

PASI301

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Taloi Havini

The Scale of Documentation in Bougainville

Kuiato

Onoriko onoriko
Company porounung
Nikangko kansiko
Kera oarimaung
Oi...oi...oi...oi
Tumang nenkeaunung
Bake tampa masika

We were living here
When Company came
Came and Dug our Land
Oi...oi...oi...oi
They have dug so much
As though it is their land

Nagovis song

Prior to the arrival of German plantations, soon to be followed by Australian mining projects and later the militarisation by the Japanese, lay an island in the South Pacific. This island of nine thousand square kilometres was home to indigenous clans whose vegetation was plentiful, their land self-sustaining. Naturally, this island was not free of conflict as had been assumed by 'papalagi fantasies', it was a living breathing society.¹ And this island continued to live and breathe, throughout the decade long war that proceeded the closure of Panguna mine. While this conflict has left an irreversible mark on this island and its peoples, contemporary artist Taloi Havini, indigenous to Buka Island, challenges framings of colonial history, human rights and environmental issues in Bougainville through artistic documentation. The world's largest copper and gold mine of its time, operated at Panguna in central Bougainville on Nasioi land from 1972 to 1989. Although resilient indigenous resistance movements single-handedly forced ConZinc Rio Tinto (CRA) to vacate, Bougainville's history has instead been remembered as a place worthy of exploitation. Not only does Havini sit with this tension, she engages with local communities, actively designing new, both uncomfortable and empowering, frames of Bougainville that bring to light an awareness of the environmental, human implications of these dichotomies. I have chosen four works that encapsulate and distil these frames; *Beroana (Shell Money)* 2015, *Habitat* 2016-2019, *Blood Generation* 2009-11 and *Reclamation* 2019. A central theme

¹ Albert Wendt, "Towards a new Oceania," In *Writers in East-West Encounter*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1982: 213.

throughout these works is that of land rights and independence. Havini embodies the role of the organic intellectual through storytelling and documentation *by* and *about* indigenous people. Taloi uses documentation to reclaim and reframe how Bougainville (and the Pacific) was sized up by European cartographers and treated as testing grounds. This view justified the extraction of natural resources at Panguna mine which ultimately denied an entire generation from their ancestral lands; now unable to return there due to the pollution. She creates from perspectives we would not immediately see, to engage audiences in this conversation.

Indigenous to the Hakö people of the Nakas Clan in Buka, Taloi Havini is the youngest child of activists Moses and Marilyn Taleo Havini. Their family along with hundreds of others were forced to migrate to Australia. It was here that Taloi Havini studied ceramics and discovered museum collections that would inspire *Beroana (shell money)* 2015. The pre-colonial history writing of what is now the Autonomous Region of Bougainville is limited; Douglas Oliver's documentations of this island has been described, unsurprisingly, as 'cut and paste', biased and anthropological in its method.² We must instead turn to indigenous oral accounts and recollections about life to understand indigenous knowledge. It is understood that 29,000 years ago a migration of Austronesian people arrived as seen in New Guinea and further

² Anthony J. Regan and Helga M. Griffin, *Bougainville before the conflict*. ANU Press, 2015: 201.

presaged by Lapita assemblages and objects found in Kilu Cave on Buka Island.³ Pre-colonial social structures such as this and small-land holdings among clans remain as strong social units. In all but the south of Bougainville, the clans and lineages are matrilineal; ‘since land can be seen as everything—as embodying everything—to Bougainvilleans, its custodianship by mothers is a powerful thing for women.’⁴⁵ Much of Havini’s work dwells on various fallouts of conflict and ‘indigenous Bougainvillean conceptions of land and water spaces as the sacred skin of the people’⁶. The 2015 installation *Beroana (shell money)* offers a meditation on indigenous trading material and the role of women in Bougainville.⁷ During her study, Taloi visited the Australian Museum home to a wealth of shell-based currency, *beroana*, which is used on Buka Island. This work considers the scale of currency, money, different interpretations of value and the inflexible financial order that is ingrained into the Western monetary model compared to Pacific local economies. *Beroana* is not recognised by the West; the Australian Colonial Government banned the use of shell money. Havini collected, ground, shaped and drilled the shells, in this physical practice and process, she actively facilitates indigenous epistemology. Their suspension in a gallery setting is intentional in that it both echoes and critiques how

³ Regan and Griffin, *Bougainville before the conflict*, 2015: 201.

