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Mining narratives, the revival of «clans» and other changes in Wampar social imaginaries: A case study from Papua New Guinea¹

by

Doris BACALZO, Bettina BEER and Tobias SCHWOERER*

ABSTRACT

The prospect of mineral resource exploitation, in the context of legal-political pressures on local communities to comply with the bureaucratic visions of mining companies and the state, and the narrative construction of community futures, invariably sets in motion processes of social boundary-making. Outcomes are driven not only by discourses originating in the state or the mining companies, but also in local and national narratives about the financial benefits from mining for legally recognised «landowners». Among the Wampar of Papua New Guinea, circulating narratives about mining interplay with and are informed by local social specificities to produce imagined futures that involve the revival of encompassing groups called sagaseg as a basis for Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs). Yet, the creation of ILGs is sensitive to the particularities of kin relations, including those emerging out of interethnic marriages, thus preserving the long-standing Wampar emphasis on inclusive sociality.

KEYWORDS: mining, circulation of narratives, reconfigurations of sociality, boundary-making, Incorporated Land Group (ILG), Papua New Guinea

RÉSUMÉ

La perspective de l'exploitation minière, dans un contexte des pressions politico-juridiques sur les communautés locales pour qu'elles s'alignent sur les visions bureaucratiques des compagnies minières et de l'État, et les mises en récit sur les avènements des communautés, génèrent des processus de redéfinition des frontières sociales. Les changements ne résultent pas seulement des discours émanant de l'État ou des firmes, mais aussi des mises en récits locales et nationales portant sur les bénéfices de l'exploitation minière pour les «propriétaires terriens» reconnus. Parmi les Wampar de PNG les récits qui circulent interagissent avec les spécificités locales et l'avenir envisagé passe ainsi par la résurrection des groupes inclusifs nommés sagaseg comme base des Incorporated Land Groups (ILG). Cependant, la constitution des ILG s'est révélée sensible aux particularités des relations de parenté, incluant des liens issus de mariages interethniques, ce qui a permis la préservation d'une socialité mise en avant par les Wampar.

MOTS-CLÉS : mines, circulation des récits, reconfiguration de la socialité, délimitation des frontières sociales, Incorporated Land Group (ILG), PNG

A dominant theme in the anthropology of mining in Papua New Guinea remains the analysis of transformations in conceptions of kinship and land tenure, and ultimately the reconfigurations in sociality that take place in

local communities with the advent of mineral exploration and extraction. Wherever the prospect of resource extraction arises, resource developers and the state demand the identification of landowners who can negotiate over access to

1. The three co-authors have equally contributed to this article with fieldwork data and analysis and are listed in alphabetical order. We would also like to thank Don Gardner for helpful discussions and comments on earlier versions of this article.

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MAP 1. – Localization of Wampar area and map of the Markham Valley showing Wampar villages and mining sites

the land, compensation, royalties and other benefits (Gilberthorpe and Banks, 2012; Imbun, 2013). As a consequence, local communities come under strong pressure to present themselves according to concepts understandable by the state and developers. As representatives of the state in Papua New Guinea use a popular version of the anthropological idea that unilineal descent groups constitute corporate, landowning entities (Jorgensen, 2007; Filer, 2007), its citizens are required to reshape patterns of sociality to conform to it: creating unilineal descent groups where none have existed before, or by rigidifying, simplifying and standardizing existing patterns of sociality and landownership (Guddemi, 1997; Jorgensen, 1997, 2007; Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997; Ernst, 1999; Golub, 2007a; Weiner, 2007; Gilberthorpe, 2013).

Diverse social processes are concerned with exclusion and inclusion, as people strive to limit and/or extend membership in newly legalized groups. Sometimes they pursue exclusionary strategies that produce novel boundaries within existing social fields. This can clearly be seen in the cases of the Lihir Big Men who limit their once important outside connections (Bainton, 2009); among the Sawianoo of the Left May River, that reframed land tenure in terms of patrilineal descent within a decade of mining exploration starting (Guddemi, 1997); or in the strengthening of

hereditary kinship to the exclusion of other types of social connections among the Fasu under the impact of the Kutubu oil project (Gilberthorpe, 2013). The opposite tendency, that people operate in an inclusive mode has been observed less frequently, and usually only in the initial stages of a mining project, as among the Gende, where Zimmer-Tamakoshi (1997, 2001) observed the continuing importance of the reciprocal nature of all «kin» relations (that are not bound by a biological reckoning of kinship but rather more by its social nature), and the Ipili in Porgera, who have kept their kinship system of cognatic and ego-centric personal networks intact in a process that Golub (2007a) refers to as a «forging of landowner identities.» However, even the Ipili, in their negotiations with government officials, were compelled to limit membership so that while the out-marrying women, their husbands and children were included, all other affines were not. Among the Gende, exclusionary mechanisms have grown over the course of the last twenty years, from an initial focus on inclusivity. With the mining operations of Ramu Nickel, and a second project in Yandera getting close to realisation, this has created three distinct localised social networks (the two areas around the mine sites and a third area on the Simbu side of the Bismarck range) grounded in concerns about claims to mining royalties (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 2012).

Such processes of representation as landowning groups, however, are not necessarily directly instigated by the discourses emanating from the state and the mining companies. Particularly in the early stages of resource exploration, when a mining project is still in its infancy, local narratives on the prospects of financial and economic benefits as well as conflicts about «landownership» and what constitutes a «landowner» take centre stage. These narratives² often engender proactive and autonomous preparations by the local people involved, who start formalizing and transforming kinship relations long before a resource development plan even reaches a feasibility stage (Guddemi, 1997; Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997).

