How Did Solomon Islanders Live with Conflict? A Case Study of Daily Life in Northeastern Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

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This paper deals with conflict that is commonly referred to as “ethnic tension” in the Solomon Islands. The conflict caused a number of people to become internally displaced. There have been continual studies of the migration patterns and livelihood strategies of displaced people in Malaita. However, little attention has been given to how the people in northeastern Guadalcanal, where some of the most severe fighting took place, lived under conflict. In this article, I consider how the internally displaced people lived with and avoided becoming involved in the ethnic tension by analyzing their daily lives.

This article has 2 aims. First, I offer an ethnographic description of the people of northeastern Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. Second, I discuss their everyday struggles and choices during the conflict and social unrest, referred to as “ethnic tension.” Specifically, I examine their living conditions during the turbulence as well as their strategies for avoiding conflict.

In conclusion, I state 2 key points describing the living situation of people in northeastern Guadalcanal during turbulence: First, the subsistence economy played an important role in their livelihood under the conflict. Second, they avoided becoming involved in the tension by providing foods and goods to militants along with physically keeping a distance from the conflict itself.

Keywords: Solomon Islands, northeastern Guadalcanal, “ethnic tension”, internally displaced people (IDP), avoidance of violence, subsistence economy

1. Introduction

This article has 2 aims. The first is to offer an ethnographic description of the people in northeastern Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. The second is to discuss their everyday struggles and choices during the conflict and social unrest, referred to as “ethnic tension.” Specifically, I examine the living conditions and strategies for avoiding conflict during the turbulence.

This conflict, which led to around 200 fatalities and over 35,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), is generally referred to as “ethnic tension” (Kabutaulaka, 2001; Statistics Office,

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2002: 128; Braithwaite et al., 2010: 20). This is because the two armed groups in the conflict, the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) and the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), were mainly organized by the two ethnic groups of the Guadalcanal and the Malaitans.

Many researchers have pointed out that the phenomena known as ethnic conflicts, such as the Rwandan Civil War or the civil war in Sudan, are not to be understood from the viewpoint of ethnicity. The same applies to the “ethnic tension” in the Solomon Islands (Kabutaulaka, 2001; Ishimori, 2013). Not everyone in Guadalcanal acted as agents of violence in the conflict, and not all Malaitan people joined the MEF. In fact, IFM threatened the Guadalcanal people and MEF often attacked Malaitans who were living in Honiara during the ethnic tension (Fuji, 2012: 164, 173). Furthermore, while most of the Malaitan IDPs had fled down to Malaita due to attacks or threats by the armed groups (Miyauchi, 2011), some Guadalcanalese had also evacuated to various rural areas in Guadalcanal due to other reasons.

In this article, I consider how the internally displaced people lived with and avoided becoming involved in the ethnic tension by analyzing their daily lives. There have been continual studies1 of the migration patterns and livelihood strategies of displaced people in Malaita (Miyauchi, 2003, 2010, 2011). But little attention has been given to how the people in northeastern Guadalcanal, where some of the most severe fighting took place, lived under the conflict. What motivated those who enrolled in the military group? How did the displaced people live? And how were others able to maintain their own lives in their homeland? This paper will focus on these questions in the absence of such studies2 on the people of northeastern Guadalcanal.

2. Ethnic Tension in Solomon Islands

In this section, I describe the historical background and process of the ethnic tension in the Solomon Islands, with a special focus on the main agents at the macro level.

The background for the conflict was accumulated resentment regarding land rights since the colonial period. After the Imperial Japanese Army destroyed the protectorate capital located at Tulaghi Island during World War II, a new government center was constructed in northern Guadalcanal which constitutes the current national capital, Honiara (Fraenkel, 2004: 29–30). During the construction of Honiara, large numbers of migrants were drawn to Guadalcanal from other parts of the country, especially from the densely populated island of Malaita (Sekine, 2002:

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2 A few ethnographies can be found on the people in Guadalcanal, such as works by Hogbin (1964) and of Lasaqa (1972).
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70). With the development of Honiara, the northern part of Guadalcanal also developed rapidly. Therefore, more people came from other islands to Guadalcanal for employment opportunities (Lasaqa, 1972; Kabutaulaka, 2001; Fraenkel, 2004: 32–36; Miyauchi, 2011: 78–79; Ishimori, 2013: 104).

