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Author/s:

Minnegal, M;Lefort, S;Dwyer, PD

Title:

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Date:

2015-10-20

Citation:

Minnegal, M., Lefort, S. & Dwyer, P. D. (2015). Reshaping the Social: A Comparison of Fasu and Kubo-Febi Approaches to Incorporating Land Groups. *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 16 (5), pp.496-513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2015.1085078>.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/56361>

This is the authors' post-print PDF version

of the paper 'Reshaping the Social: A Comparison of Fasu and Kubo-Febi approaches to incorporating Land Groups' which was published in *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*.

Citation details for the published version are:

Minnegal, M., S. Lefort and P. D. Dwyer (2015) Reshaping the Social: A Comparison of Fasu and Kubo-Febi approaches to incorporating Land Groups. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 16 (5): 496-513. DOI: 10.1080/14442213.2015.1085078

**Reshaping the Social:
A Comparison of Fasu and Kubo-Febi approaches to Incorporating Land Groups**

Monica Minnegal, Sandrine Lefort and Peter D. Dwyer

In Papua New Guinea, local communities increasingly strive to render themselves 'visible' to the state as entities entitled to control and claim benefits from developments on their land. When people commit expressions of social form to paper they inevitably reshape previously operative social and political forms. This article compares ways in which two groups of Papua New Guineans have gone about the process of forming Incorporated Land Groups. Different histories of resource extraction, associated differences in engagement with state and companies, and different pre-existing social forms are all reflected in the negotiations described. We discuss people's motivations for drawing up lists of members, the ways they went about this, and implications for the communities themselves and for ILG registration more generally. Our analysis draws attention to how outcomes are shaped by scales of differentiation and emergent inequalities within the legal entities being imagined.

Keywords: *Social Change; Logging; Gas Industry; Distribution of Benefits; Land Management; Papua New Guinea*

Introduction

Forms of social and political organization in Papua New Guinea are both variable and fluid. In circumstances where people are obliged to commit expressions of social form to paper – to, for example, list names of those who qualify as members of newly devised, bureaucratically recognised, corporate groups – there is the potential that, in the process, they reshape and fix previously operative social and political forms (cf. [Jorgensen 2007](#)). This has been the case since 1974 when timber and oil and gas industries, influenced by a recently implemented Papua New Guinea Land Groups Incorporation Act, adopted Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs) as a framework for distributing monetary benefits to people who owned the land from which those industries extracted resources ([Filer 2007](#); [Weiner 2013](#)). That Act aimed to recognise 'the corporate nature of customary groups and allow them to hold, manage and deal with land in their customary names' ([Fitzpatrick 2010](#): 7). It was not,

however, designed for the purpose to which it was put by extractive industries and, in an attempt to resolve inherent ambiguities, in 2012 was replaced by the Land Group Incorporation (Amendment) Act (Lea 2013).

The amended Act effectively envisages construction of a socio-economic landscape comprising equivalent, indivisible and mutually-exclusive legal entities, each comprising a unique set of members on behalf of which it acts. Those members, in turn, are presumed to be coeval rights-bearing individuals, occupying identical positions in society and with equal rights to contribute to decision-making processes. The act specifies management structures that mandate ‘democratic’ procedures and accountability. The ‘flat’ social landscape thus imagined bears little relation to the reality of social worlds in PNG, where rights are commonly acquired rather than ascribed – developed through performance, through interaction with others and land, rather than being considered inherent attributes of individuals.

This paper compares ways in which people living in two communities – Fasu at Haivaro (Gulf Province) and Kubo and Febi at Suabi (Western Province) – went about the process of forming ILGs in 2014 (Figure 1). The communities differ in pre-existing social forms, in histories of engagement with extractive industries and in knowledge and experience of the bureaucratic procedures entailed in forming ILGs. These differences have influenced motivations for seeking to register ILGs and the processes followed in deciding, first, whether the central focus of intended ILGs should be securing land or accessing financial benefits and, second, who should or should not be recognised as a member of an ILG. We direct attention to the tension arising between prioritizing either exclusion or inclusion when seeking to establish new corporate entities, to the scales of differentiation and emergent inequalities within the entities being imagined, and to ways in which some people may seek to ‘domesticate’ each other through an emphasis on relational imperatives while others may seek to ‘domesticate’ the structures of Company and capital. We discuss implications for the focal communities themselves and for ILG registration more generally (cf. [Bacalzo et al. 2014](#)).

We first outline the purpose, requirements and process entailed in registering ILGs to the satisfaction of the state and then, for each community, provide background on social and political organization, relevant historical detail, and accounts of motivations and processes entailed as people moved toward devising ILGs.