When we conducted fieldwork among the Wampar people in the Markham Valley of Papua New Guinea in 2009, 2010, and 2013³ we were struck by the preoccupation of the people with a copper/gold mine called Wafi-Golpu, which – apart from exploration drilling – so far exists only on paper (and on colorful powerpoint slides or in an animated video on the mining company's website). Narratives on the wealth that this mine will bring to the Wampar, and the preparations that have to be put in place to ensure it, flowed through the villages. These narratives are diverse, refer to local, regional and national processes and are patterned according to the level and kind of access people have to specific information. It became evident that for the Wampar, Morobe Mining Joint Ventures (MMJV) – a 50/50 joint venture between Australian gold mining giant Newcrest Mining and South-African based Harmony Gold that is developing Wafi-Golpu – has become a kind of «person», who is an important agent, and to whom different people are related in different ways. These relations are carefully observed and discussed by nearly everybody, with a view to acquiring enough understanding of this agent to put social relations with it on the appropriate footing. Existing social differences and inequalities among the Wampar tend to be reinforced by these relations with MMJV, as well as by access to news and narratives that matter.

This circulation of narratives transforms not only Wampar social imaginaries, but also sociality itself. For these narratives inform processes of boundary-making apparent in manifold efforts to enumerate and list group members, which is the central part of obtaining the legal status of an Incorporated Land Group (ILG) under the Land Group Incorporation Act (see Fingleton, 2007 for an analysis of the act's history). What is striking is that through these exercises, Wampar actively began to negotiate amongst themselves with a view to coordinating the creation of ILGs. In the process, they reactivated and reworked the Wampar social category of *sagaseg*, which refers to large, encompassing, clan-like groups. Prior to the discovery of valuable mineral resources nearby, the descendants of a particular person (*mpan*)⁴ had become the primary organizing framework for economic activities that implicate land. The significance of the *sagaseg* had declined because of changing practices concerned with land tenure, kinship and settlement patterns as a result of colonization, missionization, and engagement with market forces. With the advent of mining, the *sagaseg* is being revived in the context of possible future benefits.

In this paper we present two aspects of the way mining narratives shape social imaginaries and ultimately sociality itself: an ethnographic account of the historical fall and rise of the notion of *sagaseg* that shows how the reformulation of groups into ILGs was sensitive to the specific social characteristics of each group; and an account of the way Wampar narratives about possible futures emerge from highly active information circuits of different scales and different types. The presence of state institutions and a large mining company, which the Wampar constitute as corporate macro-agents, might, under contemporary circumstances, have elicited a local «public» that acted as a political subject in the mass-mediated struggle between visions of the future. In fact, the narrative rendering of Wampar futures is still sensitive to a heterogeneous range of specific factors that pre-empt any tendency to the creation of such a large-scale political subject (Cody, 2011).

2. We understand «narratives» in a wide sense as spoken or written representations of states of affairs and events. Narratives encompass gossip, rumours, stories, jokes, or statements on Facebook; we follow the general Wampar practice of differentiating stories according to their content: e.g., war stories (*dzob a tir*), stories about ghosts and myths (*dzob mamafe*), new stories which deal mostly with personal experiences (*dzob wafu*) and stories about people (*gara gab a dzob*) (Fischer, 1994). We favour this notion of narrative over the concept of «discourse» which carries a burden of theoretical baggage we prefer not to deal with here in this essentially ethnographic piece.

3. Tobias Schwoerer and Doris Bacalzo did fieldwork in the village of Dzifasing between 2009 and 2010. Bettina Beer did fieldwork in Gabsongkeg village, first in 1997, and thereafter in 1999-2000, 2002, 2003-2004, 2009, and 2013. Together with other German and Swiss anthropologists who have conducted fieldwork in Wampar villages, they are part of the «Research Focus Wampar».

4. In this paper we use *mpan* as the Wampar do, in the context of land ownership, to refer to the descendants of a named ancestor. It is also used in context-specific ways to refer to quite different social collectives: to the clan (*sagaseg*), to ethnic groups and even to nation states.

Wampar sociality and social change

Previous research on the impact of mining on sociality in Papua New Guinea has been focused on distant communities in mountainous regions or on small islands, which were completely overwhelmed and transformed by their experience with large-scale mining. Wampar communities, by contrast, are almost «suburbanized», for they are all situated in the Markham Valley, close to Lae, the second largest city in the country. Many people are well educated and long accustomed to taking up economic opportunities in whatever form they present themselves. Moreover, and again in contrast to communities affected by mining elsewhere in Papua New Guinea, which were comparatively homogenous prior to the onset of mining, Wampar social life has already experienced significant in-migration, and involves a substantial number of interethnic marriages (Beer, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Bacalzo, 2012).

The Wampar live in eight villages in the Markham River Valley. These villages are political units in the sense that there is a Local Level Government Councillor (short LLG, *kaunsel* in Tok Pisin) for each village, but they differ substantially in their degree of not only spatial but also political cohesion. The concentration of the population in villages is a post-contact phenomenon, developed under the influence of colonialism, missionization, and «villagisation» (see Barker, 1996) after 1911. The Wampar practice of building houses in gardens away from the villages offsets this centralization in some villages, and in the last few decades many of these garden houses have developed into new hamlets away from the main village. With new economic opportunities through cash crops, cattle and chicken farms, and marketing along the main Highway, additional settlements have proliferated (Fischer, 1996: 124-128). Aside from the growth in number of hamlets, there has also been an increasing factionalism in the dominant Evangelical Lutheran Church and the growth of new religious denominations and churches. Thus, the once centralizing force of a single institutional church as the centre of village life from the early colonial period has been dissolved as well.