Some of these immigrants acquired land rights after borrowing or purchasing plots of customary land from the people of Guadalcanal, without, however, going through the appropriate procedures\(^3\) for obtaining land rights. Some Malaitans also took part in violent crimes (Ishimori, 2013: 105). The people of Guadalcanal came to view Malaitans as disrespectful guests on their land, and these factors led to an accumulation of grievances by the Guadalcanalese toward other islanders who had settled in Guadalcanal (Braithwaite et al., 2010: 18–20; Miyauchi, 2011: 238–240; Ishimori, 2013: 104).

A direct cause of the breakout of ethnic tension was a statement\(^4\) in which demands for restitution were issued in late 1998 by Ezekiel Alebua, the premier of Guadalcanal (Fraenkel, 2004: 44–52). At the same time, the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA) was organized by youths from Weather Coast in southern Guadalcanal, and the members of GRA—aided by the use of arms—started to force people from other islands to leave Guadalcanal. As the

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\(^3\) In short, those who seek land rights to reside in Guadalcanal are required to hold a customary ritual with gift exchange.

\(^4\) This statement consisted of some demands, including $2.5 million in compensation for 25 alleged murders in Guadalcanal, compensation (and/or rent) for the use of Honiara as the national capital, and a halt to inter-island migration (Fraenkel, 2004: 47–50; Moore, 2004: 104–110).
conflict progressed, the military group became known as the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) (Miyauchi, 2011: 242). In early 1999, their exclusionary practices became more serious and caused large numbers people to become internally displaced. The number of refugees to Honiara was over 1,000 by the middle of 1999. Some of them went back to their home islands (United Nations, 2000: 14–15; Fraenkel, 2004: 53–55).

On 23 May 1999, a reconciliation feast ceremony was held at the Cultural Village in Honiara, with an exchange of traditional gifts to try to reconcile the militants and the settlers. But it had no effect on calming down the conflict. Less than 24 hours after the ceremonial feast, violence erupted again on the Guadalcanal plains. By June 1999, the ethnic tension had escalated to a point at which at least 50 people had been killed and more than 20,000 were forced out of their settlements in Guadalcanal (Kabutaulaka, 2001, 2002: 11; United Nations, 2000: 14–15; Moore, 2004: 110). On 14 June 1999, the government cabinet passed an Emergency Rule, which was signed by the governor general the next day and remained in place until 14 October 1999 (Moore, 2004: 111).

After the issuance of the Emergency Rule, Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa’alu requested assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat. Sitiveni Rabuka, former Fijian prime minister, was appointed as a special envoy to facilitate negotiations. Rabuka managed to facilitate a dialogue between IFM and the national government. Although the Honiara Peace Accord5 was signed on 28 June 1999, the conflict between IFM and the Police Field Force6 continued. On 12 August 1999, the Panatina Agreement, which demanded that militants lay down their arms and disband their organization, was signed. In November 1999, the Multinational Police Peace Monitoring Group (MPPMG), composed of police officers from Fiji and Vanuatu, arrived in the Solomon Islands, trying to disarm the IFM (Fraenkel, 2004: 68–73; Moore, 2004: 120).

After the outbreak of the conflict, Malaitan people demanded compensation from the national government for their loss of residence, property, and employment due to the IFM. But the government refused their demands, and finally the Malaitan people organized a counter-military group, the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF). In January 2000, they raided the police armory at Auki, the Provincial capital of Malaita, taking arms and bullets for use in seeking revenge against IFM. MEF, which cooperated7 with the Police Force that mainly consisted of Malaitans, launched a coup d’état in June 2000. Sogavare, the new prime minister, exerted efforts to solve the issue,

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5 This accord was signed among the Solomon Islands Government, premiers of Guadalcanal and Malaita, and the leaders of the IFM.

6 There is no official army in the Solomon Islands, so 2 types of police keep responsibility for domestic security: one is the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), a lightly armed force, and the other is its paramilitary wing, Police Field Force (Fraenkel, 2004: 44).

7 The MEF cooperated with the Police Force because most of its police officers were Malaitans at that time.
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and the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) was signed on 15 October 2000, mediated by the Australian government (Fraenkel, 2004: 87–99).

Harold Keke, one of the leaders of IFM, did not sign the TPA and reorganized some of the IFM members into the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF), based on the Weather Coast in southern Guadalcanal. By the middle of 2001, over 2,000 former militants had been recruited into the “Joint Operation” against the GLF (Fraenkel, 2004: 102, 126–130; Braithwaite et al., 2010: 39).

