

Rot Bilong Mipela:
the politics of logging in East New Britain, Papua New Guinea

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The conclusions and opinions are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the people and organizations mentioned here or elsewhere in the thesis. Obviously, I am solely responsible for all mistakes and inaccuracies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rot bilong mipela. “Our road” in Neomelanesian Pidgin, or Tok Pisin. When starting my fieldwork in Papua New Guinea (PNG) on the politics of logging, I was aware of the political significance of roads that connect places – another interesting theme – with each other. Having read accounts of the political aspects of roads both in PNG and elsewhere (see Fajans 1998, Ferguson 1996, West 2006), I was still surprised how central a question roads really were. On my way to my field site located in the Wide Bay area of the Pomio district on the east coast of New Britain island (see 8.1 Maps), I reached the end of the road in Kokopo, the provincial capital of East New Britain. The road network covers the capital area of Kokopo and Rabaul, but after that it just stops. A few branches reach out into the inland, but not very far. Turning away from the main road running through seemingly endless copra plantations between Tokua airport and Kokopo, quite near the Vunapope mission station, is a *transit haus*. This abandoned plantation building has been turned into a “boat station” by the inhabitants of Wide Bay, who sleep there and wait for boats on their trips to Kokopo. The road literally ends, from there on the Wide Bay area can be reached only by boat.

After a few days of waiting at the transit I got a ride on a boat going to a coastal village named Sampun that was only an hour walk away from my destination, Toimtop village. After a long boat ride, we reached Sampun and I took my backpack and box of supplies on the shore and wondered how to find my way to Toimtop. Kindly, a teacher from Sampun, who had come on the same boat, decided to show me the way. We took a track (*rot* in Tok Pisin – the same word is used for roads too) that climbed upwards a forested mountain slope. Half way, on a particularly steep part, nearly fainting due to my backpack (that I wanted to carry myself, hoping to be polite, but learning later that it was the opposite) and from the heat to which I was unaccustomed, I met my contact who was to become my adoptive brother. We continued upwards, and on top of the 700 meter tall mountain the forest suddenly cleared and a regular unpaved road opened. A logging road, my brother remarked. This new road just started there, between forest and subsistence gardens on the edge of the mountain. It was in no way connected to the road network around Kokopo.

Going to church service down to the coastal village on the next day, my younger brother told that a footpath we were walking down the mountain is a “new road”. The trails of

the ancestors (*rot bilong tumbuna*) are going parallel to this newer path in the forest. The different layers of infrastructure interested me, but only later I found out that besides meaning actual roads and tracks, *rot* is a powerful metaphor in Tok Pisin. *Rot* can also mean a “way” of doing things (cf. Filer 2006: 65), a way of life or maybe even an ideology. Thus *rot bilong tumbuna* can mean “the track of the ancestors” or the “way of the ancestors”. Soon it became clear to me that the people are contemplating and discussing numerous roads to answer to questions brought up by logging, “development” and other more or less recent changes. For example some people told me that the sitting MP Paul Tiensten advocating for economical development is a “good road” (*gutpela rot*), while others had turned to environmental conservation instead.

Thus the title of my thesis refers on the one hand to the actual roads and paths of different types and purposes that run in the Mengen environment, disappear into the forest or outrightly destroy it along with marks of previous human existence. On the other hand it refers to the different ways in which the people of Wide Bay address the questions brought up by logging, “development” and indeed – roads. During my stay in the village, national elections were held in Papua New Guinea. Questions such as roads, logging and conservation were of interest to the people of Wide Bay. Some candidates were associated with logging, others with conservation, one was also a member of a “cargo cult”, the Kivung movement – long time a powerful political force in the Pomio district. Besides the above mentioned double valence, the title is also an intended pun referring to Peter Lawrence's (1989 [1964]) *Road Belong Cargo*, a classical study of New Guinea's cargo cults as social movements.

1.1 Research questions and theoretical framework

This thesis is about the political significance of large scale commercial logging in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The two main research questions, which I attempt to answer in the course of the discussion are:

1. What forms of political mobilization and/or awareness does large scale logging bring up in small scale communities of PNG?
2. How – if at all – does commercial logging change the relationship between these communities and the post-colonial state of PNG?

These questions will be discussed in the context of the Sulka-Mengen, two small

peoples living on the eastern coast of New Britain Island. The bulk of my material was collected during a three month period of ethnographic fieldwork in a predominantly Mengen village of about 100 inhabitants. A more thorough description of the fieldwork, ethnographic material and a set of caveats follows in the next section.

A central premise of this thesis is that large environmental changes will affect the societies living in it. With “environment” I refer to the physical surroundings in its totality ranging from societies to the flora, fauna and geographical features. Thus society is in a constant interaction with its environment, a variable in the eco-system, like the flora and fauna for instance. According to this view neither the environment nor societies as a part of it can change without causing a change in the other. This interaction is discursive, in as much the environment affects the society, but in turn the environment itself is produced by the society, both physically and culturally, i.e. the environment is invested with various meanings (Biersack 2006: 4). This discursive construction of reality is also connected to power relations, or in the words of Aletta Biersack (2006: 14):

“[W]hat reality is being constructed, by whom, for whom for what political purpose, and to what political effect.”

Thus I assume that a large scale environmental change will also have *political* effects.

With “political” I refer to the exercise of power in its different forms, to power dynamics and asymmetries, i.e. how “power is acquired and transmitted” as John Gledhill (1994: 22) notes. By defining “political” in this way, I wish to avoid bringing the “western” state-centered view of politics, often restricted to formal party politics, into the Papua New Guinean context. Following John Gledhill (1994: 28), I attempt to see politics broadly in the different spheres of society. Thus cultural phenomena such as kinship, religion and so on have to be seen as political as well, especially in stateless or small scale societies (and obviously elsewhere), because they are central sources of power and spheres where power is exercised. In relation to this, I do not wish to see “power” and the use of it as inherently negative and oppressive. Rather, power takes on many forms, it comes from different sources and different actors can use it in different ways. For example, the Orokaiva people of Papua New Guinea, see power as good and legitimating itself when it is productive (Bashkow 2006: 59). Broadly, it is on this ambivalence of power that I want to focus in my thesis: how and what forms of power

do different actors exercise? How do they legitimate it? When is it productive and when destructive? In what ways does commercial logging bring existing power relations to light and how does it change them?

I start my actual discussion in the second chapter by examining ways in which the Sulka-Mengen (re)produce their environment, both conceptually as well as physically. The Sulka-Mengen are subsistence farmers, and they are economically dependent on the condition of their environment. However, the environment is invested with meanings that go far beyond questions of economical subsistence. Indeed, the environment holds mytho-historical marks of the ancestors as well as evidence of individual and clan histories. Here the anthropological discussion about “place”, for example Basso (1996), is significant. As James Fox (1997, 2006) shows, origin, ancestry and the environment are deeply interconnected in the Austronesian world, to which also the Mengen belong. The question then is, in what ways are these constructs of the environment sources of power and to whom? As will be shown, placed histories often serve as a legitimating discourse for landownership (see McWilliam 1997), which is a crucial question in the environmental politics of PNG.

The environment however is not only produced by the locals, but also by large scale institutions, such as states and companies. With “local” I mean the actual people, living on and of their land in various communities, while the “state” is a set of government institutions, services and departments. Thus in the third chapter I focus on the ways in which states and companies produce, modify and sometimes even destroy the environment. Instructive here is the political geography of James Scott (1998), who shows how large scale institutions such as states and companies seek to produce environments that can be easily administered. This process happens according to the conceptual abstraction of the environment and focusing on the “interesting” aspects of it, i.e. “seeing” the environment more narrowly than the locals. In close relation to this process of abstraction is “de-politicizing” (Ferguson 1996), namely masking the use of power in these processes of conceptual abstraction and physical modification. An example of this de-politicization according to James Ferguson (1996) is treating “development” as a set of technical, rather than political, questions. Besides the physical modification of the environment, such as the building of roads and plantations, I touch upon questions such as mapping, namely the conceptual creation of environments, and

how these themes are connected to the use of power as well. Crucial questions will be in what ways states and companies create “legible” environments in East New Britain? How do state and company infrastructures differ from each other, as their goals are in the end different from each other? How do the ways of large scale institutions collide with local forms of relating to the environment, as described in Chapter 2? Also of interest are the social consequences of environmental destruction (Kirsch 2006).

A direct consequence of “development” and logging according to the Sulka-Mengen themselves is the rising number of land disputes, on which I will focus in the fourth chapter. Interestingly, local ways of communally holding the land are codified into the national law of PNG with the result that the state itself owns only a few percent of its land area. In this chapter I will show how the Sulka-Mengen hold their lands, how local land tenure is legitimated among other things through ancestral stories and belonging to kin groups. Thus disputes are situations in which company, government and local ways of relating to the environment come concretely together. For example, government land mediators base their decisions in dispute cases on the “traditional” knowledge about land areas provided by the disputants. In dispute cases also different ways of exercising and gaining power come to the surface: people tap into different sources of power, such as kinship connections or formal government positions. As will be shown, alliances between actors of different scales are formed and different “tactics” used. A major attempt here is to unpack the entities of “the local” and “the state” and to show that neither of them are in fact monolithic actors.

Land disputes, even though questions seemingly between local parties, in fact involve actors of many different scales taking part either openly or in the background. Indeed, it is a conjuncture in which local communities, large companies, states and transnational organizations come together. Disputes, as logging in PNG in general, are situations of global connections that Anna Tsing (2005: 4) calls “friction”. These connections are “unequal [and] unstable” and they cause “unexpected alliances” (Tsing 2005: 4, 12). According to Tsing (2005: 5) this “friction”, i.e. “heterogeneous and unequal encounters” leads to the rearrangements of culture and power. It is to these alliances and rearrangements that I turn to in the fifth and final chapter of the actual discussion. I describe two – partly contesting – forms of political organization that I have dubbed as “developmentalism” and “conservationism”. These two have in my opinion largely

emerged in relation to the questions and problematics brought up by logging. There is also a third political movement, a “cargo cult” called the Kivung operating in East New Britain, which I briefly compare with “developmentalism” and “conservationism”. All three forms are outrightly and self-consciously political organizations that take part national parliamentary politics.

Both “developmentalists” and “conservationists” have made connections to transnational actors in order to advance their own agenda. The “developmentalists” have connections to logging companies, while the conservationists have made contacts with international NGOs. How then do these transnational connections affect the movements? What compromises must the local actors make in relation to their partners of a larger scale? Here I will touch open the discussion about (neoliberal) conservationism (Bamford 2002, West 2006) and “global from below” movements (Kirsch 2007). Also local traditions, or *kastom* as it called throughout Melanesia (Fajans 1998, Keesing 1982, 1996), is also invoked to address both the problematics of logging and the transnational discourse around it. Finally in the concluding chapter I will draw my analysis together and attempt to answer my main research questions. In the last discussive chapter I will briefly examine the effects of logging on local *kastom* and the question about cultural change and loss.

1.2 Ethnographic setting and fieldwork

The ethnographic setting of this thesis is – as mentioned above – the Wide Bay area located on the east coast of New Britain island. Administratively the Wide Bay area is in the Pomio district of East New Britain Province (ENBP). The majority of the about 220 000¹ inhabitants of East New Britain are Tolais living in the northern Gazelle peninsula around the provincial capital of Kokopo/Rabaul (see Map 3 for village distribution). There are other distinct “ethnic” and language groups in ENB, such as the Baining, Sulka, Mengen, Tomoip and the Kol, but they comprise a relatively small amount of ENB's total population: according to Fajans (1998: 20) groups other than Tolai comprised only about 30 000 persons some ten years ago. Specific demographic information on the various ethnic groups is however hard to find.

1 Based on the 2000 national census (<http://www.statoids.com/upg.html> <visited 21.08.2008>).

From the end of May until the end of August 2007 I conducted three months of ethnographic fieldwork in PNG, and I spent roughly two and a half months in Toimtop² on the southern part of the Wide Bay (see Map 2). The majority of the 130 (official census) inhabitants of Toimtop are Mengen, yet intermarriages with the neighboring Sulka are common. The Mengen are mostly distributed along the coast of Jacquinet Bay, while some of them inhabit inland areas (“bush Mengen”). As noted, census data on a “tribal” level is very hard to find and I assume that the Mengen today number about 10 000 persons. This assumption is based on the figure of 8000 persons given by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Gordon 2005) for the 1980's. I could not obtain any more recent data. According to the 1991 census by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Gordon 2005) the Sulka in turn number about 2500 persons. All in all, the “ethnic” groups of East New Britain – with the exception of the Tolai – seem to be comparatively small.

Michel Panoff (1969a: xii) notes that the Mengen living in the southern part of Wide Bay and Cape Orford could be called “sulkanized Mengen” (see Map 2) and the Summer Institute of Linguistics database for languages notes that some linguists classify the Mengen dialects into two distinct languages (Gordon 2005). The label “sulkanized Mengen” by Panoff is in my opinion very good. While the villages of Bain, Wawas, Toimtop and Sampun are predominantly Mengen, there are comparatively more Sulka living in Sampun and already Klampun is a predominantly Sulka village (see Map 2). The Sulka and Mengen, especially in the Wide Bay area are closely related, and both peoples share a matrilineal social structure based on two exogamic moieties and several exogamic clans (dealt more in depth in Chapter 4 and Appendix 8.4).

Indeed, I was told many a time that the Sulka and the Mengen have the “same culture”. The Mengen and Sulka clan systems are two distinct systems in as much as Sulka and Mengen clans hold their own territories and have their separate clan leaders, but “compatible” to the extent that certain Sulka and Mengen clans are said to correspond to each other. Obviously, the exogamic rules have to be observed in cases of intermarriage

2 The majority of the inhabitants refer to the village as Teimtop, as it is written in most administrative maps and other official instances. However, the village gets its name from the adjescent Toim-river (for naming see Chapter 2) and one of my brothers in the village had started to use the original “Toimtop” name again and I chose to use that one in my thesis as well.

(see also Panoff (1969a: 22) on the interrelations between the various peoples of ENB). Interestingly however, Sulka (a Papuan language) and Mungen (an Austronesian language) are not mutually intelligible. Yet in the areas where the two people live side by side it seems that people do know the other language to a certain extent. When referring to “the Mungen” in this thesis, the reader should keep in mind that my fieldwork was done among the “sulkanized Mungen” or “Sulka-Mungen”, and it is to these cultural groups I refer to, even when using “the Mungen” for the sake of convenience. Lastly, even though closely related and similar, the two peoples perceive themselves also as separate groups and cultures.

As noted, I spent most of my fieldwork in the small village of Toimtop. Toimtop is located near the coast about a hours walk inland from the coastal village of Sampun (ca. 300 inhabitants) on top of a plateau on a 700 meter tall mountain. Another neighboring village is Wawas (ca. 200 inhabitants), about a half an hour walk from Toimtop along a logging road that runs ultimately to the Jacquinot Bay. “Village” in this case is a spatial and conceptual category. Spatial in so far as in Toimtop all the houses were fairly close to each other forming a clear spatial entity. It is also a conceptual category, since people saw themselves as inhabitants of one certain village (*ples*, mankun in Tok Pisin and Mungen). Administratively the two small villages of Wawas and Teimtop comprise one government ward, i.e. there is only one councilor and for example both villages vote together, although there is a *komiti* (committee) in each village.

I came to stay in Toimtop out of coincidence mostly. When planning my thesis I had contacted a Papua New Guinean NGO explaining that I planned to do my thesis on the political effects of large scale logging in PNG. The NGO kindly decided to help me, and since they had been working with people from Toimtop, they asked if the people would allow me to stay with them. Regarding the theme of my thesis, Toimtop is an interesting case, because there have been logging operations in the area with villagers being members of landowner companies. On the other hand, Toimtop also has a conservation association and one descent group from the village had decided to put its land areas under conservation. Additionally, national parliamentary elections were held in PNG on the 30th June 2007. Questions about logging, development and conservation were also central themes in the elections, and following electoral work in the villages provided ethnographic material for my analysis.

Given the short duration of my field research, I decided to live only in Toimtop, even though I visited Sampun and Wawas several times and Bain once. Villages are obviously not isolated entities and social life extends over a large area. Clan members are dispersed over a wide area, people frequently visit other villages, stay there and so on. Many young people move out of the villages after education or work in regional centers such as Palmalmal and Pomio, in Kokopo or even in other provinces. Indeed, a striking feature of Toimtop was that there were relatively few young men present at the time of my fieldwork. Many return during the holidays on Christmas for traditional festivals, others stay for long periods away from the village. Despite the fact that social life and relations extend over a vast area, I thought it is better to get a point of view from one place and position rather than trying to achieve an all-encompassing “view of everything from nowhere”. For a such a short period as two and a half months, I thought it is better to get to know one village well and be conscious of the limits of that approach rather than to try see all at once.

My position in the village was – at least according to my interpretation – defined by my interest in logging and conservation. As noted, I came to the village through the contacts of some inhabitants with NGOs, and even though I slept in a community house, I was associated with the family whose members were local conservation activists, to the extent that I was at some point “adopted” into the family. Despite this, I tried to point out that I was not affiliated with any NGO or organization and that my purpose was to gather material for my thesis. Methodologically I tried to take part in the village life as much as possible. In the end, I often labored with one of my brothers doing work of young men, i.e. clearing of gardens, building fences and various other forms of communal work. Much of my material is based on notes that I took constantly during my informal discussions with people. In addition to this I conducted 25 (semi)structured interviews in the village ranging from very general topics, such as life in the village, to very specific ones on terminology or land legislation.

When gathering material, I tried to be as conscious as possible about gender and age differences and collect different points of view. Yet, my material is probably biased in terms of gender in as much as I spent most of my time with young men and boys, even though I deliberately tried to get the women's perspective on central themes. Also, I

have tried to be as sensitive as possible to my position as a white outsider on the one hand and my association with environmental conservation on the other. Indeed my own sympathies lie with environmental conservation and local autonomy, based on my left-liberal political views. This does not mean that I have omitted material that contradicts my own initial assumptions or views, but I state my opinions in order to let the reader know my own position. In my opinion greatest objectivity is achieved through being as conscious as possible about one's own subjectivity.

In addition to my stay in the Toimtop village, I stayed about two weeks in the national capital of Port Moresby and in Kokopo, the provincial capital of East New Britain during my way to and from Wide Bay. During the travels I visited the offices of Papua New Guinean NGO's and conducted four interviews with members of four different NGO's working both in Kokopo and Port Moresby.

Notes on orthography

During my fieldwork I spoke exclusively Tok Pisin, or Neomelanesian Pidgin English. All the quotes from interviews included in the thesis are translated into English; pauses and breaks have been omitted, sentences have been combined, and other minor changes were made in order to make the quotes more easy to read. Tok Pisin is at times an ambiguous language, because it has relatively few words, and a single word may stand for a variety concepts. I have done my best in order to translate the quotes as faithfully to the original as possible. Thus I have included the original unedited transcripts of the quotes in footnotes for the reader to be able to judge my translations. All terms in Tok Pisin are in *italics*, and I use the standard Tok Pisin orthography

The text includes where appropriate some terms in Mengen. There is considerable dialectical variation among the Mengen speakers (Panoff 1969a: 2), and the terms I have gathered are in the dialect that is spoken in the Wide Bay area. I do not speak Mengen and I do not know the standard way of transliterating Mengen terms. Many terms were spelled out to me and I noticed that curiously Mengen and Finnish pronunciation are written very much in the same way. Thus I have used the transliteration that I learned from my Mengen friends. Some notes on this:

- a is pronounced as the “a” in “bar”
- e is pronounced as the “e” in “text”
- i is pronounced as the “i” in “sick”

- o is pronounced as the “o” in “dock”
- u is pronounced as the “ou” in “you”
- ä is pronounced as the “a” in “bad”

The doubling of the vowel means that it is pronounced long. All Mengen terms are underlined.

1.3 Logging in Papua New Guinea: a historical perspective

In this section I will very briefly describe the emergence of global timber trading and describe commercial logging in Melanesia and Papua New Guinea. My intention is to contextualize the topic of this thesis by showing that the structures behind commercial logging in PNG are vast both spatially and temporally. Even though the global timber trade is an old phenomenon, logging for raw timber is a relatively new enterprise in PNG. For example the plantation economy is an older contributor to deforestation. However, as will be shown, today these two types of modifying and deforestating the environment are connected.

As Michael Williams (2007: 104) points out, timber is an interesting commodity: it is bulky and low-value and yet it has been for a long time been transported over the world from “peripheries” to (regional) “centers”, which often had depleted their immediate areas of wood. An early example of a spatially large timber trade is the Mediterranean, where first the Roman and centuries later the Muslim empires set up a regional trade network of grain and timber (Williams 2007: 110). Timber was imported to the centers, i.e. Rome and later Cairo, from as far as the Black Sea (Williams 2007: 111, 113). In addition to the Mediterranean, the Muslim empire imported also teak from the Malabar coast of India (Williams 2007: 112). From the 16th century onwards central European powers, such as Spain, France and Great Britain, began to expand both economically and geographically, thus replacing “centers” of the world economy such as the Ottoman Middle East or Mughal India (Williams 2007: 106). Timber was being imported to these centers from regional peripheries, such as the Baltic, especially for shipbuilding, which was both a means of expansion as well as a reason for an even greater need for raw timber (Williams 2007: 117; Williams 2003: 146).

In the latter half of the 18th century “scientific forestry”, which aimed at a sustainable, yet economically efficient management of forests began to emerge in Prussia, and was

later adopted throughout Europe (Scott 1998: 14). As will be shown in Chapter 3, this was also connected to state-making. However, “scientific forestry” was not necessarily used to manage the forests of the “peripheries” and colonies. In the tropics, European colonialism contributed to deforestation in a two-fold way: besides logging for timber, such as teak in India by the British East India Company (EIC), forests were also logged in order to clear land for agriculture, plantations and cattle (Williams 2003: 346, 349, 215). Whereas the EIC began to “scientifically” manage India's teak forests in the middle of the 19th century (Williams 2003: 353), commercial logging in Melanesia was far from “scientific” or sustainable as shown below.

In Melanesia the large scale extraction (or exploitation) of timber started with the sandalwood trade in the 1840's with the discovery of sandalwood on the Isle of Pines in New Caledonia by European traders. This trade soon expanded to the Loyalty Islands (New Caledonia) and the New Hebrides (today Vanuatu). The trade in Melanesia was advanced by the depletion of sandalwood in Hawai'i on the one hand and on the other by the fact that at Canton its price was very high. In addition to this, the EIC had lost its monopoly over the China trade. (Howe 1984: 319). According to Howe (1984: 322) the sandalwood trade was described by contemporaries as a violent and bloody exploitation of the islanders. Violence and mutual killings did occur, but Howe (1984: 323) maintains it was more often than not caused by mutual misunderstandings and that it ended when the trade became more established. It seems, at least according to the account of Howe (1984: 324, 323) that the inhabitants of New Caledonia and New Hebrides were not passive and exploited, but took actively part in the trade, especially since they had the advantage of having the wood, which could not be logged without their consent. The trade had also manifold political consequences: in New Caledonia ambitious chiefs could strengthen their power by monopolizing the trade. Similar trends existed in the “big man” societies of New Hebrides as well. Although, also the opposite happened, with established “big men” loosing their authority when others could gain more traditional wealth, such as pigs, through the trade of sandalwood. (Howe 1984: 326). While done in cooperation with the islanders, the sandalwood trade in Melanesia did not last long: already in the 1850's New Caledonia was largely depleted of sandalwood and by the 1860's trading of sandalwood ended altogether in Melanesia (Howe 1984: 329).

