There have been several Bougainville crises, based on two main sentiments. In 1966–1970 Nasiol- and Rorovana-speaking villagers rejected the alienation of parts of their land for the mine, processing, and port facilities; this opposition was a harbinger of the revolt initiated by some Nasiol from 1988. From the late 1960s separatist or secessionist sentiment arose among both elite and rural Bougainvilleans; it spread and was renewed in 1972–1973 and climaxed in the 1975–76 unilateral declaration of independence by provincial leaders. After the 1979 riot at Panguna, initiated by some Nasiol people, compensation was increased for some of the landowners, but its distribution remained a divisive issue among the Nasiol. From 1987 there was clearly intense resentment of the mine infrastructure and tailings disposal for their adverse environmental and social impacts across central Bougainville.

In the broadest terms, the sequence of the recent crisis was that Nasiol landowners disputed compensation among themselves and later with the company. Nasiol militants first demanded that the mine be closed, then sought half the profits and environmental damages of ten billion kina (about US$10 billion)—far more than the mine had earned or could earn. When their demands were rejected, they sabotaged mine facilities.

From December 1988 the national Papua New Guinea (PNG) government was heavily involved in responding to the militants. Riot-squad police burned houses and used random brutality, sexual harassment, and torture. Landowners escalated their retaliatory violence and attacked some mainland Papua New Guineans and mine staff. Militant landowners took refuge with cultists and were joined by rebellious youth and criminal elements to form the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) in early 1989. The PNG Defence Force was brought in and used machine guns and mortars against alleged guerrilla areas, and in their frustration randomly harassed Bougainvilleans far and wide.

The state vacillated, alternating calls for negotiation with suppression,
and thereby facilitating the spread of a campaign by militant landowners against the mine into a secessionist campaign throughout the island. After humiliating losses, the central government security forces were withdrawn in March 1990. The militants had used terrorist violence and committed human rights abuses, but it was apparently the incompetence of rampaging security forces that led to the temporary withdrawal of the PNG state and probably the permanent closure of the mine. From May 1990 the national government imposed a near-total blockade, and the BRA’s unilateral declaration of independence followed. These actions resulted in widespread illness and deaths for lack of medicines, and in the collapse of the modern economy of PNG’s wealthiest province.

Negotiations were held between secessionists and national government representatives in August 1990 and January 1991, leading to the Endeavour Accord and the Honiara Declaration, respectively, imprecise agreements that have each been violated by both signatory parties. Low-level talks continue spasmodically. In late 1991 the PNG national government hoped for an interim settlement of the current Bougainville crisis, to be based on the establishment of local interim authorities on the main island and Buka. Nonetheless, medicines were still used as bargaining chips by secessionists and the center alike as the tragedy dragged on.

It may be too early to evaluate the crises from 1988 on, yet a reader may reasonably expect from these three books some analysis of the impact of the mining revolution on the lives of the villagers who initiated the revolt, and a better understanding of the escalating crises.

The monograph by the eminent anthropologist Douglas Oliver has the greatest scope to develop a comprehensive analysis. Oliver wrote an influential 1955 study of prewar Siwai society and leadership. In 1968 he became a consultant to Conzinc Rio Tinto Australia (CRA), the parent of Bougainville Copper Limited, in order “to advise the company on how to conduct their operations so as to shield Bougainvil­lians as much as possible from the harms that inevitably accompany such mining” (xiv).

Oliver disarmingly says he is not an academically qualified historian, but he has written a history. The first half of the 1991 volume is based on his 1973 study, Bougainville: A Personal History (Melbourne University Press). Working from Siwai models, he describes village society and the subsistence economy and briefly summarizes the precolonial and colonial background. The book notes linguistic and political divisions that have been highlighted since 1990 and were important in 1975–76, although that first period of declaring independence is virtually ignored. He describes how subsistence lifestyles were transformed into a monetized economy, but is somewhat inconsistent on whether land was available to expand tree crops. Oliver states that the rapidly increasing population and the sociopolitical divisions were key factors in the emergence of the crises, but does not integrate these points into his discussion of events from 1987 onward.
From the 1970s, the volume changes gear, with extensive chapters on the mining, which Oliver observed personally, and the revolt. The latter has developed since he last visited the island and is covered using limited secondary materials. This book sketches events to mid-1991 and valuably reprints the “Honiara Declaration on Peace, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation.” It covers the return of national government elements to northern Bougainville and the 1991 admission by the PNG military commander that Australian-donated helicopters were used to strafe villages and dump bodies.

