 1962.

...a meeting of over 1000 leaders in the town of Kieta requested that the Trusteeship of Bougainville be taken from Australia and placed in the hands of the United States of America. The meeting claimed that Bougainvilleans had been neglected, exploited and poorly treated and that the Australian Administration had ignored promises on non-segregation that had been made during WWII. (Havini 2000: 5/27)

This was rejected, as were further petitions in 1968 and 1975 for independence. Bougainville was not granted independence as were the British Solomon
Islands or Fiji or Samoa. Griffin has pointed out that “...there were isolated calls for secession in Bougainville before 1964 [and] it is an apt date to begin a discussion between the colony of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville District” (Griffin 2005: 291). At that time a World Bank report on Papua New Guinea advocated a “selective and intensive development policy” and Charles Barnes as Minister for the Territories thought that independence “need not come to Papua New Guinea until the 1980s or 1990s... and economic should precede political development” (Griffin 2005: 291). Griffin’s account directly links the 1963 discovery of rich copper deposits in the mountains of Central Bougainville with an intensifying of the secessionist movement. Conzinc Rio Tinto, an Australian mining company, gained permission for a massive open cast mine at Panguna over the protests of the women landowners who had tried to block the advance of the bulldozers with their bodies. By 1971 the workforce at the mine reached 10,000 and many of these were from mainland PNG who came to the island without their families and sometimes caused trouble in the villages. Copper prices continued to rise to record levels, and the Panguna mine became spectacularly profitable and was seen as an essential part of the national economy that would support the independence of PNG which would come in 1975.

On September 1, 1975, while I was in the field, two weeks before PNG was granted independence from Australia, Bougainvillians made their own declaration of independence and raised their own flag. There was industrial unrest at the Panguna mine that led to rioting in some of the town centres. However, neither side wanted an all-out war and a compromise solution granted provincial government to Bougainville—now named the North Solomons Province. There was to be a referendum on full independence in five years time, but as it turned out that never took place.

But Bougainville did have local elections and set up their provincial government, incorporated traditional ideas into the legal system and the village courts, and included custom and indigenous languages in their schools. The mine continued to be a major source of income both for Bougainville and for PNG.

Nevertheless, in 1988 the Panguna landowners’ growing resentment at their small share in the profits from the mine and the pollution that spoiled their rivers and killed their wildlife demanded an incredible 20 billion kina (PNG$) compensation for mining activities, plus a 50 percent share in BCL profits, and a greater environmental protection. A meeting was called with a New Zealand team of consultant engineers, who came to Bougainville and rejected claims of serious environmental damage. The Panguna Landowners Association, led by Perpetua Serero and her brother, Francis Ona, became frustrated by the lack of response to their demands by both the mining
company and the PNG Government. With their supporters, they closed down the mine by destroying power poles and blocking the road to the mine which remains closed to the present day. The response of the PNG Government was swift and violent.

Francis Ona, who had worked for Bougainville Copper Ltd. as a surveyor, by 1990 was notorious as the leader of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. PNG, with Australian advice and equipment such as helicopters, began military operations against the rebels, the rebellion spread across the whole of Bougainville and PNG troops were unable to subdue it. In 1990 PNG withdrew its troops and imposed an embargo on all goods and services to the island. The embargo continued for ten years, causing great hardship and many unnecessary deaths. That same year (1990) the leader of the rebels, Francis Ona, again declared independence for the “Republic of Bougainville” with himself as interim President. Over the next eight years there were numerous failed attempts at ceasefires and peace accords, while at the same time PNG soldiers supported a counter-revolutionary army on the island resulting in terrible factions among the Bougainvillians. Battles continued with PNG troops who attacked from sea and from the air with helicopters. During this time PNG gave some supplies and services, and medical supplies to those Bougainvilleans living under their control in “care centres”. In 1995 Bougainvillean leaders met in Cairns, Australia to discuss a ceasefire. Those negotiations were undermined when the PNG Defense Force attempted to ambush the Bougainville Rebel delegation as it returned to Bougainville.