The sandalwood trade did not reach the New Guinea islands. In fact the whole colonial annexation happened fairly late: New Guinea was partitioned in 1884 between the British and the Germans (Sillitoe 2000: 24). The same holds true for the integration into the world economy with plantations being established in the end of the 19th century. This applies to the setting of this thesis as well: according to Michel Panoff (1969a: 3), the first recorded contact between Europeans and the Mengen happened in 1899 and the first plantations were established in the Mengen areas at Kolai and Palmalmal (see Map 2) only shortly prior to the First World War. As for commercial logging, very little occurred in New Guinea before the independence of PNG in 1975, even though surveys of potential timber had already started in 1938 (Filer 1998: iv, vii). Paul Sillitoe (2000: 147) notes that the Vanimo region in West Sepik has “a long history of commercial logging, starting in the early 1960's”, i.e. a hundred years after commercial logging had depleted New Caledonia and New Hebrides of sandalwood. In the Wide Bay area of New Britain, commercial logging started as late as in the 1980's. The timeline of Papua New Guinea's commercial logging is best illustrated through statistics: in 1978 500 000 cubic meters of raw logs were exported, in 1990 the volume of exports was 1 000 000 m³, already 3 000 000 m³ in 1997 and 2 500 000 m³ in 2006 (Shearman 2008: 20). In 1997 the export value of the logs was about 400 million Kina (K) and export taxes about K150 million (Filer 1998: 51).

Commercial logging in PNG has been dominated by Malaysian logging companies from the start. These companies “discovered” PNG (and Sarawak) in the 1970's after having depleted the Philippines and Sabah of timber in the 1960's and 1970's (Filer 1998: 60). Of the Malaysian companies Rimbunan Hijau controls over 50% of PNG's log exports, while 30-35% are controlled by other Malaysian loggers (Filer 1998: iv). Asia is also the destination for raw timber from PNG: well over half is imported by Japan, followed by South Korea. China, the Philippines and Thailand import smaller about equally large amounts. (Filer 1998: 58). In the end of 1980's PNG's Prime Minister appointed Thomas Barnett, an Australian judge, to investigate claims that PNG's timber industry was fraught with problems. Barnett described the situation as “out of control” with logging companies acting as “robber barons”. (Filer 1998: vii, 59). Barnett's findings lead to an attempt to change the forestry sector. Filer (1998: x) notes that the greatest improvement was a log export surveillance system (initiated in 1994), which was also welcomed by the loggers themselves.

However, it is still more convenient for PNG to produce raw logs, because countries consuming timber have made it difficult to enter into the market with value-added products, such as plywood for instance, through high tariffs (Filer 1998: 60). Thus these countries ensure PNG's position as a regional “periphery”, with raw materials “flowing” into the centers, such as Japan. Often also the local communities, which according to the PNG land legislation own much of the land, have been in favor of logging and not seeing it as a threat to their way of life, because much of their agriculture is done in secondary forests (Filer 1998: xii). Conversely, it has often been argued that local people are tricked into signing logging concessions with promises that the loggers will bring services such as roads and schools or indeed pressured with threats and the use of violence (CELCOR 2006: 14, 15, 10). The dynamics of local decision making over “customary land” are discussed in Chapter 4.

In addition to tax revenues brought by commercial logging, PNG's government hopes to achieve other benefits from it. As noted above, local landowners are often persuaded to sign logging concessions with promises of “development” and services ranging from roads to schools and aid-posts. Building and maintaining infrastructure is expensive and difficult, especially given the “difficult” geography of PNG. To this day, many areas are best reached by airplanes (see for example West 2006: 76) or boats, as noted above. Logging companies however build logging roads, and today – at least in East New Britain – the government seeks to use these unconnected and individual patches of roads (see Map 3) as the basis of national infrastructure. I mentioned above how tropical forests were often cleared for plantations. Now in East New Britain, as will be discussed more in detail in Chapter 3, logging and plantations are deliberately combined. The plan is that in exchange for logging concessions the companies build roads and oil-palm plantations are established on the logged areas in order to create jobs and ensure the maintenance of the roads – with a minimal cost to the government (Oimop Nius n.d.: 2).

Commercial logging thus connects in many ways the local communities of PNG with large companies, transnational organizations and the world economy. It is a sphere where power is used by different actors in different ways ranging from persuading one's relatives into signing (or not signing) logging concessions to the threatening of locals with violence by corrupt policemen to the work of NGOs. Moving from this large scale

discussion of Malaysian logging companies and the international flow of timber, I will now start my discussion by describing how the Wide Bay Mengen live on and of their land through working the environment.

2. MEANING AND HISTORY IN THE MENGEN ENVIRONMENT

Every society lives in an environment and every society has an ongoing relationship with its surroundings. Obviously, how different societies interact with their environments varies considerably. This variation is largely due to culture and culturally different ways of perceiving the environment. Rather than arguing that culture is a mere way of adapting to the environment, I see culture and the environment as being in an ongoing “discussion” with each other: what meanings are attached to the environment, how it is used, how people relate to it, etc., are cultural actions, while the environment – and changes in it – affect culture. The environment is the framework in which societies act their culture. Yet culture, as noted, also affects the environment, and neither can change without causing a change in the other as well. Both are complex and living systems, rather than static and unchanging.

In this chapter I will describe the environment in the Wide Bay area and show certain aspects of the Mengen interaction with it. I start the discussion by describing swidden horticulture, as practiced by the Wide Bay inhabitants, because this is the main and most important subsistence activity and the most important way of working the environment. The discussion may seem tedious and redundant, but the mechanics of gardening need to be understood in order to understand the Mengen conceptual environment. Gardening holds great value going beyond questions of subsistence. Crucial to gardening is the Mengen way of conceptualizing – and indeed inventing – seasons in an environment that to people used to clear seasons, such as summer, autumn, winter and spring, may seem relatively unchanging. The Mengen seasons are visible in their environment in the phases of certain indicator trees. Trees were, and still are, used to conceptualize the flow of time. And as the discussion hopefully shows, time, including history, and the environment are tightly linked. Time is irreversible, but the environment holds physical proof of it, and therefor “place” features prominently in history.

2.1 The Mengen environment and subsistence

The relatively sparse population of about 5000 persons³ of the East Pomio Local Level Government (LLG) is located mainly along the coast (see Maps 2 and 3). Inland mountains are covered with rainforests descending all the way to the coastal area. Thus

3 According to the 1998 census (Bosip n.d.: 2).

the Mengen and Sulka of the Wide Bay area are located at the intersection of rugged rainforests on one side and the open ocean on the other. The inhabitants of the small villages, like Toimtop, in the Wide Bay area are subsistence farmers practicing swidden or rotational horticulture as their main subsistence activity. Larger cash-cropping started in the 1960's according to the older people of Toimtop with the production of copra. Nowadays both copra and cacao are cultivated and they generate some monetary income. The absence of roads and the irregular ship transport of the products from Wide Bay to Rabaul, the former provincial capital and main port, diminishes the income, because parts of the produce rot while waiting for the transport.

Swidden or shifting cultivation involves clearing garden plots into the forest (see Illustrations 1 – 3 in Appendix 8.5). At first the undergrowth is cleared by men, women and often young boys. After this, the men cut down the smaller trees (5 – 15 cm in diameter) with bushknives. The cut-down trees are let to dry for a day or two and the remaining larger trees are felled by the men. In theory, a woman, if strong enough, could also take part, but most of my male Mengen friends thought of this as a mere theoretical possibility, since a woman would always have male relatives willing to help. The men proceed with first clearing the branches of the felled trees and then cutting the trunks into logs suitable for the garden fence. Arranging the tree trunks and branches along the edges of the clearing is done by women, while building the fence is a task for the men. Setting up the fence is usually the single most labor intensive task in establishing a new garden. The fence keeps wild pigs from raiding the garden, although a Mengen friend of mine noted that more often than not it is the domestic pigs that eat in the garden. Usually after the fence is built, the women set fire to the dry twigs and tree stumps thus increasing the fertility of the soil (Panoff 1969: 25).

Planting the main crops, such as taro and yam, and tending the garden are female activities. I was told that banana and sugar cane are plants associated with and planted by men, as noted by Françoise Panoff (1969: 25n19), too. Gardens are cultivated for about one year, after which they are abandoned to regenerate the forest, which can be cleared for a new garden after five to seven years. Shifting cultivation, while as such ecologically sustainable (Panoff 1969: 20), requires relatively large areas of land and many villagers with whom I talked perceived population growth as a potential source of land scarcity and conflicts.

Subsistence gardening is of crucial importance, since it enables the villagers to be totally self-sufficient in terms of food. Gardening has however also other meanings beyond questions of subsistence. Francoise Panoff (1969: 21) notes that in the 1960's an abundant garden was a sign of the gardener's good relations with others and the effectiveness of the garden magic used. I do not know how extensively garden magic is practiced today, but often when working in the garden I was mentioned that “some special people” know how to manipulate the weather and perform other garden magic. An older man said that his older male relatives knew effective weather spells, but that he did not want to continue this tradition, because specialists are accused for unsuitable weather, even if they had nothing to do with it.

According to Panoff (1969: 22) a successful garden had aesthetic qualities, and growing new or rare species had an intellectual value to it beyond just adding to one's resources. This remains the case today. People have an impressive knowledge of plants, both domestic and wild, and when walking in the forest with my friends, they gathered seedlings for planting in the village. New crops are also tried out in smaller plots. It seems that this is mostly for the sheer intellectual pleasure of it, rather than for pressing subsistence needs. According to Panoff (1969: 28) the most valued crop, taro, was perceived to have a soul – just as humans – and it is precisely this that makes the plant nourishing. Wild forest plants, devoid of soul, may be domesticated and they acquire a soul in the garden (Panoff 1969: 30). I did not obtain information about this, but learned that different taro varieties are associated with the clans to which the person who introduced them belonged.

The tropical environment of the Wide Bay Area is dominated by two main seasons of about equal length (Panoff 1969b: 154): the rainy and dry seasons. Both seasons are usually associated with the most extreme periods, i.e. the most rainy period from June until August compared to the least rainy time from December to February. The people referred to the dry seasons often as “good time” or “time of sun” (*gutpela taim* or *taim bilong san*), while the rainy season was “bad time” (*taim nogut*). These seasons dominate gardening activities as most crops can not be planted during the rainiest months and the rough sea diminishes fishing and traveling by boat. On the other hand, during the dry season taro can be harvested and big rituals (*kastom* or *wok kastom*) are

held at that time. Michel Panoff (1969b: 159), arguing against Edmund Leach's (1971 [1961]: 135) notion that rituals organize time, claims that the occurrence of these festivals is determined by the seasons, the dry time being the only favorable time for them, since the main crops are abundant by then. Moreover, Panoff (1969b: 159) states that his position is supported by the fact that the interval between two festivals is not named by the Mengen and when counting time, the Mengen refer more often to ecological events than to the festivals.

Even though gardening and other activities are co-ordinated along the two main seasons, the Mengen gardening system is much more sophisticated. It could be said that the two seasons are the main or the “crudest” divisions of time, while specific gardening activities are done in reference to the so called tree or village calendar (*kalender bilong ples*). Sometimes this was also referred to as the “calendar of the ancestors” (*kalender bilong tumbuna*). As the name suggests, the “calendar” is based on the Mengen 12 lunar months (Panoff 1969b: 156) and the phases or seasons, i.e. flowering and the falling of leaves, of five to six indicator trees. Michel Panoff (1969b: 157) collected and described the calendar in use in the 1960's, while my Mengen friends taught me the locally systematized version of it. I was told that the old men (*bigman*) of the villages composed this systematized version, so that it could be taught to the children in the elementary schools⁴.

During the different “tree phases” different gardening work is done. According to the villagers, the phases should be followed in gardening in order to gain a good harvest. Even though lunar months are at the basis of this, the phases of the indicator trees are more important. According to Panoff (1969b: 156), this means that anomalies in tree phases – such as late flowering due to meteorological conditions – causes discrepancies between the lunar months and plant phases, but that the system works well and that it has prevented the addition of a thirteenth month into the Mengen calendar. The detailed calendar, as it was taught to me, is reproduced in Appendix 8.2, simplified in the sense that it is conformed to the western calendar months.

4 I was told by the teachers of the local schools that this is connected to the educational reform of 1997, which allowed elementary schools to teach in the local languages. In Toimtop this resulted in the establishment of a new elementary school in 2001 in the neighboring village of Wawas.

Panoff's (1969b: 159) claim that the Mengen order their activities and rituals according to the seasons, rather than using rituals to demarcate time, seems credible. Moreover, it seems that the environmental phenomena are used to count time rather than time being used to make sense of the environmental phenomena. The village calendar suggests this, as well as the fact that the growth of trees is used to conceptualize the flow of time. I was interviewing a man in his 70's about the history of the village, and he used the growing of coconut trees to recall how many years the villagers were hiding in the forest during World War II:

The war started and we fled into the forest. I think we must have been something like three years in the forest, because when we came back, the coconut trees were ready to carry.⁵ - man, in his 70's (06.07.2007)

While trees are a way of counting the flow of time and conceptualizing seasons, the tree serves also as a metaphor of history for the Mengen. This kind of "botanic metaphor[...] that combine[s] notions of growth and succession", as James Fox (2006: 8) notes, is common among Austronesian peoples. Panoff (1969b: 164) claims that the Mengen notion of history is linear and it is equated with the growth of a tree. History is understood as progressive, both in the sense of a growing tree and in the sense that it is irreversible: events are like the drying of twigs. Equally, I was told, clans are like trees and subclans like the branches. There is indeed a certain aspect of irreversibility to it: I heard many stories about subclans separating from the main clans, but as Panoff (1969b: 164) notes, no accounts of subclans merging back into the main group are told.

2.2 Human inscription into the environment

As shown above, for the Mengen time and the environment are conceptually tightly linked. Environmental phenomena are used to conceptualize the flow of time, trees are used to divide the year into agricultural seasons and the tree stands metaphorically for 'history' as the Mengen see it. In addition to this, the Mengen environment very concretely represents, documents and in fact *is* history. Stuart Kirsch (2006: 11) has argued that for the Yonggom people living in central New Guinea individual life histories are inscribed into the environment in recognizable traces produced by the work of the people, such as felling trees or clearing gardens. Thus the landscape holds "memories of the past" (Kirsch 2006: 189). According to my own experience this is the

5 *Paít i kamap, mipela i ronwe i go long bus. [...] Ating mipela i mas stap olsem... i mas tri yias samting mipela i stap long bus, bikos mipela kamap, ol kokonas i redi long karim.*

case also among the Mengen.

Indeed, human action is literally inscribed everywhere in the Mengen environment. Trees along paths bear an ever growing number of marks chopped with bushknives by the people, especially young men and boys, walking to their daily activities. This habit did not have "any special significance" according to the boys themselves, but at least it helped me to recognize the sometimes less-than-clear paths (see Illustration 4). Human action is not just seen in these trivial marks, but also for example the Mengen terminology on different forest types incorporate the aspect of human work.

The word gurloon is equivalent to the English term "forest" and a general term with no specific connotations. However, gurloon covers four words that all describe various types of forest with the emphasis on the age and use of the forest.

1. paplii: refers to secondary forest or bush that begins to grow in gardens after they are abandoned. Recognized as a former garden area. At this stage no new garden can be cleared.
2. mlaap: secondary forest that grows in abandoned gardens. It is distinguished from paplii through the size and type of the trees. Certain tree species start to grow in size and thus kill other species typical to secondary forest or paplii. Recognized as a former garden, and the traces of human work, like tree stumps or ax marks, are still visible. At least five years after abandoning the garden, a new one can be cleared again at the same spot. At this stage the forest has grown from paplii to mlaap.
3. loom: Primary forest, glossed as "virgin forest" in English by some informants. Is not seen anymore as a former garden, even though after a "long" time secondary forest can again turn into virgin forest. Distinguished from paplii and mlaap through the type and size of the trees: in the virgin forest the trees are of different species and considerably bigger than in a secondary forest. Also, visibility is better in the virgin forest, because of the size of the trees and the lack of dense undergrowth, as opposed to the two types of secondary forest. Traces of human work are visible, because people gather various materials from the forest. Trails (*rot*) are also visible marks of human action.
4. loom son: the definitions for this category were somewhat vague, but it refers to forest growing on mountain ranges, with poorer vegetation due to the less fertile

land and poor fauna. In some definitions loom son was distinguished from other types of forest due to the lack of any (visible?) human action. One informant also said that if people were to start using this kind of forest, it would change into loom. Another considered the main definition to be based on the different flora.

As apparent in the forest terminology, great emphasis is put on the social aspect of the environment, i.e. visible marks of human work. The first two terms are directly linked to the garden, since this type of forest would not exist without human action. I asked whether new forest growing on clearances made by large scale logging would be classified as either paplii or mllaap. According to one informant it would not and another one was unsure, but considered it possible, although originally the terms do not include any clearing of the forest other than gardening. The third term, while meaning the actual rainforest, also incorporates a wide range of recognized human activity, whereas the fourth one is distinguished precisely by a total lack of it.

Making one's mark into the environment, and thereby anchoring people in the land, are common themes both in Melanesia as well as in the Austronesian world. Maurice Bloch (1995: 65) describes how the Zafimaniry, swidden cultivators living in Madagascar, the westernmost part of the Austronesian world, have regarded even deforestation in positive terms, because work in the forest is seen as inscribing oneself onto it. Like traditional work, such as making village clearings, large forest clearing is even more successful in marking and attaching the humans into the land than is the building villages and the work of the ancestors (Bloch 1995: 75). The Baining, a people living north of the Wide Bay area on the east coast of New Britain, hold a somewhat similar ethos. As Jane Fajans (1998: 15) shows, work that transforms “natural” entities into social ones, for example forest into gardens, holds great value for the Baining. Due to this, also the Baining have initially regarded logging in positive terms, since it is a very recognizable form of human activity, but have later been disillusioned by large scale logging, because it has damaged the signs of prior Baining work (Fajans 1998: 19, 21).

As indicated by the forest terminology, the case seems to be very similar among the Wide Bay Mengen, too. When moving around in the outskirts of the village or in the deeper forest, I was notified of spots where my friends had felled trees, or signs that

showed that people had collected roof materials, or who had treaded the path we were walking on, and so forth. When resting on a long trip in the forest, I was told that some years before a group of scientists studying the rainforest had set their camp on the site. It had been a “clean” (*klin*) place then, but now it was overgrown again. An older man from the village used precisely the same idiom – a clean place – about the village copra plantation that was not being tended anymore. Now “it is only bush” (*em i bus tasol*). Human work, such as removing the undergrowth, makes a clean place.

Fajans (1998: 14) notes that the Baining indeed have a notion of nature as opposed to culture or society, but that these are not essential or static categories. Nature for the Baining is “raw potential” that can be transformed into the social through work. For example, the Baining divide the forest into the categories of primary and secondary, of which the latter is more social “since it bears traces of human activity” (Fajans 1998: 15). Fajans' overall description seems applicable in the Sulka-Mengen context as well. Panoff (1969: 23) notes the opposition of wild / domesticated plants, but my informants said that there are no distinct categories in Mengen conforming to “wild” or “domesticated”, nor is there a word equivalent to “nature”. However, one can refer to domesticated animals with the term *pengee*, which means to “care (or look out) for” (*lukautim*). The same term can be used of adopted children as well. For the Baining adopting children is an analogous process to tending vegetatively reproduced plants: they are taken as already conceived and tended with human labor (Fajans 1998: 14). Indeed, human work has among the Mengen as well a socializing aspect: as noted, domestic plants have a “soul”, wild ones acquire it through human work, while the same term is used for “domesticating” pigs and adopting children.

Thus for the Mengen, even though not explicit and mutually exclusive categories, the distinction of wild / domesticated seems to be recognizable. Along the socializing aspect of work, the idea of (visible) human work in the environment is central. Peter Metcalf (2008: 38, 39) notes that the people of Long Teru, swidden cultivators in the Borneo jungles, see themselves not as living *in* the jungle, but next to it. The long house in a human made clearing surrounded by the jungle is a conceptually different environment. As Fajans (1998: 14) notes in the case of the Baining, the distinction of wild / domestic, should not be seen as a clearcut binary opposition, but as a more dynamic relation. In reference to this, I argue, the Mengen conceptual environment, meaning the way of

understanding and “seeing” different types of environments and their interrelations, should be seen more as a continuum or a Gaussian distribution of humanity that diminishes into the two extremes – the rainforest and the sea – of the Wide Bay environment (see Diagram 1).

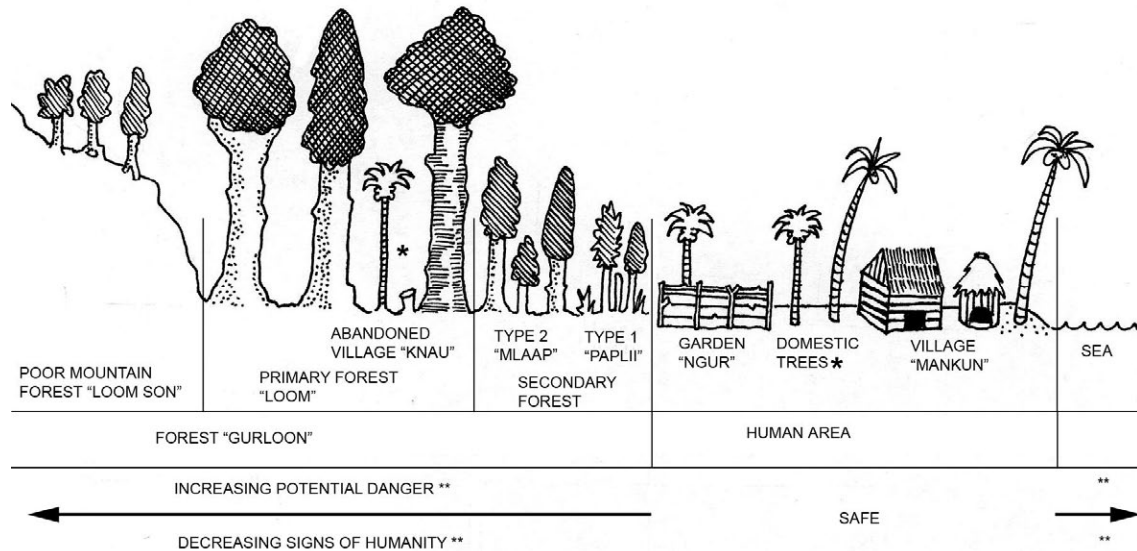


Diagram 1: coastal Mengen conceptual environment

The signs of human activity continue to be seen in the virgin forest as shown in Diagram 1, and it is an environment used by the villagers, not unlike the sea, where people fish and gather coral for making lime. Moreover, the sea is not a barrier, but a “route”, upon which the inhabitants of Wide Bay travel (waterways are discussed more in Chapter 3.2). Yet both hunting and fishing remain as less important activities in terms of subsistence (see also Panoff 1969: 21). The forest and the sea are also potentially dangerous, already in terms of physical danger: one can get lost in the forest, be attacked by cassowaries, and conversely, one can drown at sea or be attacked by sharks. Out of the village setting people are also at risk of being attacked by the *saguma*, sorcerers, dubbed in Mengen as “wild men of the forest”. Rather than the forest being “empty nature”, it is non-human and wild, which makes it fertile and dangerous at the same time. Indeed, I was noted that gardens cleared into primary forest are the most fertile (see also Bashkow 2006: 149).

As Thomas Strong (2008, personal communication) notes, the danger of the wild is

probably associated also with its creative power and that the axis in Diagram 1 showing the decreasing signs of humanity could also be seen as a temporal axis. This is true on many levels: gardens when left to regrow turn first into the two types of secondary forest and after a longer time back into primary forest. The temporality of this axis goes however beyond the regrowth of the forest: signs of human work, i.e. human relations, are newer in the secondary forest, abandoned villages in the primary forest (recognized from domestic trees (marked with an * in Diagram 1)) are signs of older relations, while the “human area” is characterized by present relations. Finally, some of the mythical clan ancestress' have come into being according to ancestral stories in the rainforest, for example by being born out of trees. Here again the fertility and the history associated with the rainforest come together. In the next section I will examine more closely the spatial associations of time.

2.3 Placed histories

The work of individuals is visible in the environment and much of the terminology contains aspects referring to human work. These signs of work can be regarded – as Kirsch (2006: 11) notes – as individual life histories “that are represented as a series of movements across the landscape”. Along individual biographies, also clan histories are represented in the environment – and often precisely in the movement through it. Landscape is an “embodiment of history” (Kirsch 2006: 195) and in these clan histories, places become crucially important.

