The story of the people who shut down a mine on the island of Bougainville
Introduction

On April 8\textsuperscript{th} 2020, Rio Tinto, one of the largest mining companies in the world, held its Annual General Meeting.

Every year, \textbf{London Mining Network} invites community representatives to London to attend the AGM as dissident shareholders. We work with them to hold the company to account for human rights abuses, loss of land, livelihoods and environmental destruction caused as a consequence of the company's mining activities. There are usually a variety of other activities including demonstrations, public meetings and discussions with shareholders.

Unfortunately, this year, that was not be possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic and both Rio Tinto's AGM and London Mining Network's response went online.
To mark the 2020 Rio Tinto AGM, we are sharing some resources which can be used with young people to celebrate the resistance by communities on the island of Bougainville to the Panguna mine. They were the first Indigenous people to permanently (to date) shut down a mine. They endured a ten year civil war and blockade of the island which meant no food, fuel, medical supplies or travel to and from the island. Some people call this struggle the world's first eco-revolution.

It is a chapter of Black History that ought to be better known. The experiences of the Bougainvillean people raise many questions about

- Colonialism and neo-colonialism
- Life under lockdown
- Resourcefulness and resilience in times of scarcity
- Who owns and controls the land
- The role of women
- The need for mining - who benefits and what the alternatives might be
For this project it would be useful to download the following documents:

**We are crying for our land  Stories from the Panguna Listening Project**
Catholic Diocese of Bougainville and Misereor
Personal testimony, stories, songs and photos.
This is needed for some of the activities.


**After the Mine  Living with Rio Tinto`s Deadly Legacy**
Human Rights Law Centre Publication
This is the most recent publication about Bougainville, launched a week before the Rio Tinto AGM. Optional background reading and great images.

[https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2020/03/29/HRL012_HRLC_Panguna_mine_report_FA.pdf](https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2020/03/29/HRL012_HRLC_Panguna_mine_report_FA.pdf)

Links to films and other reports and articles can be found through this presentation.
This presentation is not a single lesson. It is a series of mainly discussion activities based around films and articles which are designed to be done over several sessions. Parents and carers please get involved! Suitable for young people aged 12 upwards.

Take your time and do not rush to finish it all at once.
Where is Bougainville?

Bougainville is an island in the Pacific. It is part of the Solomon island archipelago but politically it is the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.

In November 2019, the Bougainvilleans held a referendum to decide whether to become an independent country. 98% of the people decided they wanted to separate from Papua New Guinea.

But the final decision is up to PNG.

Activity: Find Bougainville on a world map.
Bougainville: What's in a name?

The first European to set foot on Bougainville was the French admiral Louis Antoine de Bougainville who arrived in 1768. It is said that he named the island after himself.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the island has been inhabited for at least 29,000 years.

Many Bougainvilleans have their own name for the island: Mekamui which means Sacred Land.

To discuss: What does the name Mekamui tell you about how they feel about their island? What do you think about the French admiral naming the island after himself?

Activity: Look on page 36 of *We are crying for our land: Stories from the Panguna Listening Project*. Find the song about Mekamui. It is called Song in Nasioi. What does Nasioi mean?

Activity: Research and create a timeline for Bougainville`s experience of colonialism
Background Reading before you start

Many people in Bougainville lived off their land, largely from subsistence gardening, hunting and fishing, in a matrilineal system where each person is identified by membership of their mother's clan (more about matrilineality later).

1969 - a huge deposit of copper and gold was found in Bougainville. Many people who lived near this deposit, especially women who are the traditional landowners, were opposed to mining as they feared it would destroy their land and their livelihoods.

The company registered various traditional landowners of the Nasioi language group, but excluded women despite their position as traditional custodians of the land under the matrilineal system.

1972 - Mining began at Panguna. Bougainville Copper Ltd was mostly owned by Rio Tinto. The Papua New Guinea (PNG) government owned 20% and Bougainville received only 0.5% - 1.25% of the profits. For the PNG govt, the mine brought in over 40% of the country's revenue.