For the most part, New Zealand and Australia said that they could not interfere in the internal affairs of PNG (although Australia was sending military advisers and helicopters)—apart from offers to facilitate peace talks. But this all changed in 1997 when it was revealed that the PNG Government hired Sandline International mercenaries to go in and finish off the Bougainville rebellion any way they could. The PNG military was outraged at the amount of money the mercenaries were to be paid when the PNG soldiers were paid so little—and sometimes not at all. The PNG military threatened their own government and arrested the leader of Sandline troops in Port Moresby. New Zealand and Australia had had enough and announced a joint bid to bring peace to Bougainville. New Zealand was the prime mover and brought all the Bougainville key combatants from all factions to New Zealand’s Burnham Army Base, looked after them, and left them to talk through their differences so that they would be in a position to negotiate with PNG for peace (Sirivi 2004a). It was a brilliant move. The next year saw a truce that led to a permanent ceasefire and agreement to a peace monitoring force made up of New Zealand and Australian unarmed military. The New Zealanders’ intervention has gained much respect from Bougainvilleans and
they also appreciate New Zealand’s subsequent efforts towards reconstruction. They are less trusting of Australians and their aid.

Initially, the presence of Australians in the TMG raised some issues among Bougainvilleans, given the Australian Governments’ [sic] role in supporting PNG during the war. People questioned us many times about whether they could be sure the Australians were there to monitor peace and not continue the war. (Sirivi 2004b: 153)

When I was in Bougainville in 2000 and 2007, I was very aware that this was still an issue in spite of the continuing significance of Australian aid in the enormous task of restoring essential services.

Through all this, Francis Ona, the commander of the rebels and his core troops remained in the mountains and did not take part in the peace agreements. The area around Panguna and Ona’s stronghold remained a “no-go area” and Ona died there of an illness in 2005. Joseph Kabui, who was for a time part of Ona’s rebel group, became the elected President of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. The peace agreement with Port Moresby has promised a referendum on full independence sometime in the next five years or so.

“Tribalism”, reference to the complexity of multiple “social identities”, historical disputes and internal conflict over royalties from the mine are all emphasised by some commentators (see Regan 2005) who challenge the Bougainvilleans sense of unity and common understanding of their own historical circumstances, which they so strongly voice. The not so subtle shift in perception from a civil war between PNG and Bougainville to a “civil war” internal to Bougainville (perhaps an unwitting result of the activities of NGOs, peacekeepers and other interests) is, I believe, a misreading of history. James Tanis (2005: 471) expressed this well: “Many different interest groups on Bougainville were pulled together by their common aspiration for Bougainville identity and their common blame of the Papua New Guinea National Government for causing their economic and social problems.” He goes on to present a list of questions that are a direct challenge to the wider interests—PNG, Australia and financial institutions, as well as global economic, political, military and religious power brokers—implicated in their struggle for independence. It must also be acknowledged that there are still some unresolved internal issues, such as disposal of weapons, and a continuing need for reconciliation between some groups.

When I went to Bougainville in 2000, I observed some of the peace negotiations with delegations from Port Moresby including the Prime Minister, Michael Somare. Bougainville was busy with aid agencies of all kinds, new
schools were being built, there was an upgraded hospital on Buka, and various administrative agencies were being established. A small university outpost was set up and I taught there for five months. People were still traumatised from the war and not altogether trusting of one another or of Port Moresby and Australia. It is estimated that from 10,000-20,000 Bougainvilleans lost their lives because of the war and this will not be forgotten.

I returned to Bougainville in 2007 for two months. Reconstruction was not going ahead as fast as people had hoped. The new Autonomous Bougainville Government occupied a building on Buka initially designed as a library for the university. This has left the university with no library at all. The new government was struggling to find the funds to put in place all the systems and structures necessary to convince Port Moresby, the U.N. and its neighbours that it could stand alone as an independent nation. There remains controversy surrounding the copper mine which is still closed. President Kabui and some other members of the Autonomous Bougainville Government want to reopen the mine and have signed a “memorandum of understanding” (MOU) with Invincible, a Canadian company, which would give it the right to explore the potential development of Bougainville’s resources. They claim this is to stop the flood of less reputable people who come to the island hoping for lucrative deals with unsuspecting landowners.

Suspicion of their own government is growing among some Bougainvilleans and the mine looms as a dark shadow. Will they find a way to create a sound economic base for their island so that they can make a good case for independence at last? Will their new government resist the temptations that lead to corruption in so much of the Pacific? A few days before his death, President Kabui was in danger of a motion of no confidence in the Bougainville Parliament. Kabui had apparently signed a deal with Invincible which seemed to give them majority control of Bougainville’s resource development agency. Opponents claimed he had done so without proper consultation. Kabui retaliated by sacking his economic and investment adviser and Magdalene Toransi, the Minister for Women, who opposed the deal (Radio NZ International 2008).