The second half of the book is the weaker, in its discussion of the impact of the mining, the growth of the revolt, and the role of the state. Basic information is available in environmental and social studies of the mine’s impact, which Oliver cites but then accuses of anticompany bias and does not explore.

As a consultant, Oliver had alerted the company to problems among landowners. In the first year of mining he stated that a few of the villagers near the mining complex “became and remained implacably hostile. Most of them however appear to have become resigned more or less disconsolately to what they regard as another example of the white men’s cupidity, deceit and irresistible power” (1973, 162). He noted that “the construction of this huge enterprise has brought some physical discomfort and psychological stress. Households bordering the new roads have been subjected to the constant jarring noise of large trucks and the clouds of dust raised by them. In many places the privacy normally enjoyed by the indigenous settlements has been violated by strangers sightseeing, curio-seeking, or in search of women” (1973, 166).

His 1991 volume, however, does not follow up such issues. Written when the Panguna mine crater had grown to 2.5 kilometers across and 400 meters deep, and the tailings had damaged a far larger area, the later book contains even less analysis of the environmental impacts and social distress felt by the villagers. Oliver says he will discuss the “direct, large-scale and more or less detrimental effects” of the mining, and states that the “cost to the relocated people, in terms of physical and psychological hardship, cannot be expressed in figures,” but then describes the impacts mainly in terms of benevolent compensation arrangements. He notes these reached only some of the male descendants of the landowners because of the matrilineal descent system (137 ff). Oliver allows himself only one mild criticism of Bougainville Copper Limited, for resisting demands for housing by the married children of previously relocated Nasioi villagers, “on grounds that ... were inappropriate and short-sighted on Bougainville” (153).

Oliver does mention “round-the-clock mining noises” and the “sufferings” and “human costs of operating an open-cut mine” (138) experienced by villagers blandly described as “severely discommoded” (195). But he gives only a hint of the significance of their loss when, in discussing “bizarre” compensation arrangements, he quotes Richard Bedford and Alex Mamak saying “To the inhabitant of a moun-
Oliver indirectly alludes to an explanation of the political process of the conflict among Nasioi landowners in asking “how decisive and how durable was the authority of the ‘clan elder’ who ‘agreed’ to long-term lease of a piece of land?” (113) and in passing refers to a “generation-based revolt” (204). This interpretation, which he later (210) attributes to Colin Filer, is discussed later.

A major hole in Oliver’s analysis is demonstrated in the recent book by Paul Quodling, a retired executive of Bougainville Copper Limited (Bougainville: The Mine and the People, 1991). Quodling empathizes with Bougainvillean resentments at the inequalities that arose from the project and summarizes data on the adverse social and environmental impact of mining. He says the mine “with its apparently insatiable appetite for land, had a traumatic impact on the resident society, who saw land rights being violated and land being permanently taken out of traditional usage” (32). On his very first page Quodling confronts the issue Oliver omits, when he states that “any alienation of custom-owned land for such purposes as open-cut mining completely goes against the indigenous social structure. This eliminates the prospect of any enduring prior approval from resident villagers. The fundamental issue facing the administrators of the day was whether to mine (accepting the attendant conflict with cultural standards) or not to mine (accepting the loss of economic benefit to independent PNG)” (1). Once that was decided, the independent state was locked into these revenues and the mining process.

Oliver barely examines wider political dimensions, such as why, after twenty years of enforcement by the government of the 1967 mining lands agreements, was state force irrelevant in preventing this revolt by the previously powerless. He notes the divisions within the PNG Cabinet, but does not relate the political problems of Bougainville renegotiation in 1980–81 and 1987–88, and the handling of the subsequent crises, to the dependence of the state on the mine, the vulnerability of Papua New Guinea’s unstable national governments, and the virtual autonomy of the security forces.