Although the TPA promised to compensate the victims on both sides for their loss of residence, property, and employment, the money was taken by politicians and the former militants. This elicited distress from the people of both Guadalcanal and Malaita. Moreover, the Guadalcanalese experienced increased distrust of the government because the situation following the signing of the TPA—such as disarmament—turned in Malaitans’ favor. Their distrust turned to an anti-Malaitan sentiment with an incident in which armed Malaitan police officers killed an unarmed Guadalcanal civilian. In 2002, Keke carried out repeated violence towards residents who opposed him, and in August 2002 he killed a cabinet member. The result was that the TPA actually extended the deterioration of law and order in all parts of the country (Fraenkel, 2004: 120–130).

The situation led Australia to intervene and try to resolve the ethnic tension. On 23 July 2003, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), which organized the forces and police of Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) member countries, arrived in the Solomon Islands, led by the Australian armed force and police. They rapidly achieved the disarmament of GLF and the collection of arms. After the deterioration of law and order, many foreign advisers were dispatched to the government ministries to reconstruct the country. This marked the end of the ethnic tension, which had lasted for around four years (Fraenkel, 2004: 159–180; Braithwaite et al., 2010: 49–61).

I suggest that the conflict can be divided into 3 phases based on the agents of violence and the main places of conflict (Table 1).

The first phase occurred from late 1998 to the end of 1999. Throughout 1999 there were continuous confrontations between the Royal Solomon Islands Police and IFM. The violent agent here was mainly IFM, the Guadalcanal military group, as the counter-military group had not been organized yet. This means that IFM unilaterally excluded the Malaitan people at the time. Further, the conflict was mainly experienced in Honiara and the rural areas of Guadalcanal. Therefore it was the people who lived in Guadalcanal who suffered and were raided. These

8 For example, while the guns that were submitted by the IFM numbered 927, those collected from the MEF amounted to only 204 (Alpers and Twyford, 2003: 92).
Table 1. Three stages of the conflict process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agent of Violence</th>
<th>Main Place of Conflict</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Phase (within 1999)</td>
<td>IFM, RSIPF</td>
<td>Guadalcanal Prov. and Honiara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Phase (within 2000)</td>
<td>IFM, MEF</td>
<td>Guadalcanal Prov. and Honiara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Phase (2001–2003)</td>
<td>GLF, Joint Operation</td>
<td>Guadalcanal and Malaita</td>
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Inclined both the Malaitan and the Guadalcanalese.

The second phase took place in the year 2000. The MEF, the Malaitan military group, emerged and initiated retaliatory actions against IFM. The agents of violence were the IFM and the MEF, but the battlefield remained on the island of Guadalcanal. This means that the conflict mainly affected people who lived on this island.

The third phase began after the TPA was signed in October 2000 and lasted until the deployment of RAMSI in July 2003. The TPA achieved cease-fire between IFM and MEF, but the other military group, GLF, continued to confront the armed police. In this phase, the agents of violence were the government army and the GLF. Although Guadalcanal was the main site of continued conflict, the social unrest that came about as a result of the deterioration of law and order expanded to the other islands, especially Malaita and Western Province⁹ (Fraenkel, 2004: 8).

Most studies on the “ethnic tension” in Solomon Islands have reconstructed the history of the conflict by focusing on the two military groups, and have tried to point out the background factors in the conflict or its socioeconomic impacts (Kabutaulaka, 2001; Sekine, 2002, 2009; Fraenkel, 2004; Moore, 2004; Ishimori, 2013). In the following 2 sections, I wish to reorganize the history of ethnic tension in terms of the internally displaced people.

3. Malaitan Refugees and the Ethnic Tension

The ethnic tension started when IFM, the armed military group in Guadalcanal, began pursuing and attacking the Malaitan settlements on the Guadalcanal islands at the end of 1998. In December 1998, all Malaitan people who lived in Tambea, in western Guadalcanal, were forced to relocate to Honiara at gunpoint by IFM. At the same time, IFM burned down a settlement located in the Lavuro plantation. These incidents compelled settlers in both Tambea and Lavuro plantation to relocate to Honiara (United Nations, 2000: 14).

In 1999, forced displacement by the IFM escalated. An informant from northeastern Guadalcanal, who attended boarding school in Tangarare in western Guadalcanal, described the

⁹ Fraenkel notes that “(the) climate of lawlessness and conflict also came to prevail on Malaita and, to a lesser degree, in the country’s Western Province. By mid-2003, […] the country was in such disarray as to be widely regarded as “the Pacific’s first failed state”’ (Fraenkel, 2004: 8).
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IFM attack:

One night, GRA (Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army) came to the school with guns while the students slept. They said to the Malaitan students, “Get out before this morning!” If they did not leave, they would be shot by GRA. The next morning, all the Malaitan students fled to Honiara. After all the students and teachers had gotten away from the school, the GRA plundered the property of the school. (Field note, 4 March 2010, translated from Solomon Pijin)