Sadly, Joseph Kabui, who had served Bougainville for many years in a leadership role, did not live to defend his reputation against claims that initial payments from Invincible were misused. However, the seeds of suspicion had been sown at a time when trust in the Bougainville Parliament was (and is) a significant factor in maintaining peace and hope for the future. Meantime, there still remains a small core of rebels in the mountains—waiting and watching.
Bougainvilleans’ sense of their own independence is an expression of historical and contemporary social/cultural values and a way of life based on centuries of political/economic practices that allowed for a successful adaptation to their environment.\(^5\) And although it is relevant to note Bougainville’s considerable distance from the PNG mainland, the distance from other neighbouring islands is not great. The sense of isolation and separation that can be attributed to islands is less important, I believe, than the value islanders attribute to their way of life. Bougainville is predominantly matrilineal in both a material and a spiritual sense—women own the land, authority and status is held by and inherited through the female line (senior sister to senior brother), complex negotiations between the two major clans is traditionally structured to maintain (or restore) peace and order when, as in all human societies, the balance between competing interests is overturned.\(^6\) These arrangements are literally grounded in place through land and genealogy (Nash 1974, Rimoldi 1982, Sagir 2005, Sarei 1974, Sirivi, J. and M. Havini 2004, Tanis 2005). They are, in other words, island specific. Therefore, the things that have value in negotiation between competing interests are land and the fruits of the land, access to the sea and the fruits of the sea, women and the children they bear.

But isolation or separation is nevertheless a factor that can be significant in relation to island integrity and success. Baldacchino (2004: 274) has suggested that the “conception and expression of island identity, as well as its size are part of an ongoing dialectic between the geographic and the political”. As an entity unto itself, a small island may have, he says, a “hinterland” elsewhere that provides a buffer against isolation economically and culturally. Historically Bougainville has had isolation imposed on it, being politically cut off from near neighbours, realigned with more distant entities or states. Informal contact and trade continued however, and with political independence in the region, notably the Solomon Islands, formal relations and border negotiations continue to develop. However, small islands may also create their own internal “hinterland” that corresponds to economic zones and political divisions that necessitate complex negotiations between groups that are potential competitors for resources and influence. In this way, the islanders themselves become highly complex, informed, creative individuals in order to traverse the physical and cultural terrain that is diminutive in contrast to the large personalities that inhabit it. People form distinct zones of economic and political authority over human or material resources. One side of an island can be hinterland to the other, one clan to the other. Groups of people can also constitute “moral zones” where they
are identified, as in the case of Buka and North Bougainville, as outside of the two major clans, Nakarib or Naboen. These two major clans are both competitive and cooperative. They compete for land and resources. However, this competition is constrained by the necessary agreement of the leaders of both clans on matters of importance such as the recognition and confirmation of chiefly title. Nakarib chiefs confirm the legitimacy of Naboen chiefs and vice versa. Traditionally it is expected that Naboen should marry Nakarib which is seen as a way of preventing conflict in the community. However, there are also named “sub-clans”—Nakas associated with Nakarib and Natasi associated with Naboen. I had always understood Nakas and Natasi to be of lesser status, serving the two major clans in various capacities. Very few people ever claimed to belong to Nakas or Natasi. But recently I was told by one informant that in fact Nakas and Natasi referred to people born outside of the moral prescriptions of society. The word used was English “incest” but the definition of incest in this case seemed to refer to the failure to marry into the opposite clan. Nevertheless these groups have a recognised role in relation to the two major clans, not least, in establishing a buffer zone where the continuity of authority and identity is confirmed and at the same time anomalies are contained. In his afterword to Mosko’s and Damon’s (2005) collection of essays on anthropology and chaos, Roy Wagner argues that “the practice of incest and its prohibition both require and contradict one another at the same time, that a kind of resonance or turbulence is set up that makes natural and cultural orders components of a mutual representation” (2005: 211-12). The idea that Nakas and Natasi create a social space that identifies, and possibly legitimates, the custom of intermarriage between Naboen and Nakarib is possibly just such an area of “turbulence” where the status of the two major clans can be negotiated between them across the divide.