Incorporated Land Groups

The Land Groups Incorporation Act of 1974 envisaged registration of ILGs as establishing corporate ‘actors’ able to transact land previously alienated for plantations, not as registering ownership of land. With the adoption by forestry and petroleum sectors of ILGs as the entities entitled to receive benefits in return for resources extracted from land, these groups took on new significance. The implicit recognition of rights to benefit from development on the land with which they are associated has resulted in many local people viewing ILGs as a mechanism for representing their views within broader Landowner Associations (LAs); associations ‘supposedly vested with the authority to represent landowners in negotiations that may affect their social and economic welfare’ (Goldman 2009:3-2). Whether ILGs do work effectively to negotiate ‘informed consent’ of members or result in ‘just distribution’ of benefits to members is open to question (Lea 2013). Indeed, there are numerous accounts of organisational leaders manufacturing consent without consultation and failing to distribute monetary benefits to ordinary members (e.g. Golub 2014: 11-12; Martin 2013). Nevertheless, a concern with ‘informed consent’ and ‘distributive justice’ remain key motivators for

establishing ILGs. But, as we will show, the weight given these two factors, and how they are mobilised, may differ between communities.

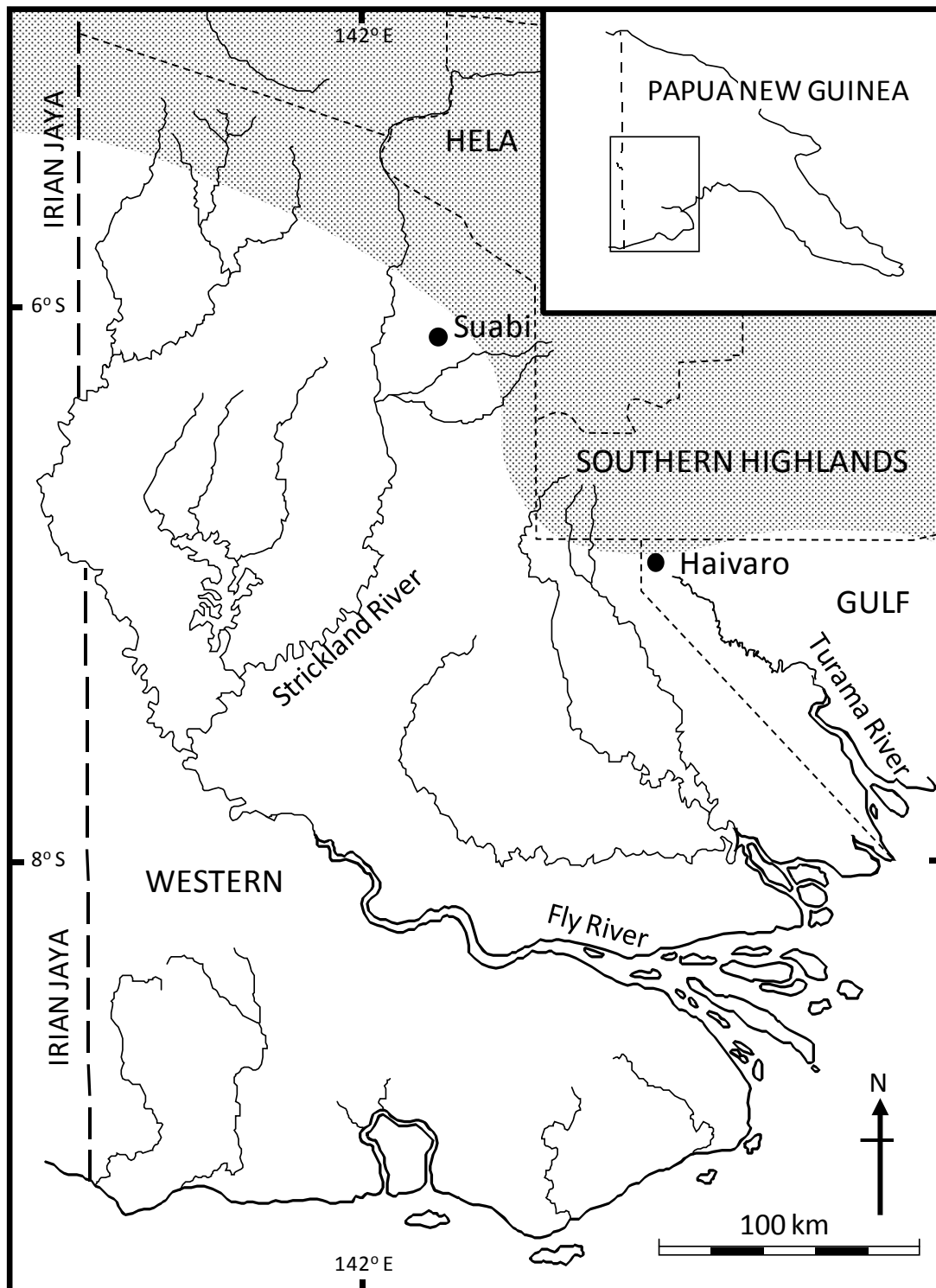


Fig. 1: Map of southwestern Papua New Guinea showing location of Haivaro and Suabi. The names of provinces are capitalized. The shaded area shows land above approximately 200 m ASL.