Fischer (1975, 1996), who has studied the Wampar since the late 1950s, observed that until the 1970s, all Wampar conceptualized themselves as members of the about 30 named social groups called *sagaseg*. Already, at this time, several of these *sagaseg* were too big to effectively function as corporate units with respect to land, and their members already at the start of the 20th century were spread over different villages. Wampar speak of *sagaseg* as patrilineal, but (as is often the case in Papua New Guinea) the incorporation of non-agnates is common. Also, the fusion of non-related *sagaseg* is historically verifiable. Furthermore, marriage patterns and practices have been diverse and are changing, e.g., with the

increase in interethnic marriages, having children born out of wedlock and adoptions. Marriages within the same *sagaseg* were formerly subject to sanctions, but this is no longer the case, mostly because younger people are unclear about their membership of a *sagaseg* (Fischer, 1996: 129-144, 1997: 75-78; Beer, 2006a).

What appear to be the more important landholding social groups are localised lineages of varying depths (called *mpan*). Accordingly, lineages have become more important with the increase in cash cropping and cattle farming (Lütke, 1999). Yet, knowledge of lineage depth has also been decreasing (it now hardly covers more than two or three generations) and land tenure more and more individualized (Fischer, 1996: 240). One of the clearest examples to illustrate this central importance of the *mpan* is the set-up behind the Dzifasing Cattle Ranch. This large ranch was founded in the late 1970s with government support as a model cattle ranch and breeding station, and is the only one of these stations established at the time still operating today. It is a cooperative business enterprise, in which 13 *mpan* have pooled their landholdings west of Dzifasing village. Each *mpan* is an equal shareholder in the enterprise. What is notable in this case is that the pooling took place independently of their *sagaseg* affiliation, as the 13 *mpan* identify themselves with different *sagaseg*. At the same time not all *mpan* in each *sagaseg* are involved in this enterprise.

With increasing, but unevenly distributed knowledge about legal frameworks for the registration of land, some of these localized lineages took the opportunity offered by the state to register their portions of land through the Land Group Incorporation Act, leading to a proliferation of small Incorporated Land Groups (or ILGs), which were sometimes in dispute about boundaries. In 2009, a district land administrator informed people in one Wampar village that all ILGs with few registered members and landholdings under dispute would be deregistered. One specific reason cited was that a number of extended families registered their land without informing other members of their *sagaseg*. The land administrator subsequently declared that all future ILG registrations would need approval, from – in his own words – «clan leaders» and the village *kaunsel* (the representative of the LLG), before being handled by the Lands Department. The conflicting narratives about «landownership» evident in these relations between Wampar groups, and between Wampar and representatives of the state, are aspects of a broader contemporary engagement between local, national and international understandings that deeply affect local social fields in Papua New Guinea (Filer, 2007; Golub, 2007b).

Another challenge to local conceptions of sociality results from the relatively frequent rate at which

FIGURE 1. – The Markham River with sedimentation (2009, picture Doris Bacalzo)

Wampar have married individuals of other ethnic groups over the last few decades (Beer, 2006a, 2010). Analyses of census data show that intermarriages between Wampar and non-Wampar have constantly been rising and that the level of intermarriage in younger marriage cohorts is sizeable, with about 60% of Wampar individuals being intermarried (Beer and Schroedter, ms). As yet there is no evidence of the Gende tendency to maintain exclusivity through marriage (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 2012). Intermarriages, through transformations of concrete practices, challenge normative conceptions of kinship and pose questions about what constitutes a Wampar, who is a member of what *sagaseg*, and how membership of a *sagaseg* is to be configured. Thus, «transcultural kinship» (Beer, 2010), and «the politics of acknowledgement» (Golub, 2007a: 75), which it has entailed, has added to the fluidity of group recruitment and the entitlements that it involves. Fieldwork between 2009 and 2013 made clear to us how kin networks that join ethnically different groups, also act to complexify Wampar narratives concerning boundaries and identities. In practice, the specific circumstances of particular social actors and the kind of relationships that they have among themselves and with their extended families, including those of interethnic marriages, are decisive in accounting for their narrative commitments.

Wampar Mining Narratives

The Wampar have already started to feel the impact of large-scale mining, following the start of operations at the Hidden Valley gold and silver mine in 2007. For instance, people have observed an increased sediment load in the Markham River that threatens to destroy riverside gardens, and sightings of dead fish tend to support narratives about poisoning of the river and increase anxieties that fish from the river are no longer edible. The same mining company, Morobe Mining Joint Ventures (MMJV), is now planning an even larger copper and gold mine in the immediate vicinity of the Wampar at Wafi-Golpu. MMJV just recently completed a pre-feasibility study of the prospect, which is expected to begin full production in 2019. MMJV's activity is evident to anyone living in the area: Wampar hear sounds (detonations, helicopters, etc.) of one or both operations, and they see traffic, storage depots and other installations that form the infrastructure required by Hidden Valley and Wafi-Golpu. Although some Wampar say that these operations cause earth tremors and kill fish, rumours about enormous compensation payments already received by Hidden Valley landowners also circulate frequently, so that

many Wampar anticipate the monetary benefits they too will obtain when production at Wafi-Golpu begins.

Although Wampar communities are differentially positioned with respect to MMJV operations, in ways that will impact on their future options, most of the representations in circulation constitute common knowledge for the population as a whole. However, that people do not have access to all the informational resources they desire is also common knowledge (in the sense that all people know it and know that all know it).