In complex societies of the developed industrial world, vast continents are inhabited by people whose personalities sometimes seem diminished by the specialisation of sentiment, fragmentation of work and remote control of politics. Richard Sennett (1999: 63) has described the ways in which the “new capitalism” encourages the “capacity to let go of one’s past, the confidence to accept fragmentation” and the “confidence to dwell in disorder, someone who flourishes in the midst of dislocation”. On a small island, however, relations between people are well-defined, firmly located and afford a constraint that defines who you are and where you are. People move about less freely and their identity is fixed. Geography and politics are personal. Even the past is a hinterland peopled by ancestors who still emerge from the bush, from caves beneath the earth, from off-shore winds, and do battle with the change agents and “new men and women” who would define the Bougainville of the future. At the same time that Bougainvilleans are pursuing an independent
state, internal and external border issues remain in this tribal society. But the mechanisms that used the various divisions across society to forge alliances and ensure stability—the authority of the clan chiefs—are being dismantled and disordered. There is the worry that Dyer’s (2005) “punctuated entropy”—years of violent encounter from first contact—may result in collapse in spite of the adaptations and social movements that readjusted Bougainville culture in the past.

There are also changes in perception that follow from political, economic and cultural mapping. The people of Buka often referred to the larger island across Buka Passage as Big Buka, whereas it appears on maps as Bougainville, with the small island at its northern tip separately identified as Buka. During the civil war, Buka was reoccupied by the Papua New Guinea troops and used as a base to try and take back the whole of Bougainville. It is now the centre for business and government administration. Much of Central and South Bougainville, which has the majority of the population, remains in a state of uneasy truce. The much smaller Buka presents the face of a pacified Bougainville to the world. This situation threatens to force Buka and other tribal groups across Bougainville to become more inward looking.

Francis Ona’s retreat into a more self-contained, traditional, cooperative community has been compared to other social movements in Melanesia, including the Hahalils Welfare Society. The latter comparison was the topic of some debate in the Hahalils community when I was there in 2000—there was both interest and suspicion surrounding these claims. In 2007 I attended a commemoration at Hahalils in celebration of the life of John Teosin, who was the leader of Hahalils Welfare Society from the early 1960s until his death during the blockade enforced on the island by PNG during the civil war. The commemoration was also meant to be a reconciliation ceremony between various factions involved in the conflict. Military, political and traditional representatives from Me’ekamui (representatives on this occasion referred to themselves as the “Me’ekamui Government of Unity”) attended. However the Hahalils chiefs and the Me’ekamui leaders agreed, after discussions on the day, not to hold a reconciliation after all; they felt that there was not yet Bougainville-wide agreement on the conditions required for either true reconciliation or appropriate sanctions for breaking such agreements. Further, reconciliations funded by outsiders, such as NGOs or government agencies, were seen as orchestrated for effect or gain and thus would not last. Therefore, they agreed to hold meetings throughout Bougainville in preparation for a genuine reconciliation when consensus was reached and when they could muster the necessary resources for feasts themselves, no matter how long this took. This latter requirement was a way in which the commitment of the community could be measured. But the celebration of
the life and leadership of the late Paramount Chief and leader of the Hahalis Welfare Society, John Teosin, went ahead, beginning with a moving military salute in front of his tombstone by the Me’ekamui commander’s small band of “former combatants”. Teosin is recognised by many on Bougainville, perhaps now more than in his lifetime, as a man who stood both for non-violence and for independence. The rejection of “managed” reconciliation and a desire to return to traditional modes of negotiation between clan leaders represented a re-emergence of the late Francis Ona’s rebel group from their isolated “no-go zone”—but under terms of their own choosing.

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In his review of Jared Diamond’s (2005) book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* Clifford Geertz (2005) argued against studies that rely almost entirely on archaeological evidence, as on Easter Island, that allow for a hypothetical analysis and a moral position that societies choose their own fate through ignorance or self-delusion or greed (2005). Geertz (2005: 4-6) suggested that it might be better to pursue monographic studies that provide more detail as to the choices actually available to people. And I would add, analyses of the political/economic forces that control information and populations in a myriad of ways, making any notion of “choice” highly problematic in relation to cultures and peoples. These are difficult times for indigenous peoples, not only in Melanesia but all around the world, as their resources are targeted by outsiders keen to profit regardless of the costs. When communities react to protect their resources and use them in their own way, they are often suppressed. On Bougainville, when the Hahalis Welfare Society was established on Buka and they attempted to initiate the marketing of their own copra and cocoa, there was no system of roads necessary to get their produce to a wharf for export, among other obstacles put in their path to independent community-driven economic progress (Rimoldi and Rimoldi 1992). Their refusal to pay taxes to the Australian Administration until a road was built led to the imprisonment of their leaders. Eventually, the road was built, and to this day it is acknowledged on the island as John Teosin’s achievement.