1972 – 1989 - The mine discharged (ie dumped) over a billion tonnes of mine waste into local river systems destroying local people’s health and their ability to fish and farm. They demanded compensation.

1989 - When people realised that the company was not listening to their grievances, saboteurs attacked the mine and forced it to shut down.

Activity: List three things that made people in Bougainville angry about the Panguna mine.
In 2016 Rio Tinto gave away its shares in the mine to the PNG govt. and the Autonomous Bougainville govt., saying that this meant they no longer needed to take responsibility for the legacy of the mine. The mine is like an open wound in the land. Polluted water still flows into the local rivers, turning the riverbed and rocks blue. The Jabe-Kawarong river valley downstream is like a moonscape with huge piles of rock and mine waste all the way to the coast 40km away.

12-14,000 people live along this river valley.

To discuss: List at least three ways in which these people are affected by the mine?
The Coconut Revolution

Well done for getting this far!

Now it is time to watch a film called *The Coconut Revolution*. It is about 40 minutes long so give yourself time.

Here is a question to answer and a short task to do during or afterwards.

1. Why is it called the Coconut Revolution?
2. Make a note of some of the ways in which people were able to survive during the blockade.

[https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/coconut-revolution/](https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/coconut-revolution/)
Women's Voices

These are not in the film even though, as the traditional custodians of the land, women played a huge role in resisting the Panguna mine from the very beginning.

In August 1969 …”a major confrontation took place between the bulldozers with lines of riot police carrying batons, shields and respirators, facing a group of about 65 women and children unarmed and quite defenceless. They ignored the instruction to move [from their land], then refused an attempt to shepherd them out of the way. When a barrage of 150 tear gas shells was fired at them, they stood firm.”

They only retreated when the police charged at them with batons.
Perpetua Serero, was the “chairlady” of the Panguna Landowners Association, who along with Francis Ona, spoke out against the Panguna mine, drawing attention to the damage it caused, which the company denied. They were both also critical of Bougainvilleans who supported the mine, and in some cases stood to gain from it. Perpetua Serero warned of the divisions and in-fighting that the mining company would bring to their communities.

Sadly she died just a year after the war broke out.

You can see a brief clip of Perpetua Serero speaking towards the end of this short film (approx. 4 mins).  
Earlier on in this presentation we saw the word matrilineal.

This article and film explore what this actually means for the women of Bougainville:


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWX9TwSuaT0

Activity: Watch the film and/or read the article and discuss the following questions

• How do the women make their living?
• Why is land important to the women?
• Why is the village council important?
• What changes have the women experienced over the years?
• What hopes do they have for the future?
Women also played a major role in ending the war and bringing about peace.

This short film celebrates their role.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBdzNfZ3YQQ

It is made of excerpts from a documentary called **Soldiers without Guns** which tells the remarkable story of the **New Zealand** led peace mission to Bougainville. The peace keepers left their guns at home, drew on the **Maori people’s** knowledge and experience of peace-making and most importantly, included the women of Bougainville in the peace talks.

You can watch the trailer here
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETlq0HThiPc&feature=emb_title

**To discuss: Why do you think it was important to include women in the peace talks?**

Read more here:
CREATIVE WAYS OF BUILDING PEACE - a story from *We are Crying for our Land*

I want to share a short story. One old man who used to walk with a stick passed on a story to me at the time of the crisis, when the fight was on. I am thinking of that story and how it has a connection to the situation we are in now between individuals, families, communities, even the districts.

A long time ago during the time of our ancestors, the clans used to fight and many people died. Many of the chiefs tried to stop the fight, they tried their best but did not succeed.

After many years, one woman had an idea, this woman came from the Basikan clan. This woman went to the bush and got some leaves; we call it biriko- bush umbrella. She came to the village and she dried out the leaves and did the design, from the leaves from the tree, it was the first bush umbrella with decorations.

The woman went with that umbrella to the place where they usually fight and began to dance with the biriko. The clans that were fighting were really surprised, it made them stop their fighting and because of what that woman did, it stopped the fight overall.