We will address how mining and narratives about it evoke hopes and fears that create expectations and social tensions, and prompt actions, while obscuring political issues and power relations underlying them. These processes, we will argue, result from the way the state – in the interests of mining projects and governmental processes – creates a zone that «black boxes» mining enterprises for local people, who, despite prominent talk of «informed consent», find it almost impossible to get reliable answers to the questions they have. In 2012, for example, local people demanded information from authorities about the dead fish that were being found in the Markham River. But information relating to Water Discharge Permits is not available to the public and it was not possible to determine what responsibility MMJV bore for the fish deaths. So, in addition to the physical enclosures required by MMJV operations, which make parts of Wampar territory inaccessible to local people, there exists a zone of interaction that comprises complex relations of inclusion and exclusion with respect to information: and given the value of such information, we might speak of a local knowledge economy, one that is no less characterised by inequality, tension and the generation of social relations than the circulation of other valuables. Creating enclaves is one of the organizing principles of the political economy of large-scale capitalist projects like mines or factories.

Nevertheless, no government or company is in a position to completely black-box undertakings of the scale of those that MMJV was set up to run: narrative representations of what is going on, in the form of visual images, rumours, gossip, scandal, jokes, critiques and stories are circulating continuously. Precisely because the government and the corporation are so interested in controlling the mines as enclosures these become a realm of such productivity for Wampar projected futures.

Here we want to consider four different ways in which narratives and representations circulate at the local level: first, via sociocultural brokers like village *kaunsel* and other individuals who are invited to workshops and mine visits; second, company and personal Facebook

pages and internet sites with some news but mostly pictures of MMJV operations; third, staged political events and speeches; and fourth rumours of the enormous wealth landowning groups can acquire. These different circuits of representation, charged with values and emotions, all have a «trickle-down» effect on Wampar social imaginaries at the village and household level.

Local socio-cultural brokers

Various members of local communities play a mediating role as brokers (Paine, 1975; Lewis and Mosse, 2006), which involves the interpretation for local circulation of narratives having their origin in external institutions (government, corporations, NGOs, etc.). In the following we exemplify this process through a discussion of the role of a village *kaunsel* who was the representative of the Local Level Government (LLG).

The *kaunsel* of Gabsongkeg was invited three times to MMJV seminars between 2011 and 2012, in his capacity as a LLG representative. In early 2013, he went to a fourth workshop during which the local politicians also visited the mining site. These seminars were held at hotels and restaurants in the city of Lae to which the average village *kaunsel* would normally have no access. Reports that circulated around the villages about the seminars were largely concerned with the food and accommodation they involved and the personal experience of the journey. In addition, seminar participants are picked up from their villages in new and expensive company vehicles and driven into town. Most Wampar don't pay a lot of attention to the topics of the seminars, as they don't expect their *kaunsel* to learn facts, for people do not expect representatives of MMJV to answer their questions truthfully. They are, however, interested in hearing about the otherwise inaccessible lifestyles associated with MMJV.

One seminar, for example, was intended to answer questions about fish deaths in the Markham River in 2012, and a «cyanide awareness training program» was organised in 2013. During and after the fish deaths in the Markham, Wampar had a lot of questions about what was going on, in particular, whether it was safe to eat fish from the Markham. Even well-connected individuals found it impossible to get answers from district government authorities or the company at that time. The workshop later held by MMJV blamed artisanal miners in the Watut for the fish deaths, but it also claimed that fish death had occurred in former times. The *kaunsel* and other villagers did not believe these claims. Many Wampar said that some white scientists had come to the village to test Markham water and had warned against eating its fish. Who they were and to which

organisation they belonged was not at all clear to villagers and nobody could answer questions about these people. Nevertheless, the majority of Wampar in the village of Gabsongkeg are scared and follow the advice of the «scientists». MMJV's explanations are not trustworthy in this matter. More generally, the lack of independent sources of information, the anxieties of local people, and their mistrust of MMJV, put other aspects of seminars such as the hotel, the food, and modern technological equipment at the mining site at the centre of attention. The lack of information about what is going on in the enclave, and the mistrust it creates, thus generate a displacement of the local peoples' attention and focus. MMJV, accordingly, is being identified with a luxurious lifestyle, good modern cars, plenty of food and financial resources, but it is expected to be guarded or even deceptive about its operations. In this respect MMJV is like any other political agent on the local scene: the success of political plans and projects frequently hinge on others not being aware of their exact nature. The extent to which local political representatives are in a position to act as honest brokers in the local knowledge economy is compromised, even while accounts of their experiences circulate as relevant features of the relationships between the Wampar and MMJV.

Another local socio-cultural broker who is indirectly and directly related to MMJV is a young man who founded a land-awareness theatre group, which travels to different places to stage plays about the dangers of selling Wampar land to businessmen. He thinks MMJV corrupts the *kaunsel* with their invitations to hotels and restaurants. He had declined an offer to stage a play at one of the MMJV informational events, in fear that he would not be in a position to criticize MMJV operations in the future. Nevertheless, through his critical engagement with MMJV, and its attempts to associate itself with him, his connections via Facebook to the company's General Manager of Sustainability and External Relations and the support he receives from other supra-regional theatre groups, he has become an important broker for representations of the corporation and NGOs.

The Internet and social media

MMJV presents information on its activities on an official website, as well as via Facebook. The MMJV website shows a movie about the Wafi-Golpu deposit which is a technical and highly abstract account of how MMJV will access the gold and copper deposits. The Facebook page «Morobe Mining Joint Venture» with 1,555 followers is probably known more widely among the Wampar than the company's web

pages. Many Wampar access the Internet by smartphones and have Digicel contracts with very good conditions. Digicel provides Internet access in most Wampar villages. Both MMJV's Hidden Valley and the Wafi-Golpu projects have individual Facebook pages as well, where employed people post pictures and texts. These are the spaces where social relations and networking are represented and enacted, so that who is working for the company or supporting its projects becomes visible. People, like the company's social relations managers, post messages crafted to present the company in a favourable light, for example, that a girl has been rescued by an MMJV helicopter and brought to the next hospital.