Frances Ona’s Me’ekamui settlement on the site of the closed Panguna Copper Mine is another example of a political/economic/cultural resistance. But this spearhead of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), which forced the hand of the Port Moresby Government and led to the latest form of a Bougainville Autonomous Government, eventually became a thorn in the side of the new Bougainville administration, some of whose members were part of the BRA during the civil war. The unrelenting progress towards
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state control in the Western model, supported by big business, has revealed contradictions between the original rebellion and the conditions of political agreements for peaceful resolution of the conflict. Francis Ona never signed any peace agreement and referred to the process as a kind of “buy-out”—the “economics of peace”.

Tensions sooner or later return to the question of the copper mine which remains closed. It was clear on my visit to Bougainville in 2007 that there were intensive efforts being made by those who represented the interests of Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL), Rio Tinto and others to convince Bougainvilleans that mining was the only way to establish an economic base that could support an independent Bougainville. In listening to a range of business people who passed through Buka, the subtext was almost always “reopen the copper mine”. So pervasive was this opinion that I rarely heard any serious talk of whether or not to reopen the mine but, rather, how and when to reopen the mine. Some former leaders of the Bougainville rebellion, whether in the Autonomous Government or in Me‘ekamui or now working with NGOs are in some way beholden to economic resources traced back to BCL.

I am convinced that only a major project in cultural economics can reveal the extent and the implications of this history for the understanding of the relationship between cultural and economic entropy. Even the leaders of the Me‘ekamui Government of Unity who met to celebrate the life of John Teosin in September 2007, along with the chiefs of Hahalis, called for a “referendum” where all of the people of Bougainville, not just the Panguna landowners, could vote on whether or not to reopen the mine. The mine remained top priority on the table. And in one way or another, many Bougainvilleans were “shareholders” both in the devastation and in the wealth it created. The contradiction rests on the conundrum of that dialectic between the geographic and the political, autonomy and engagement with others, what is treasured and what is valued. By focusing on island economies it is possible to reveal some of the dynamics of cultural construction in a world where the local, or locality, struggles against the rising tide of globalisation and economic standardisation. A culturally specific sense of value is difficult to locate in that it seems to contain so many conceptual contradictions.

By positioning myself in the township rather than in the village in 2007, I shifted my attention to the importance of the business community, the relevance of governance and the ideology of liberation in relation to the prevailing project of statehood. I began to see villages as stressed by poverty and unable to take advantage of the comforts of town life, such as electricity, ready access to imported goods, air-conditioned homes and offices and modern appliances. There were fewer people in the village to carry out the necessary work of subsistence and domestic life. The trucks that went up
and down the road each morning and night seemed to carry more people than produce reflecting the change to a bureaucratic and service economy. Although there is no tourism to speak of, there is a steady flow of advisors, NGOs representatives, researchers, volunteers, aid workers and business people who feel they have something to offer and something to gain.

Involution, entropy and innovation are concepts that may be good to think with but real life does not always fit neatly into these categories. For example, the community established under Francis Ona during the civil war became known as the “no go zone”, yet I do not consider his seeming isolation an indication of entropy. Further, an analysis that depended solely on the Geertz’s (1963) concept of involution would be incomplete because Ona’s movement was not just a move back to a new, deeper, stronger command of custom. It also entailed the use of resources from the abandoned mine, technological skills training and a range of introduced knowledge and materials. Yet, there are aspects of involution because custom and tradition became strengthened and more complex in a situation of relative isolation. In contrast, the care centres set up by PNG military during the war in order to separate villagers from rebels were essentially entropic in nature. Those incarcerated within them were cut off from the resources of bush and sea unless they had a pass from the soldiers; many rules of social decorum and morality were broken in the forced living arrangements and the pressure on the legitimate landowners was an abuse of customary hospitality. Promises of payment to those who gave assistance to the PNG military in this manner, or by joining the resistance to fight alongside the PNG military against their own people, have added to the social alienation that, to this day, is a shadow over the island. Endless reconciliations taking place up and down Bougainville sap material resources and distract attention from the immediate needs of the people as well as the future goal of independence. The prolonged attention to these matters—the repeated demands for compensation or payment from Port Moresby from the resistance group, the reconciliations that are often superficial and managed by NGOs—can lead to a state of suspended animation, or anomie, the maximum state of social entropy.