Before discussing the placed aspect of Mengen clan histories, I will shortly define what I mean by the terms *space* and *place*. Following the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1979: 6), I use “space” meaning something general and abstract, the physical space where everything is located. Place, on the other hand, comes into being when we define and delimit space and attach value to it. Or, as in the case of the Mengen, transform its value through human work, i.e. socialize the wild and fertile. Places are “pauses” in the general view of a scene, something which “catches our attention”; points of interest in a space (Tuan 1979: 161). As I understand it, space and place are in constant interaction: places are differentiated out of space, while at a different moment space is understood as the interrelationship of different places, i.e. space is made out of places. Both space and place are always culturally constructed. As Paige West (2006: 27) – following Henri

Lefebvre – notes, space “comes into being” through mental, material and social practices, such as the representation of space for instance.

This is also what Tuan (1979: 4) argues: while sensing space and place are biological universals, *how* this is done is affected by culture. Tuan (1979: 13) demonstrates this by showing how an Inuit woman and man sense the same space differently: for the woman the space is defined by the location and distance of significant points, i.e. places, while for the man the defining aspect is the coastline that serves as a boundary. These ways of conceptualizing one's environment are cultural, and in my opinion largely dependent on the situation and purposes of the experiencing subject. In a different situation the Inuit woman would very probably sense space in a different way. Just as Helsinkians conceptualize their environment in terms of important places and their interconnections when riding the subway, but depend largely on their sense of more abstract space when walking in the forest. Keeping the relativity of space and place in mind, I think Tuan's definition is *analytically* useful, as in many places the points of interest can be (conceptually) differentiated from space that is something more general.

In addition to the forest, seen largely in terms of the extent of human action, the Mengen environment consists also of different types of named places. When discussing the environmental terminology with my Mengen friends, I was surprised to hear that the general term knau means an abandoned village. It is interesting that while in English or Finnish, for instance, an abandoned dwelling is referred to largely in negative terms, the Mengen have a positive and autonomous term for it. Later I learned that many of the named places around the village and somewhat further in the rainforest had also been sites of previous villages.

During my stay in Toimtop I tried to gather as many named places and their meanings as possible. Younger people usually knew the names, but in most cases not the meaning or possible stories behind them. Due to this, the majority of the names and stories I learned from one older man who was widely regarded as having a great deal of traditional knowledge. The place names fall roughly into four categories: 1) place names that do not have a specific meaning or the meaning is forgotten, 2) place names that describe the physical features of the place, 3) place names that describe human action and 4) place names that refer to a mythical story that describes how the features

of the place came to be. This categorization is based on the roughly 20 place names I gathered and is to be regarded as a tentative approach, rather than a well elaborated and totally encompassing description of a system of places.

An example of the first category is Kniik, an abandoned village in the rainforest, relatively near Toimtop. This village was abandoned in the 1960's when the colonial government wanted people to be more easily accessible and the inhabitants moved mostly to Toimtop. Similarly, some rivers, mountain slopes and so on had names that did not have any further meaning, or it is forgotten.

The second category includes also both villages (abandoned or inhabited) as well as other places. Toimtop, the village in which I stayed, means “the curve of Toim-river”, because the village is located at the intersection of two rivers, of which the one bends strongly as it flows into the other. Equally, Wiakaoun, an abandoned village, means “the trail of wild pigs”, because the village was built on a site with many trails of wild pigs. Or Mos'p'takail, a site in the forest, means a rope plant hanging straight down from the tree. This particular species is used to tie the roof material of a house. Many place and village names refer to tree species that are particularly common at that location. In these cases the name is formed by attaching the suffix -pun (meaning root) to the name of the tree species. Thus the village Korpun refers to a location where many bamboo trees grow. James Fox (2006: 5, 6) notes that the Iban concept “pun” also means root or cause, and it is derived from the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian concept “puqun” with the same meaning (“tree, trunk, base, source”). Interestingly, the Mengen term “pun” seems to have the same meaning as the Iban term. In fact, shared semantical and metaphorical idioms are common to the Austronesian discourse on origin (Fox 2006: 5), and the Mengen seem to be no exception.

Names of the third category describe usually some rather mundane action or event, which has become the name of the site. For example Wutegin, which means “broken back”, refers to a story of men carrying a pig they had caught and tied to a pole. At the named spot the spine of the pig broke. Similarly Kungumeel has its name from cordyline plant used for decoration in feasts and rituals. The site was named after a man planted it in the place while resting there. Some of these names stood for longer stories: Sopkeen, a clearing in the forest, has the name of a man. A group of villagers was

returning from another village and they decided to rest. One of the women was sitting on a root and she stood up carelessly, so that her loincloth fell. Ashamed, the woman ran away, but a man fond of the woman stayed behind to sleep on the root. The older man said that the story was “a dirty one” (*nogut*), and caused great laughter by telling it.

The last category also includes stories that tell how, in mythical times, some places were formed. *Nuut klestut klemene* means “Nuut [a god-figure] stopped the river”. It is a low point near *Toimtop* village, which is said to be the footprint of Nuut, who stopped the *Toim*-river from flowing into the ocean by forcing it to bend (see also: *Toimtop*). *Telpuputkeis*, “a man trying to carve a possum out of the rock”, a waterfall in the forest, characterized by big holes in the cliffs where the water runs (see Illustration 5). According to the story, a possum was sitting on a branch above the water and its shadow was cast into the river. A devil (*tambaran*, in some versions a man) thought that the animal is in the rocks and started hitting the rocks with his ax, in order to catch the animal. Thus the holes in the rock. (In one version, a man comes and asks the devil what he is doing and the frustrated devil deprived of his game decides to eat the man. The man however points at the animal in the tree, the devil is distracted, and the man runs away.)

As shown above, many of the names with a known meaning refer to events and action. This is in line with the findings of the previous section, i.e. the social aspect of the environment is central. New places are not named often. People told that they do not name sites after contemporary anecdotes similar to those quoted above. When a new village is established, it is named and some existing villages are relatively new, so that the founders are known. In addition to villages and named places, some places are also inhabited by spirits (*masalai*). The *masalai*, in themselves neither good or evil, are potentially dangerous and respect is to be shown when in a spirit place. The spirits are also territorial in the sense that they are said to be dangerous to persons they do not know. When a new person is visiting a *masalai* place, people familiar with the area should announce them to the spirits. New spirit places may be found, for example if one has a dream of a spirit upon visiting a new place, and spirits can also be asked to leave a site, for example if a new village is to be founded. Thus the environment is not just made of resources to be utilized, but of social relations, i.e. through the links to individual or clan histories, spirits, or indeed potential new relations, that emerge when

the environment is worked and through that, the social aspect becomes increased.

Places are tightly linked to clan histories. Individual clans have mythical ancestresses, who are said to have come into being at certain locations. I use “come into being” deliberately rather than “being born”, since in the cases I heard, the clan ancestresses came out of a tree for example. Also the fission of subclans from their mother-clans is linked to locations, evident in the names of the subclans, which refer to plants or stones. During the time of the ancestors, birth was a secret of the women and twins were a taboo, because the woman would feel shame for giving birth to several children like an animal. When twins were born, one of them was carried into the forest, under a tree or a rock, by older women. The old women would bring the child back claiming that the rock or tree had given birth to it and it was given as an adopted child to the true mother. The “adopted” child became an apical ancestor of a new sub-section, and the subclans are often named after the rocks or plants where their ancestress were “found”.

Clan histories, or origin stories, tell about the birth, genealogy, movement and settlement of the clans (or subclans). The genealogies tell the succession of the clan from the ancestress, while movement and settlement tell *where* the ancestress came into being, where did she move to, which villages did the clan found, where the old graveyards and gardens of the clan are located and so on. Due to this, the Mengen general term for an abandoned village is less surprising. The places, including villages, feature prominently in such stories. Indeed, genealogies and places are more tightly linked. As James Fox (1997: 4) shows, this is common among Austronesian peoples. To describe this, Fox (1997: 8) introduces the concept of *topogeny*. In short it is an ordered recitation of place names. Varying greatly in form among the Austronesian peoples, the topogenies may tell the journey of ancestors, the migration of a group or the transmission of an object (Fox 1997: 9). History is tied to places, which means that “topogeny represents a projected externalization of memories” (Fox 1997: 8). Whereas genealogies establish a succession in time, topogenies establish it in space (Fox 1997: 101). Just as work inscribes the life history of an individual onto the environment, also the clan histories are partly visible: the abandoned places are recognized from domestic plants planted by the former inhabitants. The landscape indeeds holds the memories of the past, as noted by Kirsch (2006: 189). This is an interesting two-way relationship of historical knowledge: on the one hand the clan histories hold the knowledge about

places, while on the other the places contain the histories, as noted by Alan Rumsey (2001: 12).

A place can have various meanings attached to it, but it also concretely contains the marks of history; it is “an archive of memories” (Tuan 1979: 154) . This is not only so for oral societies, such as the Mengen, but for industrial societies as well. The importance of physical places as the embodiments of history is nicely shown in the agreement between the governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea to preserve the Kokoda trail, a trail used by the Australian forces fighting the Japanese in New Guinea in WWII (The National 2008). The former conservative PM John Howard stated that he will “do anything” to stop a gold mine planned to be built near the site (ABC 2006). Howard's concern for the preservation of the what he regards as a significant part of Australia's history, is analogous to the concerns of an older Sulka woman about the advent of logging. Her clan was discussing whether to sell logging rights on their clan land to a company, and the women in question objected. One of her younger clan mates says:

“Many of the traditional boundaries and marks, where our grandparents had stayed on the mountain, are still there. Like the cemetery, like the old villages, because our clan had settled on that mountain, so we had all these things there. And she [her older clan mate] wanted the children too, the future generations, to know them. For them to be able to *see* those marks [my emphasis].”⁶ - female NGO-worker, 42 years (9.8.2007)

The visibility of these marks is important, because they are physical documents of a history. Countless books have been written about the Kokoda campaign, and yet the actual place remains important, as John Howard's concern shows. Historical marks, placed in the environment, are even more important in the case of oral societies, like the Sulka-Mengen. Although it should be noted that today the majority of the Mengen are literate and that the documenting of the clan histories in writing is becoming increasingly popular (and important) to them, as will be shown in Chapter 4.

As Panoff (1969b: 163) notes, the Mengen clan histories form, at least ideally, a

6 *Na planti ol tredisonel ol boundaries and maks, we ol grandparents bilong mipela, ol i bin stap antap long maunten, ol i gat desla ol samting i stap. Laik cemetery, laik villages, bikos klan bilong mi, ol i bin stap antap long maunten, so we had all these things there. Na em bin laikim ol, ol liklik pikinini tu, ol future generation tu, long save. Ol lukim ol desla maks.*

consensus, which can be checked and inquired, if needed. Even though Panoff (1969b: 164, 165) does note that Mengen histories mention place names, that clan histories are equated with the migratory process, that the Mengen terminology for time is indeed spatial (for example, the term “forever” has primary spatial connotations) and that history is visible in the environment as planted trees, he fails in my opinion to notice the importance of place. Place and sites are, as Keith Basso (1996: 64) notes in reference to Apache stories tightly linked to places, something concrete, something to which people can return. Whereas time is irreversible, places can be revisited and are thus good for thinking with.

The clan origin stories among the Mengen are the marks of rootedness into the land. Whereas the length of a genealogy tells the relative age of the descent group, knowledge about places is a sign of the strength of the relationship of the group to the land. Andrew McWilliam (1997: 104) notes that among (Austronesian) farmers of West Timor, knowledge of named places usually resides with people “who hold particular claims to land and territory” in that area. The link between group names and significant places serves as a “legitimizing discourse and statement of a claim of land” (McWilliam 1997: 111). This process is analogous to the significance of named places in the questions about land tenure among the Sulka–Mengen. The group that can name more old villages, burial sites and other significant places, is usually regarded as the holder of a particular land area in situations where the holding (or ownership) of a certain tract of land comes to the surface. Disputes, which are dealt with more specifically in the fourth chapter, are situations where clan origin stories, and thus also topogenies, are the focus of new interest and indeed, sources of power.

2.4 New horizons

Relationships between people, both living and long since passed, are inscribed in the Sulka-Mengen environment. Human work makes its mark and the trees continue to indicate the right seasons to plant the important crops. But other ways of seeing, conceptualizing and working the environment exist in the Wide Bay area. Cash cropping has been introduced and practiced for some time – an interesting shift from subsistence gardening. During the 1980's large Malaysian logging companies came to the Wide Bay area, and in many parts large logging operations started. Natural resource

extraction is in many ways a totally different way of working the environment than Sulka-Mengen gardening. On the one hand, it is recognizable human work, which is by default valued by the Sulka-Mengen. On the other hand, logging companies are interested in the environment as a resource, their main interest being in the “stuff” that the environment contains, and not for example in the relationships represented by the signs in the environment and by the environment itself.

In the next chapter I will discuss more closely the ways in which the government and companies make the environment understandable (or in James Scott’s (1998: 25) terms, “legible”) to themselves, both conceptually as well as physically. However the aims and practices of the PNG government and the companies are different: the government tries to administer the people and the environment, while the companies try to extract as much value as possible out of them. In some cases the interests of the companies and government coincide, in some cases – as in road building – their difference becomes increasingly blurred due to neoliberal policies. It is to these “neoliberal environments” that I shall now turn.

3. MAKING THE ENVIRONMENT LEGIBLE

States⁷ are territorial and these territories must be defined, defended and controlled. Indeed, the sovereignty of the modern state is founded in the control of territory (Neocleous 2003: 411). This control is however not only based on the use of violence over which the state claims a monopoly, but also on the administration and cognitive control of space. This administrative interest of the state is visible in its need for a standardized and legible environment, like standardized citizens (populations) and an administrable social life (laws) (Scott 1998: 22). The state has to manage and administer much larger entities, both environmental and social, than local communities. Local ways of seeing the environment suit the local needs, but are often too complex and too heterogeneous for the state, as are local practices of social interaction (Scott 1998: 22, 24). These processes are too manifold and they have to be simplified and standardized, in order to be easily comparable, legible and thus administrable. Because of this need the state creates abstractions that enable control and “legibility” from the center (Scott 1998: 30).

In a very concrete way this process of abstraction is visible in the “scientific forestry” born in 18th century Prussia (Scott 1998: 12). At first the abstraction was done on a conceptual scale by “ignoring” those aspects of the forest that were not economically interesting, but the logical outcome was that actual forest became managed in this way (Scott 1998: 13, 15). The product was a monocultural and even-aged forest, a “neatly arranged construct[...] of science” (Scott 1998: 15). According to James Scott (199: 14) this process has to be seen as a part of a larger context, that of centralized state-making. In New Britain, plantations are a form of this standardized environment. During the colonial period some plantations were established in the Wide Bay area, for example at Tol and Palmalmal (see Map 3), yet there are not many privately owned large plantations in the Wide Bay area. The case with the northern part of East New Britain, the Gazelle peninsula, is different: much land there has been alienated during the colonial times for cash cropping (Sillitoe 2000: 79, see also Illustration 6).

Another aspect of this process is the creation of standardized measurements, which are essential to the state for the administration of both space and people. As Scott (1998:

7 I use “the state” here as referring to the institution in general, not a specific state unless so mentioned.

22) notes, just as "natural" space in its so called raw form is too complicated to be administered in itself, so are the actual patterns of social life. Local means of measurement and ways of conceptualizing space usually fulfill local needs, but they do not serve the interests of the state (Scott 1998: 24). A standardized system gives however the officials of the state the possibility to compare and administer different areas (Scott 1998: 27). According to Scott (1998: 27, 29) "every act of measurement was an act marked by the play of power relations" and one of the central themes in the French revolution was the creation of standardized systems of measurement. The use of local measurements was in relation to this a sign of the state's lack of control (Scott 1998: 29). The "cacophony" of local system was seen not only as a threat to central legibility and administration, but to the birth of the French citizen. In the end, the standardized ways of seeing did not just change how these relations were depicted, but they also changed the relations themselves (Scott 1998: 33).

In East New Britain, as elsewhere in New Guinea, villages are partly a result of this, since the colonial administration wanted people to move from areas it regarded too hard to reach into "legible" villages along trail networks. People scattered in small hamlets and villages around the forest were difficult to control and tax from the point of view of the colonial administration. A Mengen man talks about the abandoning of a village in the 1960's:

"The government wanted all people to be only along the roads [main trails]. They didn't like to go around the bush to look for people, it was too much hard work. They have to be along the roads at the time when they are to be given work or checked that they live in an orderly fashion, like that. He [the colonial official] would only walk along a road. Climbing mountains and all that was too much hard work."⁸ - man, in his 70's (06.07.2007)

Contemporary villages are areas where local and state environments intersect. I was told that the government has greater control in the villages and for example expelling unwanted people is nowadays more difficult, since the government would not allow this. On the other hand, the villages in East Pomio are still quite difficult to reach and government presence is visible mostly visible in the form of schools and villagers

8 *Em, bikos govaman i laik bai ol man i stap long rot tasol. [...] Na noken hatwok long brukim bus i go nabaut bilong go lukim ol long bus nabaut. [...] Ol mas stap long rot tasol, bai taim i visitim long givim wok o lukautim ol long gutpela pasin, olsem. Em bai wokabaut tasol long stretpela rot. I noken hatwok long kalapim ol maunten na i go olsem.*

elected to be government officials, such as *komitis* and councillors.

3.1 Maps

The legibility of the environment and people is not just based on physical modifications of the environment, but crucially rests on conceptual abstractions, such as maps. The point of view of maps, i.e. the view from above, is very different from how people on the ground actually perceive their environment. Michel de Certeau (1984: 119) contrasts these two ways of seeing by calling them maps and tours respectively, in as much as maps are based on “the knowledge of an order of places”, while “tours” require “going” or “spatial actions”.

However, these two types are not mutually exclusive and in many cases either one presupposes the other. For example, going or “touring” requires place indications or sometimes the action “permits one to see something”, i.e. the tour conditions the map. (de Certeau 1984: 120). Indeed, the “autonomous map”, based solely on “scientific representations of space” is a fairly new phenomenon (de Certeau 1984: 121, 120). Medieval European maps, as well as Aztec maps from the fifteenth century, were “memorandum[s] prescribing actions”, “itineraries” describing the journeys or history books, more than actual geographical maps (de Certeau 1984: 120).

From the fifteenth century onwards, maps have started to gain autonomy from the “tour” type of vision, even though actual tours, such as exploring, were the practices that produced those maps. The “pictorial representations” of these tours vanish from the maps and maps become “totalizing stage[s which combine] elements of diverse origin” thereby creating a new form of geographical knowledge. (de Certeau 1984: 121). In this autonomy and “authorlessness” lies also the power of modern maps: we are encouraged to forget that the picture represented by the map is a picture made by someone by abstracting, selecting and manipulating (Neocleous 2003: 421).

As Scott (1998: 45) has noted, maps “make the local situation legible to an outsider”. Cadastral maps, abstracted and the information they hold reduced to a very great extent, allow quick surveying of the tracts in question (Scott 1998: 44). Maps have been, and still are, central devices for administering and controlling and we are increasingly aware

of the questions about power that are related to them. But maps are not just devices of making a certain situation legible to the "center", but they also construct certain realities. According to Mark Neocleous (2003: 418) maps do not just reproduce the world, but they very much also construct it through borders and divisions. Maps are important devices for concretizing the territorial needs of the state. For example, colonial powers renamed far away places often *before* actually arriving there. (Neocleous 2003: 418).

In Papua New Guinea, mapping is conducted by the Department of Lands and Physical Planning and the National Mapping Bureau in Port Moresby provides interested parties, from private citizens to corporations, with these maps. But the state is not the only party that conducts mapping. Alongside private companies, which produce maps that cater for their needs, NGOs also conduct various kinds of mapping. Much of the mapping is done under the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) -toolkit developed in order to "enable development practitioners, government officials, and local people to work together to plan context-appropriate programs" (World Bank 1996: 191). In a nutshell, the PRA aims to involve the locals in gathering the relevant information needed for a project and help the locals gain awareness of the various institutions and resources they at their disposal.

A Kokopo-based NGO-worker told me that a PRA was conducted in Lake Murray before the beginning of a community forestry initiative, in order to identify clan land boundaries so that each clan would fell trees only on their own lands. Another PRA was conducted in Toimtop before the beginning of a conservation project. One of the clans wanted to conserve their clan lands and a PRA was conducted to create a consensus over the boundaries, to avoid future disputes and uncertainties. According to the NGO-worker one objective was also to find out whether all the clan members were in favour of the conservation project and not just the clan member who had invited the NGO to facilitate the project.

In this case the main tool used in the PRA was community mapping. The idea was to create a community map that shows clan land and village boundaries and that all the clans in question agree on the map. In order to get all the villagers participating, the map was at first worked on the ground using local materials, such as sticks and stones,

to represent various geographic and social elements such as rivers, gardens, and abandoned villages. The point of the PRA is that the NGO-workers explain and facilitate the process, but that the actual map is ostensibly made by the villagers themselves. According to the NGO-worker who had been conducting the PRA in Toimtop, participation is at first slow and especially women are often refrain from taking part, but as the mapping progresses, people start to speak out, correct things that they perceive as mistakes. The map is completed when all the villagers agree on it. Afterwards, the map is confirmed by physically walking the boundaries, an interesting practice in light of de Certeau's notion on the two types of experiencing space. After the map is confirmed by walking it, it is transferred to paper and sometimes even confirmed with GPS (Global Positioning System). The finished document should go back to the villagers themselves.

PRA mappings raise of course serious questions in the light of the problematics of mapping and the questions of power related to it. The most obvious problem, mentioned by the NGO-workers themselves, is that information gathered and documented in the PRA-mappings may end up in the wrong hands and used beyond the original intentions. And as with all documenting, also PRA-maps "fix" a certain situation, as if a still picture of a flowing river, to borrow Scott's (1998: 46) metaphor. When the ownership of clan lands is thoroughly researched and documented, it also shows who in the community does *not* own land and other resources:

"It gives a clear picture of all the people who do not have land, just user rights to it."⁹ - Papua New Guinean NGO-worker (female), 50 years (10.08.2007)

The feeling of being left out and sidelined might very well create negative feelings and strengthen existing factionalism in the community. Land ownership and user rights are separate things in Papua New Guinea. This is important, because among the Sulka-Mengen each clan and often sub-clans own specific territories, but many people do not live on their clan lands. People have user rights to the land they live on, i.e. the right to clear gardens, but cash-cropping done on the land of another clan is usually not permitted and often a source of disputes. As the NGO-worker noted, there is a danger that the property relations become unduly highlighted and even fetishized, and user rights are forgotten or diminish in importance. As Stuart Kirsch (2006: 203) has noted in

9 *Em bai putim kliapela piksa long ol lain we i nogat graun. Laik they are only using user rights long graun.*

relation to the Yonggom mapping their territories with GPS-technology, fixing indigenous land boundaries to universal standards may dissolve local flexible practices of re-organizing land relations according to demographic shifts and other local dynamics. Power relations inside a given community are related to maps and mapping also because maps require a certain kind of knowledge to be read and understood. They are in a way part of the state's "code" (Scott 1998: 36), often legible only to the educated people in the local communities.

Related to the fear of "fixing" of indigenous land relations by their documentation, is the fear, often expressed by anthropologists, that mapping of indigenous lands is the first step in the commodification and registration of territory, leading ultimately to the alienation of people from their lands. This is a valid fear, shared by myself too, but the mapping done by locals in co-operation with the NGOs and sometimes with the government's Department of Environment and Conservation (Filer 1998: 252) are often not the first mappings done in their respective areas.

Large corporations are also aware of the resources prior to their mapping by local communities, and as in Toimtop, the PRA was conducted after logging in the area had convinced members of one clan to conserve their forests. Indeed, the map established in the PRA turned out to have strong legal implications. After the mapping was concluded in agreement with all the clan representatives in question, a dispute arose when another clan claimed the areas conserved and invited a logging company to do exploratory logging. In the court case that followed, the PRA map was part of the evidence presented in favor of the clan originally intending to conserve the area, since the other clan failed to provide an adequate reason why they first accepted the boundaries represented in the PRA map on which they had worked too and some years later disputed the territory.