Further influential connections between the local social networks and the mine are the personal Facebook pages of Wampar employed by, or engaged in some capacity with, MMJV. Most frequently, the employees post photos of themselves and co-workers (emphasising they are a «team»), wearing shiny orange security vests, drinking together or posing for the camera of their mobile phones. Usually they pose in an office or with heavy machinery at a mining or exploration site. The orange vests, machinery and offices (often equipped with computers) give others an idea of the desirable jobs and enjoyable sociality available through connections to the company and its operations. Photographs of buildings and houses are shown less often. Comments on these pictures usually do not pose questions, but «friends» often express gratitude for being shown the photos, click the «like it» button, or otherwise admire what is shown on the photographs.

Political events

Important political events in the region are usually visited by MMJV's General Manager of Sustainability and External Relations. Less important events, such as a groundbreaking ceremony at a future tailings area, or the opening of a small bridge, are attended by MMJV representatives lower in the hierarchy. The «Launching» of the «Huon Gulf District Five Year Alignment Development Plan» was one important event witnessed in 2013. It was organized by the members of parliament (MP) from the two areas most affected by MMJV's activities. The main aim of the MPs was to show unity in their political strategies and to maintain their own popularity among voters by distributing heavy machinery, trucks and cars to the Local Level Government and food to all guests of the event. The speeches given emphasised that the whole population should stand together, regardless of differences between

settlements and ethnic groups in their levels of expected compensation and royalties. One of the MPs appealed for all ethnic groups to fight together to ensure that lots of money flowed to the population as a whole. He also emphasised, that local ethnic groups should exclusively benefit from work in the mine and not migrants from other parts of Papua New Guinea. People supported his speech with applause – especially when royalties were mentioned.

MMJV's general manager sat on the podium during the event and then gave a short speech in which he thanked the MPs for the invitation. He emphasized that the company would cooperate with the provincial government and talked about employment opportunities for local people. No other information was conveyed by him and he did not address the claims advanced by the MP. Villagers who attended the «Launching» barely listened to the speeches; they were most excited by the food preparations that were in evidence, which included a whole cow, donated by one of the MPs. Many people were involved in the catering for the event, which was the central topic of discussions. Rumours said that another cow would be delivered later for the exclusive consumption of the villagers who had hosted the «Launching». The «Launching» as a joint activity of both MPs and MMJV was interpreted as sign for a bright future, even while its specificities remained unclear.

At a «groundbreaking ceremony» in another Wampar village, at which the spirits associated with the future tailings site were to be compensated and pacified, MMJV also sent a cow, which was central to the whole event. Representatives of MMJV arrived in a car long after the ceremony had started, and left after having a short look around. Local people were most excited by the preparation of food. They explained that one representative of a local *sagaseg*, along with representatives of other Wampar villages, was brought by an MMJV helicopter to a second venue, where the «real» ceremony took place. Again MMJV were thought to be staging one event while others taking place elsewhere involved its true agenda.

People evaluated this event in terms of the same representations that would apply to any church opening or official visit by local politicians or church leaders or the like. The main difference seemed to be that cows instead of pigs have become the new currency for bigger social and political events, introduced by newly elected provincial politicians and MMJV. At such events many stories about explorations, upcoming compensation, royalties and the shape of the future circulate. At these political events, social problems and power differentials remain hidden by a rhetoric of unity presented in a context of commensality, one that is itself rooted in practices

that were already important before large-scale mining became one of the central issues.

However, not all political events were non-confrontational. In 2009, a village meeting was called in Dzifasing to discuss the increased sedimentation load from the Hidden Valley Mine and fears of cyanide poisoning. Representatives from MMJV, the National Department of Mining and the Morobe Provincial Department of Environment and Conservation were all present to assure people that everything was under control. The environmental coordinator of MMJV explained that there was sediment runoff during the construction phase, but this would diminish now that a waste rock dump had been completed. He emphasized that there were no hazardous chemicals released into the environment, since the milling plant that uses cyanide started operating only a day before this meeting. He further explained that the cyanide would in future be chemically broken down and stored within the tailings dam. Following the MMJV presentation, the government representative assured the people that the government is there to make sure everything is safe, and that a mining license and an environmental impact assessment permit would not have been granted had MMJV failed to show it could operate safely. He also stressed the need for economic development, especially because the Ok Tedi mine was slowly ceasing production, but promised that the Wampar would benefit as well, indicating that 100% of royalties would be directed to the Morobe Provincial Government and from there down to the Districts and local LLGs.

A local village leader, who was then preparing to run as a candidate for the National Parliament in the next election, challenged this presentation: the Provincial Environmental representative had to admit that his department had neither the manpower nor the money to monitor environmental impacts, and that the mining company provided this service. The village leader, cheered on by the villagers, then harangued the government representatives present for not working for the interests or protection of the people, as was their duty, but colluding with the mining company. He said that people are sick and tired of «development» which was principally oriented to helping politicians to steal money, thus giving voice to a dissenting perspective on mining development as corruption, one that did not focus on the potential wealth the local population could capture. He told the government representatives that they had this time come to the wrong place, since he and other Wampar were no less educated than the cleverest of them. Finally, he suggested that a feast be prepared to serve the politicians, bureaucrats and mining company representatives a meal of Markham fish, so that

they could themselves experience what it means to pollute the environment.