⁴ John Braithwaite, Hilary Charlesworth, Peter Reddy, and Leah Dunn. *Reconciliation and architectures of commitment: sequencing peace in Bougainville*. ANU Press, 2010: 95.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24h90c.14>

⁵ Josephine Tankunani Sirivi and Marilyn Taleo, *As mothers of the land: The birth of the Bougainville women for peace and freedom*. Canberra, ACT: Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 2004.

⁶ Kadist 2015.

⁷ Fig. 1 and 2.

‘overseas museum collections hold vast amounts of the shell money collected from the Southwest Pacific Basin’.⁸ Each of these pieces are created from Bougainvillean soil, threaded on a string and suspended in a coil from the ceiling, similar to how Bougainvilleans would store *beroana* in *marae tsuhana*, sacred storage vessels, high up.⁹ This work invites audiences to learn about and contemplate alternative views of the world order, overlooked by mainstream discourse. Equally vexed, this work was commissioned for the United Arab Emirates, Sharjah Art Foundation. *Beroana (shell money)* I mediates Interglobal connections, space, times and proves the potential for education that art can contain.

The gradual accumulation of subduction and volcanic arc on Bougainville and Buka islands led to their mineralisation and abundance of porphyry copper.¹⁰ While this biodiversity was once self-sustaining, later discoveries and extraction of this copper resulted in irreversible harm upon the land. The mining project in Panguna was corrupted. A lack of understanding or respect by the Australian mandate of local networks and pre-existing hierarchical structures resulted in biased negotiations that became a polarising split between these two parties.¹¹ It was this chasm that allowed for relentless excavation of the land surrounding Panguna, in the centre of

⁸ Sharjah Art Foundation, *Beroana (shell money)*, 2017.

⁹ Kadist 2015.

¹⁰ Regan and Griffin, *Bougainville before the conflict*, 2015: 22.

¹¹ Donald Denoon, *Getting under the skin: The Bougainville copper agreement and the creation of the Panguna mine*. Melbourne University Press, 2000.

Bougainville Island, 'a pit six kilometres long, four kilometres wide, and half a kilometre deep' was dug and '30 million tons of overburden' was removed from the earth.¹² Though, 'We may never know the riches mined in gold and silver that reportedly exceeded all anticipation as it was siphoned off from the slurry offshore.'¹³ CRA dumped toxic waste of the mine, contaminating 7 different rivers which became a swamp, where no life *could* exist. The tension between this world view and the profit-driven corporate mission to extract the region's rich mineral resources, such as copper and gold, is an aspect of Havini's multi-channel video installation series, called *Habitat* (2016-2019).¹⁴ The investigation of minerals in Papua New Guinea began in the 1880s in the Milne Bay Province. Between 1968-86, the National Government of Bougainville, alongside the Federal Republic of Germany, investigated the area surrounding Panguna and discovered 'an anomalous concentration' of gold and copper in this soil.¹⁵ Large scale mining at Panguna began in 1972, under the CRA subsidiary BCL, (the Bougainville Copper Limited).¹⁶ This mapping was met by landowners defending the land from geologists. Despite this, mining ensued for nearly two decades by the CRA.¹⁷ Taloi describes the *experience* of returning to

¹² Amber Hickey, "Remembering the Land: Art, Direct Action, and the Denial of Extractive Realities on Bougainville." In *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change*, pp. 129. Routledge, 2021.

¹³ Taloi Havini, "Acknowledging the blood generation." *Artlink* 33, no. 4 (2013): 44.
<https://datainformatorg.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/doi/10.3316/ielapa.743309044981329>

¹⁴ Fig. 3.

¹⁵ Regan and Griffin 2015, 25.

¹⁶ Kibuta Ongwamuhana and Anthony Regan, "Ownership of Minerals and Petroleum in Papua New Guinea: The Genesis and Nature of the Legal Controversy." *Queensland U. Tech. LJ* 7 (1991): 111.

¹⁷ Don Vernon, "The Panguna mine," *Bougainville before the conflict*, Acton: ANU Press, 2005: 258.