Innovation of new social forms can create other difficulties. For example, women now talk about “baby-sitters”. “Baby-sitting” associates childcare with money, or is also used in circumstances where caring for children by family members would have been expected without comment but is no longer so freely given. With the increased availability of administrative, government, NGO, hospital, hospitality industry and commercial jobs, more and more women with children have paid work outside the home village. Sometimes husbands are said to be “baby-sitting”. There is also a new category of
“solo mothers”. The terms used were English and they were frequent and unsolicited when I was in the field in 2007. I had not heard them before. It seems grandmothers and sisters are less likely to want to look after the children of mothers who have paid work. Often the grandmothers and sisters have paid work as well. What initially might seem a positive innovation, a Western version of gender equality, could also be the first sign of kinship entropy: not enough human resources to do the work of kinship. In a kinship based culture, this could quickly create social disorganisation and confusion. The traditionally high economic and social status of women as landowners and mothers in this matrilineal society is expressed and balanced through a system of kinship relations rather than an individualised Western concept of gender empowerment.

There is a new form of government being put in place under the guidance of advisors—The Autonomous Bougainville Government, which could be seen as an innovation. Yet, it has its precursors, such as the 1975 North Solomons Provincial Government. Although a constitution has been put in place, there is still a lot of talk about it, especially talk expressing the belief that the constitution has a clause that precludes an opposition. This places constraint on the Me‘ekamui, seemingly acknowledging only one government voice even though Me‘ekamui had earlier declared itself the government of an independent Bougainville. The change in name to “Me‘ekamui Government of Unity” may indicate a compromise solution where Me‘ekamui may gain greater acceptance but that is not evident as yet. Similarly, local government and councils of chiefs or elders are not innovations either, having been initiated during the Australian colonial administration. But admittedly, circumstances are different and context adds a certain novelty. What will be interesting is the bringing together of representatives from all over Bougainville, with their cultural variations, different languages, dialects, and networks into a government that seems to demand loyalty. This places a new kind of constraint on old systems of negotiation and alliance between leaders such as tsunono ‘male chiefs’ and teitehol ‘female chiefs’. A further complication is that the Bougainville President Joseph Kabui was determined to move the government offices back to South Bougainville as soon as possible and his cabinet with him. Others say it is too soon to expect the administration and government to leave Buka as South Bougainville remains somewhat unstable.

Throughout Bougainville, Councils of Elders represented in local government are now working on constitutions of their own. These will incorporate some custom, but will also bring in contemporary notions of governance. In fact, there are so many layers of governance and administration on Bougainville that there are not enough men and women to fill the posts.
This, along with a seemingly rapid rate of loss by early death, means that administrators are shifted from one post to another and sometimes carry double or triple loads. Many are “acting” directors of this and that. There are many planning positions and yet a New Zealand Volunteer Service Abroad worker told me that there was a real need to recruit more planners.

Is this a sign of entropy? Not enough men and women to fill the ever increasing positions needed? Is the complexity of the political system expanding faster than this relatively small society of 200,000 souls needs or can handle? Is this also true of family, kinship and gender relationships? Not enough people to do the mothering—because it seems good baby-sitters are hard to find?

I am reminded of the reach of BCL when I met a Buka man whose family had ties to Hahalis Welfare Society in the 1970s, who followed Francis Ona in the closure of the mine and the following battles, and who turned up at the commemoration for Teosin in October 2007 with the other leaders of Me’ekamui. This man supported the values of Hahalis Welfare Society and traditional practices such as marriages arranged between the two major clans as a means of preventing jealousy and conflict between them. He saw his own marriage as an example and expressed to me appreciation for making a record of their culture, including a detailed account of his own wedding ceremony (Rimoldi and Rimoldi 1991). But I asked him how marriages could be arranged today when young people prefer to find their own partners and are much more independent and mobile. The contradiction between a tribal society based on kinship and the emerging nation-state could not have been clearer.