Maps are "technologies of power" (Abramson 2000: 16) and in this case the map agreed on by the villagers was powerful enough to settle a dispute in favor of the "conservationists", who were opposed by another clan backed up by a landowner company (formed by several clans in the area) and Niu Gini Lumber, a subsidiary of the large Malaysian company Rimbunan Hijau. True, maps can negatively "fix" flexible relations and commodify traditional lands, but so do timber concessions sold to large

multinational companies. And indeed, the "inscription" written through large scale logging on the environment is more or less fixed too, since the regeneration takes long a time, or is impossible if it is followed by plantations. In this case it is not the map that makes property out of traditional lands, but the deals with the companies, and when these deals are done according to the fluid traditional boundaries, the end result is also fluid and timber might be harvested on areas that people want to preserve.

Mapping, done either by states, companies or NGOs, is a double-edged sword for the locals. It makes the situation legible for outsiders (Scott 1998: 45), it fixes fluid relations and "fuzzy" boundaries on paper, it separates propertied tracts from others (Abramson 2000: 15), but it also is often the only tool powerful enough to confront companies or even states themselves. The question is also: *whose* maps does the government read? The clan members of Toimtop, wanting to conserve their traditional land areas, were disappointed to find out that despite court processes they had won, and mappings done by the NGOs, their lands were nevertheless *mapped* as logging areas in a government road project, which I shall deal with in greater depth in the next section.

3.2 Roads

Roads and road-building are important things to bear in mind when discussing spatial and environmental conceptions and the modeling of the environment. The significance of roads is easily forgotten in places where they are taken for granted and where they are an integral and almost natural (or naturalized) part of the landscape. In addition to this, roads are also necessary for any kind of natural resource extraction and they are an essential part of the infrastructure needed by the state and companies.

Roads reform in a very concrete fashion the environment into a "legible" grid, which is according to James Scott (1998: 4) essential for states. Moreover, road-building is a way of connecting (and subjecting) certain areas more closely under the control of the state. As James Ferguson (1996: 253) has shown, road-building is not just a technical operation, it has strong political effects. Ferguson uses as an example a seemingly unsuccessful "development" project operating in Lesotho during the 1980's. The project did not meet its goals, but through "technical" improvements, such as roads and other services, the area in question was tied more closely to the state, for example because the

road made the area more accessible to the military, which indeed increased its presence in the area (Ferguson 1996: 253). In East New Britain roads are important to questions concerning the state, landownership and even ethnicity.

In East Pomio, the area inhabited by the Mengen, as well as nearly everywhere else in East New Britain, roads form a peculiar private infrastructure. Around the provincial capital Kokopo there is an extending road network; however it does not reach very far to other parts of East New Britain. Elsewhere in the province roads are not absent, but they are not connected to the limited network around Kokopo, or to anything else for that matter (see Map 3). Most of the roads in East New Britain are not built by the government, but by private logging companies, such as the Malaysian Rimbunan Hijau operating in the Baining areas (Fajans 1998: 20) and its subsidiaries like Niu Gini Lumber operating in East Pomio.

These roads seem to run from nowhere to nowhere. They connect the coast with logging areas and often run through small villages. This network is only temporary: after logging operations cease in a given area, the road is abandoned by the company, not maintained and easily damaged by the heavy rains during the wet season. Bridges built by the company suffer the same fate. Even though the locals use the roads, where convenient, they serve almost exclusively the companies operating in the area. They are private infrastructure built for a single purpose, namely the transportation of timber, and thus very different from the road networks built by states, although in practice government roads in PNG are not always much better.

The road network around the capital and in general the more "developed" infrastructure in Tolai areas, i.e. north in the Gazelle peninsula, is a legacy of colonialism, because the administrative areas and plantations were and still are located there. Otherwise the government infrastructure is "punctual", as it was in the colonial days as well: there are aid-posts, schools and occasional police stations in larger centers, but it is hardly a "grid". Papua New Guinea's geography with its mountains and archipelagos makes the building of grid-like infrastructure difficult. During colonial days much of the country was administered by government patrols walking from village to village, rather than staying put in one place (Schieffelin & Crittenden 1991: 13). The villages had often houses, where the colonial officials could stay during their visits (*haus kiap* in Tok

Pisin), but were empty or in other uses most of the time. The first police post in the Mengen areas was set up only shortly before the second world war in Pomio. This means that prior to that the areas were administered from more than 150 kilometers by sea from Pomio. (Panoff 1969a: 3). Much of PNG's infrastructure is still literally punctual in as much airplanes that land on airstrips cleared in the forests remain important modes of transportation even today.

In Ferguson's account of road-building in Lesotho the roads come as mere "by-products" of a development project and advance the grip of the state almost unnoticeably. The situation in East Pomio is very different. Road-building is a central political question much debated by the inhabitants themselves. Paul Tiensten, the MP of Pomio district¹⁰, advocates the so called "Ili-Wawas Integrated Project", which aims to connect the logging roads around Ili (Baining area) and Wawas (Sulka-Mengen) and thus the Pomio area with the road network of Kokopo and later Kimbe, the provincial capital of West New Britain. It is an "integrated" project, since it incorporates road-building, logging and the establishment of oil-palm plantations. According to the plan, logging companies build the roads, harvest timber, and after this is done, plantations are established on the cleared areas. The aim is to save government funds by letting the companies build roads and it is hoped that roads will be maintained too by private funds, since it is in the interest of the plantation owners.

Many of the Mengen with whom I talked were in favor of the road link, since it was hoped that a road to Kokopo would ease the financial situation, since agricultural products from the villages as well as cash crops (like cocoa and copra) could be transported to the market. Despite the positive attitudes, many people were also afraid that a road link would bring problems, mostly *raskols*¹¹ and other suspicious people from towns. Some villagers were highly critical of roads built by the company, because of their limited durability and the government's suspected inability and unwillingness to maintain the roads. Also, since the villagers do not have cars, nor will they be able to afford them in the near future, roads and their maintenance were seen by some as a

¹⁰ During his first term from 2002-2007 a minister under PM Michael Somare and re-elected in the 2007 elections with a great majority of votes. A Mengen originally from Wawas, a small village in the Wide Bay area of East Pomio.

¹¹ *Raskol* is a Tok Pisin term for young men engaged in criminal activities such as hold-ups, rape and murder.

useless waste of money.

Ferguson (1996: 254) has noted how the roads can bring tighter government control. It seems that in East Pomio the more stronger presence of the government is desired by many, if the area is connected to the provincial capital:

”It [the government] must think about the communities and it must set quarterlies or something like that, patrol bases, men of law or police and the kind to look into the trouble [brought by roads].”¹² - man, in his mid-30's (26.6.2007)

On the contrary, the main worry seems to be that the roads will *not* bring with them government control, but just the violence and troubles from towns. On the other hand, the police do not solely prevent violence, but all too often some policemen are the perpetrators of it. For example, a conservation activist from the Lote people (Pomio district, south of the Mengen areas) told me that he was assaulted and badly beaten by policemen, who were, according to him, acting on behalf of a logging company. People from the village in which I was situated spoke about an incident where some armed policemen had threatened villagers who were opposed to logging.

In relation to his description of how states create standardized and ”legible” environments, James Scott (1998: 8) has noted that also large-scale capitalism creates this kind of environments. According to Scott (1998: 12) the scientific forestry, which ”saw” the forests from a purely utilitarian and economic point of view, served ”the direct needs of the state”. This way of ”seeing” is even more typical to logging companies, which see the environment from an even narrower economic point of view than most states.

But do companies in fact create the same kind of standardized environment and infrastructure as do states? In East Pomio, as already noted, the company infrastructure is as narrow in its uses as is the point of view which produced it. The roads are temporary and they form isolated ”grids” in the areas of interest to the companies. In response to Scott, James Ferguson (2005: 379) has argued that neoliberal capitalism in fact does not produce ”national grids”, but enclaves and ”patchworks”. Indeed, capital

¹² *Em mas tingting tu long ol community, so i mas settim olsem ... na... quarterly o desla kain, ol patrol bases bilong ol ... lo man o police o desla kain, bilong lukluk insait long ol trouble nau.*

does not flow, but it "hops" from an usable area to another, skipping the "unusable" in between (Ferguson 2005: 380). Ferguson's description of oil-companies in Africa seems in general applicable also to logging companies in East Pomio. In fact, keeping in mind that PNG's national infrastructure has traditionally been "punctual", it could be said that contemporary Africa – as described by James Ferguson – is shifting from imperial networks characterized by rail-roads (for example Ferguson 1999: 2) and government control to the punctual or patchwork-infrastructure characteristic of PNG.

Until now the logging companies have created what seem to be enclaves, even though much less extreme than the oil-enclaves in Africa or Iraq protected by razor wire and armed guards, or indeed mercenaries (Ferguson 2005: 381). The logging-road network spreads around the base camps of the companies, leaving other areas "off the grid". Some Mengen villagers were very critical towards this private infrastructure, describing the roads as mere tracks that will be washed away by rains in six months. But in some cases this kind of non-state infrastructure is desired by some inhabitants of East New Britain.

The Baining, an ethnic group living in the northern parts of East New Britain, more close to the capital Kokopo than the Mengen, have opposed a road link that would connect them to the provincial capital (Fajans 1998: 20). In East New Britain the largest ethnic group, the Tolai living around the provincial capital in the Gazelle peninsula, have the greatest political and bureaucratic influence, but are short of land. The Gazelle peninsula of New Britain was colonized during the 19th century and much of the land area has been alienated from the Tolais for plantations and the mission first by the Germans and then by the Australians (Sillitoe 2000: 79). According to Paul Sillitoe (2000: 79), nearly 50% of the land area that belonged to the Tolais has been alienated from them.

Because of the land shortage, there is a constant demographic pressure from Kokopo towards the southern parts of New Britain, according to Jane Fajans (1998: 20). The Baining have sold rights to logging companies to work on their land and as a result, the private logging infrastructure also exists in Baining areas. The Baining have viewed these roads positively, precisely because they do *not* connect to a wider network and therefor the threat of Tolai settlers is significantly lessened (Fajans 1998: 20). The

villagers seemed to be less concerned about the ethnic tensions between Tolais and other groups than about crime in relation to roads, even though they are aware of the problematic situation of land shortage among the Tolai and its implications for other groups in East New Britain.

The infrastructure situation in East Pomio and other parts of East New Britain is less clear-cut than the scenario described by Ferguson (2005). The logging-company infrastructure resembles in many ways the enclave-like infrastructure of oil-companies, but with the Ili-Wawas plan there seems to be a trade-off between companies and the state, in so far as the companies get logging concessions for which they still need the approval of traditional landowners, while the state gets desired infrastructure at a fraction of the cost the state would have to pay if it were to build the infrastructure alone. But the companies and infrastructure do not advance the control of the state just by making the areas more accessible, rather the infrastructure itself creates a need for the state and its security providing institutions, as the comment by the Mengen man illustrates. And it is not only gang-crime that creates a need for the state by locals, it is also the companies that create this need. In cases of company abuse or disputes created by royalties from logging operations, the state can be the only arena in which these problems can be solved.

In East New Britain there are three different levels of infrastructure or road networks that sometimes intercede with each other: there is the state owned road network in the north around the capital, the privately built temporary patchwork of logging roads around the province and thirdly, the local network of paths and waterways. With the advent of plans like the Ili-Wawas -project, the distinction between private and state infrastructure becomes increasingly blurred. On another level, the locals incorporate the private logging roads into their own system of infrastructure, as in the case of the Baining for example, but sometimes it also interferes with local networks, destroying old trail networks thus disorienting the locals.

Another aspect of the local infrastructure that needs to be remembered are the waterways. In East Pomio, all major distances are crossed by boat, whether it is "internal" movement from the villages to the larger centers of Palmalmal or Pomio, or from the villages to Kokopo. Even though the use of these "highways" (Hviding 1992:

2) is very fuel-intensive and thus expensive, it is perceived by some locals as an independent form of transport:

”There are other and cheaper alternatives to get development that don't pose any danger to us. Like the improvement of ports. And we could use only sea-transport and short distance roads [to the ports], like we here in Teimtop.”¹³ - man, 37 years (2.7.207)

Along with paths, the waterways form the local infrastructure that is in some cases contesting the other two ”built from above” types of transport network.

3.3 Environmental Destruction and the “Scenes of Loss”

The state and the companies do not just produce environments legible from the center or patchworks of infrastructure, but in many cases they also destroy existing environments. In East New Britain logging is not done according to the characteristics of scientific forestry according to which the ”forest as an economic resource [is] managed efficiently and profitably” (Scott 1998: 13). Trees are not re-planted in uniformed ranks, nor are there any foresters administering and ”reading” the forest (Scott 1998: 15). The Malaysian companies cut down timber in rainforests and once an area is cleared of the valuable trees, it is abandoned. In contrast to homogenizing, yet sustainable scientific forestry, logging in East New Britain is an unsustainable and destructive form natural resource exploitation. Only now, with the advent of the ever-increasing oil-palm plantations, does a grid-like and administrable and non-diverse environment extend itself. Even though the end product of these two types of processes might be entirely different, the result can be, and often is, in both cases the destruction of the local environment and infrastructure.

Logging and other forms of natural resource extraction, even though sometimes supported by the locals themselves, can threaten local forms of subsistence. Logging might decrease the number of wild animals making hunting more difficult, the oil-palm plantations often impoverish the ground and pollute waters (CELCOR 2006: 15). The latter is an often forgotten point that might have far-reaching effects. This was also evident during my stay in East New Britain: the villages in which I stayed relied solely

¹³ *We em bai i much cheaper. Na bilong kamapim development bai i no givim mipela any danger. I gat ol narapela alernatives. [...] Say, like mipela i improvim ol ports tasol. Na mipela i usim sea transport na sotsot distances long rot tasol, like mipela long hia antap long Teimtop [Toimtop].*

on the rivers and collected rain for water. Often after the rains the rivers were muddy and I was cautioned not to drink the water. The rains washed soil loosened by logging in the mountains into the rivers and the water was not potable even at the mouth of the river by the coast.

The effects of environmental destruction can however go far beyond questions of subsistence, even though they themselves are extremely important. The Ok Tedi -mine has radically changed the environment of the Yonggom. The environment, made unidentifiable by the impacts of the mine, affects the Yonggom according to Kirsch (2006: 189) in many different ways: on the one hand the Yonggom find the radically changed environment physically disorienting, because missing landmarks make moving in the environment more difficult. Moreover, due to the destruction of a landscape that is connected to and embodies collective memory, the history of the society is in danger of being lost. Therefore Kirsch (2006: 190) names the "empty" places destroyed by the mine "scenes of loss". The destroyed environment represents, and in a very concrete way *is*, the loss of history and a way of life.

The impacts of these "scenes of loss" became concretely evident to me when walking in the forest with two young men, my best friends from the village. One of them, my adoptive brother, is a hunter and knows the rainforest very well, not least because it is his clan's land area. My friends showed me around in the forest, pointing my attention to important things, such as a poisonous plants or abandoned villages as we walked. We decided to go deeper into the forest, on to a mountain top where the remains of a bomber from the second World War were still visible. Going further on top of a slope we encountered a logging road built on my brother's clan land during a land dispute some years before. Another clan had claimed the land area and granted the logging company permission to do exploratory logging. The case was disputed and after a lengthy process involving court cases in the provincial capital, my brother's clan had won the dispute and the company left, leaving behind the road that looked something like a slowly healing scar in the forest (see Illustration 7).

Greatly impressed by my brother's knowledge of the forest and his ability to move in it, I was surprised when we lost our way coming back from the wreck. He told me that he did not know the exact and shortest way back, since the logging road had destroyed

parts of the trail network. "Not even the ancestors (or elders; *bigman* in Tok Pisin) would recognize the trails they themselves treaded," claimed my brother and my other friend agreed. After a while, my brother picked up his route again and we continued our journey. Following my friends making their way in the rainforest, I started thinking about the different, and in this case conflicting, levels of infrastructure and how for me the only legible and recognizable part of the forest, namely the road, was so disorienting to my friends.

But the possible implications of environmental destruction dawned on me only much later when I was learning how land disputes are settled. As already mentioned, clan histories and knowledge about the relevant places in the area are not just history of the society, but also evidence for the ownership of specific land areas. They are evidence not only during the first step of land dispute settlement that is performed by Local Land Mediators in the villages, but also in higher court stages, where particularly difficult disputes are settled. The abandoned villages, old graveyards and other places relevant in land dispute cases are recognized through the visible marks of past human activity, such as planted trees. What happens when these are destroyed, by a logging road for example? My brother lost his way in the forest, because the road had destroyed some trails, but what would have happened if the road had been built on an abandoned village? I asked my brother what would happen if an old village ground were to be totally cleared. He reminded me of the time we were lost in the forest due to the road and pointed out that the abandoned village would not be recognizable anymore.

Kirsch (2006: 195) calls the landscape "an embodiment of memory", and indeed, when history is inscribed *in* the landscape, the destruction of it is the destruction of the "documents" that are evidence of the history. This can at its worst mean the loss of identity and even culture, but it might also have far reaching legal implications. In the situation of Papua New Guinea, where land is owned by mostly unspecified "traditional owners", ownership has to be testified to often, as in the case of my brother's clan for example. Places are, as noted in Chapter 2, for the Mengen part of this evidence and their loss might affect the result of the dispute. Of course places are not the only evidence, but given that "traditional knowledge" is of central importance in land dispute cases, the possible impacts of environmental destruction ought to be considered.

4. LAND TENURE & DISPUTE

The Sulka-Mengen say that with the coming of “development”, such as logging and increasing cash-cropping, disputes over land have become more and more common in the Wide Bay area of East New Britain. Compensations paid by the logging companies to landowner groups cause disputes about the distribution of money in and between the respective groups. Also the granting of timber concessions causes litigation, since some groups, or people inside groups, wish for companies to come and log the area, while others would like to protect and conserve their land areas. Landownership, or more specifically tenure, usually becomes an issue – and more than often a dispute – in relation to logging, since the granting of logging rights and the distribution of compensation require that landownership is specified. It was often pointed out that the elders (*tumbuna*) did not have disputes over land – sure minor quarrels over gardens – but not on the scale as today.

While there has been even internal warfare that has displaced people among the Mengen in the past, as the clan histories record, it seems disputes over land areas as such were indeed much less common. Michel Panoff (1970), in his account of land tenure among the Mengen some forty years ago, does not note any cases of larger disputes. He only mentions how in a village a man, who had lost political support while opposing a village faction, was evicted (Panoff 1970: 183). Since he could not be accused of sorcery or adultery, he was evicted on the pretext of land rights, which however would not have been a cause for expulsion had the man not been unpopular. In addition to the comments of the villagers themselves, the statement that large scale land disputes are a fairly new thing is also supported by Keir Martin's (2007: 39) notion that land disputes in the 1960's were rare in East New Britain, but already in the 1990's it had become one of the leading provinces of PNG in terms of registered land disputes. Disputes are the outcome of the contact of two systems: the local way of holding the land, to which people can lay claims using different relationships and the need of the government and the companies to be able to “read” and produce easily legible situations and environments, as described in the previous chapter. This is not to say that the local way of holding land is chaotic, but it is based on another logic of property, as will be shown below. Interestingly, in Papua New Guinea, the “traditional groups” are also the legal landowning entities.

One reason why the activities of the state and companies produce disputes is the high value of land among the Sulka-Mengen, as elsewhere in Melanesia. Subsistence farmers, such as the Sulka-Mengen, literally live off their land. It is from the gardens that they get their food and from the forests the material for their houses. With small scale cash-cropping the land brings also money. But besides the economic aspect, the land stands for and holds much symbolic value and even knowledge, as shown in Chapter 2. In addition to bearing the inscriptions of past generations in the environment, land in Melanesia is also the source of fertility, growth and reproduction, both physically and symbolically (Strong 2006: 40). A Mengen woman sums up well the importance of land to the people:

“Everybody knows now that it is the land that they live of. And if you don't have any land, would you go to live on the ocean, just drifting upon it?¹⁴” - woman, in her 40's (30.07.2007)

The disputes over land among the Sulka-Mengen may be relatively small quarrels over cash-crops, i.e. whether somebody has the right to plant cash crops on land that he received for gardening only, or large disputes over which clan owns a particular land area. As Victor Turner (1974: 35) notes, conflict situations often reveal something about the society in general, because in conflicts people's relations, alignments and views become visible. The Sulka-Mengen disputes over land are no exception. Land on the one hand is the target of current politics. Local, government and transnational actors of different scopes (from companies to NGOs) have an interest in the land and how it is used. On the other hand, the disputes tell about Sulka-Mengen politics, about the local forms of leadership, about different power relations in the society and about old and new “roads” of taking part in these inherently political questions. Logging, especially through the disputes caused by it, has also altered the way people relate to their “tradition” and to the state of Papua New Guinea itself.

4.1 Kinship, land use & tenure

Among the Sulka-Mengen, land is communally owned, or more precisely held, by local descent groups, i.e. clans and subclans. While the Sulka and Mengen regard themselves as distinct peoples (or tribes), they are closely related and share the same social

14 *Na ol man i save olsem, em graun ol i live long en nau. [...] Na sapos yu nogat graun, ating bai yu go stap antap long solwarai o dript antap long solwarai tasol?*

structure. In fact, the Sulka and Mengen clan systems are distinct, but “compatible” in as much (many) Sulka and Mengen clans correspond to each other. Every person belongs to her/his mother's group and as Panoff (1976: 175) notes, belonging to the group does not change during the lifetime of the individual. The clans are divided into two moieties called “Big Bird” and “Small Bird” (*Bik Pisin* and *Smol* [or *Liklik*] *Pisin* respectively). The moieties, as well as clans, are strictly exogamous, i.e. marriage inside one's own clan or even moiety is strictly prohibited (*tambu tru*) and a crime punishable by death in the past, as pointed out by many. Many villagers today also regarded this traditional “law” (*lo*) as a central part of Mengen custom. Breaking this rule would not be easy, since the respective persons would feel so much shame, that they would have to leave their villages, nobody would help them in work and they would become “loners” (*wan pis* (lit. one fish)). An older man said that breaking the rule just “would not feel good¹⁵”.

However, residence after marriage is not strictly regulated, nor did I hear about any preferences. On the contrary the couple seems to be quite free to decide its post-marital location. Panoff (1970: 177) notes that during the time of his fieldwork, a third of the couples lived in the wife's village, a third in the husband's and a third in the village which was the birth place of both husband and wife. The case today is very much the same, and no pattern was directly observable. However, residence in a village with no prior connections would be more difficult, since clan mates and affines provide assistance in various work and gardening land can be quasi-automatically inherited from parents. Despite this, it is not uncommon for young people to move to other districts or provinces after education or work and marry there. People in Toimtop said that many of the young people who acquire education or wage work do not return anymore to the villages and work gardens. However, it is likely that people return to their villages at some point, especially during times of economic distress.

Due to the exogamic marriage rule and the free residence after marriage, the clans are quite dispersed in terms of their membership. Following their spouses (*bihainim marit*),

15 As to any rule, there are exceptions with the rule of exogamy. The Seventh Day Adventists, a rising group in the Wide Bay area, yet a small denomination among the predominantly Catholic Mengen, is said to deliberately break the rule, due to their negative attitude towards “custom”. I was told that local Catholic priests would not marry a couple breaking the traditional rule.

clan members move to villages and so the clans disperse on a large area. Panoff (1976: 185) states that “older informants” during his time regarded marrying into one's father's group as the preferential form of marriage, because then bride-wealth and land rights move between the two groups. An older man pointed the same thing out to me: the two biggest clans in Toimtop belong to opposing moieties and thus intermarry frequently. So in exchange for women the other clan members get user rights to land. The connection between marriage and land came up also with shell money payments over land areas (see below) that one man called “brideprices of land” (*brideprais bilong graun*).

According to Panoff (1976: 175) clans are at the highest level only categories. Members of a clan recognize common ancestry, common place of origin and at least in the past it meant access to “common traditions, magical formulae and songs” (Panoff 1970: 177). People with whom I discussed the issue did not know exactly how many persons belong to a clan, but they stated it was “many”. During my stay I did gather the names of 25 descent groups, out of which 14 were clans and the rest sub-clans, and out of these ten were represented in Toimtop¹⁶. Descent groups are however not only categories, but also landowning entities, or indeed corporate groups, among the Sulka-Mengen.