If Oliver explains the upheavals at all, it is in terms of greed on behalf of some landowners with false environmental complaints who were under the influence of outsiders: they were swayed by irrational cultists, their expectations stirred up by politicians, with their violent opposition to the mine and secessionism tolerated if not advocated by priests. (He ignores the 1989 statement by Bougainville priests that sought peace and advocated greater autonomy short of secession). From Oliver’s perspective, the key initiators, the Nasioi landowners, lack a capacity for autonomous action. Political incompetence and bureaucratic jealousies combined with clerical intervention to escalate local issues into a crisis that was suffered by the entire country after mine revenues ceased.

No researcher but Oliver could have written much of this book from experience, yet not all the personal elements are strengths. The text is frequently marred by quirky, even sarcastic,
asides (eg, 190, 226, 262) about the actions and policies of all key players except Bougainville Copper Limited, displaying contempt somewhat out of keeping for an anthropologist in analyzing people he has worked among for over fifty years. Despite its flaws, this is the most wide-ranging study reviewed here. Others will mine it for information and insights, but will not find a seam of analysis running through it; that is something which “future historians will attempt to untangle” (267).

The collection edited by Peter Polomka, after an introduction on the importance of land in Melanesian society, provides valuable extracts from legal testimony prepared for a CRA insurance claim that do offer more explanation for the most recent crisis. John Connell, who studied the Siwai rural economy in the 1970s and returned in 1988 to examine environmental grievances for the PNG government, summarizes the social and environmental impacts of the mine. He records the emergence of the militant faction among the landowners, their environmental concerns, and the early mishandling of the crisis by PNG security forces. There follows a tantalizingly brief note about Nasioi values by anthropologist Eugene Ogan, who first documented Nasioi resentment of the mine two decades ago. Ogan quotes Catholic Bishop Gregory Singkai as saying the main aim of the landowner militants was “to keep the mine closed, thus punishing the Papua New Guinea Government that has taken so much.” Ogan says that “punishment” here “represents a traditional kind of ‘payback’ or reprisal, demanding a compensatory response, not a change of government” (39). In a dialogue with James Griffin, Bougainville Copper Limited Chairman Don Carruthers gives a company rationale that tends to blame the crises on the conflicting interests of provincial and national governments, with a slight mea culpa. “We really did not understand the situation well enough, or recognise that the emergence of a new, better educated generation would present problems” (61).

A statement by Ric Smith, an Australian Foreign Affairs official, seeks to straddle the contradictions in Canberra’s position, asserting that while the Bougainville crisis is an internal affair for Papua New Guinea and was not caused by Australia, the Australian government has an obligation to provide military equipment to assist an elected government—notwithstanding concerns about human rights violations. Another Australian diplomat, Matthew Neuhaus, acknowledges weakness in the PNG police and limitations of the military in imposing order, but the volume does not probe these issues. Statements by PNG ministers highlight the inconsistencies in their variously dovish and hawkish approaches. The volume reprints the 1990 unilateral declaration of independence and the subsequent Endeavour Accord negotiated in August 1990 with the breakaway government.

Several documents from Bougainvillean leaders provide clues to the militants’ and secessionists’ attitudes. The BRA leader and former mineworker, Francis Ona, clearly resents what he saw as apartheid-like social inequalities associated with Bougainville Copper Limited. The
BRA's military commander, Sam Kauona, admits a "law and order" problem in the secessionist island. Buka Islander and secessionist spokesman in Australia, Moses Havini, integrates his personal story with the mine crisis to explain the secessionist appeal. Recommendations by the provincial government (the Bika Committee Report) and the Diocesan priests for peace settlements that would allow increased autonomy short of secession are also republished. Although it is not an integrated collection, this slim book provides some essential documents for any student of the crisis.