Cultural economics allows us to ask such questions and to critique concepts such as innovation, involution and entropy. These concepts do not really work in the analysis of real data based on the observation of everyday life because they are not discrete; social reality is too complex. Anthropologists have always included economic beliefs and practices in their study of small-scale societies but there is a need for work that analyses the relation between capitalist and pre-capitalist formations. Cultural economics is a model that can be applied to any society and thus brings the two together. Kenneth Boulding in Toward the Development of Cultural Economics wrote that in

... the present generation, as far as economic theory is concerned, abstraction has completely conquered the field.... The computer, if anything, has accentuated this trend.... One gets the depressing feeling that the typical PhD dissertation these days is done by grabbing a fist full of somebody else’s data and putting it through an elaborate statistical analysis on the computer. The culmination of this movement, of course, is the use of imaginary data, which is increasingly popular. (1972: 267)
Boulding believed that cultural economics should extend to a study of economic culture itself and wrote that he had “argued for years that bankers were a savage tribe who should be studied by the anthropologists rather than by the economists”, adding, “I once tried to persuade Margaret Mead to do a book on ‘Coming of Age in the Federal Reserve,’ with, I regret to say, no response at all!” (1972: 269).

In this paper I have introduced the concept of cultural economics as a way to begin to understand the contradictions facing the people of Bougainville as they decide the best way forward. They are having to simultaneously put in place a government structure and an economic base that will support their bid for independence. They are, in all of this, subjected to advice and management from outside advisors who bring their own bias and interests, and may not fully appreciate the cultural context that has brought Bougainvilleans to this hiatus.

Finally, smallness does not preclude a viable autonomy. Small islands with an economy that can provide basic human needs and social order can resist entropy unless an extreme imbalance is created—as could happen on Bougainville—through the imposition of costly systems of governance that cannot be sustained in terms of human resources and financial backing. There is no inherent reason why such societies cannot be recognised as independent indigenous nations governed as they themselves choose.

Any notion of freedom, whether it’s the more individualistic vision of creative consumption, or the notion of free cultural creativity and decentring (Terence Turner, 1996)... demands both resistance against the imposition of any totalizing view of what society or value must be like, but also recognition that some kind of regulating mechanism will have to exist, and therefore, calls for serious thought about what sort will best ensure people are, in fact, free to conceive of value in whatever form they wish. (Graeber 2001: 89)

The development of local solutions to the universal problem of balancing economic necessity with cultural values is all too often interrupted by outside power brokers when the local solutions do not fit their agenda. Cultural economics, as Boulding (1972) says, needs to extend to economic culture itself, including those savage tribes as yet undiscovered by anthropologists who live in the remote world of global corporations and financial institutions.
NOTES

1. For a related paper see Rimoldi 2006.
2. Some Bougainvilleans supported the Japanese, at least in the early phase of the occupation. I was told stories of how some Buka informed on others who were said to support the Allies, resulting in the beheading of the accused (see Rimoldi and Rimoldi 1992:28).
3. Havini served in the Bougainville Provincial government before the Crisis. He and his Australian wife, Marilyn Havini, represented Bougainville to the world during their periods of exile in Sydney during the blockade, and have returned to the island to serve the reconstruction of government and social services.
5. I am not suggesting that the people of Bougainville (as we refer to them now) always conceived of themselves as “Bougainvilleans” or a “nation” but rather to their own traditional knowledge of habitation and social relations, trade, and indeed conflict over centuries. See Matthew Spriggs 2005 for an account of Bougainville’s early history.
6. See Ogan 2005 and Keil 2005 for a discussion of Buin where there is some debate as to the form that matriliney takes.
7. I have been told by various informants that this is the case throughout Bougainville, although there may be variations and the clans would have different names and symbols.
9. Me’ekamui Pontoku Onoring was established as a social movement by Damien Dameng in Irang village in the Nasioi area of Bougainville in the early 1960s to resist the colonial administration and mining interests. In 1998 Francis Ona and his supporters remained outside the peace process and instead formed their own Republic of Me’ekamui (see Tanis 2005). Me’ekamui Government of Unity was an idea proposed at a meeting between Me’ekamui leaders and Halia leaders at a meeting I attended at Hahalis in September 2007.
10. These terms for hereditary chiefs are specific to Buka and North Bougainville.
11. At the time of writing, word came that President Joseph Kabui died on 7 June (2008) in Buka of a suspected heart attack brought on by stress and overwork and his inability to afford the medicines that he needed.

REFERENCES


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