Panguna mine and encountering a huge gaping hole in the island, the consequences of which remain unresolved. The work *Habitat* began from an innate sense of duty she felt to document. In Taloi's position of indigeneity, away from journalistic or documentary intentions makes her entry to the mine site with a camera deeply symbolic. As an indigenous woman reclaiming photography, for herself and her own people is *empowering* given the colonial legacy and literal frame of photography and journalism perpetuating racial bias and exploitation. John Kawowo demands the continued importance of the land as a symbolic and real treasure he says,

since the land is the basis to survival in Papua New Guinea, it is worth fighting for the land rather than letting it to be destroyed by multinational corporations. A very clear example is the Bougainville Crisis where it had cost a lot of lives for only one reason – the 'LAND'.¹⁸

Habitat reiterates this notion. This work, Havini describes, allowing

different perspectives to create artwork is the essence of the Habitat series – all came about through discussions as indigenous person who feels that your land is being exploited for other people's worth.¹⁹

Havini has noted that the first contact with the colonial world was from helicopters rather than ships, she employs high-angle imagery to revisit and reclaim this.²⁰ One scene of *Habitat* is a woman working on the land, she looks up to the camera above 'suggesting stoic defiance in the face of brutal imperialism.' One scene from the work

¹⁸ John Kawowo, "The Impact of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in Papua New Guinea", a paper presented at the Fourth NGO Parallel Forum, Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, 14-17 August 1998.

¹⁹ Ocean Archive, "Messy Studio: Pacific Futures" TBA 21 – Academy, 15 June 2020.

²⁰ Fig. 4.

depicts a bright blue copper leaching from the earth, on top is a mining map.²¹ This is a powerful image; it frames the Western notion of scientific knowledge in the forms of maps as being fuelled by an incessant need for progression, exploration. This is harmful, debasing and restrictive. Scenes of women protesting the CRA are 'juxtaposed with an Australian mining company's own triumphal film about its 'great adventure' in the region.'²² A direct statement about the positive and exploitative frame of Bougainville by the West, though subtle, *Habitat* is a thorough and importunate commentary about, as noted by Terry Smith, the obliteration of indigenous visual culture by imposing calibration, in the form of order, measurements and maps.²³ Both vertical and horizontal measurements of the land are colonial tools; reimagined in *Habitat* through environmental impositions.

An incredibly resilient indigenous movement and 'carefully planned direct action campaign' caused the closure of the mine in 1988.²⁴ This movement is described as the "world's first successful eco-revolution" though this is often left out of dialogue about the story of Panguna. As the 'bloodiest violent conflict in the South Pacific since the end of the Second World War,' a large proportion of the population was displaced

²¹ Fig. 5.

²² Steve Dow, "Connecting to Land" in Art Guide, 14 January 2020.

<https://artguide.com.au/connecting-to-land/>

²³ Kyle Weise, "Limitless Horizon: Vertical Perspective," *Millennium Film Journal* 67 (2018): 11.

²⁴ Amber Hickey, "Remembering the Land," 129.

and about 25,000 people lost their lives as a result.²⁵ The intervention of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) escalated the violence into eight years of conflict. Over the years of fighting, various armed factions emerged, including the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and the Bougainville Resistance Forces. Taloi Havini's photo series the *Blood Generation* is a body of work centred around the post war generation, she created these alongside her cousin Stuart Miller.²⁶ The concept of the *Blood Generation* was inspired by a tape presented to Taloi by her father, it contained songs and stories of the generation who grew up behind the blockade.²⁷ These 17 portraits, many of the subjects related to Taloi, are striking and sobering; encapsulating the human experience. The triptych *Sami and the Panguna mine*, 2009–10 depicts three images of young woman Sami, in *Sami and the Panguna mine I* we see Sami standing in front of the Panguna mine, in which sits neglected rusted machinery.²⁸ Her figure is glowing amidst the dark and deceptive history. Sami escaped Bougainville with her family to Honiara, they later gained refugee status in the Netherlands. This image evokes the story of Sami returning to her matrilineal land site. The recurring theme of copper-blue water is seen in the pool at the bottom of the mine, the leaching of the land continues.²⁹ Taloi recalls stories from the conflict about

²⁵ Volker Boege and Lorraine Garasu, "Bougainville: A source of inspiration for conflict resolution," in *Mediating Across Difference*. University of Hawaii Press, 2011: 163.

²⁶ Taloi Havini, "Acknowledging the blood generation." (2013): 43-45.

²⁷ Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art. "Taloi Havini discusses her work in 'No.1 Neighbour: Art in Papua New Guinea 1966-2016.'" 16 December 2016. Queensland: QAGOMA.

²⁸ Fig. 6.