A similar event occurred in Ruavatu in eastern Guadalcanal. At that time, a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers staff member was teaching at the Ruavatu Provincial School. He told the story of the military group’s raid as follows:

One night in March 1999, the GRA, armed with guns or knives, came to the school and said, “All Malaitan people must get out!” They came and spread terror and destruction. At the end, GRA made all the students gather in the dining hall. Although some teachers from Guadalcanal tried negotiating with GRA, GRA’s demand was, “Get out, everyone.” Although this school was located in Guadalcanal, many Malaitan students had come as boarding students because this school had one of the highest education in the country. [...] After the school was closed on March 1999, GRA looted everywhere. Everyone who had stayed at the school ran away to Honiara, no one lived there.

We could not take many things. After 3 weeks I went back to my house to take other things, accompanied by teachers from Guadalcanal. My house had not been looted, but the school was destroyed. [...] The houses of non-Malaitan teachers had been looted and destroyed; for example, the property of a teacher from the Western Province had been stolen. (Field note, 19 July 2011, translated from Japanese)

Each of these stories reflects what was happening in March 1999. The places that were looted at that time were both western and eastern Guadalcanal rural areas distant from Honiara. Jon Fraenkel notes:

In early May 1999, concerted rebel attacks commenced on the northern plains, first closing the Ruavatu Secondary School on the eastern fringe and then working through villages from east to west, often giving settlers 24 hours to pack their possessions and depart. (Fraenkel, 2004: 55)

The main places of displacement were Tetere and Tasimboko, northeastern Guadalcanal, where the Solomon Islands Plantation Limited (SIPL) was located. The precursor of Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Limited (GPPOL), as I describe later, the SIPL was one of the key industries

10 Many stories of similar situations were reported (Beu and Nokise (Eds.), 2009).
supporting the national economy, and it employed over 5,000 Malaitan laborers (Fraenkel, 2004: 49). Both Kema village, which was burned down after the reconciliation feast at the Cultural Village, and Binu village, where 3 persons were killed on 12 June 1999, were located in northeastern Guadalcanal (Sekine, 2002: 74).

Many Malaitans who were threatened with armed force evacuated to Honiara, where they stayed in shelters provided by Red Cross (United Nations, 2000: 2). According to studies by Miyauchi, who has conducted fieldwork focusing on the people of Fataleka in northern Malaita, it is possible to categorize the displaced people into 3 groups (Miyauchi, 2003, 2011: 252–289).

The first group consists of the people who had purchased land on Guadalcanal Island before the ethnic tension occurred. When IFM attacked them, they abandoned their houses and livestock. They were under protection in Honiara, and subsequently they returned to Malaita. The second group includes those people who worked in Solomon Islands Plantation Limited. They had planned to return to their homeland in Malaita from the beginning of their migration. Therefore, they used to say, “I was going to return to my homeland some day in the future.” The third group consists of people who lived in Honiara or were born there. They escaped in fear to Malaita, but some of them returned to Honiara after the creation of MEF.

Through examination of the Malaitans’ evacuations due to the ethnic tension, Miyauchi argues that their migration patterns in fact resemble one of the frequent features of migration in the Solomon Islands since the early 20th century. That is to say, they selected the best way by applying strategies that shift between the monetary or “modern” sector and the subsistence sector. Their migration strategy reflects the question of how to choose among available social resources in order to organize their lives. This strategy was also applied to escape from the ethnic tension (Miyauchi, 2011: 282).

The ethnic tension displaced many Malaitans, but the internally displaced people were not only Malaitan: they also included Guadalcanalese people. Below are the figures of the national population census taken in November 1999 during the period of ethnic tension.

Table 2 shows the movements in population after the onset of the ethnic tension. More

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>Guadalcanal (excl. Honiara)</th>
<th>Honiara</th>
<th>Other Provinces</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaita</td>
<td>Guadalcanal</td>
<td>Honiara</td>
<td>Other Provinces</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal (excl. Honiara)</td>
<td>7,788</td>
<td>12,381</td>
<td>2,687</td>
<td>1,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honiara</td>
<td>4,888</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>3,652</td>
<td>1,747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>12,676</td>
<td>12,806</td>
<td>6,339</td>
<td>3,488</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Miyauchi 2011: 255.
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specifically, it shows where the displaced people lived at the time the national population census was taken.