“Ownership” however is a problematic term, since the land is communally held and extra-clan members can claim user rights to it. Certain land areas are said to belong to certain clans or subclans and at least today it is those descent groups that decide over the use of the respective land areas. Due to this the term “ownership” can in my opinion be used, as long as it is remembered that this does not exclude rights by other people and that it differs from western notions of landownership. Indeed property rights should be seen as inclusive rather than exclusive. Joel Robbins (2003: 16) notes that inclusive property rights “empower a person to claim a share of property belonging to a communal group of which they are a part”. In the Sulka-Mengen case, as elsewhere in Melanesia, user rights for land can be claimed according to relationships that cut across clan lines, for example residence in a village. This however does not contradict with the notion that local clan groups are ultimately in charge of the land.

¹⁶ Given that the total population of the Mengen is about 10 000 persons, and that there are at least 25 descent groups (very probably even more), the average size of a descent group would be around a few hundred persons. For a more detailed account of the Mengen moiety and clan system, see Appendix 8.4.

To my knowledge most, if not all, clans and subclans hold land areas that are recognized by the neighboring groups. As Panoff (1970: 178) notes, subclans are in most cases highly autonomous. This is also my impression, although the relation of a subclan to its “mother clan” (*mama clan*) is not completely unproblematic, especially in questions of disputes. One of the subclans of Toimtop had been totally autonomous in a dispute case with strong representatives, while in another case it seemed that the mother clan wanted to take over a dispute its subclan was having with another clan. Members of the mother clan argued that a subclan is “like a branch of a tree” and that it knows its history only until the separation, but in a dispute the whole history is needed in order to defend the land. Clans and subclans are entitled to their respective land areas on the basis of the origin stories, mytho-historical marks left by the ancestors, such as villages founded by them, old graveyards, old gardens as mentioned in the second chapter. Moreover, the overall knowledge of the land area, its named places and so on, is evidence of ownership. Another crucial aspect is the recognition by clans holding the neighboring areas, since they can confirm the boundaries. Interestingly, based on the origin stories, I was told that at least one of the subclans does *not* hold a significant territory of its own, because it is said to descent from a spirit being (*masalai*) adopted by men.

Because the members of a clan are dispersed, possibly over a large area, the clan groups living near their respective lands are important. Due to this, clan leadership is also highly localized. The older men of a clan group living in a certain area are regarded as clan leaders or “heads” of the clan. The position is hardly institutional, but more based on practical matters:

“I am the head of our clan, because I am the oldest of us and I am in this village. And all the others, my sisters and maternal kin (*kandere*), they are younger and that's why they put me as our head.” - man, 50 years (14.07.2007)¹⁷

The clan leader, or more precisely the leader of the local descent group, must know the origin stories and he must be a good orator (*man bilong toktok*), in order to defend his clan's lands. The older men, in charge of the clan lands, were also called “father of the land” (*papa graun*), an interesting notion in a society, where clan membership and thus

17 *Mi stap het klan bilong mipela, bikos mi bikpela bilong mipela na mi stap insait long desla ples. Na olgeta narapela, ol sista bilong mi, ol kandere bilong mi, ol liklik na olsem ol i putim mi na mi het bilong mipela.*

rights to the land are passed on matrilineally. The connection of women to the land is however not ignored, and at least according to the man quoted above, also women may become clan leaders, if there are no men or the men are not up to the task. Leadership can also shift according to the specific needs. The man quoted above noted that his sister's sons have taken the lead in court cases, because of their better competence in dealing with the official system. Knowledge about the stories and clan lands is however crucial and that knowledge must be passed on in order that the lands can be held.

When the use of the clan lands comes up, decisions should ideally be made by all the members present. This makes the clan, even though dispersed in terms of membership, a highly local entity in terms of landholding. In minor cases, such as giving rights to clear a garden, decisions are often made by the *papa graun* alone. But larger decisions can not be made unless the members present agree. According to some women, men do not always “hear” what the women have to say. However in terms of land tenure, the role of women is changing, because it is more widely recognized that it is the matriline that holds the land and that only women continue this line.

“They talk now about the “mother of the land” to the women. It came with the change of government laws. So they explained to everybody that it is the women who control the land, because it is their land. And the men, a man is only one. And when he dies, it is finished [the lineage]. But the woman will stay on the land, because she will continue her family.” - woman, 56 years (26.07.2007)¹⁸

In Toimtop this was the case. The clan, which holds the village land area (*graun i stap long nem bilong*, lit. “in whose name the land is”), has two older men regarded as the leaders, but since they do not have sisters in the village, clan mates from other villages will eventually come and continue “administering” the lands. It was said that the new clan head will be a woman (in her 50's or so) from a nearby village. I met her shortly when she and two male relatives had come to discuss the use of piece of land. Recently women were also “heard” in terms of land use: in two cases during the 1990's one Sulka and one Mengen clan decided not to sell timber concessions on their clan lands, and in both cases a woman member of the clan had made the initiative not to log the area and convinced others to support her. I do not know whether there are crucial divisions

18 *Ol i save tok nau “mama graun” long ol meri. [...] Bihain em, wanem, ol senis bilong lo bilong govaman tasol. Olsem ol i bin kiliam ol, olsem em ol meri, ol i bosim graun bikos em... ol i mas sindaun long desla hap, bikos em graun bilong ol. Na ol man, em, man em wanpela tasol. Na taim i go dai, em pinis. Tasol meri bai sindaun long graun, bikos em bai wok long continue femili bilong en.*

between the genders in respect of land use. On the contrary, it seemed that divisions between local descent groups were bigger than divisions between genders cutting across descent groups.

As already mentioned, persons that are not clan members also have rights to the land. For example, hunting and the gathering of building materials is allowed for residents of the village in nearby areas, even if they don't belong to the clan or subclan holding the area. Equally, residents of a village have rights to their houses in the village and expulsion is very difficult, as noted by an older man. Gardening rights are obtained from the “fathers of land” of the holding group, but in village settings there is no need to ask permissions for the clearing of a new garden on a spot where one's parents have been making their gardens. These rights are passed on through the mothers and fathers and rarely questioned (see also Panoff 1970: 187). It was also pointed out that if a member of the village clears a new garden into the bush without asking the land holders, he is not evicted. Panoff (1970: 187) also notes this “right derived from working”. A new resident of the village must however ask for permission and unknown people obviously can not just go and clear land. As shown, it is not individuals as such who acquire rights to use land, but individuals on the basis of their *membership* in certain groups, such as villages and descent groups.

In addition to this, land can also be individually owned. Panoff (1970: 189) cites cases where individuals have “bought” small parcels of land for their children. Equally, land can be also given away: in Toimtop a small tract of land was given by the land holding clan to a young man whose maternal aunt had committed suicide on the spot in question. The land was given as a compensation, because “blood had stained the land” (*blut i bin wasim graun*). It was pointed out to me that the piece in question was no longer under the authority of the original clan. During the 1960's, Toimtop had formed a co-operative society for copra production and they bought a tract of land from a clan. At first the plantation was planned with the accord of the land holding clan, but when the plantation started to produce monetary income, Toimtop decided to buy the land, in order to avoid jealousy and claims of compensation. The land tract of about 5-6 ha according to the villagers, was bought with one ceremonial shell money (paik (or page according to Panoff 1970: 189), five pigs, a “heap” of food and K2500. This deal was seen as binding and the land is now in the *ownership* of Toimtop. It was regarded also as

one of the most secure land tracts, since the descendants of the selling clan can not reverse a decision made by their elders.

In many instances the Mengen clan seems to be a mere category for defining and differentiating people by dividing them into categories that define how they should marry etc. (Wagner 1974: 110). The clans are dispersed, people may live far away from their clan mates and be the only representatives of their groups in a village. But in addition to this, the clan is also a corporate group, because it is the clan that holds the ultimate rights to the land. Local clan groups make the decisions over the use of their land. For example, the stories mention how a clan gave land to people from another clan fleeing from warfare. However, as the above mentioned case of selling land shows, clans today are not the *only* corporate groups, since also villages can hold land communally. The importance of the corporate nature of the clan has most probably risen in the past few years with the coming of “development”, i.e. cash-cropping and logging, as noted by the fact the Tok Pisin term *bisnis* can refer also to the clan.

4.2 State legislation and formal dispute settlement

The local land tenure system is also the legal way of holding land. In Papua New Guinea the vast majority of land, comprising 95 to 97 percent of the total land area, is held communally under so called customary land title, the rest being alienated land owned practically solely by the state (Filer 1998: 30, Sillitoe 2000: 30). Customary land is “owned by the Indigenous People of Papua New Guinea whose ownership rights and interest is regulated by their customs” (Department of Lands and Physical Planning (henceforth DLPP) 2005). Rights to use land are transmitted through membership or affiliation to a landowning group (Lakau 1997: 530). These groups are often defined as clans (see for example DLPP 2005), but because of the variety of traditional landholding forms, or indeed the absence of clear-cut clans (see Wagner 1974), “customary landowner” or “customary land group” are better terms. An individual may gain user rights by ties to more than one group, yet it is uncommon to belong to more than two (Lakau 1997: 530). Lakau (1997: 530) has characterized this form of land tenure as a safety net in country, where there is no social security. Customary groups are not defined more specifically, but they are legal entities in charge of their land, actors in court or in deals with companies and so forth.

Customary landowners may not sell their land or alienate in any other instance than the state. As seen above, land deals between two customary groups are possible, but this has to happen according to the customs of both groups (Lakau 1997: 531). From the 1950's onwards, there have been various attempts by the colonial government to register customary title, but for various reasons, such as underfunding and the opposition by the House of Assembly, this has been unsuccessful (Lakau 1997: 536). Behind the push for registration of customary land titles lay the belief that customary and communal ownership hinders economic development.

In 1974 a new law for the registration of titles, the *Land Group Incorporation Act* (LGIA) was passed. This law sought to incorporate both “custom” and secure the rights of customary land groups, rather than form individual freehold titles on customary land (Fingleton 2007: 16, Lakau 1997: 536). The LGIA seeks to recognize *existing groups*, i.e. groups that “already have a corporate identity under custom” and upon incorporation the group must meet certain criteria, such as who and on what terms one is a member (Fingleton 2007: 28, 27). Though the LGIA is regarded as an innovative piece of legislation, there are also problems. While the legislation was intended for holding and management of land, the incorporated land groups (ILGs) were “captured” by heavy industries, such as logging, for their purposes, that is making deals with the customary land owners (Fingleton 2007: 31, 32). One criticism is that the ILG has become a mechanism for merely distributing royalties and monetary compensation and another is that the LGIA reifies custom (Fingleton 2007: 33, 34). Clearly, the LGIA is an attempt to make the local situation “more legible” to the state, even in cases where the local situation is far less clear than the legislation would have it (Jorgensen 2007: 61). In addition to incorporated land groups, the customary landowning groups can also be represented through landowner companies. These can be composed either of several ILGs (Filer 1998: 281), or of customary land groups as such.

Land registration was proposed again in 1989, this time under the Land Mobilization Program, which was a part of the World Bank's structural adjustment program (SAP) (Bashkow 2006: 284n13). The goal was to form a framework, which allowed the use of customary land for modern commerce. One idea was that all registered land could be leased, and this lease could be used as a collateral for loan by banks and if this could not be repaid, the lease would be taken over by the bank until the debt is settled. This would

have meant the loss of user rights, even though the people would still have held the titular ownership (Bashkow 2006: 284n14). These proposals caused widespread unrest and the death of two persons in demonstrations, which led the government to withdraw it (Lakau 1997: 538).

Even though the legislation of PNG does not specify who the traditional landowners are, there is a fairly elaborate law for solving disputes: the *Land Disputes Settlement Act* passed in 1975. This law aims to “to provide a just, efficient and effective machinery for the settlement of disputes in relation to interests in customary land by (a) encouraging self-reliance through the involvement of the people in the settlement of their own disputes; and (b) the use of the principles underlying traditional dispute settlement processes” (Independent State of Papua New Guinea 1975: I.1). This means that disputes are settled by land mediators appointed by the government on different court levels.

A Mengen land mediator, a man in his 50's, explained to me the work of a land mediator, i.e. how the settlement process proceeds and the criteria for establishing traditional ownership. The first step in solving a dispute is Pre-Mediation done by local land mediators on a village level. At this level the dispute can be settled only with an agreement of understanding (*wanbel* (lit. “one belly”) *agrimen*) of both parties involved. No declaration is made, but the parties sign a memorandum of agreement stating that both agree to the solution and terms. If a *wanbel* agreement is not reached, the dispute moves on to Full-Mediation, where the land mediator or mediators examine the dispute, make a declaration and forward this declaration along with a report of the process to the Local Level Government (LLG). A 30 day appeal period gives a chance to the parties to appeal at the Local Land Court (LLC), which revisits the issue. If either or both of the parties are not content with the decision by the LLC, the dispute can be moved on to the District (or Provincial) Land Court, which should be the final step. However, the National Court has a right to review all the decisions made by lower courts (Westermark 1997: 223).

Interestingly, the mediation system is a government way of establishing, or bringing forward, the traditional ownership relations, or even the traditional owners. According to the land mediator there are four basic criteria (among the Sulka-Mengen) according

to which the claims can be measured or “weighed” (*skelim*): family tree, history, settlement (*sindaun*) and intermarriages. The length of both the history and family trees are considered: how many generations can be named from the ancestress of the clan, how long have they been on the area they are claiming. If one of the groups has a significantly longer history and family tree, it is usually a mark that they have been longer in the area and are thus the traditional owners.

Since marriage within one's own clan and moiety is prohibited, the marriages tell how the clans intermarried and “pulled” each other into the area. Here the family trees of the other clans that the clans of the disputants had married become evidence too and the length of the histories are considered. The settlement after marriage is considered in order to establish who followed whom after marriage. For example, it can be established that either of the clans came to the area following a marriage or that either of the litigants had “pulled” other clans into the area much earlier than the other. In theory, the histories and genealogies of the clans that the ancestors of the litigants have married should verify these stories. And as Panoff (1969b: 163) notes, the Mengen clan histories form a consensus, which makes it possible to “check the traditional record”. As already noted, this makes the recognition by other groups a central element of ownership.

Finally, the settlement should tell about the knowledge each clan has of the area. The land mediator weighs which party can name more abandoned villages founded by their ancestors in the area. Also the overall knowledge about named places, such as places of ancestral origin or spirit places are evidence of ownership (see Chapter 2). The more one party knows about the area, the more probable their customary ownership is. According to the land mediator:

“So if it [the clan] has how many old villages, five, ten, in the disputed area and the other has two or three, a smaller number of villages belonging to ancestors, it means that the line [clan; descent group] settled only later on.”¹⁹ - man, 52 years (22.07.2007)

This seems to be the standard procedure around PNG. Westermarck (1997: 223) notes that in the Eastern Highland Province mediators explore memories of elders and even

19 *So sapos em i gat hamaspela oldpela ples, paipela, tenpela, i stap insait long desla graun we i gat dispute long en, na narapela em i gat tupela o maybe hamas, tripela tasol, less... liklik namba bilong ol tumbuna ples, em i min olsem, em desla lain nau i kam bihain.*

looked for physical marks of former habitation and gardens. The physical inscription of individual and clan histories into the environment – as shown in Chapter 2 – are central to the Mengen too. Due to the legal importance of the traditional marks in the landscape, environmental destruction could also have dire legal consequences through the erosion of the marks that stand for social relations, of which an example was given in the end of Chapter 3.

It should be noted too, that “law” is not the only way of solving disputes in PNG. Discussing the situation in the Eastern Highlands, Westermarck (1997: 224, 231) notes that the use of violence in land claims is often an alternative “strategy” to the use of law, and that both strategies have actually emerged in relation to each other. In many cases the formal authorities lack the power to enforce the law and the use of violence re-emerges in dispute situations (Westermarck 1997: 231). Interestingly enough, I did not hear accounts of extensive use of violence in land disputes among the Sulka-Mengen. In one dispute a family was being threatened with violence by youths from a neighboring village and some property was damaged, but no persons were hurt. This was the worst case of violence I heard of, and it seems that in Pomio violence is not as common a strategy as it is elsewhere.

4.3 A clan land dispute

The combination of compensations paid by logging companies that are high according to the standards of the villagers, the landholding system that makes it possible to claim various user rights along different relationships, and the land legislation of PNG that is quite unspecific, seems to create occasionally situations that are fertile grounds for disputes:

“The traditional user right is one thing, customary ownership of the land is another thing. I think they confused traditional user rights with the right to own land. I think what is confusing many, is the foreign concept of ownership of land. A lot of these young people are taking it. Which is not supposed to be.”²⁰ - man, 32 (23.7.2007)

Disputes – as noted – vary considerably in scale and length. Sometimes a dispute is

²⁰ *Traditional user right is one thing, customary ownership of the land is another thing [...] Mi bilip ol i confusim planti long ol desla, to take traditional user rights as a right to own land. [...] I think what is confusing ol man, is that the concept bilong ownership long graun, the foreign concept of ownership of graun, a lot of these young people are taking it. Which is not supposed to be.*

confined to a village over a block of cocoa planted by a man for his children on land that he is allowed to work as his garden. Such a dispute is often quickly solved within the village and does not need special mediation. Nor is it very disrupting; the litigants may loudly argue in meetings, other villagers take part by shouting angrily that they do not tolerate this kind of behavior and so on, but as noted by the young man quoted above, the next day everybody works happily together, even if the dispute is still “on”. But not all disputes are as easily solved. Sometimes a large dispute, concerning for example the ownership of an entire clan land area, may last very long, even a few years, and it involves mediation at different levels from the village to district level courts, and is costly in terms of money and tiring to the individuals involved.

In order to show the dynamics and the actors involved in a long lasting dispute, I will cite a case that occurred in Toimtop between 2000 and 2002. Given the sensitivity of the issue, I have replaced the names of the clans with pseudonyms. I interviewed both sides of the dispute in order to gain a neutral overall picture of it, even though I was closely associated with one party of the dispute. It is not up to me to judge the correctness of the result, nor do I wish to do so. By the time I was doing my fieldwork, the dispute was ended and settled, but it had left its mark on those involved.

The dispute started a few years after one clan, Clan1 had decided to put its land area under conservation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a mapping was conducted by an NGO and the map of the clan lands was agreed on by members of the local clan groups from the three nearby villages. A few years later in 2000 a dispute over the area arose between Clan1 and Clan2 from the opposing moiety. This dispute was settled on the village level and a *wanbel* agreement was reached. The agreement stated that the land belongs to Clan1, that Clan2 will respect this, while Clan1 will take into account the interests and rights of Clan2 in any possible projects concerning the area.. In the same year a logging operation started and a third clan – Clan3 – claimed the conservation area, or parts of it, as theirs, and invited Niu Gini Lumber to log the area. A logging road was constructed and trees marked for logging, but members of Clan1 moved the company out. This led to a long court process over the boundaries and the ownership of the area between Clan1 and Clan3. Clan3, or mainly one man from it, who had invited the company, was supported financially and through advices by a local landowner company (LOC1), especially its chairman, a skilled man who had functioned also as a land mediator, while Clan1 was helped by a Papua New Guinean NGO .

Both Clan1 and Clan3 were supported in the court case by several other clans respectively, to the extent that a mother clan was on one side and its subclan on another. Interestingly, five clans supporting Clan3 had even appealed to the Pacific Heritage Foundation claiming that they are the rightful owners of the

area and that a man of Clan1 had started the conservation project without consulting them and that it is not even his clan's land. One court decision was given, but there were uncertainties over a boundary and both litigants interpreted that they had won. In reaction to this, LOC1 demanded heavy compensations (K50 000) from Clan1 for delaying the logging operation. Another decision was given shortly thereafter clarifying the situation in favor of Clan1. In the end, in 2002, the District Court had decided that Clan1 is the traditional owner of the area. No appeals were made to alter the last decision.

In 2007 I was told by members of clans supporting Clan3 that the dispute was caused by Clan1 “putting only its name” on the conservation project. Members of Clan2 claimed also that the agreement between Clan1 and Clan2 was made by only one of their members, and that others not present at the time were opposed to the decision. The chairman of LOC1 told me that as a land mediator, he thought the whole dispute was badly handled and that it could have been solved at a village level. Two brothers, leading the court case for Clan1, claimed that the LOC1 had pushed the man from Clan3 to start the dispute in order to get money from logging, and that due to the unwillingness of Clan3 and their supporters, the dispute had to be taken to court in order to be solved.

The dispute summarized above illustrates the complexity of the present situation, in which “traditional” forms of landholding and notions of exclusive property come into conflict with each other. Moreover, what is seemingly a dispute between two “traditional actors”, in this case descent groups – or members thereof, is in fact much larger. Along the traditional landholding units and their representatives, other villagers, as well as national and transnational actors are involved. The dispute shows what different tactics these actors use to advance their interests. The question here is not only who ultimately is the “father of the land”, but large political questions about how traditional land is managed and by whom, what is done with it and which actor develops the land and how.

The “local” or traditional actors in this dispute are the representatives of the different clans claiming the area in question using the tradition, i.e. the local clan histories and origin stories, to legitimate the claim, and indeed their primacy of ownership, to the land area. The representative of Clan3 claimed that an ancestress of Clan1 had come to the area only following a marriage, which would mean that the area does not belong to her clan, while the members of Clan1 countered this claim and showed – successfully – that the clan stories indeed do support their claim to the area. In the end, the provincial court decided that among other things, based on the stories, Clan1 is indeed the “traditional owner”. Of great interest here is the use of “tradition” and traditional knowledge in a

situation that is not exclusively traditional. The stories have been the basis of land tenure for a long time, but as noted in the beginning of this chapter, these types of disputes are a new phenomenon. Indeed, they are for a large part, at least according to the disputants themselves, a result of “development”, i.e. state and company policies. There are also other “traditional” tactics that can be used, that however were not used in this particular case. As noted before, a man belonging to a mother clan downplayed the autonomy of subclans. He claimed subclans are only “branches” and know their histories only until the separation from the “trunk” (i.e. mother clan), but that in dispute cases the whole history is needed. Given that subclans can be very autonomous – in fact Clan1 is a subclan – my interpretation of the comment is that the man sought to increase his authority in a dispute case, in which a subclan of his clan was involved. Equally, also extra-clan members can act in the “background”, for example through affinal kinship relations.

But using traditional stories and tactics is not the only way of dealing and acting in these disputes. Also new institutions and actors were used by the parties involved. The man from Clan3 was backed up by a landowner company that receives financial support from Niu Gini Lumber and the chairman of LOC1 was also heavily involved in the dispute, although in the background, and his name came up in many court documents and correspondence regarding the dispute. Interestingly, both sides also sought help from NGOs, with Clan1 having a stronger case and longer relationships to these actors, than the other clans supporting Clan3. Indeed, appealing to the Pacific Heritage Foundation by supporters of Clan3, seemed to be a way of trying out a new “road” to gain influence and allies. Of interest is also the involvement of LOC1. As noted, these landowner companies are often set up, and directly supported by foreign logging companies. In this situation, the line between local and transnational becomes blurred.

Thus the dispute was hardly “only” a dispute between two traditional actors. On the contrary, members of Clan1, especially the brothers handling the dispute, were convinced that the dispute was caused essentially by “logging pressure”, and by the actors of the landowner company, in order to log the area that Clan1 had decided to conserve. While the members and officials of the landowner company are local people, they did not have “traditionally” much to say in this dispute, since they did not all of them belonged to the clans involved. However, by backing up the representative of

Clan3 financially and through advice, they could take part in the dispute, although in the background. The new institutions, including both company and government positions, are ways to act in these situations. Some people claimed that disputes are started often by educated people who want to gain benefits and regard land as a prize in a competition (*resis*). In addition to this, a young man told me that members of a clan, which owned land further away, had sought themselves into formal positions, such as councilor, land mediators, in order to gain prominence that was hindered by their lack of say in land issues, since their own lands were far away. Indeed it was true that many formal positions in the villages in question were occupied at the time by members of the same clan, although it is difficult to know whether this was a coincidence or a result of deliberate planning from the side of the clan in question. However, it is clear that the formal institutions can be “used” tactically in order to gain in influence in “traditional” questions about land.