Being a member of a landowning group

One of the most enthralling narratives to have captivated the Wampar is the extent of wealth that is due to landowners of mining projects. These narratives circulate throughout Papua New Guinea and are fuelled both by newspaper and TV reports, and personal reports from individuals working at or visiting mining sites. As the Wampar are situated next to the main Highlands Highway, which also serves as a conduit for gossip and rumours emanating from the resource projects provisioned by this vital transport link, they are always informed about major developments in the big mining and natural gas projects. Stories about Porgera landowners marrying dozens of wives for hundreds of thousands of Kina, or Lihir landowners buying real estate property in Brisbane, Australia circulate nationally. The two major national newspapers were, in 2009, full of articles on the negotiations regarding benefits worth billions of Kina for landowners in the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project in the Southern Highlands. News reports vividly convey messages about the importance to landowners of a strong negotiating position in relation to resource companies and the state. Being a member of a landowning group recognized by the mining company and the state is thus seen as a sure way to «strike it rich».

As a consequence, the Wampar are determined to be recognized as landowners and expect to profit in two ways. First, they claim the area around Wafi-Golpu as their ancestral homeland, where they had been living, as a united group, before migrating down the Watut River and splitting up into the villages that are now located in the Markham Valley (Fischer, 2013). Accordingly, all Wampar see themselves as the rightful landowners of the project area, and claim that they should receive all the compensation and benefits due to those in that position. In fact, they are engaged in a long-standing court battle over landownership with the Yanta and Hengambu communities (which speak a different language) currently living close to the project site, and who, together with the people of the Watut valley immediately downstream from the project area, have hitherto been the focus of community programs by MMJV. The Wampar thus feel neglected despite their historical claims and their much larger demographic profile; this underlines the need for them to increase their negotiating power. Second, there are plans for Tailings Storage Facilities and access roads on land everyone acknowledges belongs to the Wampar. Compensation might thus be forthcoming for these facilities, as well as for possible environmental devastation of the rivers and the land adjacent to it.

ILG formations and reworking of social boundaries

This diverse but related set of narratives has set in motion a pre-emptive move to list group members and register claims to land that might be used for other mine-related purposes. The lack of transparency and the inaccessibility of pertinent information, coupled with mistrust in MMJV led the Wampar to seek to form Incorporated Land Groups (ILG) of their own accord. It is important to note, that ILGs have so far only been used in the petroleum and forestry sectors to organize landowners, with the mining sector having preferred other mechanisms (Filer, 2007). The Wampar decision to use the ILG to safeguard their interests in the context of mining is a result of their establishment in earlier business ventures, mainly in cattle farming. In contrast to these earlier ILGs, the new mining-related ILGs were formed on the level of the *sagaseg*, sometimes even encompassing sections of the same *sagaseg* from different villages, and thus contributing to a certain guarded cooperation between Wampar villages to secure ownership of the land where the mine is located, and to a general «strengthening» of the *sagaseg*. That the incorporation of Land Groups is made on the level of the *sagaseg*, and not on the level of the landholding *mpan*, is clearly influenced by media and government narratives that perpetuate an «ideology» of landownership by «clans» (Filer, 1997, 2007).

We would now like to present cases of ILG formation involving different *sagaseg*. The cases illustrate different levels of expertise involved, and how the particularities of Wampar kin relations inform the constitution of individual ILGs. For the purpose of discussion here, we will describe each case as *Sagaseg 1, 2, 3, and 4*.

Sagaseg 1

Sagaseg 1 started forming an ILG while we were in the field in 2009. They held a meeting under the shade of the mango tree in the dusty yard of one of the village leaders. All male lineage leaders came together and in a lined school notebook drew up a list of those they would count as a member, constructed a genealogy encompassing all the lineage leaders and listed all pieces of land they claim as their own. Being a rather small *sagaseg*, its leaders were able to trace their genealogy to a common ancestor. They quickly reached an agreement on the list of members: it included all living agnatic descendants (male and female), as well as male and female children of women of their *sagaseg* who married a *yaner* (strangers or outsiders who are considered non-Wampar). However, children of these women married to other Wampar (men from another

FIGURE 2. – A *sagaseg* meeting discussing ILG formation (2009, picture Tobias Schwörer)

sagaseg) were not included, as it was argued that they belong to the *sagaseg* of their father and would be included in an ILG of their father's *sagaseg*. When we asked why the children of women in their *sagaseg* who married an outsider were included, the leaders answered that they were only a small *sagaseg* that would benefit from more people. They also pointed out that there would be a lot of money flowing from the Wafi mine, which they can generously share with the families of their sisters and daughters.

The lineage leaders debated whether to include in their list an extended family (*mpan*) that actually claims to belong to a different *sagaseg*. As there was an ongoing conflict between this *mpan* and *Sagaseg 1* over an extensive tract of forest located in an area covered by one of MMJV's exploration licences, it was deemed wise to ask them to join *Sagaseg 1* in order to avoid a lengthy court battle. The *sagaseg* leaders argued that this *mpan* was in their patriline, but that one of its ancestors had been raised by a man of another *sagaseg* after his mother remarried, a fact that current members of the *mpan* had forgotten, so they mistakenly thought they were of the other *sagaseg*. Wampar pre-colonial history is dominated by warfare and its effects; this offers scope for manipulation, through old stories suddenly recalled, to claim or deny membership in a *sagaseg*.

Sagaseg 2

The formation of an ILG for this *sagaseg* was started in 2008 and included all of its lineages in two Wampar villages. The question of inclusion or exclusion of people was decided only by the lineage leaders, who did so in isolation from one another. The result was a mix of different criteria for inclusion and exclusion. While one lineage leader generally followed the same criteria as that of *Sagaseg 1*, except that he excluded female descendants of interethnic marriages, on

the grounds that they would marry out of the *sagaseg*, another leader opted for a more inclusive approach. He listed as *sagaseg* members not only all children of living women of his lineage, regardless of whether they were married to another Wampar or to an outsider, but also the *yaner* husband of his sister, thus incorporating an affine into the *sagaseg*. This difference in approach had much to do with the quality of relationships between the lineage leader and his in-married brother-in-law: amicable relations facilitate their incorporation, whereas when relations are strained, the *yaner* husbands are excluded. The idea of broadening the membership to incorporate all children of the lineage leader's sisters, and even their husbands, is also associated with the sharing of benefits, for he expects to get a larger share of the benefits due to the *sagaseg* as a whole because of these additional group members.