Under the 1974 Act, registering an ILG was a relatively simple process. The application form required an assertion that the proposed ILG comprised a ‘customary group’, named the Local Government area in which they owned land and provided the names of people who would act as management committee and Dispute Resolution Authority. No list of proposed members was required, and no governance procedures specified. The amended Act imposes stricter constraints. It requires a list of all proposed members, accompanied by birth certificates, and specifies that no person can be a member of more than one ILG. ILGs are now to have a constitution, hold minuted annual general meetings, provide written annual reports on financial dealings, keep bank accounts open to inspection, and reach decisions by voting. Women must comprise at least 10% of the 60% quorum at general meetings and at least two women must be included in the management committee. Further, each prospective ILG must declare the land over which it claims ownership, providing at least a sketch of boundaries and highlighting any areas in dispute.

Others have written of ‘the lack of transparency and the inaccessibility of pertinent information’ that characterises the ILG system ([Bacalzo et al. 2014: 71](#); [Tararia and Ogle 2010](#)). In remote communities, with limited and unreliable mobile phone coverage, few newspapers reaching the area, and no access to the internet, these problems are compounded. Information filters through as (often contradictory) rumours; it is unevenly distributed, as is the literacy essential to reading documents and filling in forms.

The ambiguous relationship between ILGs and land further complicates negotiations. While the original Act required simply that members of a proposed ILG ‘possess common interests ... and share or are prepared to share common customs’ and that their association ‘represents a customary form of organisation’ ([Lea 2013: 70](#)), this has become widely taken to mean that ILGs comprise patrilineal descent groups. Where such clans are also identified with particular land, it is not difficult to see how the assumption emerged that ‘the very existence of an ILG was ... evidence of an already apparently established ownership claim’ (71) over that land. But the logic entailed in this connection may go in either direction. Where the primary concern is with control over land, then the focus of negotiations around group membership is likely to concern relationships mediated by that land. Where the concern is with control over distribution of benefits, then other modes of relationship are likely to emerge as focal; association with land may well be a product, rather than a principle, of ILG membership.

Case Studies

Reconfiguring social worlds is not new at Haivaro and Suabi. Fasu people recount extensive travels of ancestors in the recent and distant past, travels that established new connections and alliances with people and places. Kubo and Febi, too, tell such tales, often in mythological terms with travel along underground roads. In both places, raids and the abduction of children are still remembered. Births, deaths and marriages all changed the configuration of relationships between persons and groups.

But the reconfigurings that ILGs entail are of a different order, focussed on the definition of categories and drawing of boundaries rather than on negotiation of relationships (cf. [Ernst 1999](#); [Guddemi 1997](#); [Jorgensen 1997](#)). To frame our discussion of the processes entailed, in each of the following sections we first provide background information on the community, before describing negotiations observed in 2014.

*Haivaro*¹

Haivaro village, in the north west of Gulf Province, is home to approximately 230 people from six southern Fasu clans.² Resettlement of widely dispersed longhouses into larger communities, encouraged by government and missionaries, has been underway since the 1950s. Initially, some lineages (*kepo*³) relocated to form clan-based hamlets near the current location of Haivaro. After completion of an airstrip in 1986, these merged as a single village. The people now live in nuclear family houses, grouped by 'clan' (*aporo ira*). Roads, community school, and Community Health Centre have been provided by timber companies during the past 35 years.⁴

Social organisation among southern Fasu is primarily based on patrilineal descent. Sociality entailed competitive exchanges, payments of war compensation and transfers of women against bridewealth. Residence pattern was, and largely remains, virilocal, wives becoming identified with the clan of their husbands. The oldest living man in each lineage, and others who held much traditional knowledge or had acquired prestige through transactions with extrafamilial kin, were responsible for settling disputes, making decisions about movements and guiding economic decisions (Gilberthorpe 2004, 2012).

Though subsistence at Haivaro was originally based on hunting and horticulture, the arrival of outsiders had notable effects. During the 1980s, some men obtained sporadic work on seismic surveys. In the 1990s, Timber Forest Industries encouraged local clans to register ILGs and soon afterwards people began receiving large sums of money as royalties and compensation payments. From that time onward, few people sought paid employment, store-bought foods became a regular part of the diet, and children were increasingly sent away, mainly to Port Moresby, for schooling. The people spent much less time in the forest.

But access to money, through this time, was not equal. Initially, the groups selected for registration were clans, each encompassing several lineages, though some lineages subsequently broke away to register separately.⁵ Only men were listed as members of the 16 ILGs eventually based at Haivaro. ILGs received quite different amounts of money, depending on the species and size of trees taken from their lands, while gender, age and degree of kinship affected distribution of benefits within each ILG.

Despite some tension over inequities in access to benefits, this system stayed in place for 20 years. In 2013-14, however, it became clear that the logging company planned to depart and, further, that under the revised law new ILGs would have to be registered. While these might no longer be needed to facilitate negotiation with loggers, rumours had reached the community that strong ILGs would be needed to protect land from theft by the National Government. The Haivaro Councillor organised a meeting to inform people of the new developments. SL assisted in interpreting revised guidelines, attended meetings of each clan, joined many other discussions, and typed membership lists for all six of the newly proposed ILGs.