²⁹ Sana Balai and Judith Ryan, "Taloi Havini and Stuart Miller Blood Generation" in *The National Gallery of Victoria Art Journal* 54 (2016).

women waking up before the BCL and chaining themselves, and their children, to the machinery as a form of protest. As a direct descendant of the landowning women of this area, the second iteration of the portraits of Sami pictures her standing underneath the towering digger above, harping back to the battle the women before her fought.³⁰ The images *Jennfier, Buka* and *Jedi, Buka* featured in the canonical exhibition *Oceania* held at the Royal Academy – and mark a milestone for Bougainvillean contemporary art and a reimagining of Captain Cook’s legacy in the Pacific.³¹³² *Lillian, Daantania Nasioi Region* recalls the environmental implications on Panguna, she sits in a river close to the mine site.³⁴ With these portraits, Taloi set out to create a ‘new visual language’ legacy of photography of indigenous peoples and for the generation to which she is a part of.³⁵

Embroided with identity politics purporting to religion, language and skin colour, Bougainvillean nation building is complex.³⁶ Bougainville has been involved with

³⁰ Fig. 7.

³¹ Fig. 8 and 9.

³² Quanchi, Max. "Oceania: Curated by Nicholas Thomas and Peter Brunt. London, Royal Academy of Arts, 29 September–10 December 2018." *The Journal of Pacific History* 55, no. 3 (2020): 432-435.

³³ McLaren, Annemarie, and Alison Clark. "Captain Cook upon Changing Seas: Indigenous Voices and Reimagining at the British Museum." *The Journal of Pacific History* 55, no. 3 (2020): 424.

³⁴ Fig. 10.

³⁵ Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art. "Taloi Havini discusses her work in 'No.1 Neighbour.'"

³⁶ Anna-Karina Hermkens, "Like Moses Who Led His People to the Promised Land: nation-and state-building in Bougainville." *Oceania* 83, no. 3 (2013): 194-195. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ocae.5020>

PNG in various capacities. In 1999, the process of nation building began, Bougainville eventually signed a peace accord which would produce a referendum on independence from PNG. Whilst they now remain autonomous from Papua New Guinea, recent referendums indicate Bougainville is edging closer to full independence.³⁷ The population of Bougainville has created community-based humanitarian programs on the basis of prior exploitation. This shift away from neoliberalism and towards collaboration and reclamation of indigenous knowledge has been described by Havini's father Moses as,

challeng[ing] the whole philosophy of self-reliance to a people who will reject dependency in any new guise that is presented (rather than) over rid[ing] or compet[ing] with the existing infrastructure (which) will (...) waste valuable resources.³⁸

The process of reconciliation and social change has been community led, this has allowed for the acknowledgement of indigenous knowledge such as oral knowledge sharing, weaving and intergenerational connection.³⁹ Stewards of the land at Panguna resisted its exploitation, with no acknowledgement from the United Nations nor any global audience.⁴⁰ Taloi Havini responds to the post-colonial era in the aftermath of conflict in Bougainville through her work *Reclamation* 2019 which marked her first solo exhibition.⁴¹ This work is comprised by a dimly-lit room filled with sand, upon which

³⁷ Mcdonald, Joshua. "Bougainville Inches Closer to Independence" in *The Diplomat*, 19 July 2021.

³⁸ Moses Havini, "Peoples Integrated Development Peace and Economic Self-reliance," *Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Forum on Peace and Human Security in the 21st Century on board the Peace Boat Brisbane Australia to Auckland Aotearoa* 20th-28th September, 2000: 24.

³⁹ Volker Boege and Lorraine Garasu, "Bougainville: A source of inspiration for conflict resolution," 2011: 167

⁴⁰ Amber Hickey, "Remembering the Land," 130.