Sagaseg 3

In this *sagaseg*, the formation of their ILG was significantly influenced by a man of mixed parentage, the son of a woman of this *sagaseg* and a father from the Sepik. He represented himself as well versed in the bureaucratic requirements in registering an incorporated land group, noting that he knew the necessary shortcuts and that he had personal contacts with relevant departmental heads in Port Moresby, through his employment with Ok Tedi Mining Ltd. This *sagaseg* had organised several fundraising activities to support his work in registering all of their lineages under a single ILG group. They started the process early, in 2005, and, by 2009, were expecting the final papers to be signed soon. The *sagaseg* was also in the process of registering a landowner company with the Investment Promotion Authority (IPA), and had already opened a bank account in its name. The list of members of the ILG included all cognatic descendants of the original ancestors (of each lineage), thus swelling the total membership of the ILG to over 700. In their view, the larger the group, the larger their share of total payments to the Wampar. In addition, an increase in the number of members was also seen as a way to increase the *sagaseg*'s negotiating power vis-à-vis the mining company and the state.

The inclusive system of *Sagaseg 3*, however, was buffered by some safeguards. They indicated in their ILG bylaws that while all cognatic descendants are considered members of their *sagaseg* as represented in their ILG, only members that have paid the membership fee of 32 Kina will be entitled to receive a share of the benefits expected from the mining operations. In addition, only members descended through the patriline were chosen as ILG representatives.

A chairman who was only related through his grandmother was ousted from his position, which prompted him to cease attending *sagaseg* meetings.

Sagaseg 4

While the three *sagaseg* described above have found ways to form themselves into an ILG, not all *sagaseg* have managed to do so despite considerable effort. The leaders in *Sagaseg 4* explained what makes it difficult to form an ILG from a large *sagaseg* that is already divided by land disputes and other conflicts between its constituent lineages. Pre-existing conflicts between lineages and/or extended families, breed acute suspicions about representation and control of benefits in the context of mining. The cooperation necessary for ILG formation is hard to achieve. In the absence of an ILG for this *sagaseg*, some who would otherwise organize themselves agnatically have decided to actively participate in ILG formation of their matrilineal *sagaseg*.

The three *sagaseg* that successfully formed ILGs comprised members who were strongly motivated to increase membership in order to achieve significant demographic weight. This motivation is, on the one hand, connected to narratives that stress the need for negotiating power *vis-à-vis* the state and the mining company, and, on the other, to the idea that compensation will be a function of the size of an ILG's membership. Both strategies suggest that it is advantageous to increase membership of one's group to gain a larger share of a limited pool of benefits. This applies both to a lineage leader seeking a larger share of payments made to the *sagaseg*, and to a *sagaseg* intent on a larger share of the payments to the Wampar as a whole.

The rationale for this inclusionary strategy is also connected to narratives that portray the immense wealth mining provides for landowners. With such wealth at stake, the importance of a large number of supporters is stressed, as is the capacity to share benefits widely that, precisely, is ensured by success in maintaining that support base. It is thus coherent with Wampar notions of reciprocity and exchange that characterize group solidarity. To gain numbers of members and keep them in the group implies caring and looking after the well-being of the members. The male lineage leaders are also particularly mindful of performing their obligation to look after their sisters. As explained by a lineage leader in talking about the ILG formation, it is in their *kastom* (the Tok Pisin word for «culture», «tradition») to include their sisters, who therefore should not be neglected. Thus, the inclusive motive is expressed through this cultural value that finds another expression through engagement with

the ILG formation. How they actually distribute the wealth across the members once the expected benefits start flowing is another question.

There are nevertheless also differences between the specific mechanisms that the three *sagaseg* employ to bolster their membership. The different levels and categories of inclusion range from children of interethnic marriages, also qualified by their gender, to their non-Wampar fathers, families of women of the same *sagaseg* who married other Wampar men, to all patri- and matrilineal descendants of the lineage ancestors. A further difference is on the level at which decision-making takes place, which also depends on the number of lineages within a *sagaseg*: *Sagaseg 1* is a small group compared with *Sagaseg 2* or *3*. The relatively small *Sagaseg 1* was able to reckon on an uncontested connection to a common ancestor. The relatively bigger *Sagaseg 2* has left it to the respective leaders of the member lineages to organize their list of who is to be counted and who not. Other *sagaseg*, which include several lineages and extended families, have so far not organized themselves the way the three other groups have done so. Their size and pre-existing conflicts between their constituent lineages regarding land boundaries make it hard for them to consolidate into an ILG. And lastly, there is a difference in the levels of knowledge, experience and connections necessary to undertake such a bureaucratic endeavour. *Sagaseg 3* clearly has an advantage in this sense, as they count in their midst a mining professional with the necessary knowledge and contacts.

Conclusion

The Wampar case clearly shows that narratives concerning mineral extraction have a significant impact on local imaginaries and the way conceptions of kinship, sociality, group boundaries and access to land are expressed. The circulation of these narratives takes place on different levels and is distinctively patterned according to relations and contacts people have with MMJV, state representatives, cultural brokers and local political leaders. As MMJV has a very large-scale presence in Morobe Province, many of its activities impinge on local lives in unprecedented ways (directly or indirectly – through companies and political institutions providing services for MMJV) and decisively engage real and imagined futures. If we think in network terms, and constitute MMJV as Wampar do, as a sort of person, then the company represents something like a hypernode in social life. Through the company, local social networks intensify in various ways but also extend outwards – around Papua New Guinea and beyond.