Motivations

While the first registration of ILGs at Haivaro resulted from each group seeking to secure a share of anticipated benefits from logging, the negotiations in 2014 were framed in terms of securing control over land. With the expected departure of loggers, people began to explore other ways to generate income through, for example, tourism or cash-cropping. Who is entitled to make decisions in relation to land, and who has the right to give or withhold consent to its use, have thus become increasingly salient concerns for local people.

Previous inequalities in access to benefits, and associated tensions, further encouraged reconsideration of relations between and within clans. When ILGs were first registered,

people had only recently come together as a single village. They considered themselves to be one community where everyone had access to resources of the land and, hence, the capacity to make what they needed or wanted. With clans receiving very different amounts of money from loggers, however, a climate of suspicion and ‘jealousy’ emerged, with suggestions by some that other clans avoided obligations to share by hiding money. Increasingly, too, disputes arose between clan leaders who controlled the distribution of money and others who felt they were not receiving a fair share. In particular, younger men with the education and skills to deal with paperwork began to argue that distribution of benefits should reflect the differential time and effort people invested in negotiation with loggers, rather than just status within the clan.

The registration of new ILGs in 2014 was seen by Haivaro residents as an opportunity to officially recognise the independence of clans, each with the right to manage its own land and designate leaders who would protect that land and ensure equitable sharing among members. Past disparities in benefit-sharing at Haivaro have led people to focus on money-making projects organised at the clan level, rather than at community level. The concern, in their discussions, was not with ensuring equality between clans in terms of wealth but with finding ways to tie (potentially unequal) outcomes to work and investment rather than have it reflect the undoubtedly unequal distribution of valued resources across the land of different clans. Several people expressed the strong feeling that ILGs, if set up properly, could facilitate this.

Process – deciding foci

When negotiations to establish new ILGs began, people at Haivaro were unaware of requirements outlined in the amended Act. When SL secured copies of the guidebook and training manual developed to accompany the Act⁶, and provided these to the community in July 2014, the foci of proposed ILGs shifted. In contrast to Fasu in the Kutubu region, where, to ensure access to benefits, each lineage was registered as a separate ILG ([Gilberthorpe 2007: 111](#)), people at Haivaro decided to register ILGs only for clans. While there was, eventually, a strong consensus about this, the discussions entailed reveal much about local concerns.

The leader of one clan initially asked SL to prepare application forms for each lineage within that clan as separate ILGs. When SL explained that this would require splitting the clan’s land into an equivalent number of parcels so that the land associated with each ILG could be specified on the forms, he rapidly changed his mind. He decided to register a single ILG for the clan as a whole. When he further gathered that, under the new rules, any decision in relation to developments on the land would have to be ratified by a vote of all ILG members, he lost interest in the process. It seemed that either he must divide his clan land and thus lose control over much of it, or he could retain association with it all but risk having his decisions overruled by others. Eventually, however, fearful that his clan might lose all control over its land, he prepared a rather perfunctory application for the clan.

In another case, where two clans had previously registered a joint ILG they decided, this time, to register separately. One of those two then decided to register separate ILGs for the two lineages that comprised it, one using the name of the clan while the other planned to use the name of another clan that had no living members. Again, however, problems arose when the requirement to specify the land over which the ILG asserted ownership was raised. An ancestor of the first clan had given some land to the second when ILGs were first registered. The lineage that was splitting from that second clan now requested that it also be given some land by the first. Fearing that these two parcels of land would be beyond his control under the new arrangement, and possibly signed over to government or a company without his consent,

the leader of the first clan withdrew his support for the proposed new ILGs. The matter had not been resolved by September 2014.

The decision to focus on clans in registering ILGs also reflected local social realities. At Haivaro, only clans are seen as independent social units, with social cohesion within each, in the past and now, perceived as legitimately regulated by the senior man in that clan. In contrast, lineages are not perceived as units that can act alone – at least in relation to land – without the agreement of all the clan through the voice of the ‘chief’. Nor is there, at Haivaro, a legitimate leader at community level with the authority to regulate relations between clans; the Councillor’s perceived role is to defend the community’s interests in relations with outsiders, rather than to mediate relations within the community. The feeling in the community was thus that effective management of ILGs, and associated land, would be best organized at the level of clans.

Process – drawing up lists

Each clan held separate meetings at which their lists of members were decided, though individuals from other clans did, at times, try to influence those decisions. Though the meetings were private, broad commonalities emerged. In general, only members of the clan were included on lists. Because all members would be eligible to vote, people initially decided to exclude children on the understanding that these could be added when they reached 18 years of age. But, because birth certificates were needed for all members and procuring these was free for those under 18, it was later decided to list everyone aged over 15 years.

Each person was included on one list only, and always under their ‘bone name’.⁷ While younger people often spontaneously offered their ‘modern’ name, this was immediately corrected by their elders, who considered that rights to the ground could be properly protected only by registering ‘true’ names.