⁴¹ Fig. 11.

are placed cane, arched structures.⁴² The use of 'shadow play' evokes 'intangible cultural heritage' and places the viewer into a nondescript spacetime, confronting them in a state of limbo. *Reclamation* was created collaboratively with her Hakö clan members, 'hope, resistance, and emancipation' each play a part in this work, woven into the work itself and the shadow.⁴³ These sculptural works explore map making,

underlying the ephemeral installation of cane and earth, are questions about the ways in which we relate within temporal spaces; how borders are defined and claimed as well as the value of impermanence and embodied knowledge over fixed historical understandings.⁴⁴

Equally, *Reclamation* encourages art audiences, who are not otherwise considering the implications of colonisation, to imagine the process of social disintegration and reintegration. In other words, Havini would not have created this work had it not been for the displacement of a generation. Moses Havini told Taloi,

You have to go to university," Moses told his daughter, having been given the same advice by his father, the late paramount chief of the Naboin clan on Bougainville's Buka island. "But then, you have to come home and develop your own culture. You have to learn all the white man's knowledge but come home and better your own people.⁴⁵

Reclamation is a testament to this advice and in many to ways to the importance of decolonising the academy, it is 'art as generative refusal' of diminutive frames.⁴⁶ The collective nature of creating this work is central to Bougainvillean modes of

⁴² Soo-Min Shim, "Reclamation Taloi Havini" in Art Asia Pacific, 2019.

⁴³ Soo-Min Shim, "Reclamation Taloi Havini" in Art Asia Pacific, 2019.

⁴⁴ Soo-Min Shim, "Reclamation Taloi Havini".

⁴⁵ Steve Dow, "Connecting to Land" 2020.

⁴⁶ Amber Hickey, "Remembering the Land," 132.

communication.⁴⁷ Havini is part of a collective fight for a framing of Bougainville that does justice to its people, in this sense she is a freedom dreamer.⁴⁸

‘Mired in histories of bloodshed over political, economic and cultural disruption, the legacy of mining in Panguna brought into startling visibility by Havini’s work.’⁴⁹ Taloi Havini is actively creating a deeply impressionable legacy on Bougainvillean art and the framing of Bougainville. Her employment of multiple media, spaces and places canonise her into both local and global art markets. The use of documentation, filming, archiving, photography and sculpture, particularly, shift dominant structures. With Taloi’s work as a tool, audiences are able to comprehend the devastation brought to Bougainville but equally how revolutionary Bougainvillean blockades were, and remain to be. Each of these works pose an intimate documentation of the environment, which are in turn, implicated with climate change. The leading position of Pacific climate resistance being both born out of urgency, and the reclamation of ancestral knowledge and indigenous epistemologies.⁵⁰ Havini weaves together themes that resonate with her experience of Bougainville, conflict, displacement and return. In these four works, extractive modes of exchange, collective memory, identity and

⁴⁷ Josephine Tankunani Sirivi and Marilyn Taleo, *As mothers of the land*, 2004.

⁴⁸ Robin DG Kelley, *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*. Beacon Press, 2002.

⁴⁹ Kyle Weise, "Limitless Horizon: Vertical Perspective," *Millennium Film Journal* 67 (2018).

⁵⁰ Titifanue, Jason, Romitesh Kant, Glen Finau, and Jope Tarai. "Climate change advocacy in the Pacific: The role of information and communication technologies." *Pacific Journalism Review* 23, no. 1 (2017): 133-149.

regeneration each ask the question about the scale of documentation, past, present and future.

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Appendix

Figure 1



Taloi Havini, *Berona (shell money)*, 2015. Stoneware, earthenware, porcelain, glaze, steel wire, dimensions variable.

Figure 2



Taloi Havini, *Berona (shell money)*, 2015. Stoneware, earthenware, porcelain, glaze, steel wire, dimensions variable

Figure 3



Taloi Havini, *Habitat* 2018-19. Four-channel video: 10 min 35 sec. Installation view at
“Reclamation,” Artspace, Sydney, 2019–20.

Figure 4



Taloi Havini, *Habitat* 2018-19. Three-channel video: 10 min 40 sec. Installation view at
Art Gallery New South Wales, Sydney, 2019–20.

Figure 6



22

Figure 7



Taloi Havini and Stuart Miller, *Sami and the Panguna mine II*, 2009; printed 2015. Colour inkjet print, 84.0 x 120.0 cm.

Figure 8



Taloi Havini and Stuart Miller, *Jennifer, Buka* 2009. Digital print on Canson Platine fibre rag paper 310gsm.

Figure 9



Taloi Havini and Stuart Miller, *Jedi, Buka* 2009. Digital print on Canson Platine fibre rag paper 310gsm.

Figure 10



Taloi Havini and Stuart Miller, *Lillian, Daantania Nasioi Region*, 2009. Colour inkjet print, 84.0 x 120.0 cm.

Figure 11



Taloi Havini, *Reclamation*, 2019. Cane, vine, steel, varnish, site-specific installation, dimensions variable.