This has lead also to a change in the attitude towards the origin stories and clan histories. The majority of the villagers regarded the clan origin stories as public, and widely known, although there was also the notion that the true stories in their totality are known only by clan members. In addition to this, my adoptive family, having endured the long lasting dispute, was very cautious towards their stories. They did not want me to record the stories, because I could misunderstand something and so a mistaken version would be recorded in “my book”. This fear is far from invalid, and my family has acknowledged the power of a written document correctly. This made one of my brothers, a highly educated young man, skeptical towards local land mediators: they are men from the villages (*man bilong ples*) with their own interests, but they get to know the stories of other clans, which gives them the opportunity to use this for their own benefit, by “twisting” the stories for instance. A NGO-worker from Kokopo acknowledged this same danger:

“The information you give out about your ancestors, all other people can use this information and twist it around. Some people are becoming clever these days. The custom of before is no more. That's why people don't like to disclose their information, for the fear of that.”²¹ - Papua New Guinean NGO-worker (female), 50 years(10.08.2007)

21 *Information yu givim out long ol... ol big man long yu bipoa bipoa... ol tumbuna bilong yu - ya, ol lain ken usim desla information na twistim twistim araun. [...] Some people are becoming clever these days. Pasin bilong bipoa, i no mo stap. [...] That's why people are... ol i no laikim disclosim information bilong ol, for fear of that.*

The mediation process has altered the relation to clan stories also elsewhere. Westermarck (1997: 218, 231) notes that in the Eastern Highlands people have started to elaborate their clans stories and especially to document these in writing. These formalized stories are filed in courts in order to fix them for the future (Westermarck 1997: 230, 231). For the fear of the partiality of the local land mediators my brother regarded the Provincial land court as a better place to solve the disputes, since decisions are made by neutral outsiders. Interestingly, his older brother, educated as well, had come to a different conclusion. According to him, the court case to defend their traditional ownership was needed, because no other solution was possible, but that the court decision fixes the ownership to only one clan. Also a local land mediator regarded the village mediation as a better way to solve disputes, because local mediators know the litigants and their culture and can thus make informed decisions. A big factor in court cases is also money. Traveling from East Pomio to the Provincial court in Kokopo is expensive, as is staying there, to say nothing of possible lawyer fees.

There are numerous power asymmetries involved. As noted, money can be an obstacle that prevents appealing to a decision made by the court. This can have especially dire consequences, if the other party receives support from a landowner company that is funded by a transnational corporation, as is often the case. On the other hand, NGOs may provide free legal advice and even support, which can equalize the situation. This makes knowledge about formal institutions a new source of power too: people must know how to get help from NGOs and educated people have an upper hand in dealing with NGOs, companies and the government. It should be remembered that the government code is not equally legible to all the locals. Along with this “new” knowledge about government institutions and the formal way of solving disputes provided by education, traditional knowledge is also a source of power. In order to defend one's land, either in the village level mediation or in court, one has to have access to the clan origin stories and histories. As also noted in the previous section, clan leadership is assumed through knowledge of the traditional stories.

Knowledge and legibility are central to the politics of land. As noted, the “code” of the formal institutions is not equally legible to all locals, and education is an increasingly important source of power, along with the traditional knowledge of clan histories.

Another important factor is the legibility of the local situation to the formal institutions, manifested precisely in the formalization and increasing documentation of clan histories. Disputes are settled on the basis of these stories, and therefore whose stories are told is of the utmost importance. By documenting and formalizing the stories, some locals have indeed tried to make their knowledge legible to the state. Another example of the political significance of whose knowledge is used, is the already mentioned PRA-mapping. Even though the clan seeking to conserve its areas has made its knowledge legible to the state, this has not been recognized and the areas are still mapped for logging.

As is evident from the discussion, the questions about landownership and disputes are highly political questions in themselves. Due to this, they are also connected to formal or state politics in numerous ways. In the national elections held on the 30th June 2007, the sitting MP Mr. Paul Tiensten, who ran a campaign focusing on economical development, won parliamentary seat. A friend of mine claimed that due to this people from the neighboring village started to “cross boundaries” by planting cash crops on land that was not theirs. According to him this was a tactic to gain land: with the newly planted cash crops they could make claims to the land on the basis of their work. Moreover, my friend assumed that people crossing boundaries hoped that their claims to land made in the name of “development” would be favored now that the MP supporting economical development (including increasing cash cropping) was re-elected. Equally, some people noted how the land dispute questions should be solved before any “projects” (especially the Ili-Wawas Integrated Project) are introduced. In the next chapter, I will discuss the different strands of formal politics tightly linked to these questions, if only for the fact that economic “development” is a source of disputes.

5. ECO-POLITICS

How do people react to the questions and problems brought up by logging? In the previous chapters I have described how locals perceive their environment and what values are attached to it, how companies and the state modify and perceive the environment in a different way and how disputes over land arise in this new context, namely the contact and tension between two ways of working and being in the environment. I do not wish to present a simplistic *a priori* dichotomy between local and state and company practices. There are similarities between the two, for example the high value that human work holds for the locals and thus makes certain modifications recognizable. How much and in what extents these ways differ from each other, I leave to the reader to judge on the basis of the material I have presented. Disputes are, as stated already, one outcome that affect the practices and values attached to the environment and bring up old and new power asymmetries.

In this chapter I wish to explore the political situation of the Wide Bay villages. I shall focus on two different “ideologies”, or trends, that stand out that I call “developmentalism” and “conservationism”, which is a clear reaction to logging. “Developmentalism” is less a reaction to logging as such, but more a set of opinions about what is desirable and what should be done. Both strains are self-consciously political with their activists taking part in national parliamentary politics and trying to advance their views on a number of levels and forums, from village meetings to dealings with government institutions or transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Even though both “conservationism” and “developmentalism” take part in the official politics as defined by the government and the international community, I do not wish to restrict “political” to this sphere. Thus strategies, such as manipulating kin relations or one's connections to the official sphere in land disputes for instance, have to be seen as equally political actions. The power relations, even if they take “traditional” forms such as kinship or the telling (or not telling!) of a genealogy, are political actions not to be dismissed and as we shall see, are also part of “official politics”.

As I see it, these reactions are based more or less – depending on the case – on the values attached to the environment described in the second chapter. The local values form a “base structure” from which these reactions grow. However, it should be kept in mind that “culture” or “cultural values” do not simply determine the actions of people;

instead they present a framework in which these actions take place. Obviously, the Sulka-Mengen do not react uniformly to the changes in their environment and their lives. Both reactions take clearly recognizable modern forms, that however have their basis in the local values. What I mean is that the reactions I shall describe are “culturally logical” (Sahlins 2004: 290) outcomes or reactions to change. By no means do I wish to discredit either one as “inauthentic”, even though my own sympathies lie with the other. Rather than exclusive opposites, both reactions are also the ends of continuum along which people align themselves.

5.1 “Developmentalism”

“Development” and monetary income are key concerns for many inhabitants of Wide Bay. Money is needed for school fees, daily necessities, such as kerosene, clothing, bushknives and batteries. Medicine and traveling by boat, are sporadic larger expenses. Money is also used in customary activities (*kastom*), such as in brideprice (the sums can be very high, even K3000) or compensation payments. Many villagers, especially young unmarried men, complained that monetary income has caused an escalation in *kastom* expenses. This is the case especially for the brideprice, which has to include along the traditional shell money and “heaps” of food, also PNG money and a variety of store goods, such as tinned meat and fish, cloth, tobacco and so forth. An older man estimated that excluding school fees (K50 a year for elementary schools and later K100 a year per child) and *kastom* a family requires about K200 – 300 a year. Money is often earned by planting some cash crops, such as cocoa, along with subsistence gardening activities. Toimtop also had a communal copra plantation, and a co-operative society founded by the villagers themselves in the 1970's, but due to the irregular ship transports, the copra plantation is abandoned. Many youths work as migrant laborers in other provinces, for example on oil-palm plantations in West New Britain, and part time work on a “block” outside the village is not uncommon. Selling timber concessions to logging companies is a new form of gaining relatively large amounts of cash quickly.

Unlike “conservationism”, “developmentalism” is not a clear “movement” and it's origins harder to pin down. Yet, for many inhabitants of Wide Bay, “development” and “modernity” are persuasive concepts that I think should be described. While money is an important factor, “development's” appeal pertains to modernity and changing of styles of life, to “move forward” as some villagers put it. Achieving a “Good life” –

meaning permanent houses, roads and more opportunities to earn money – characterize the aims of developmentalists:

“The life in the village, we live like in the past. There isn't anything new. I would like to change this, all this now, our small houses in the village. And leave the life of the past.”²² - man, 65 years (02.07.2007)

As shown in Chapter 2, human work is a central value for the Mengen. Many villagers mention that “working together” (*wok bung*) is a very good thing about their social life and retaining this value is crucially important. Human work is also recognized in the environment, and working gardens is highly valued. Jane Fajans (1998: 20) has noted that the Baining, who also value human work, have initially regarded logging very positively, because it is a recognizable human activity that transforms or inscribes humans into the environment. My impression is that due to human work as a central value, “development” and “progressing” are persuasive concepts for some, and that logging as an activity is culturally recognizable. This does not mean that money and a “good life” are not persuasive in themselves or that all are in favor of logging. And as with any central symbol or value, people do not necessarily agree with its meaning. For example, some individuals who oppose logging regard neighboring villagers that hoped for a road so that they could transport self-planted rice for milling by car as lazy, because they are afraid of the physical work involved in carrying.

Interestingly, many development-minded people in Toimtop, as well as from other Wide Bay villages, were very much opposed to a “cargo cult”, the Kivung movement, that has its strongest support among the Mengen living around Jacquinet Bay. The Kivung movement is based, as Andrew Lattas (2006: 130) notes, on the biblical ten commandments and a local understanding of “the law”. The Kivung followers focus very much on their own morality and the following of Kivung rules, to the extent that small fines are gathered from breaking these (Lattas 2006: 133). One villager told me that this makes Kivung a strong movement, but on the other hand the control over the life of their members alienates many from the movement. A central idea of the Kivung is the Mengen division of “cover” and “inside”, with the inside being truer and more important. Thus the current government, which the Kivung does not oppose or

22 *Laip bilong ples, mipela i stap olsem long bipoa yet. [...] Na nogat niupela wanem samting. [...] Em mi laikim senisim long desla nau, ol desla nau, ol liklik haus bilong mipela long ples. Na larim ol laip bilong bipoa.*

undervalue, is still a cover and the “true” features of modernity are hidden in the government of dead ancestors (Lattas 2006: 130). According to Lattas (2006: 131, 137) the Kivung is about localizing the government, of creating their own forms that can be controlled. The Kivung is also interested in reclaiming modernity, and indeed this is to be achieved through moral work (Lattas 2006: 143).

Yet according to many, the Kivung has precisely *failed* to do this, i.e. to bring development and modernity. Lattas (2006: 130) notes that a reason for Kivung's support is that they want to strengthen the government's transformative powers, i.e. they want projects to be more effectively realized. In a certain sense, the same has happened to Kivung, with people being unhappy by not seeing the Kivung promises of modernity effectively realized. Because work is a central value among the Mengen, the Kivung members also claim that they are not a “cargo cult”, with people just sitting idly waiting for cargo to come, but that they work hard for their future (Lattas 2006: 143). But non-members accuse them precisely of being cargoists. I was often told that the Kivung members wait for “money to come out of nowhere” etc. And conversely, this is also how “conservationists” criticize supporters of logging: that they have a “hand-out mentality”, waiting for royalties instead of growing cash-crops. Interestingly, seeing development as an alternative to the Kivung is not a new thing. Indeed, as a side note Michel Panoff (1970: 191) notes that in the 1960's some Mengen saw the planting of cash crops as a way of liberating themselves from the control of a “a centralized magico-political movement”, based on the ten commandments.

5.2 “Conservationism”

The coming of logging to the Wide Bay area of East New Britain in the 1980's and 1990's was greeted with contradicting reactions among local landowners. Many villagers in the Sulka and Mengen areas supported logging and the “development” brought by it. Others however, were more skeptical and managed to convince their fellow clan members and other villagers not to sign agreements with the logging companies. Interestingly, in the case of two Wide Bay villages, Toimtop (predominantly Mengen) and Klampun (predominantly Sulka), it was older people who were the first to oppose logging.

An activist of the Wide Bay Conservation Association, a Sulka woman from Klampun,

told me that the first one to oppose logging in her village was an older woman from her clan. In the 1990's logging was proposed from Bain to Klampun (see Map 2 and 3) and clan representatives, i.e. older men (*bigman*), gathered in the Setwe village to discuss logging. According to the activist, women were invited too, but the men did not consult them. At the end of the meeting, a man from the activist's clan said that it would be good to hear what the woman from his clan had to say. She said that other clans, and family lines in her clan, may give their land to logging as they please, but the lands under “her authority” [from the activist's interview] should remain as they are. The activist told that the older woman came up with opposing logging by herself (*tingting bilong em yet* (lit. her own thought)), because she was thinking about the future generations. Her reasons were partly strategic: her descent group does not own land on the beach where the village is situated, and if land becomes short, they can always re-settle on their lands where the forest is still intact. Another reason was water. The land area is mountainous and the old woman was afraid that logging might pollute the rivers flowing from the mountains and the villagers would have to find a new water source. Indeed logging often spoils rivers, since soil loosened up by logging is washed into the rivers by rains making the water undrinkable. A third reason for the older woman to oppose logging was that many signs of her clan's history are located in the area, and she was afraid that they might be erased by logging (see quote in Chapter 2 and notion about erasing traditional marks in Chapter 3.3).

In Toimtop, opposition to logging also came initially from older people. When logging was proposed, the majority of villagers supported it, with the exception of one family. The woman and her children belong to a sub-clan that holds land near Toimtop and the woman and her husband, a Sulka man originally from Iwai village, were opposed to logging. As the man states:

“I want the forest to be safe. I don't want to disturb the forest. The others were against us and only we were against logging. It went on, and I said to her [his wife]: 'You can't give up, you have to stand up.'”²³ - man, 69 years (21.06.2007)

The two women in their respective villages prevented their descent groups from signing contracts with the logging company. They were also connected through kinship: the man quoted above belongs to the same clan as the older woman opposed to logging in

23 *Mi laikim forest i mas safe. [...] Mi no laik disturbim forest. [...] Ol i ageinsim mitupela, mitupela tasol i pait ageinsim logging. Na i go, mi tokim em: “Yu no ken suruk, yu mas sanap.”*

Klampun. Later on, the family in Toimtop called their oldest son, by then a student at the teacher's college in Mt. Hagen, to come and help them. Their paternal cousin, the activist from Klampun, was working for a national NGO dealing also with environmental issues and had contacts to Conservation International (CI), which looked for partners in rainforest conservation in PNG. The activist referred her relatives from Toimtop to the NGO and CI, who came to help the villagers interested in conservation. In both villages conservation associations were set up, and CI organized the founding of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) into the two villages. Klampun is a WMA, while Toimtop is still in the process waiting for the WMA to be gazetted. A constitution and rules were set up for the WMA, and ultimately it is the landowners who remain in charge of the area and its use, even though CI did the organizing. Finally, a third NGO, the Wide Bay Conservation Association, was set up to act as an intermediary organization between the village conservation associations and other actors.

In Toimtop, the family who first proposed that their clan lands should not be logged, strived to convince other villagers that even though the lands belong to their subclan, conservation is a village project. The conservation association thus has a committee, with representatives of all the willing clans in the village. At the time of my fieldwork, six descent groups (clans and subclans) were represented by village members. As described in Chapter 4, the decision to protect the clan lands had led to a long lasting dispute, and even though the matter was considered mostly settled, some were still unhappy about the outcome of the dispute. A handful of people from the “losing” clans told me that they were unhappy, because the subclan who had decided to put their lands under conservation had named the conservation project after themselves. Indeed, the land *area* is named after the subclan in question, while the conservation association is named after the village. Others, mainly those who were not directly involved in the dispute, said that because the lands conserved belong to the subclan, it is normal for them to “lead” (*go pas*, lit. “go first”) and that the project is still a village project.

Recently, the conservationists in the village decided that along with environmental conservation, “culture” should be conserved as well and the association was named as “Teimtop [old version of the village name] Bio-Cultural Conservation Association”. A major achievement of the bio-cultural conservation association was a grant of K33000 from the World Bank to establish a Resource Center in the village (see Illustration 8).

The center was completed in May 2007, and the opening ceremony was attended by the staff of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (IPNGS) and the National Cultural Commission (NCC), with the Executive Director of the NCC opening the building. A daily newspaper, *The National* (owned by the Malaysian logging company Rimbunan Hijau!) ran a story about the conservation project and the opening of the Resource Center (The National 2007). The Resource Center, a house built from locally sawn timber, is a part of the project to document Sulka and Mengen traditions, such as dances and stories for example. The center houses recording equipment and a computer (run with an aggregate), and the youth group of the village is to be trained in the use of this equipment. The Resource Center has also guest rooms in which visitors, such as myself, can live during their stay in the village.

As shown above, the motivation to oppose logging has stemmed from the concern of older people that radical changes in the environment will disrupt the way of life of villagers and the loss of their security in the form of their traditional lands. It seems that the reason for concern is not the loss of the “environment” as such, but the multiple relationships represented in it, the “resources” such as trees for making houses, water, the potential for new gardens., along with history and social relations inscribed in the landscape, as described in Chapter 2. In the case of the two Wide Bay villages, young and educated people came, or were called by their relatives, to come and help them in the new situation. It was they who sought or already had contacts with NGOs and government departments – such as the NCC – of different kinds. This is a crucial variable to keep in mind: the villagers sought the help of NGOs rather than NGOs seeking to “convert” villagers.

Development

For many villagers supporting conservation, “development” is also of great concern. Indeed, many see conservation as a project comparable to other development projects. Conservation does bring some monetary income. Toimtop was visited in 2000 by both local and foreign biologists and villagers helping them by cooking food or carrying equipment. were paid. Equally, I paid for my upkeep to the village and the money was distributed evenly among the village households. Earning money is often problematic and how to find ways to earn was discussed in many instances in the village, for example Monday meetings of the community. A young woman tells why she supports

conservation:

“We [inclusive] are here on top of a mountain and it is hard for us to find a way to earn money. So that's why it's easy to get this conservation, so that we can get money from those men, who want to come and see the conservation area.”²⁴ - woman, 23 years (25.06.2007)

Seeing conservation as an alternative source of development is not uncommon among both villagers and international conservation agencies. Paige West (2005: 635) has described that a “core hypothesis” of what she calls “neoliberal conservation” is that if people get money from conservation, they will support it. In another instance she tells how a conservation projects basing on the idea of “conservation as development” in Highland PNG fails, because development as the people see it is often incompatible with what international agencies mean with conservation (West 2006: 217). “Conservation as development” has been the target of heavy critique (see for example Bamford (2002)), and for good reasons. It has been argued that international conservation agencies commodify “culture” and bind people into the capitalist world economy through the commodification of bio(cultural)diversity.

Yet despite the critique, the situation in the Wide Bay area is not a simple black and white situation with people being “liberated” or tied to the capitalist world market by NGOs. As shown above, conservation was initiated by villagers interested in protecting their environment and a way of life that is closely tied to their environment, for a *variety* of reasons. Conservation, as practiced by the people of Wide Bay, is based on the idea that people can use the conserved forest for hunting, gathering of materials, such as trees for houses, and so on. Indeed, conservation is seen primarily as local *control* of the conserved area, so that it can be used by the villagers. Thus the people in Wide Bay conserving their forests are neither “ecologically noble savages” as some international conservation agencies would like to have it, nor neoliberal capitalists commodifying their way of life, even though this danger exists, of which the activists themselves are aware.

My impression, based on discussions with “conservationists” in the village, is that they are well aware of the problems of treating “conservation” as a source of income on the

²⁴ *Bikos yumi stap antap long maunten na i hat long yumi long painim we bilong kisim mani. So isi tasol long, kisim desla conservation i kam, bai yumi ken kisim mani long husat ol man i laik kam insait na lukim conservation area.*

one hand, and the need of people to gain monetary income on the other. Many of the villagers supporting conservation emphasized that they have to find a way to balance “tradition” and “business”:

“Business and things like that, when we want to do them, we must balance them with our [ancestral] traditions (*ol pasin tumbuna*).”²⁵ - man, 37 years (02.07.2007)

The reason that the villagers are more aware of the problematics of development and conservation, more than for example in the case of a conservation-as-development - project in the New Guinea Highlands, as described by West (2006), is because the idea not to allow logging on their lands, came from the people themselves. Conservation, as a “new” concept, came only later from young and educated villagers – in order to clarify the legal status. The villagers supporting conservation are seeking ways to gain monetary income by different small scale projects, such as soap making, and indeed the commodification of biodiversity, such as raising butterflies for sale, has been contemplated. In Toimtop, two sons of the family, which initially decided to oppose logging, have actively tried to explain that conservation is a long-term project that will not bring fast cash, yet both are also of the opinion that there have to be economic benefits in order for people to support conservation over logging.

Even though monetary income from conservation has been modest (at least when compared to logging royalties), people acknowledge the benefits of leaving the forest in tact. As one man told me, he had first supported logging, but after seeing that it brings no “real development” (meaning that those who have sold timber rights still live in essentially the same conditions as others), he has shifted to support conservation. With villagers learning to plant rice (a major commodity for which a household needs money) and other skills taught by NGOs, he realized that they can do many things themselves, and stated that: “We are already developed.” (*Mipela i develop pinis.*)

Transnational Connections

The Wide Bay conservationists are, as noted already, well connected both nationally and internationally. They have received organizational help from Conservation International, a large conservation agency based in the US and with offices around the world, they

²⁵ *Wok bisnis, samting olsem, taim mipela i laik mekim, em bai mipela i mas balansim wantaim ol pasin tumbuna.*

have received help in legal questions from national NGOs, which again are well connected to other organizations and they have received grants from the World Bank, and other institutions. Alliances with such transnational actors, especially in environmental questions, are not uncommon at all. Stuart Kirsch (2006, 2007) describes the campaign of the Yonggom of central New Guinea against the Ok Tedi mine, which has polluted and permanently damaged the environment from which the Yonggom gain their livelihood. The “going global” of the Ok Tedi movement made the claims of the Yonggom as successful as they were, on a local scale their demands would not have been heard (Kirsch 2007: 305). What made this “counter-global” or “global from below” movement so successful, is that it used the same “conduits through which capital ordinarily flows” for the purposes of the protest (Kirsch 2007: 306). However, a problem in the alliances with large international actors, such as conservation agencies, may be that people have to adapt discourses that do not necessarily represent their actual aims (Kirsch 2007: 314). As Kirsch (2007: 314, 311) notes, international conservation agencies may represent the aims of indigenous people and companies as radically opposed, even though they are not, or make them “choose” between the “environment” and “development”.

This is what Fajans (1998) and Bamford (2002) seem to criticize too, when accusing conservationists of presenting people as “ecologically noble savages”. As Bamford (2002: 41) shows, “indigenous” peoples have often been portrayed by conservationists as their “natural allies” and on the other hand as “greedy landowners”, as noted by Kirsch (2007: 310) when failing to act according to the international discourses, for example for wanting to combine “development” and “environment”. Jane Fajans (1998: 22, 24), in her account about the relation of Baining of East New Britain with logging, has argued that the Baining are not in fact environmentalists, but that they are rather using environmental discourse “tactically”, to advance their own interests and help them with company abuses they could not foresee when signing agreements. While the critique of international environmentalism and their often neoliberal discourse and practices is highly important, I see the discussion about “real” environmentalism as highly problematic as well.

The people of Wide Bay do not want to preserve their environment just for its own sake, but because of the economic and cultural *values* attached to it. As described in previous

chapters, the environment is a resource enabling people to be nearly self-sufficient subsistence farmers, providing them with game and building materials. At the same time, the environment and places in it, stand for social relations with other peoples and the past. The history of clans (and ultimately of the society) is inscribed in the different types of the environment, and many “cultural activities” (*wok kastom*), require certain plants. Based on these values the older people initially decided not to sell timber concessions, and later on their younger clan mates came into contact with NGOs. Indeed, they have used “tactically” conservation discourse, foreign NGOs etc., but is this less “pure” environmentalism?