As required under the amended Act, both men and women were included on the new lists. Whereas unmarried women were included in the ILG of their father, however, married women and widows were listed with their husbands and sons. One recently-married woman did ask to be included in her father’s ILG (his clan had previously been generous in sharing benefits with women and children), but her request was rejected. While several men indicated that they would give a little money to their married daughters, it seems this was not to be accorded to those women by right. The only exceptions concerned women married to men from elsewhere who had come to live at Haivaro. In most such cases, the couple lived near the wife’s father, and both were included on the list for his ILG. In one case, however, the couple lived near the wife’s sister rather than near her father and brothers, and though the woman was listed with her brothers her husband was excluded. Finally, confronted with the need to include women on the management committee, general discussion among men led to a consensus that nominated women would be those known for docilely supporting their husband's decisions.

A last consideration concerned relations between some clans as a result of shared histories of migration. In two cases, during the migration that brought both groups to Haivaro people of one clan had temporarily lived on and ‘looked after’ part of what is now considered the land of another. The former asserted their right to speak for that land, and requested that a son be included in the ILG of the latter. Responses to these requests had not been finalised by September 2014.

Only two people with no affinal ties to Haivaro were included on the lists. These were men encountered by local elders during travels to the Highlands and Port Moresby. Both had

graduated from Year 12, were able to read, write and speak English, and had social networks that included people working for development projects elsewhere – all qualities that the elders considered potentially useful in future negotiations.

*Suabi*⁸

Suabi village, on the land of Kubo people, lies at the northern edge of the Strickland plain, about 30km south of Juha, the most upstream of five gasfields intended to feed into the Papua New Guinea Liquefied Natural Gas (PNG LNG) project. Australian Government patrols first reached the vicinity of Suabi in 1968, Christian missionaries came in 1982, an airstrip – on a site where the lands of several clans adjoined – was finished in 1984, a medical aid-post established in the same year and the first school opened in 1988. Through subsequent years people moved to Suabi from two or more days walk away, to access these facilities. In 2014, 764 Kubo, Febi and Bedamuni people were living at several discrete clusters of houses (Corners) near the airstrip. There are no roads in the area, and there has been no logging, sustained cash cropping or mining, though there has been exploration for gold, and then oil and gas, in mountains to the north and east since at least the 1950s.

The forebears of people now at Suabi lived as widely dispersed longhouse communities which comprised people of two or more intermarried *oobi*, named groups which Kubo speak of as patrilineal, associate with particular lands, and now commonly refer to as ‘clans’. Boundaries around these groups and lands were highly permeable ([Minnegal and Dwyer 1999](#)). Women retained their *oobi* affiliation and associated rights to land after marriage; men often lived, gardened and hunted on the lands of wives. By 2014, however, there was much discussion of the need for brothers to reside together, not merely in the same Corner but in adjoining houses. *Oobi* identity was becoming a categorical imperative, rather than reflecting the relationships negotiated in everyday life.

In contrast to Fasu, Kubo and Febi strongly valorize autonomy, expressed at both individual and family levels ([Minnegal and Dwyer 1999](#)). While some men were widely recognised as knowledgeable in particular domains, this was not extrapolated to other domains. In present-day contexts, men elected to positions as Councillor, ‘Law and Order Committee’ and so forth have responsibility only for secular matters in relation to government; they lack general authority and are not considered ‘leaders’ in negotiating matters of development.

Most residents of Suabi still make their living from subsistence gardening and hunting ([Dwyer and Minnegal 1992](#)).⁹ While there has been some access to money since the 1980s, mainly from casual work on government make-work projects and for mining exploration teams, the work was sporadic and the amount of money received small. This began to change as exploration at Juha intensified. From 2005, most men were employed for periods of a few weeks or a few months cutting seismic lines, some receive a little income from Church or Government, and a very few have employment at distant towns. Companies, however, came and went according to their own agendas and, initially, Kubo responded to these unpredictable opportunities by enjoying the bounty while it lasted and then turning their attention back to gardens and hunting ([Dwyer and Minnegal 1998](#)). The world of Company money was unpredictable, but so were the forest and the rivers.

Now, however, the PNG LNG project is starting to take shape. Wells have been drilled at Juha, seismic exploration is on-going, and people talk of the vast wealth that they imagine will be delivered in return for Juha gas. But to share in the anticipated bounty it is necessary that people be recognised as having rights to the land from which the gas will be drawn and, as well, have established corporate entities to which money could be paid. Through the first few months of 2014, people were intensely engaged in drawing up lists of members and

executives for subclans that they expected to be recognised as having a stake in Juha. MM and PD typed 20 of these lists and saw another 20.

Motivations

For people at Suabi, the primary driver for seeking to establish ILGs was the desire to secure a share of benefits from the PNG LNG project for themselves and their children. Discussions were focussed on designating membership in ways that would maximise returns to the group, and on identifying who had a right to share in those returns. Issues of ‘informed consent’ were raised at times, particularly in disputes over distributional arrangements agreed to by particular men without wider consultation. Other disputes arose over the failure of senior men to share with others monies received as Infrastructure or Business Development grants. But such disputes, ultimately, still concerned perceived inequities in actual or planned distribution of benefits. In 2014, people sought to establish ILGs that might minimize the potential for diversion of payments away from their own kin.