This story is telling us now today that women are peacemakers on Bougainville, that we can find creative ways for peace. Because of our matrilineal society, when these things are happening, we need to do something and speak our views, this is one of the chances that we can speak our views. It is time now to come out and air our views.
If the Rio Tinto Annual General Meeting had gone ahead in 2020, Theonila Roka Matbob, a community advocate, teacher and traditional landowner from Makosi village in Central Bougainville (just downstream of the Panguna mine) would have come to London to speak on behalf of her community. She says:

“The Panguna mine devastated our communities physically and culturally and we are still living with the consequences. Our land is destroyed and our rivers are poisoned. Kids are drinking and bathing in the polluted water and getting sick. New areas of land are still being flooded with the waste from the mine. We urgently need Rio Tinto to come back and deal with these problems so our communities can find healing.”
Communities who have been affected by the mine need:

- **Rio Tinto** to listen to them, take responsibility for the damage caused by the mine and provide independently managed technical and financial assistance towards cleaning up the mess.

- The **Bougainville** and **Papua New Guinea** governments to ensure that the communities are compensated and supported so that this never happens again.

- The **Australian** government to provide financial support and to ensure that mining companies listed in Australia can never act in this irresponsible way again.

Reading Activity: What does this all mean in detail? Is this an accurate summary? Go to pages 6 and 7 (Recommendations) in the report “After the Mine” to find out more (https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2020/03/29/HRL012_HRLC_Panguna_mine_report_FA.pdf)
Some believe that re-opening the mine is the only solution for an independent country to develop greater financial independence. In December 2017, landowner’s groups were asked to vote on whether to allow **Bougainville Copper Ltd** to re-open the mine.

*Janet Colman from Guava Village said she did “not really” want the mine to reopen.*

*“If I had a choice, but I don’t think I have a choice. If I am crying for independence; then I need the mine.”*

Read more about this debate here:


However, there was also huge opposition to re-opening the mine from many of the traditional landowners and villagers and the vote was split. Fearing that this could lead to violent civil unrest, the **Bougainville government** enacted a **moratorium on mining** in January 2018. It is uncertain if this is to be permanent.
FOUR STRENGTHS from We are Crying for our Land

Our story is about four things which give us strength.

First is spirituality, during the hard times everyone was committed in their prayers and these were very powerful, it was like we were seeing our prayers being answered.

Our second strength is resources, the land was our resource. What little land we had we used it to sustain our lives, through gardening. During those days there were no income generating opportunities. The only way we survived was from our food gardens.

The third strength is human resources and community groups, we survived because we helped each other. The people needed each other. From doing it and knowing it, we survived from the resources of the land.

Our fourth strength is custom, families and our elders helped each other. We needed each other’s support. Everyone contributed in their own small ways in trying to make ends meet. We also have songs which helped us through difficult times.

Joanne

How do people get through difficult times? This is a story told by Joanne, a woman from Bougainville.

Discussion and reflection activity: What strengths can we draw on during difficult times and how can we use these to build a better future?
Could there be a future for Bougainville without the mine? What are the alternatives? This film suggests that there could be. But before you watch it, do the activity.

**Discussion activity:** What other options might people in Bougainville have instead of mining as a way of generating an income for themselves and the country?

(approx 15 mins long)
For further reading download the report that goes with the film here


After watching the film:

**Discussion activity:** What can we learn from watching this film for our own lives and future? What do we need in order to live? What would we grow? Are such changes even possible in a so-called “more developed” economy? How should “developed” countries trade with a small island like Bougainville? Could the strengths we draw on in adversity also provide the solutions for the future?

**Extension activity:** To help answer these questions it may also be helpful to watch this film from Cuba
https://vimeo.com/ondemand/powerofcommunity (approx. 50 mins long)
London Mining Network hopes you have enjoyed the activities in this presentation. To find out more about our week of action against Rio Tinto please go to our website here:

https://londonminingnetwork.org/2020/04/rio-tinto-online-week-of-action/

To find out more and get regular updates about our work at London Mining Network, please sign up to our mailing list here:

https://londonminingnetwork.org/

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