I would like to focus attention on the respective numbers of displaced groups of people who evacuated from Guadalcanal. While the number of displaced Malaitans who moved from Honiara or other parts of Guadalcanal to Malaita is 12,381, the number of displaced Guadalcanalese reaches 12,676. This confirms that many people from Guadalcanal went away from their homelands to other parts of the island. In the following section, I will describe the livelihood of Guadalcanal inhabitants based on my fieldwork.

4. Lifestyle in Northeastern Guadalcanal

I begin with an ethnographic description based on my fieldwork in northeastern Guadalcanal.

According to the 1999 national census, there are between 7 and 18 languages and their dialects spoken in the Guadalcanal Islands (Statistics Office, 2002: 266–268). The language of northeastern Guadalcanal is Lengo.\textsuperscript{11} The population of Lengo speakers at the time was 12,272, and this is the most commonly spoken language of all those spoken in Guadalcanal.

The Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Limited\textsuperscript{12} (GPPOL), which is a key industry in the Solomon Islands, and the Gold Ridge Mine are located in northeastern Guadalcanal. Before the ethnic tension arose, positions at these facilities were occupied by people from other islands\textsuperscript{13} (Fraenkel, 2004: 49), but large numbers of Guadalcanalese have been employed since the ceasefire.

In this region, cacao and coconut are grown for cash income. Those who are not engaged in wage labor produce copra as an important part of their daily activities. When the copra they have produced reaches a quantity sufficient to sell, they bring it to Honiara for sale.

I conducted fieldwork in Koivo village and Suagi village (Figure 2). Each village is located 30 km east of the capital, Honiara. Koivo is located on the west side of the Mbarande River in eastern Tasimboko. The number of households when fieldwork was conducted was 36, and the

\textsuperscript{11} I conducted my fieldwork using Pidgin English (Solomon Pijin) and Lengo. In this article, I follow the Solomon Pijin spelling guide (SITAG, 2008) for text in Solomon Pijin, and I make a notational distinction between Solomon Pijin (underlined text) and Lengo (text in italics).

\textsuperscript{12} GPPOL is the oil palm plantation company which was established after ceasefire. GPPOL has 3 stations, called “GPPOL 1,” “GPPOL 2,” and “GPPOL 3,” and there are houses on-site for laborers. These stations hold a periodic market every other Friday, GPPOL payday.

\textsuperscript{13} Fraenkel notes that “(i)n 1999, 65% of the SIPL (GPPOL) workforce was Malaitan, and 16% from Temotu Province. [...] Guadalcanal’s gold mine [...] had an agreement with local landowners to employ local workers [...] but ‘people from the Islands of Malaita made up much of the Gold Ridge mine’s 400-strong workforce’” (Fraenkel, 2004: 49).
Figure 2. The locations of Suagi and Koivo (data source: OpenStreetMap)

total population of Koivo was 188. The religion of most people in Koivo is Roman-Catholic, and the church building is positioned in the center of the hamlet. The site of each household is divided into a cacao and a coconut plantation. Located near the houses are gardens, planted with staples of the local diet such as kumara and cassava. The GPPOL 3, in which a periodic market is held, is a 30-minute walk away.

Suagi village is located on the seaside in Tetere, on the west side of Mbalisuna River. The number of households in Suagi when fieldwork was conducted was 137. In the village there are 2 church buildings. One is the Roman-Catholic church, the other is Anglican. Those who worship in the same denomination live together. The GPPOL 2, where the mill factory is located and where a periodic market is held each payday, is an hour walk away.

In both Koivo and Suagi, the villagers’ livelihood consists of subsistence agriculture and wage labor. They mainly plant root crops such as taro (na kake),14 yam (na uvi), sweet potato (na kumala), cassava (na rarutu); greens (na paura), which they call “slippery cabbage”15 in Solomon Pijin, vegetable fruits such as eggplant (na kukusa), cucumber, chili pepper (na vanigha), and beans such as peanuts. These crops and vegetables are produced both for the growers’

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14 *na* denotes the article in linguistic terms.
15 “Slippery cabbage” in English.
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Figure 3. Central market in Honiara

Figure 4. Outdoor market at GPPOL 2

consumption and for sale at the central market in the capital or the outdoor market at the GPPOL site (Figures 3 and 4). They also cultivate bananas (na vudi), breadfruit (na begho), and sugar cane (na tovu).

While in Koivo, which is located in the interior of the island, villagers catch freshwater fish only for consumption, in Suagi they often go fishing in the sea using boat seines or fishing line. Sometimes they sell fish, but mostly it is for their own consumption (Figures 5 and 6).

Villagers breed pigs (na be) and chicken (na kundo), as in other parts of Melanesia; however, the meat is for feasts, not for the daily diet.