I would argue that “pure” environmentalism, i.e. environmentalism detached from cultural values, does not exist and I do not find it useful to think in these terms. A Wide Bay elder opposing logging for the fear that it erases historical marks is no more or less an environmentalist than Finnish activists trying to preserve old forests, even though the reasons underlying their respective actions may be different. The idea of “pure” environmentalism is in my opinion a result of not understanding the cultural and economic interests underlying it. It is important to understand the motives of peoples and to avoid misrepresentation, as for example Fajans (1998) has done, but questions about “purity”, “authenticity” and whether people are “real” environmentalists or not, may implicitly bring non-intended value statements into the discussion. By stating that a given people are not “real” environmentalists, because they use the environmentalist discourse tactically, one can discredit a genuine concern over the environment and its history. Being canny does not mean being “inauthentic”. As James Ferguson (2006: 108) notes, in many cases of “third world resistance”, the activists are “media savvy, well-connected [...] finding allies horizontally, flexibly and even opportunistically”, while at the same time being serious with their politics. Based on the discussion above, this is in my opinion the case with the Wide Bay conservation activists as well.

5.3 Parliamentary politics on a village level

Parliamentary elections were held in PNG on the 30th of June 2007. There was much talk about the elections, especially because a new voting system was to be used for the first time. Until 2007, the electoral system in PNG was the traditional Westminster “First Past the Post”, which was to be replaced by the so called “Limited Preferential Voting” (LPV) system (PNG Electoral Commission 2007). In the LPV-system the voters

can vote preferentially for three candidates, which balances the situation. Both “conservationists” and “developmentalists” in Toimtop and other Wide Bay villages were very involved in the elections. Both “sides” had their own candidates, and supporters did electoral work, such as campaigning, before the elections.

The “developers” supported the sitting MP Mr. Paul Tiensten, a Mengen, originally from Wawas, a small village near Toimtop. He has led a successful career, educated as a geologist in Dundee, Scotland, and before his term as MP and minister, he worked in various government departments and on natural resource extraction. Many of his supporters admired how he had come from a “small village” and reached the top. Some of his supporters even asked me to talk about him, because he shows that people from villages are not “savages”, but can be educated and successful. Running as a candidate of the National Alliance party, led by the long time PM Sir Michael Somare, Tiensten in the end won the elections.²⁶

Tiensten was associated in the elections with economic development and many villagers were convinced by the “projects” he had initiated or brought, such as water tanks into the Wide Bay villages or funding to churches (K800 in Toimtop). Many people also supported the Ili-Wawas -project (see Chapter 3.2), which intends to connect the logging roads of Pomio with each other and to the national road network, i.e. Kokopo and the Kimbe, the provincial capital of West New Britain. It was widely hoped that the road will ease the financial situation and bring opportunities for income, such as better prices for cash crops. As a supporter of Paul Tiensten tells:

“[The village] will be well, and the life of all will turn out good too. Because of this road. I supported [Paul Tiensten] just for this. Because of the road and some other plans he has made. I think he has done a good job.” - man, 65 years (02.07.2007)²⁷

According to my experience, i.e. from the discussions I had with Tiensten's supporters, he was supported because of his promise of “development”. Many mentioned also that when political power had been in the hands of the Kivung

²⁶ Tiensten won in the Pomio electorate with about 6700 votes, over the next candidate Francis Koimanrea, also a long time politician and Kivung member who gained about 4100 votes. Out of about 27 000 votes 16 000 were cast, with only 167 informal votes. (*Post Courier* 2007).

²⁷ [*Ples bai*] kamap gutpela na sindaun bilong ol man bai gutpela. Long desla long rot. [...] Mi bin sapatim long desla tasol. Long rot, na sampela plen em i bin wokim pinis. [...] Mi lukim olsem wok bilong en i gutpela.

movement - from the days of the National Assembly (1964) until the national elections of 2002, when Paul Tiensten first won – the Kivung had failed to bring any real development or benefited only its own members.

“So from 1964 until 2001 [...] power was in the hands of them [the Kivung]. And the development in the district didn't turn out well. Since Paul [Tiensten] came into power or came into the government, in the 2002 elections, we saw, I myself saw, that there were some changes taking place.”²⁸ - man, local campaign manager for Paul Tiensten, 52 years(22.7.2007)

In the Wide Bay villages Paul Tiensten was the most visible candidate, with his electoral posters distributed widely into the villages, and several campaign events held. Clearly, the National Alliance (NA) had the most well-funded campaign: while NA posters were numerous, no other candidate was promoted with posters, except Michal Koimanrea, the Kivung candidate. It has been said that NA received large sums of money for campaigning from Rimbunan Hijau.

The supporters of Mr. Tiensten also campaigned actively. During my stay in Toimtop, I saw two larger electoral campaigns and in addition a village member spoke for him in a Monday meeting. In one campaign event men from nearby villages came and explained the policies of Tiensten and spoke about his background. Afterwards, people discussed questions with the campaigners as well as among themselves and a meal was served to all men at the men's house. Everybody, including those opposed to Tiensten, thought it was a good event and as campaigning should be (see Illustration 9). The other event however was regarded as bad campaigning by many, even supporters of Tiensten. Men from more far away villages dressed in campaign t-shirts, came with trucks, borrowed from the logging company, and the campaigning was done via a loudspeaker. Since the campaigners were on a tight schedule, at least according to them, they did not leave time for discussion and left after eating quickly at the men's house. Especially the use of the loudspeaker was regarded as threatening and not appropriate for “village campaigning”. Such behavior would be alright in a city, but not in a village, where things are done differently, I was told. A supporter of Tiensten remarked that the event was a “rubbish campaign” (*rabis kempein*) altogether.

28 *So 1964 i kam [...] inap long 2001 [...] paua i stap long han bilong ol. Developman insait long district i no bin kamap gut. Since Paul em i kam insait long paua o i kam insait long govaman long 2002 elekson, mipela i lukim, mi yet mi lukim olsem, i gat sampela changes i wok long take place.*

Also “conservationists” were actively involved in the parliamentary elections. I was told that in the 2002 elections, Paul Tiensten was nearly uniformly supported, at least by Wide Bay villagers, but now communities were “broken” (*bruk*) in terms of electoral support. The conservationists, and those disillusioned by economic development, supported Mr. Ereman Yareng, a Sulka from Iwai village and the president of the East Pomio LLG. Yareng campaigned with considerably less funding than Tiensten – for example to my knowledge no electoral posters or other forms of advertisement were used – but he campaigned actively with his campaign crew around Wide Bay and Jacquinet Bay, going far inland to the “bush Mengen” and Mamusi.

I discussed very briefly Yareng's program with him before a campaign event held in Sampun (see Illustration 10). Yareng's belongs to the fairly new Star Alliance party, lead by Mr. Clemen Waine, a bio-technologist at the university in Port Moresby. Yareng's program was based on what could be called sustainable or small scale development and localism. Development should be locally lead, for example down stream processing, cash crops and small scale selective logging, not large clear cuts as done by companies. According to him, the most important level of decision is the local level, with the village being the “engine room” of it, and the local level develops the province. The problem with Tiensten's policies according to Yareng is that the process of decision making is the opposite, i.e. “top-down”. In environmental politics Yareng said he would co-operate with NGOs. Yareng's campaigners also mentioned that bio-diversity could also be economically beneficial and that PNG would be strong in emission trading.

In his campaign speech Yareng and his supporters emphasized local culture and how it should be the basis of all policies. “The time of the whiteman is finished.”²⁹ stated Yareng, and his campaigners noted that “our way of life” must be combined with the modern way, so that if either fails, the other will still be there. Especially interesting was that one of Yareng's campaigners held a speech *against* a provincial plan to conserve the Naganai range, a mountain range running in the center of East New Britain. According to him the problem is that the Provincial government and the bureaucratic power are controlled by the Tolais and thus provincial conservation would give control of the Naganai, as a *resource*, to the Tolai. The provincial government sees the potential of the

29 *Taim bilong masta i pinis*. (10.6.2007, campaign speech at Sampun)

range, and that's why others have to be careful, because according to him, their “lack of knowledge” has been taken advantage of in the past.

A key concern of the Wide Bay inhabitants are questions posed by logging, “development” and “modernity”. How will they take their place in a situation where they are on the one hand tightly linked to the capitalist world economy through large scale logging, part of global world with transnational actors operating with them and with whom the inhabitants work? And on the other hand they are physically relatively isolated, with no roads apart from a “neoliberal infrastructure” serving logging companies. How the different political trends – conservationism, developmentalism and the Kivung – define development and modernity differs, but all are concerned with them. The developmentalists strive mainly for economic development through extraction of resources and tighter integration into (neoliberal) capitalism, with large companies and oil-palm plantations. Their road to development is based literally on roads and the road link, that many see (probably correctly) as a necessary condition of economic development. The Kivung, as shown by Lattas (2006), tries to appropriate the governing forms into local control, mainly through moral work and tight control.

5.4 Eco-localism

“It is not good for us to follow other customs, other roads that are not good.”³⁰ - man, 33 years (19.06.2007)

Like the Kivung, the conservationists also want to localize power, but unlike the Kivung they do this through manipulating transnational connections on the one hand and emphasizing the need to strengthen local control and culture. Comparably, the Kivung (Lattas 2006: 144, 145) wants to find their own, local civilization, the Melanesians “creating their own grand culture”. Similar lines of thought are arising among those whom I have labeled as “conservationists”. One of Yareng's campaigners noted that what is needed is a “PNG-way-development” and the Wide Bay conservationists have turned to “cultural conservation”, in order to progress on their own terms. These discussions are not new. Roger Keesing (1996: 167, 168) notes how *kastom* as an ideology, an “an anti-thesis of Western materialism [and] individualism” is being invoked by both the new Pacific elites and common villagers. Referring to the analysis

30 *Nogut mipela i bihainim [...] ol narapela kain pasin [...], ol narapela rot we i no gut.*

of the Tongan intellectual Epeli Hau'ofa, Keesing (1996: 167, 168) claims that “custom and tradition” are being used by the elites to blur emerging class differences, while the villagers use them to synthesize “essential elements of traditional life” with the changing world.

The latter notion describes in my opinion well the Wide Bay conservation projects. As noted above, “cultural conservation” is an important theme in the work of the local conservationists. Along with the recording traditional elements, such as dances, songs and stories, “cultural conservation” has a deeper meaning. Local *kastom* is in many ways seen anti-thetical to western capitalism, or the most socially disruptive aspects of it. Indeed, many conservation-minded villagers noted how their tradition and culture is something very important that should be held. Especially often people singled out elements such as the men's house (*haus boi*), sharing (*serim*), working together (*wok bung*) and the respect for people (*ruru long man(meri)*) as the most central aspects of custom, or *kastom*. These were contrasted with the “western style” of working alone for money, disrespect for other people and so on.

Cultural conservation is then not about “show-casing” culture, as my brother noted, but about strengthening communal values and avoiding the disruption of social relations. The conservationists perceive that many of today's problems are in fact a result of the weakening of the central cultural values. The loss of respect towards the elders and in general to other people, more individualistic thinking in terms of property and such, lead to social problems as the conservationists claim. Land disputes are a case in point: they were not an issue before, but now there is an unprecedented number of them. The reason is that customary obligations towards others, to recognize the rights of others on the basis of kinship and residence, are declining due to foreign concepts of ownership (see quote in 4.3) for instance. For any kind of development or progress to happen, as the conservationist put it, social harmony has to prevail and that is only achieved by strengthening the central cultural elements.

Along with “cultural conservation” being taken as a part of conservation in Toimtop, similar outrightly revivalistic forms of “cultural conservation” have come up elsewhere among the Mengen as well as other conservationists of East New Britain. During Ereman Yareng's campaign event in Sampun, I spoke with a man from Yareng's

campaign crew, who told that he had formed a movement called Pomio Potor Potong Paga Urgud in Palmalmal, a larger regional center in the Jacquinot Bay area. The name of the movement means loosely translated Pomio's return to traditional customs, with "potong" being a traditional advice given by older men in the men's house. The man said he had come up with the organization, because "he saw" how traditional customs start to be lost and that is a loss of identity. An example of this are the men's houses that had been forgotten, but that some are being rebuilt³¹, partly thanks to his organization. He too thought that "development" has to start from the tribal level as he put it, basing on *kastom*.

Conservationism in the Wide Bay area has thus strong localistic and autonomistic aspects to it. Any kind of "development" has to be done according to the terms of traditional culture. Moreover, no "real development" is possible, if traditional culture is ignored. Related to this is the strong emphasis on local control. The conservationists, no doubt having adopted the language of "sustainable development", stress out that development has to start out "small", from down-stream processing, people-oriented initiatives according to a bottom-up fashion. For the same reasons, the conservationists stress the importance of the Local Level Government apparatus in national politics, because it is nearer to the villagers. Similarly, many initiatives of the conservationists should be seen as aspects of this localism. Conservationists have offered para-legal training to villagers, in order to make them more aware of their rights and able to act in the legal setting. Womens groups have supported conservation and women's rights, for example in decision making over land.

My brother and sister had been trained by a Japanese NGO in Rabaul to plant rice, and my sister had been on a year long training in Japan. Upon her return she educated other young women to plant rice, make soap out of coconut and even taught Japanese as a free time activity. These initiatives may seem small, but given the fact that money is often hard to come by and that commodities such as rice and soap are actual and constant sources of expenses, these strive for greater autonomy. By planting rice and making soap, the villagers can cut their own expenses *and* possibly even generate some monetary income by selling their produce to local trade stores. And precisely because

31 The men's houses have not at any point been lost in the Wide Bay communities as far as I know. Apparently some larger centers, such as Palmalmal, had abandoned them for a period, I was told.

these projects are relatively small scale, they are comparatively easy to adopt by the villagers and do not require radical changes in the environment or the way of life.

Roger Keesing (1982: 237) notes that doing things themselves provides satisfaction for the Kwaio traditionalists of Solomon Islands. The same holds true for the Wide Bay conservationists, as I think is shown in the discussion above. I point back to the comment of a Mungen man who noted that with conservation they have learned to do much themselves. Rice needs not to be bought, it can be planted. The resource center was built out of planks made by the villagers themselves, so there is no need to let Malaysian loggers to extract raw timber and so forth. In relation to this, people (both conservationists and developmentalists) are very pleased that today primary education starts in the local languages (*tok ples*, lit. “village language”) instead of English. “Language”, as the local languages were referred to in schools³², are again as acceptable as English. Similarly, it was noted that traditional medicine (*bus marasin*, lit. “forest medicine”) could maybe be used more widely again. Indeed, since people have noticed that they are able to do many things, why not medicine – especially since it was used by the ancestors – I was told.

In my opinion “eco-localism” is an apt term for the Wide Bay conservationism, because the movement stresses local control and autonomy, and does this as a reaction to the problems brought up by large scale commercial logging. Global capitalism as a process manifests itself in different ways for the Sulka-Mungen of Wide Bay. On the one hand it brings royalties, with which commodities can be acquired. It brings roads that promise an easier economic situation and trucks to carry the produce. The problems of capitalism manifest themselves however *in* the environment as the depletion of forests, pollution of rivers and the erosion of culturally significant marks, in “scenes of loss” as Stuart Kirsch (2006: 190) puts it. Also, its disruptive effects, such as the unprecedented number of land disputes, are *about* the environment. Much of the work of the conservationists is about strengthening local autonomy and the people's control of their own lives, as I hope to have shown above. Hence “localism”. The prefix “eco-” emphasizes the fact that as a clearly recognizable political *movement*, this localism has come into being as a reaction towards logging, and the problems thereof.

32 I was told that in the past teachers would scold pupils for speaking the local language and say: “Do not speak language, speak English!”

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the introductory chapter I presented my research questions, and asked what forms of political mobilization and awareness are brought up by logging in the small scale communities of PNG? As shown in the above chapter, two distinct lines of thought, namely “developmentalism” and “conservationism” have arisen in the Wide Bay communities to address questions brought up by logging, such as “development” and “modernity”. In the fifth chapter I argued that both lines of thought are self-consciously political, with their supporters taking part in national parliamentary politics, allying themselves with various transnational actors and taking part in local level politics. Especially “conservationism” is clear a movement, with its local organizations and its activists trying to gain support throughout the villages. It has also clearly emerged as a reaction towards logging: at first a few older people from the villages started to oppose logging, with their (educated) children coming up with ideas about environmental conservation, as shown in Chapter 5.

Both “developmentalism” and “conservationism” take internationally recognizable forms and both lines of thought, or “movements, legitimate their claims with international discourses. The “developmentalists” refer to “development” and “modernization”, the idea of “progress” and how with “development” the people of Wide Bay can “leave the life of the past”, as one man quoted in previous chapter noted. People supporting “developmentalism” want through road building and the increase of cash cropping to be more tightly integrated into the global economy of which they see themselves being marginalized. They seek active participation in the economy, for example by creating contacts with logging companies and by forming their own landowner companies. Relatedly, the “conservationists” have “used tactically” international conservation discourse to support their aims, namely local control and autonomy. It should be noted here, that “conservationists” are not diametrically opposed to the ideas of “development”. On the contrary, also the conservationists acknowledge the need of economic benefits and development, and they too seek ways in which take part into the global economy, for example through small scale (organic) cash-cropping, eco-tourism and so on. Neither are they opposed to the building of roads. Rather, the point is that these things have to happen according to the terms of the local communities. Indeed, what the conservationists emphasize very much is a “bottom-up” process that should be the basis of all projects that affect local communities.

Interestingly, both “conservationists” and “developmentalists” have allied themselves with actors of very different scales, ranging from government departments to transnational actors, such as NGOs and international companies. Still, as I have shown in Chapter 5, both lines of thought base on central cultural values. As I suggested “development” is not only fascinating because of its promises of “good life” (as illustrated in Chapter 5), but because human work and production are central values among the Mengen. In many cases “conservationists” have indeed used international conservation discourse “tactically”, but this should not be interpreted that they are not genuinely concerned about their environment. Environmental conservation among the Sulka-Mengen villagers does not base on an abstract idea of the environment as something outside the society. It is not nature to be preserved for the sake of it. On the contrary, for subsistence farmers who cultivate their own food and gain monetary income through small-scale cash cropping, the environment has extremely important economical value, as shown in the beginning of Chapter 2. The first elders to oppose logging were motivated partly by this, which in turn supports my argument that conservation should be seen as local autonomism. Indeed, being able to produce their own food and gather the material for housing by themselves makes the villagers independent in many ways. The economic importance of the environment is however not the only reason for the protection of it. Throughout the second chapter I describe the Sulka-Mengen ways of being in the environment as a part of it. Rather than a romantic notion, I hope to have shown, how the villagers produce the environment through their work, inscribe themselves into it and transform its value.

As noted in the fourth chapter, land disputes are a direct consequence of logging, and in dispute situations different sources of power and power asymmetries came to light. Land tenure, and being able to make decisions about its use, are of crucial importance in questions about logging. Clan histories and stories (described in Chapter 2) serve to legitimate ownership of land. As shown in Chapter 4, clan leaders have to learn these stories in order to “defend” their land. Conversely, with the increasing number of disputes these stories become increasingly documented, as well as kept secret for the fear of extra-clan members “abusing” these stories for their own interests. Thus, the placed histories dealt with in Chapter 2 have political significance to them. These “traditional” sources of power are however not the only ones used in dispute cases.

Official positions, such as those of land mediators and councilors, can serve as new sources of power. For example, in Chapter 4 I suggested that people who would “traditionally” have little say in questions about land use, because their own clan lands are far away, can seek to increase their influence through these official positions. Or by allying themselves with international logging companies or NGO's. Indeed, as shown in Chapter 4, many “makeshift” alliances, to borrow Anna Tsing's (2005) expression, between actors of various levels occur in dispute cases. For example, some clan members *supporting* logging appealed to the Pacific Heritage Foundation in order to gain leverage in a clan land dispute. Relatedly, the conservationists of Toimtop got a grant for cultural conservation from the World Bank, which usually is associated with pushing for land registration, privatization and logging.

The conservationists of Wide Bay have also correctly identified a key source of power in today's world, namely education. As noted in the fourth chapter on land disputes, education and the ability to “read the government code”, to borrow James Scott's (1998) expression, can be crucial in terms of the outcome of disputes. Conservationists have indeed sought education ranging from para-legal training and women's rights to small scale agricultural education, often provided by NGOs. In education, questions about gender come to light as well. A woman noted to me that often in dispute cases women are shy to participate, because of their poor education. As I hope to have shown, the conservationists of Wide Bay are often educated and canny knowing how to advance their aims. But it should also be remembered, that their power is often small when compared to that of international capital, which can be outrightly destructive, as noted in Chapter 3.3 on environmental destruction.

Parallel to the question about political mobilization caused by logging runs my other research question, namely how does logging change the relationship between local communities and the state of PNG. Traditionally, at least in anthropology, the local communities of PNG have been seen as fairly egalitarian, “acephalous” societies, where leadership emerges from the relationships a competent individual can manipulate (see for example Sahlins 1963). Conversely, the role of the government, both colonial and post-colonial, has been seen as problematic in relation to the local communities. Stereotypically PNG has been described as a “weak state” unable to enforce its own laws, the state lacking legitimacy in the eyes of local communities, the state being alien

or moreover a “super-clan” to be competed with and so on (Strathern & Stewart 2000). In many instances this is also true: for example Thomas Strong (2006: 51) notes that in the case of the Eastern Highlands people find ways to govern themselves, but these modes may not “fit within a picture of efficient or fair liberal governance”, nor do people necessarily want to be so governed.

Something else may however be happening in East New Britain, at least in the Wide Bay region. Above I discussed political activity risen in Wide Bay communities as a response to logging. Related to this, large scale logging has also affected the relations between Wide Bay communities and the state of PNG. As noted in Chapter 3, the Baining people of East New Britain have used commercial logging as a way to by-pass the provincial government (Fajans 1998: 20). The Wide Bay conservationists, some of them suspicious towards the provincial government as well, have turned to parliamentary politics and have cooperated with various government departments, such as the National Cultural Commission, as shown in Chapter 5. In addition, the conservation association of Toimtop has sought government *recognition* of their conservation area, hoping to get a Wildlife Management Area status for it. Some conservation activists have also participated actively in the national parliamentary politics. This all is hardly by-passing the state. On the contrary, in terms of political activity, the Wide Bay conservationists work in the official sphere of the state.

On the basis of my material presented in this thesis, I argue that large scale logging and neoliberal environmental politics do in fact elicit the state in East New Britain, as paradoxical as it sounds. Indeed, commercial logging does advance the role of the state of PNG in a two-fold way. As noted in the third chapter, logging companies do create cheap infrastructure, i.e. logging roads, that the government seeks to adopt as the basis of its own national road network. The building of what is in many cases manifestly poor infrastructure is however not the only way logging and logging companies advance the state. More importantly, large scale logging, company abuses and the frequent land disputes – as described in Chapter 4 – create a *need* among the local communities for state institutions that can protect their interests. A case in point is security, as noted in section 3.2 on roads: many people told me that if the road link to the capitals of East and West New Britain is built, the government should also establish more police stations.

Also the increasingly frequent disputes over land – brought up by logging – support the role of the government. All the disputes in the Wide Bay area I know of, were or are being settled rather peacefully through the use of the mediation system. Minor disputes are settled on the village level, and the majority of people with whom I discussed the subject including a local land mediator, preferred this level. The village level solution is the cheapest in terms of money and it allows for the most flexible results. Since the land mediators can not legally make any decisions on the village level (see Chapter 4 on dispute settling), the solutions must be compromises satisfying both parties. This is a part of the government system of solving disputes and local land mediators are appointed by the local level governments. The village level is however not unproblematic. Some people are critical towards it, because they do not regard the local land mediators as neutral parties, but as “men of the village” (*man bilong ples*) with their own interests and relations. Due to this the people critical of local mediators regard the higher court levels as more neutral instances for solving disputes. This is an extremely interesting, since it in my opinion shows that due to the disputes some people shifting more and more closely to the state, or in fact wishing for certain sorts of governmentability. Indeed, the mostly educated people, supporting higher land court levels, do want a neutral and transparent mechanism of dispute settlement. I was also noted that in the dispute case cited in Chapter 4, the court was able to enforce its decisions effectively.