There was no questioning by Suabi residents, in 2014, of the PNG LNG development itself. And there was little discussion about who had the right to speak in deciding what was to be done with potentially affected land. The desire for ‘development’, and the future that narratives of development in the community imagined – a life of ease and certainty, with the wealth and lifestyles of the outside world drawn into the community – undoubtedly played a part in this unquestioning stance. But it also reflected the fact that the footprint of the current mining camp, well-heads at and planned pipeline from Juha will be small. There was occasional speculation about possible consequences of removing gas from the land; one man suggested that land would collapse as a result. By 2014, a few men from the Highlands had come in search of work and to check other opportunities, and a few local men had brought in Highlands brides. But this arrival of outsiders, it was felt, merely reflected a long-awaited recognition by the wider world of Suabi’s importance. The PNG LNG project would, people thought, bring new opportunities to be harnessed; it posed little threat.

Process – deciding foci

People at Suabi did not know the bases on which benefits from PNG LNG would be distributed or, beyond the need for providing a list of members, the legal requirements and processes for incorporating Land Groups. There was much speculation about the former. The government had declared the percentage of royalties to be shared by clans directly associated with wellheads (50%), those to the east who asserted ancestral rights to the Juha area (38%), those to the north, identified as Hela Province Febi (10%) and those Kubo clans at Suabi who had provided support and facilities to the Juha clans over many years (2%). But it was unclear how those shares were to be further distributed: equally among the component clans in a category, among subclans, or among individual members of these.

This uncertainty informed initial negotiations. At a Clan Vetting meeting organized by the Department of Petroleum and Energy to finalise the list of groups with a legitimate claim to a benefits, held at a small Febi village 30 km north of Suabi in November 2013, one group that had previously identified as a clan (Wuo) now presented as eight distinct ‘major clans’. Other neighbouring groups followed suit, presenting themselves as comprising two, three or four ‘major clans’. The original twelve clans identified by social mapping for the PNG LNG project (Ernst 2008: 61) became 27 ‘major clans’, many comprising a single family. And each of these, in turn, nominated between five and ten subclans, though they employed different strategies in doing so. Thus, a population of about 500 people was now identified as comprising 186 subclans. A similar process has been described elsewhere, with proliferation of ever smaller kin groups as people seek to maximise their own royalty payments (Bell

2009, Ernst 1999). But at the margins of the stakeholder region, particularly among Kubo, a different response emerged. There, what had been distinct *oobi* were declared to be subclans of a larger entity, only part of which was unambiguously within the area the government recognised as entitled to royalties. In some ways, this reflects what [Bacalzo et al. \(2014\)](#) describe among Wampar people, with the recent revival of larger encompassing groups in a context of an emerging potential to receive royalties from anticipated mining activity in the area. The inclusion of *oobi* within a particular clan reflected current socio-political realities rather than prior mythological connection. Thus, for example, there are both Kubo and Febi *oobi* named Wuo, Yawuasoso and Heyadibi. Though the lands of the Kubo *oobi* are far from Juha, each was invited to identify as a subclan within one of the newly-declared ‘major clans’ derived from the Febi groups with those names. But other Kubo *oobi* were also now identified as subclans of Febi. The rationales offered for these inclusions highlighted support received or friendship expressed in the present; for example, a senior man of the *oobi* hosting men from a Febi clan during visits to Kiunga, or caring for children of that clan when they attended distant schools.

Each of the subclans now recognised as entitled to share in the benefits from PNG LNG, people were told, was required to register as an ILG.

Process – drawing up lists

People at Suabi, unlike those at Haivaro, had little reliable information about the ILG registration process, and had not seen the new registration forms. They had been told at the Clan Vetting meeting that a list of prospective members was to be prepared for each ILG, and that a management committee and dispute resolution authority had to be nominated. But there was less certainty about the form any of these should take. For this, they turned to rumour. They gathered that prospective members should be identified by name, age and relationships to others, and could be differentiated according to rights held, but were unsure how these attributes should be recorded. They were, however, sure that each list should comprise exactly 150 names¹⁰, and that no name should appear on more than one list.

With these minimal guidelines in mind, the task of drawing up lists began. In many cases, a single person – the sole member of a newly designated ‘subclan’ – was responsible. In other cases, a senior man advised a literate son, daughter or wife who to include. Sometimes members of a major clan met, to compare notes and decide who should be included in which subclan and under what name. But the eventual lists were drawn up by individuals, young men for the most part, who could be seen crouched over paper under a house, head in hand, sighing loudly as they agonised over the task.

Though layout and terms used varied, the 40 lists seen were all presented as an assemblage of nuclear families, each comprising a married man, identified as ‘head of family’, his wife (or wives) and unmarried children. Married sons were listed as heads of their own family, while married daughters were excluded, in most cases, on the assumption that they would be listed elsewhere as part of their husband’s family. Being identified as ‘family head’ was clearly considered important. One man, drawing up the list for a subclan of which he was the only full member, included names for his as-yet-unborn children. Another, in a similar situation, listed as his ‘wife’ a woman from a different language group whom he hoped to one day marry, and her siblings as their children.