Nowadays, mostly metal pots are used for cooking, and plastic plates and ceramic cups are used for eating. But traditional ways to cook are also used, such as na umu, which is the steaming and roasting of root crops and vegetables on hot stones and banana leaves.

In the region of Lengo speakers, including Koivo and Suagi, there are many intermarried households (McDougall and Kere, 2011: 146; Beu and Nokise (Eds.), 2009). Villagers mainly use Lengo for verbal communication within the village, but they speak Solomon Pijin to communicate with people from other islands or language groups. Therefore, they do not have any problems communicating with each other. Although issues of inheriting titles to estates

Figure 5. Fishing with a line

Figure 6. Net fishing from a canoe
or defining group identities are different from the Malaitan, the people in the region say that these differences between the Guadalcanalese and the Malaitan have not developed into violent conflict.

5. Livelihood Strategies of People in Northeastern Guadalcanal during Ethnic Tension

How did the Guadalcanalese people living in northeastern Guadalcanal experience the ethnic tension? I classify them into 3 groups: (1) people who became involved in the conflict willingly, (2) people who kept a distance from the conflict, and (3) people who moved away from their village to other places.

Some youths willingly became involved in IFM, the military group in Guadalcanal. They have said about their motivation to join that they were fascinated by fighting or that they wanted to protect themselves or their children. The second reason, in fact, was due to members of the IFM pointing guns at them, leaving them no choice (Sugalonga, 2011; Ishimori, 2013: 117). Also, some youths were inspired by militant images gleaned from television, videos, and pictures (Braithwaite et al., 2010: 100). An informant living in Koivo told me that during the ethnic tension, he had collected armories from the sea which were used in World War II, and had guarded the shore to prevent MEF attacks.

However, most people of Guadalcanal tried not to become involved in the conflict (see also Fujii, 2014). In this article, I point out 2 ways people used to avoid the conflict. First, some people continued to live in their settlements without becoming involved. Second, others moved away from their homelands, and in this way they kept a distance from the conflict.

According to an informant who remained in his homeland,

When the ethnic tension broke out, the GRA came to my village and told us, “At least one young man in this village should join us.” But no one in my village joined the GRA. Then we provided food as a substitute for joining them. (Field note, 27 February 2010, translated from Solomon Pijin)

Nobody in the informant’s village joined the military group. According to him, they provided food for the military group as an alternative to supplying fighters. I heard a similar story in Suagi:

The GRA came to Suagi with guns. They said, “Cooperate with us.” We gave them root crops instead of offering our involvement. (Field note, 29 July 2012, translated from Solomon Pijin)
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It is not always clear what was provided to the military group, and how often. While some people provided a bag of sweet potatoes when they were demanded by IFM, some owners of retail stores gave them a little food and some goods whenever they demanded it. However, it is clear that many Guadalcanalese remained in their homeland and avoided involvement in the violence, as well as reducing potential damage by providing foods and goods to the militants. I collected similar stories of this avoidance strategy from both Suagi and Koivo.

On the other hand, many people in northeastern Guadalcanal moved away from their settlements in order to avoid the ethnic tension. Fraenkel reports that “(i)n the worst-hit areas on the northern plains, East Tasimboko recorded 66% of the population displaced, West and East Ghaobata reported 65% and 58% relocation” (Fraenkel, 2004: 55). Nakazawa reports that most people of northeastern Guadalcanal had no other choice than to move away from the village to hide in the “bush” (Nakazawa, 2009: 248). In fact, when I asked them about their lives during the ethnic tension, they answered, “The people came with guns. I was so scared that I ran away to the bush (sipu i pono).”

The word pono in Lengo corresponds to the word bus in English, pono refers to “bush.” In Solomon Pijin: Sipu i pono means to run away into the bush. Pono generally refers to the people living in the mountains south of the village, or a forested area that has not been exploited for agriculture. Therefore, at first, I assumed that they had relocated far from their homeland or village. However, as I proceeded with my investigation, I became confused about where they had gone and what they did during the conflict.

People also lived in their gardens, building temporary dwellings. Generally, they have several gardens in separate spaces, so they were able to move to other gardens if they felt unsure of their current choice because of the conflict. In addition, they had many shelters in their village, and could rely on their kin.