The volume edited by Ron May and Matthew Spriggs has more analytical value. Jim Griffin's potted history of Bougainville secessionism argues that because of the island's geography and history, Bougainville ethnonationalism is a special case. Using precrisis fieldwork, PNG graduate student Henry Okole traces the 1980s politics of the Panguna landowners. Spriggs details local political rumor in northern Bougainville during the climax of the secessionist struggle, showing how the incompetence and indiscipline of the security forces facilitated the militants' takeover. Moses Havini describes PNG security forces' actions and human rights abuses and their political impact. Carruthers points to the costs to Papua New Guinea and Bougainville of the mine closure and to the real problems inherent in maintaining agreement over mining among landowners in any mining project. Ethan Weisman summarizes the impact of the crises on the national economy, and May highlights some domestic and international political implications. An initiator of the 1990 ceasefire initiative, Graeme Kemelfield, records how that attempt at peaceful reconciliation partly succeeded, only to be derailed by the passionate intensity of various actors.

This book also valuably reprints Colin Filer's influential article, which analyzes the Panguna case in the light of the well-recognized transitory nature of Melanesian leadership. He argues that the act of making a land agreement can undermine a local leader, and that because of generational change any agreement with landowners over mining and compensation must be unstable and ultimately temporary. Filer describes mines as "sociological time bombs," unlikely to sustain landowner agreement beyond about fifteen years. As noted, this article—which Griffin in his chapter rather oddly describes as Marxist—has already been influential. Unlike the other published literature on Bougainville, it provides an interim explanation of the sociological processes behind the Panguna upheavals and hence the latest Bougainville crisis, and has a direct relevance for other resource projects in Melanesia. This volume contains interpretative essays of lasting value.

Taken together, these three studies are reconstructions of the revolt after the event, and unfortunately only fleetingly describe the concerns of the landowners, especially the women. Further works are in preparation, such as the 1991 "update" conference papers edited by Spriggs and Donald Denoon (which does include a piece on women) and a set of documents compiled by Spriggs. During the long hiatus, some Bougainvilleans have argued their case on paper, but still more fieldwork is
needed, after the peacemaking politicians have had more success. Till then, the volumes here reviewed will remain interim reports.

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Who is to blame for the Bougainville rebellion? Who could have prevented it happening in the first place? Who can now restore the “strife-torn island” to some semblance of normality? And, at the end of the day, who will have gained and who will have lost?

In 1989 these were popular questions in Papua New Guinea, and the normal way of answering them was to point a finger at the actions or inactions of a single individual and add to this some positive or negative remarks about that person’s qualities of leadership. Such questions are less popular today because all such answers have been thoroughly aired; there is still no general consensus, nor even any grouping of opinions into clear political perspectives; and the death of all this talk seems more conducive to a resolution of the crisis than does its further repetition. Such is the Melanesian Way.

From this Papua New Guinean perspective, Paul Quodling’s contribution to the argument is somewhat overdue. Within Port Moresby circles I have heard it said that the rebellion would never have happened if Paul Quodling had still been managing director of Bougainville Copper Limited in 1988, because his knowledge of the Melanesian Way would have enabled him to keep the peace. But no one points fingers at themselves in this kind of debate, and Quodling’s own finger is firmly pointed in a more familiar direction—at Father John Momis and the so-called Bougainville Initiative that accompanied his general election campaign in May 1987.

For those who wish to pursue the question of personal responsibility, the centerpiece of Quodling’s book is Appendix C, which comprises a photocopy of the five-page letter in which Father Momis suggested that Quodling and his company could only demonstrate their adherence to the Melanesian Way by giving 3 percent of their gross income to the North Solomons Provincial Government, and a photocopy of the one-page letter in which Quodling replied that this would constitute a breach of the agreement between his company and the state of Papua New Guinea. In his brief commentary on this exchange (50–51), Quodling asserts that Momis raised the expectations of the Panguna landowners and other Bougainvilleans to a point from which they could not subsequently be reduced and at which they could never reasonably be satisfied. That, for Quodling, was the “major catalyst” for the rebellion.

The basic problem with this argu-