With 150 names required, each list included many people whose affiliations were elsewhere. Some families appeared on more than one list, though in each case with a different version of their names; unlike at Haivaro, people at Suabi did not prioritise ‘custom’ names.¹¹ The overall structure of the lists conveys a strong impression of patrilineality, at odds with the

distinctly cognatic orientation of much past and present practice where people freely garden and hunt on the land of their mothers' lines. This new emphasis is reinforced by comments from some people that 'under PNG law, only men can own land'. In almost all cases, the 'father's name'/'surname' listed for wives was that of their husband, not their father. But a closer analysis reveals a more complex picture. The lists included not just agnates but also a range of affines – families of mothers, sisters, or wives' brothers. In two cases, this provided a way to include in-married men, former Community Health Workers who married local women while posted at Suabi and still spent much time in the community. Several lists included families of in-married women.

Finally, many lists included people from more distant places, who were neither agnates nor affines – families from Kiunga, Tari, Mount Hagen, Goroka, Lae and Manus. These people had never been to Suabi, spoke no local language and knew nothing of the land or its stories. But their friendship and guidance, in hosting residents of Suabi who ventured to their towns, had made a significant difference to the lives of their guests, making survival and growth possible. Without them, those drawing up the lists would not have been where they were now, who they were now.

At Suabi, then, as at Haivaro, the process of drawing up lists was informed by deeper understandings of personhood. Persons here are made, and remade, throughout their lives as they interact with persons and beings around them. Thus, to their eyes at least, the lists were a right and proper record of those who had a stake in the world they occupied. But it was recognised that not all contributions were equal. In a few cases, all those listed were accorded 'full rights' in the proposed ILG. Most lists, however, distinguished people with 'full rights' from those with 'user rights' though the strategy for allocating differential rights varied. Agnates were usually given full rights. Some lists assigned full rights to married daughters or sisters, others did not. Some accorded full rights to all men and children, but not to wives. Others accorded only user rights to anyone who was not an agnate of the focal line.

Discussion

The imperative to develop ILGs, at Haivaro and Suabi as elsewhere in PNG, ultimately arises from a need to become visible to the state ([Jorgensen 1997](#)). Only by presenting themselves in ways that comply with concepts understandable to the state and developers are people able to engage with these institutions and have their claims officially recognised. But what people seek to render visible is not always the same.

Different imaginings of the future, informed by local particularities of past experience and anticipated developments, shaped the opportunities and threats that people at Haivaro and Suabi sought to manage by establishing ILGs. At Haivaro, the concern with control over land engendered desire for recognition of authority in relation to land. The design of ILGs thus entailed identifying clearly bounded groups, with a markedly hierarchical structure. Membership was exclusive, grounded in patrilineal descent, and distinguished rights to speak by age and gender. At Suabi, in contrast, the concern with distribution of benefits engendered desire for recognition of association not with land as such but with those who held rights to that land. The design of ILGs thus entailed identifying a network of connections that, in some cases at least, spanned much of Papua New Guinea. Membership was inclusive, encompassing not only agnates but also affines and allies of a focal man or woman, and did not discriminate by age.

The tension between exclusion and inclusion as organising principles has been identified elsewhere in PNG, as people seek to incorporate in response to development on their land. Inclusive approaches, it seems, are more likely to be observed in the initial stages of a

development project such as mining (Bacalzo *et al.* 2014: 64), with continued recognition of ego-centric personal networks and cognatic relations (e.g. Golub 2007; Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1997). In many cases, however, within a few years more exclusive forms emerge, with land tenure being reframed in terms of patrilineal descent and senior men seeking to limit recognition of outside connections (Bainton 2009; Guddemi 1997). Northern Fasu, for example, in response to the Kutubu oil project, increased emphasis on hereditary kinship and began to downplay other types of social connection (Gilberthorpe 2013).

Our observations at Haivaro and Suabi, however, indicate a more complex picture, one that demands attention not just to ‘local specificities’ (Bacalzo *et al.* 2014: 74) but also to the scales of differentiation and emergent inequalities within the legal entities being imagined. Given their concern with control over land, it is not surprising that Haivaro people decided to register one ILG for each clan; in the one case where a clan discussed registering two ILGs, negotiations faltered over the fear that one or other might be able to sell part of the land associated with the clan as a whole. The previous strategy of registering some *kepo* as ILGs, to secure equitable distribution of benefits, was now seen as a threat. At Suabi, in contrast, people planned to register an ILG for each of the subclans now recognised as entitled to share in the benefits from PNG LNG. Several of those subclans comprised a single person, few comprised more than one household, and a significant number had no direct knowledge of, or relationship with, the land where PNG LNG activities were to occur.

At Haivaro, too, the perceived failure of previous ILGs has resulted in a greater emphasis on traditional authority structures as a way to mediate relationships both within and beyond lineages and clans. While the proposed ILGs were undoubtedly framed in patrilineal terms, this was cross-cut by negotiations that revisited relational connections to land. At Suabi, the emphasis on ego-centric networks, rather than on descent or ties to land, is complicated by an increasing objectification of households and differentiation of relationships within these. In both cases, the position of married women in particular is problematized. Their membership of ILGs is usually tied to husbands, rather than fathers, and thus always contingent. On most lists seen, moreover, they are accorded ‘user rights’, rather than the ‘full rights’ accorded males and unmarried women, and their rights to speak for and benefit from developments on land is thus constrained.