Figure 7. The pono and a temporary dwelling

Figure 8. The inside of a temporary residence

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16 In English, pono refers to “bush.”
Let us examine the situation of people who moved away from their homeland. An informant in Suagi village had been engaged in labor work in Honiara until the end of 1998. He had resigned his job and migrated to Nggela Island, where his wife was born. He told me:

During the ethnic tension, I lived on Nggela Island. Many people from Nggela lived in Tasimboko at that time. They were not from Guadalcanal. As soon as the ethnic tension happened, they escaped from Suagi to Nggela. I already lived on Nggela, so when I heard about the ethnic tension, I came to pick up my family and my friends using my own motorboat. After that, I accepted whoever wanted to escape. And I sent back anyone who wanted to come back to Suagi. (Field note, 29 July 2012, translated from Solomon Pijin)

Although he lived on Nggela Island, he played an important role in helping his family and friends in Guadalcanal. It seemed to me at first that he was exaggerating when he told me, “I went and came, went and came, many times.” However, I heard another resident at Suagi saying, “He brought me to Nggela Island at that time.”

In addition, I noted how the lifestyle in northeastern Guadalcanal had been changed by the ethnic tension. Yamauchi and Nakazawa, who conducted fieldwork in East Tasimboko from 1995 to 1996, wrote:

Residentsof villages located in the suburbs of Honiara had been experiencing rapid modernization; however, they were temporarily forced to return to subsistence farming and fishing, and their diet changed from purchased food to tubers, fish, and local vegetables because of the ethnic conflict. (Yamauchi et al., 2010: 227; Nakazawa 2009: 246)

The SIPL, one of the industries that played a great role in the national economy, was located in northeastern Guadalcanal. SIPL products were transported to Honiara on a paved highway, and the highway infrastructures between Honiara and northeastern Guadalcanal had been constructed in the early days. Therefore, villagers had indeed experienced modern lifestyles as referred to in the quote above.

With the fighting between IFM and MEF, bridges were destroyed and military groups were deployed at strategic spots along the roads. The roadblocks, which were set up by both military groups on the highway, limited people’s access to Honiara. It also meant that people were not able to sell their crops and purchase foods. For example, there were instances in which people could not enter Honiara, or in which they had to make a list of the goods they had purchased and then obtain permission to bring their goods back to the village. If they did not obtain permission, the militants held up their goods at the roadblock.

Regarding the lifestyle of the people of northeastern Guadalcanal before the ethnic tension,
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Yamauchi and others report:

Before the ethnic conflict, the community had 4 microbuses to transport villagers to Honiara and 3 large trucks for transporting agricultural products such as watermelons, sweet potatoes, coconuts, and pineapples to Honiara to sell. The villagers raised chickens in the village for both their own consumption and for sale. People frequently went to Honiara to purchase imported foods such as noodles, rice, tinned fish, and beer.

However, most daily activities involved agriculture (slash and burn), and most gardens were located within a 1-h(our) walk from the villages. The diet mixed traditional subsistence foods such as tubers (e.g. sweet potatoes, yams, taros, and cassavas), fish, and coconuts with purchased foods such as noodles, rice, and tinned fish. (Yamauchi et al., 2010: 228)

Nakazawa points out that the economic crisis occurring with the ethnic tension created supply shortages in the Solomon Islands and changed people’s collective lifestyle, which had been more or less involved in the modern capitalist system for about 20 years (Nakazawa, 2009: 246). I agree with Nakazawa that the limitations to transporting goods during the ethnic tension changed the lifestyle of northeastern Guadalcanal and influenced their livelihood and subsistence.

6. Discussion

Many anthropological studies on conflict and civil wars around the world give attention to disputes with neighbors or neighboring groups. As Fraenkel writes, quoting the testimony of an evicted Malaitan woman: “(M)ost of the militant men smoked with our husbands and ate in our homes but all of a sudden they came in the night and burnt our houses.” Familiar friends suddenly turned violently against their neighbors (Fraenkel, 2004: 55; McDougall and Kere, 2011: 146; Miyachi, 2011: 248). Many Malaitans who lived in northeastern Guadalcanal were evicted, and some of the Guadalcanalese also moved away or otherwise avoided becoming involved in the conflict.

However, as Nakazawa notes, the degree of reliance on the neighborhood by the people of northeastern Guadalcanal was not marred even in the conflict (Nakazawa, 2009: 247). In my fieldwork, I also found that many people in northeastern Guadalcanal kept a distance from the conflict.

According to discussions in previous studies, the goal of IFM was to evict the Malaitans from Guadalcanal Island. However, many Guadalcanalese suffered or experienced damage from the behavior of IFM: some of them had their farm crops ruined; others had their peaceful daily life destroyed (Ishimori, 2013: 116–117). To escape harm, those who remained in their homeland
provided food for the militant group. Most people who moved away from their settlements lived in their gardens, building temporary houses, or they found shelter in other places, relying on their kin or friends.