FIGURE 3. – The «Launching» of the «Huan Gulf District Five Year Alignment Development Plan», members of parliament gave speeches and heavy machinery was handed over to the Local Level Government (2013, picture Bettina Beer)

Whether, though, the company and its state partners have created a single public or «large-scale political subject» seems to be debatable. Even though MMJV is locally interpreted as a sort of macro-actor, the representations at work along the edges of the network, which define the quality of its sub-regions, seem too heterogeneous and locally specific to constitute a single public sphere. The power of the company and the state to inflect the real and imagined futures of the Wampar still over-determines each local impetus, without amounting to anything that would justify notions of ideological control. Moreover, neither national narratives, nor those that result from particular relationships, which are propagated through social space in locally specific ways (even if they include social media and the politics of blogging) to inflect face-to-face encounters and interpretations thereof, are subject to effective manipulation in a state like Papua New Guinea.

We argue, therefore, that mining sites and the narratives relevant to their interpretation do not so much create «publics», those «large-scale political subjects, [...] that are thinkable and practicable by means of mass-mediated communication» (Cody 2011:38), as provoke representations that transform social imaginaries in ways that also depend upon local specificities. MMJV and the mining and exploration sites have become central to Wampar social networks through the imaginaries they facilitate. One of the most important channels for the distribution of representations of mining is Facebook. The majority of the population is actively excluded from access to more direct information, or

classify it as unreliable, so they process these representations and their own everyday observations, along with the accounts of socio-cultural brokers and national narratives, in a manner that produces desires and expectations relevant to their participation in development and modernity. Yet these are locally conditioned: for everyday observations of developments relating to mining – like the growing number of immigrants, the increased readiness of local groups to sell Wampar land, the increase in lethal accidents on the highlands highway, fish death in the Markham river, the mushrooming of fences and security services, which also entail a wider circulation of firearms and an increase in criminal activities – also act to create anxieties.

Access to good information, like access to education, work and income, is still difficult for the majority of Wampar. Though some individuals – for example, return migrants with good education and extensive work experience – were well-placed to benefit from economic developments induced by MMJV's ambitions, others are left to deal with the increased social inequality as best they can. The Wampar case suggests that the representations circulating within communities located on or near prospective mining sites, can – from the first signs of interest by a mining company – create social expectations and tensions while simultaneously disempowering those communities by restricting information and obscuring political questions and power relations.

The complex, diverse, and dynamic local narratives produced at such sites significantly shape imagined futures. They create not only high expectations of future wealth but also anxieties about exclusion, which would mean not only being left out but having to cope with friends, neighbours and relations who are able to enjoy the expected benefits. As the government and the mining company are perceived as untrustworthy, the Wampar proactively acted on these understandings and started to coordinate among themselves (sometimes by coordinating how they compete). They redefine and reshape themselves in novel ways to make the most of this new economic opportunity, and attain what they consider the best possible of imagined futures. Drawing on their cultural categories to craft representative groups legible to the state and the company, they also adapt those categories to be as inclusive as their understanding of the future requires.

That most Wampar operate with an inclusive mode of social boundary-making when confronted with the prospect of resource exploitation is not unique in Papua New Guinea, as the example of Porgera (Golub, 2007a) and the Gende (Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 1997) has shown. Through their engagement with the ILG

framework, they are consciously de-emphasising patrilineality, which is a notion that they would otherwise use and emphasize in other contexts such as when it comes to restricting children of non-Wampar fathers from planting permanent cash crops on the land of their Wampar mother, as this would permanently alienate the land, or the general narrative on the perceived threat that migrants and an increase in interethnic marriages pose for their land resources (see Bacalzo, 2012; Beer, 2006a). In contrast to these exclusionary forms of boundary maintenance, the Wampar are forming ILGs in the context of mining that are as large as possible by drawing both on the biological and social dimensions of kinship.

This thus leads to a «revival of clans» that are actually not strictly unilineal clans. People often use the word «clan», or more precisely, the Tok Pisin word *klen*, to refer to these types of social groups. These *klen* as formed by the membership list of an ILG, however, are not complete innovations, as maternal kin have always enjoyed certain rights in Wampar social life. There are numerous cases of matrilineal transfer of land tenure rights, mostly in the absence of male descendants (see Fischer, 1996: 135-144). In addition, exogamously married women are neither cut off from nor deprived of rights flowing from their natal lineages. Thus, a married woman continues to identify with and is recognized as a member of the *sagaseg* of her father. Women never completely relinquish usufruct rights on land belonging to their natal lineage after marriage. In the context of interethnic marriages, Wampar mothers are even able to transfer some of these usufruct rights to their children.

The revival of the *sagaseg* among the Wampar under the influence of narratives about mining, after their former decline in colonial and early post-colonial contexts, suggests that such categories might always have been sensitive to specific local and broader narrative influence. The analysis of these narrative contexts is thus crucial for understanding the processes at work, especially in settings where other social forces operate (e.g., the state, mining companies), and where social change (here through interethnic marriages and the ensuing transcultural kinship) constantly mediate the conditions for what kind of concepts can be employed (like with the required procedure for an ILG registration and the codification that follows). This also suggests need for caution about predicting the reconfiguration of these categories into the future. It is not yet clear, for example, what will happen to these *sagaseg* once official negotiations between the mining company, the state and landowners take place, or when the mine finally starts operations and the expected benefits will start to flow. The experiences from other mining

areas in Papua New Guinea, lead us not to discount the possibility for more exclusionary processes and increasing inequalities, in the medium to long-term future.

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