The different approaches to drawing up lists of prospective members for ILGs, at Haivaro and Suabi, reflected not just different access to information about requirements but also different orientations. At Haivaro, the focus was very much on identifying who had a right to speak for and make decisions about future use of the land. At Suabi, it was on identifying who had contributed to the viability of the landowners, and were thus entitled to a share of what they acquired.

The lists people were drawing up will eventually, though perhaps in modified form, become legal documents, with the power to shape rights and privileges and responsibilities into the future. As yet, however, the reconfigurings we have described are largely imaginary, existing primarily on paper. But social imaginaries are potent – ideas that come to be taken as common sense, by at least some; ideas on which those with power act, in ways that make the real world conform to the imagined one. Changes that, seemingly, exist only on paper, do play out on the ground. As the Comaroffs noted, in *Ethnicity Inc.*, the process of objectification implicit in drawing up lists, defining boundaries, ‘also has an impact on everyday conduct: on those less-objectified, unremarked upon ways of doing things – even things instrumental, bureaucratic, and commercial – that embed themselves, “thickly” or “thinly,” in local conventions, styles, and values’ (2009: 75). In many ways, the people at Haivaro and Suabi are doing as they have always done, creatively eliciting relations with

others. But the tensions generated by recent negotiations – tensions over who gets included in what list, rejection of one man’s authority to speak for others, realignments as some are told to join a different group, decisions about who to stay with when visiting a community in an attempt to influence decisions – will not be easily erased. Recognition that such decisions are overtly grounded in critical and tactical consciousness feeds into changing subjectivities. As Febi and Kubo seek to ‘domesticate’ the structures of Company and capital – and of an imagined ‘PNG *kastom*’ where only men can own land – they are themselves increasingly domesticated, subject to the imperatives of a categorical epistemology that constrains their capacity to construct their own biographies through interactions with others and land. And as the Fasu at Haivaro seek to reassert ‘traditional’ control over land – to ‘domesticate’ each other, through an emphasis on relational imperatives – they find themselves subject to new modes of categorical control imposed by the state.

Such encounters between relational and categorical ontologies have happened elsewhere before, in Papua New Guinea and around the globe, as local communities are encompassed by – and themselves seek to encompass – the opportunities and threats of global capitalism (LiPuma 2001). At Haivaro and Suabi, however, we are seeing the earliest stages of that process. And it is the messiness of what we observed – as boundaries are drawn, while networks stretch ever more widely; as some clans fission, and others amalgamate; as multiple identities are concretised on paper, and singular identities are imposed – that offers insight into the process of change itself.

Acknowledgements

MM and PD thank the people of Suabi, and SL thanks the people of Haivaro, for their friendship, hospitality and teaching. Our work was supported by the Australian Research Council under Grant DP120102162.

Notes

- [1] SL conducted fieldwork at Haivaro for 15 months from June 2013.
- [2] The people at Haivaro identify as Namo Aporo, the vernacular term for people generically known as Fasu (Gilberthorpe 2013: 267-268), but perceive themselves as distinct from Fasu living to the north around Kutubu.
- [3] According to Gilberthorpe (2007: 115-116), ‘Kepo comprise either father and productively mature sons, or a band of brothers with immature offspring’. Haivaro people translate *kepo* as ‘foot of a tree’ and its referent varies with context from ‘family’ to ‘lineage’. For this paper ‘lineage’ is taken as the appropriate referent.
- [4] Logging in this area was started by Timber Forest industries (TFI), which was succeeded by New Guinea Industry Corporation (NIC) and then Rimbunan Hijau (RH).
- [5] Two clans registered as a single ILG, an agreement reached as part of negotiations over a marriage in which land had been exchanged for the wife. The decision to join ensured that the husband’s line retained some control over, and the right to benefit from, that land.
- [6] The amended Act was accompanied by a 42 page guide book and a 123 page training manual (Department of Lands and Physical Planning 2012; Constitutional and Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea 2012).
- [7] Among Southern Fasu, each person has a ‘bone name’, given by the father when a child is about six months old, by which time its vital principle (*ho*) is considered to be effectively fixed in the child’s body. This name is drawn from those of people, places or species associated with the lineage of the father. People also have a ‘skin name’, which again may be that of a place or species or a ‘modern’ Biblical or English name.

- [8] MM and PD first visited Suabi in 1986, and passed through the community regularly through the next 13 years en route to another Kubo community to the northwest. They conducted fieldwork at Suabi for a month in 2011, two months in 2012 and five months in 2013-14.
- [9] Approximately 25 km² surrounding Suabi has been declared, by clans associated with that land, available to all residents for gardening and harvesting sago.
- [10] We are unsure where this understanding originated. It may be that a recommendation to not include more than 150 names in one ILG was interpreted as an instruction to include that number.
- [11] Kubo and Febi people usually have several names: a ‘custom name’ given soon after birth, other names emerging through life as interactions reveal different aspects of them as people, and yet others (usually Biblical or English) chosen by the person as one expression of who they wish to be, or be like.

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