In considering the lives of internally displaced people during the conflict, we should examine what they ate to live or what they did to keep their livelihood (Konaka, 2010; Kurimoto, 2011). For example, Konaka, who has studied people's lives in the refugee camps in Kenya, points out that the reciprocal relationship of kinship or friendship, which he refers to as a regional safety net, maintained the livelihood of the refugees. He reports that in spite of receiving relief food provided for refugees, they do not have enough cooking devices such as pots or plates. Therefore, they relied on one another's help to cook their relief foods (Konaka, 2010: 38–40). Kurimoto points out the problems of humanitarian intervention, examining the food situation under the civil war in Sudan. His research focused on the way daily foods were obtained by soldiers, the refugees, the internally displaced people, and the people who had remained in their homeland (Kurimoto, 2011: 269–288). Kurimoto concludes that they all obtained foods not only from humanitarian aid agencies, but also from a pluralistic subsistence economy, i.e., agriculture, pasturage, fishing, hunting, and gathering (Kurimoto, 2011: 261).

How did the people of northeastern Guadalcanal live during the ethnic tension? To pursue the question, what is important is the place in which they lived. As I have described in the previous section, in fact, the people who said, “I ran away to the bush” mostly built shelters themselves in the gardens near their settlement. This means that neither those who remained in their homeland nor those who moved away from their village were forced to live far from their own gardens.

One thing I should mention here is the “wantok” system. Wantok, which derives from the English words “one talk,” conveys common linguistic or kinship bonds, but is frequently also used to mean “belonging to the same island” (Fraenkel, 2004: 206). This system has played an important role in this area, especially under the conflict. The wantok system is a kind of reciprocal relationship (Yamauchi et al., 2010: 233). If 2 people are wantok, one expects the other to provide support in all respects. Moreover, it is important to note that the wantok system functions a kind of social norm. It means that one must assist another if he or she is one's wantok. Even if the people in northeastern Guadalcanal did not get enough food on which to survive, they could always rely on their wantoks’ support.

Therefore, although the ethnic tension changed the lifestyle of these villagers, it is likely that they kept eating the same foods needed for survival as they did before the ethnic tension. As Sekine (2009) and Miyauchi (2011) point out, the subsistence economy enables people to support their livelihood. Although there has been a widespread cash economy since early days,
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as reported by Lasaqa (1972), the subsistence economy and reciprocal relationship have not
diminished in importance in northeastern Guadalcanal. In addition, although people depended
on imported or purchased food, it was not necessary for their survival. That their subsistence
activities were mostly related to agriculture, and that most of their gardens were located within a
one-hour walk, helped to support their livelihood and ability to survive.

7. Conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed the livelihood and living strategies of the people of
northeastern Guadalcanal under the conflict in the Solomon Islands, describing their daily
lives. Many studies on the ethnic tension have tended to describe the history of conflict as a
sequence of notable events in the process of ethnic tension for purposes of finding out the cause
or socioeconomic impact of the conflict. However, to understand the conflict in its totality, we
should also examine the real lives of the displaced people in the conflict.

In this paper, I have presented ethnographic findings on the Guadalcanal societies based
on fieldwork, thereby providing insights into the lifestyle and daily life in Guadalcanal. I then
explained villagers’ strategies for avoiding the conflict through a look at their lives—in other
words, how the ethnic tension changed and affected their daily lives in northeastern Guadalcanal.

The following conclusions can be made: First, the subsistence economy played an
important role in the people’s livelihoods under the conflict at the time of the ethnic tension. The
subsistence economy in northeastern Guadalcanal had not died out completely, despite being the
locus for one of the nation’s most widespread areas with a cash economy. The “ethnic tension”
had the result that people in northeastern Guadalcanal were not able to access the capital as
people had done before the outbreak of conflict. Moreover, the conflict hurt the effectiveness
of a cash economy. Nevertheless, despite this situation in which they struggled, they could get
by with reliance on their continual subsistence economy and reciprocal kinship relationship, the
wantok system.

Second, the people of northeastern Guadalcanal avoided becoming involved in the
conflict by providing foods and goods instead of fighters. In addition, they physically kept a
distance from the conflict. Although the IFM consisted of people from Guadalcanal, the general
Guadalcanalese population did not become involved in the conflict willingly. From the point
of view of the northeastern Guadalcanalese, the IFM was seen to be an outsider group as much
as the Malaitans were, because most of its members were people from southern Guadalcanal.
Moreover, they also regarded the IFM as something that came and disturbed their peaceful daily
life.
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