Equally, in the discussion about neoliberalism in the fifth chapter, I noted how NGOs have been said to advance the neoliberal agenda by “by-passing” the state (see for example West (2006)). My own experience with a Papua New Guinean NGO offering free legal help to communities affected by environmental questions suggest the contrary. True, the NGO receives foreign funding and so self-consciously does not take government funding in order to be independent. By focusing on national law to address environmental problems faced by local communities, this NGO does not undermine the role of the state, but in fact supports it. Using the government legal apparatus to support the (constitutional) rights of local communities, is hardly “rolling back the state”, but supporting the public sphere associated with it. This is in line with my argument that “wild capitalism” and the (environmental) problems caused by it, does in some cases create a need for the state to support its people's rights and interests. As noted, legal settlement of disputes (as well as mapping) might be problematic, because they can

“fix” traditionally flexible and inclusive property relations. On the other hand, in some cases the legal setting is the only way to protect traditional communal ownership from the commodification of the environment. Herein lies also a profound irony: in order for the people to hold on to their flexible and inclusive ways, they may have to turn to mechanisms that endanger the existence of the practices as well.

Another related shift is that of land registration. To my knowledge, and according to the local land mediator I interviewed, no land registration has taken place in the Pomio district, although as far as I know, some ILGs have been formed by the Sulka. Land registration is something normally very much opposed in PNG, as noted in Chapter 4. It has been seen as a way to *de facto* alienate land from its traditional owners. For example, a brother of mine, while very positive towards solving disputes in courts, did not trust land registration and stated that as long as he does not know enough about it, it something not to be considered. But a handful of people were not outrightly opposed to land registration, on the contrary some hoped it would be a way to end disputes once and for all. Indeed, it was hoped that once the land title is “in the book of the government” (*long buk bilong govaman*), i.e. recognized by the state, no more disputes can emerge, because there is no openness or ambiguity about the owners. However, the registration of titles can be especially damaging, if it opens the way for the loss of user rights and the further commodification of land. Almah Tararia (2005), a Papua New Guinean lawyer, states that in the current situation it is safer not to register any titles at all, because there is no guarantee against abuses, such as the alienation of land.

This leads to the final point: company abuses, frequent disputes, crime that comes with the building of roads and other problems associated with logging, creates a perceived need among the locals for the state. As many people noted to me, these problems – such as gang crime – are too big for the villagers themselves to solve, they must be addressed by a powerful institution such as the state. This need is however for a certain kind of state, namely one that can protect the interests of its citizens, provide legal support and basic services. The question remains, do even more powerful institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, elicit this kind of state? Or is it a neoliberal, “rolled back” state, which at its best creates a framework in which multinational companies can operate without hindrance as a trade-off for cheap and in practice temporary infrastructure like logging roads?

7. DISCUSSION: Change or loss?

“How have you in Finland managed to combine capitalism with your customs?”

My brother asked me this question at the end of my fieldwork after we had left the village and were waiting at the *transit haus* in Kokopo – he to resume his work with the local conservation organization in Kokopo and I to fly back to Port Moresby and ultimately to Finland. We were passing our time by reading through old *Post Couriers*, catching up to news that we had not been able to hear during the stay in the village. In relation to his question, my brother noted how Marx had claimed capitalism will end local customs and traditions. I could not answer his question. I told him that obviously many customs associated with the life of say my grandparents or their parents had ceased with the changes in the way of life. Not to mention even older traditions, of which remnants are to be recognized here and there. Yet a feeling of being Finnish exists, maybe it is the language? And what we, Finns, see as “Finnishness” varies greatly. I do not know if my answer satisfied him. Obviously he knew the complexity of the question as well.

The Pomio district is now on a verge of a great change. This does not mean that Pomio is – or ever has been – a “timeless” place and isolated from the outside world. Many radical changes have happened, and as I hope to have shown, Pomio has been for quite some time a part of the globalized world with timber flowing out, people moving after work and education and connecting themselves with other people around the globe. But now with the plans to link Pomio into the national road network, a feeling of change is in the air. Despite the connections to the outside world, Pomio has been geographically relatively isolated and changes have been more gradual. Linking Pomio with other parts of New Britain will accelerate the ongoing change. For good or worse it will be a change, which can not be undone. Especially since the road project is connected with more logging and the establishment of oil-palm plantations. And profound change is what the Ili-Wawas project is about: to bring “development” and change Pomio – into a good direction as its proponents claim.

People are aware of this change, and it seems the loss of customs and traditions, much what is attributed to “culture” genuinely concerns them. In the previous chapters I noted how the “conservationists” are worried about the changes that will come. As my brother

told, a key incentive for conservation (both cultural and environmental) was that the people noticed how certain elements of the Mengen culture start to be lost. But it is not only the “conservationists” who are worried about the change. After an electoral campaign for Paul Tiensten held in Toimtop, I briefly talked with one of the campaigners. We talked about the campaign and about the Ili-Wawas project, which the middle-aged man obviously supported. However, he was also aware of the scope of the change and somewhat concerned about Mengen culture. In fact, after hearing that I am an anthropology student, he talked briefly about Margaret Mead and then noted how good it is that someone has come to document Mengen ritual customs. I had to disappoint him twice by noting that Mengen ritual customs are not as such the main focus of my study and that it is not in my power to send someone else from my department to study them.

This widespread concern made me understand another thing. When discussing in various interviews and other instances what the villagers thought that “good life” is, many noted that “customs” (*pasin, kastom* or indeed *pasin kastom*) are an integral part of this, and moreover that good customs are sharing (*serim*), working together (*wok bung*), the men's house (*haus boi*) and the respect for other people (*ruru* or *rispekt long ol man(meri)*). Indeed they are parts of the Mengen culture, but I was still surprised about the way they were presented, as what seemed curious auto-essentialization or reification of culture to me. Since “Mengen culture” was referred to me fairly often in this way, I started to wonder what is the reason for it – besides these “things” being central parts of the culture. My interpretation is that this form of “auto-essentialization” is part of the concern over the possible culture loss as a result of the coming changes. Indeed, it seemed that people listed elements of their culture in order to be able to make sense of the possible change, as if to check later what elements are still “there” in the future. Assuming that this really is the reason for people to essentialize their culture, it is an interesting phenomenon, especially because it is very similar to what Stuart Kirsch (2001) has proposed in relation to “culture loss” and environmental destruction.

Kirsch (2001: 168) has proposed that the concept of cultural property rights could be used to identify losses caused to indigenous peoples by the destruction of their environment. In the course of his article Kirsch (2001: 171, 174) cites various cases where such cases have been discussed in courts, and how environmental destruction can

destroy much more than resources, but traditional knowledge as well. For example in the Marshall islands certain forms of knowledge on the building of sailing canoes have been lost, because due to outside environmental destruction crucial raw materials are missing (Kirsch 2001: 174). As Kirsch (2001: 174) notes “such knowledge is cultural property” and that its value should not be over-looked in courts. Moreover, the loss of it is concrete. Intellectual and especially cultural property rights require a certain extent of reification of culture, i.e. some elements – for instance Marshallese canoes – have to be reified as cultural elements in order to be able to recognize their value as cultural property. This, in my opinion, is analogous to the reification of culture done by some Mengen, even though for different purposes. Rather than using such essentialization in court cases, it seems the Mengen are doing it in order to make sense of very possible change to themselves.

This concern for culture loss is by no means exaggerated. As noted in the second chapter, Mengen culture and traditions – as they are today – are closely tied to the environment. Traditional clan histories and stories are seen in different mytho-historical marks in the environment, certain plants are required for rituals, there is an abundant knowledge of plants, some of them being used for medicinal purposes and indeed the current way of life is for a large part based on subsistence activities, which in turn is largely dependent on the condition of the environment. I was also noted that some customs make sense only in their proper context, i.e. on the land. Obviously in this kind of situation large scale changes in the environment, due to logging and especially with the establishment of plantations, the change and even loss of culture are very serious threats. Not all are of course concerned, some people noted that “we won't lose our customs” (*Mipela i no inap lusim pasin.*), that there has already been much logging, and “all our customs are still there” (*Olgeta kastom bilong mipela i stap yet.*).

Environmental destruction, as noted, can have far-reaching effects and mean the loss of knowledge and cultural elements. In addition to this, as noted, it can have also legal implications in the context of PNG. The clan histories tied to the environment are also evidence in the now frequent disputes about land tenure. Kirsch (2001: 174) noted how knowledge regarding canoe-building in the Marshall islands has been partly lost due to the loss of raw materials as a consequence of environmental destruction. What about knowledge of landownership? Could it be lost in the process of radical environmental

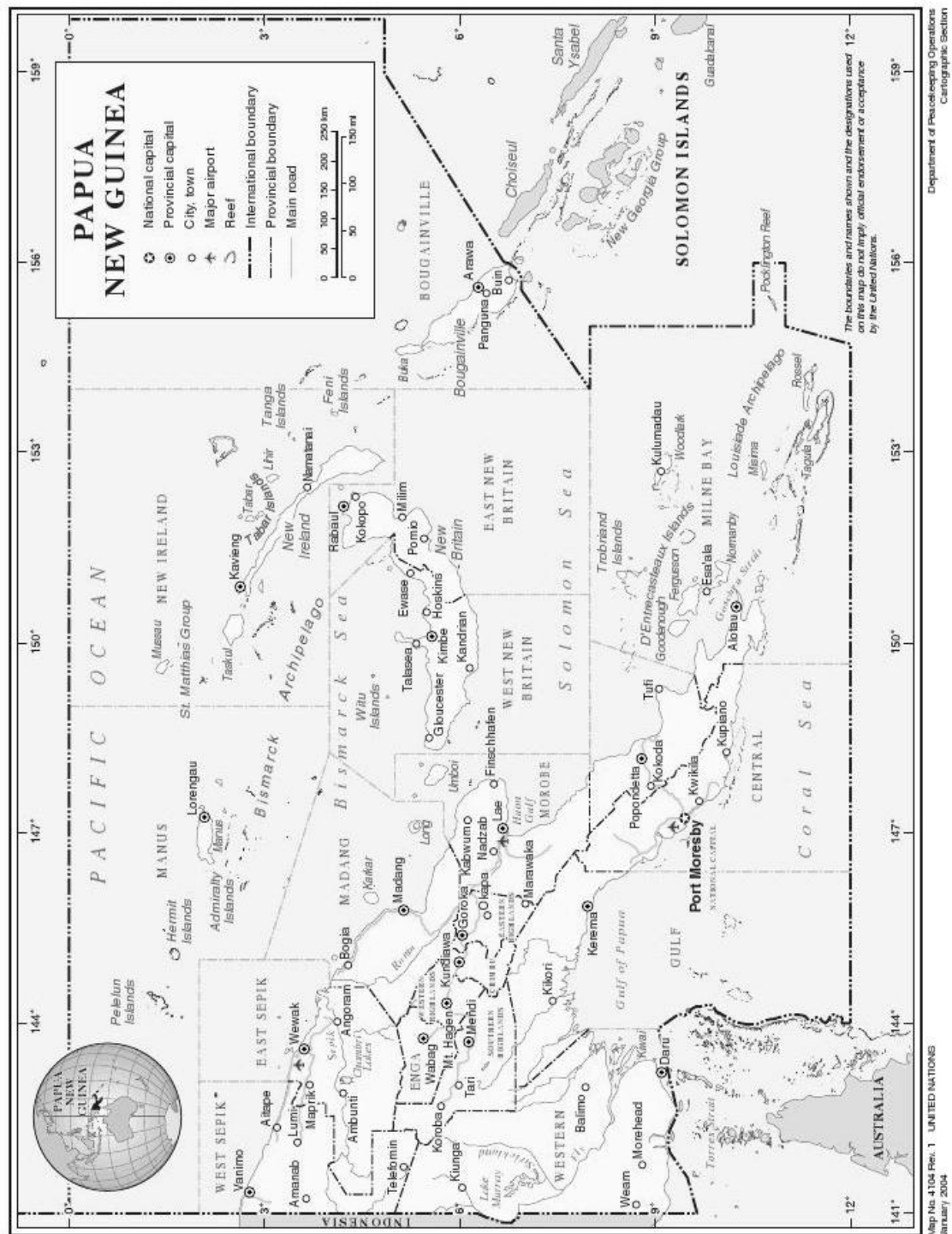
change or destruction? Of course the traditional clan stories are not the only evidence, the Mengen have increasingly started to document the stories and they might indeed survive even radical destruction or re-fashioning of the environment. But what if they would not? What if the stories lose their meaning with the physical points of reference that were destroyed? Does it mean that people lose also their strong relationship to the land? Or are indeed unable to prove their ownership?

Another concern of mine is the establishment of oil-palm plantations. As such, cash cropping could be a good source of monetary income, but oil-palm has certain problems with it. Forest does not regrow on areas where plantations are established, and since oil-palm uses nutrients of the ground intensively, subsistence gardening is not possible. As noted to me by a NGO-worker, subsistence crops, such as taro and yam, can be planted into cocoa blocks, which makes it possible for cash croppers to grow their own food. With oil-palms this is not possible. Deforestation and plantations might erase cultural marks by transforming the mytho-historical environment into a “Christmas tree farm”, to borrow James Scott's (1998: 362n23) expression. In terms of economy, another dangerous possibility exists: with tighter integration into the capitalist world economy, people could be turned from low-income subsistence farmers into poor rural proletariat. If people are not able to produce their own food and housing, their need for monetary income grows considerably, and it is not said that plantations can generate it adequately. Plantations can in the worst scenario end the old way of life by erasing significant parts of local culture and by making the old way of life as subsistence farmers impossible.

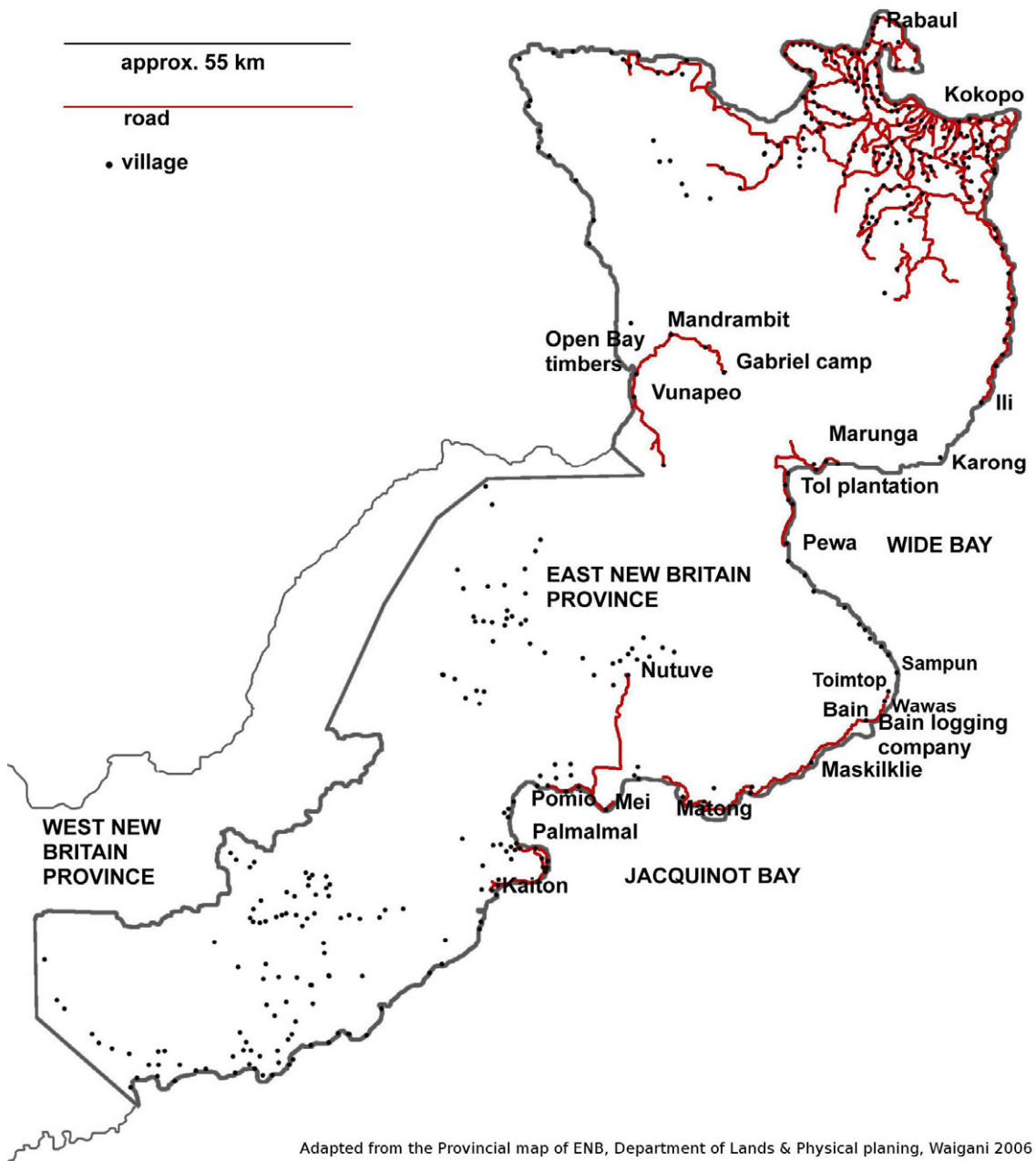
Change is an integral part of culture and some elements of it are lost while new ones emerge. But can culture be lost? Following Stuart Kirsch (2001: 168) I argue that besides changing, cultures indeed can be lost. Often it is difficult to tell the difference between change and loss. If change is a part of cultural dynamics, maybe “loss” is when the people affected by change perceive that the change is unwanted or that they are not in control of it. I noted how the Pomio district is now on the verge of a significant change. How this change will turn out, we can not know before hand. But in order to avoid loss, the peoples of East New Britain must have their say in the process and have their views respected. Indeed, I hope that my friends in the Pomio district do find a road of their own, on which they can proceed according to their own terms, wishes and opinions.

8. APPENDIX

8.1 Maps



Map 1: Map of Papua New Guinea (UN Cartographic Section, map no. 4104). Reproduced with the permission of the the Secretary of the United Nations Publications Board.



Map 3: East New Britain Province with selected named villages and (logging) roads

8.2 Mengen “tree calendar”

As noted in Chapter 2, the Mengen use different trees and their phases to divide the year into seasons more complex than the elementary division between the rainy and dry season. As Panoff (1969b: 156) shows, the Mengen lunar months are identified with “certain botanical species”, and thus the year is divided into several *vega matana* (“tree category”). The trees, which I have called “indicator trees”, and their phases are observed and activities from planting crops to the yearly festivals, are co-ordinated accordingly. In the words of a young Mengen elementary school teacher:

When a tree flowers, we [exclusive pronoun] plant one sort of food according to the flowering tree. When the tree starts growing seeds, we plant another crop following the seeds of that tree. Our calender, we have twelve months [in it] as have the white men, and following our trees we make our gardens and do our work, like our *kastom*.³³ - female elementary school teacher, in her late 20's (01.07.2008)

I reproduce the calender as it was taught to me by the school teacher quoted above. The calender is adjusted to the western calender months, most probably to make it more easy to teach to a person accustomed to western months. The calender has been systematized by local elders (*bigman*) so that it can be taught in elementary schools to young school children. This is part of a education reform (started in 1997, but came really in force in 2001) according to which education starts in the local language and “local culture” is a teaching subject.

After my fieldwork, I found the same calender summarized by Michel Panoff (1969b: 157). Overall the two versions seem to correspond to each other quite well, given that both are collected some forty years apart. There are discrepancies in the Mengen names of the trees, as is with other linguistic data collected by the Panoffs and me. As noted, there might be several reasons to this, ranging from different transliteration to dialectical and temporal variation. The teacher who taught the calender to me, did not remember English or Tok Pisin names of the trees, and I collected leaf samples and photographed the trees for possible further identification. Panoff (1969b) has identified most of the central trees, and I have been able to compare my leaf samples with

33 *Taim diwai i flau, mipela i save planim wanpela kain kaikai bihainim desla diwai i flaua. Taim diwai i go na i wokim seed bilong en, mipela i planim narapela kain kaikai bihainim desla seed bilong desla diwai. So kelender bilong mipela, mipela gat tvelypela month, olsem bilong ol waitman, bihainim desla ol diwai bilong mipela, we mipela i mekim gaden, mipela wokim ol wok bilong mipela, olsem long kastom bilong mipela [...].*

botanical pictures of the trees identified by Panoff. In the calendar summarized below, I will use the Mengen terms taught to me and I have written the names of the trees as they were spelled out to me by the teacher. The Mengen names collected by Michel Panoff are included for comparison.

1. January: The tloop tree is flowering. New gardens are made and the main food eaten is the taro. January is at the height of the dry season. (In Panoff's version the indicator tree for mid-January is called "tolova e volau" (*Evodia elleryana*). My leaf samples are similar to pictures of the *Evodia elleryana* (also *Melicope elleryana*). I was told that the flower of the "tloop" is purple, and indeed the *elleryana* has a pink/mauve flower.)
2. February: The flower of the tloop has withered and its seeds are visible, therefore the phase is called tloop kan, with "kan" meaning seed. The season is still dry and the weather "good", i.e. long periods of sun with occasional rains. The main food is taro, and the crops planted are: taro, sweet potato, banana, cassava and "greens" (*kumu* in Tok Pisin, for example the aibica).
3. March: The saap tree flowers and taro can still be planted, along with the crops mentioned for February. The main foods are cassava and sweet potato during this phase. (Panoff (1969b) notes the tree "tava" (*Alphitonia incana*) for the period from March to April. While the terms "saap" and "tava" seem not to be related, the plants may very well be the same according to my leaf samples and pictures of the "saap" I took during my stay.)
4. April: The seeds of the saap are visible, and the phase is called saap kan. As for foods or planting, April and March are the same.
5. May: Some of the trees start to grow new leaf. (Panoff (1969b: 157) calls this phase "Oala kuna" (i.e. vine head), because two climbers work as the indicators.) The gardens are weeded, because the food must renew along with the trees that grow new leaf. Some late planting can still be done, if one has been late in working new gardens. The rainy season starts and yam starts to be the main food. (As noted by Panoff 1969b: 157) for this phase too.)
6. June: The prij tree (*balbal* in Tok Pisin) flowers. For the indicator of this phase Panoff (1969b: 157) mentions the flowering of the "piri" tree (*Erythrina indica*). (The prij most probably is the *Erythrina indica*, since my leaf samples corresponded to pictures of *Erythrina's* leaf. Note also the similarity of "prij" and "piri".) No planting is done, because the rainy season is at its height, but weeding and tending of the gardens continue. New gardens can be cleared, and hunting with dogs is possible. Fishing is not, since the sea is too rough because of the rainy season. The main food is yam and cassava
7. July: The flowers and the leaf of the prij have fallen down. The rainy season is still at its height.
8. August: Prij and saap make new leaf. It is still the rainy season, although the heaviest rains start to end. Taro, banana, sweet potato and cassava are planted, while the food consists of yam, a close relative of it, taro and cassava
9. September: The name for this phase remained somewhat unclear to me. It is referred to as muk mugang, but I do not know the precise translation. It refers to early flowering, but it remained unclear what the name of the tree is. (It could be that "mugang" means flowering, since Panoff (1969b) notes that "manangana" means "to flower".) The rainy season starts to end. Taro, yam, cassava and sweet potato can be planted, and the food consists of taro, yam and cassava

10. October: The kreng tree flowers. (The kreng very probably is the same tree Panoff (1969b) calls the “kerenge” (*Pterocarpus indicus*) according to the similarity of the terms and the similarity of pictures with my leaf samples. However, in Panoff’s version, the “kerenge” is an indicator for a phase in August/September.) The season is dry and the weather “good”. The main food is taro, while yam, taro, cassava and sweet potato can be planted.
11. November: The pokal tree flowers. (In Panoff’s (1969b) version the tree is called “paugala” (*Albizia [sic] falcata*). My leaf samples are clearly leaves of an *Albizia* tree. Note the correspondence between the “pokal” and “paugala” as well.) There is much sun, new gardens are made and fishing is possible as well. The main food is taro (planted in January) and taro, yam, sweet potato and cassava can be planted.
12. December: The loop flowers. The height of the dry seasons. Taro, yam, banana and cassava are planted into the gardens cleared in November. Taro is abundant and *kastoms*, i.e. ancestral dances are held.

8.3 Mengen kinship terminology

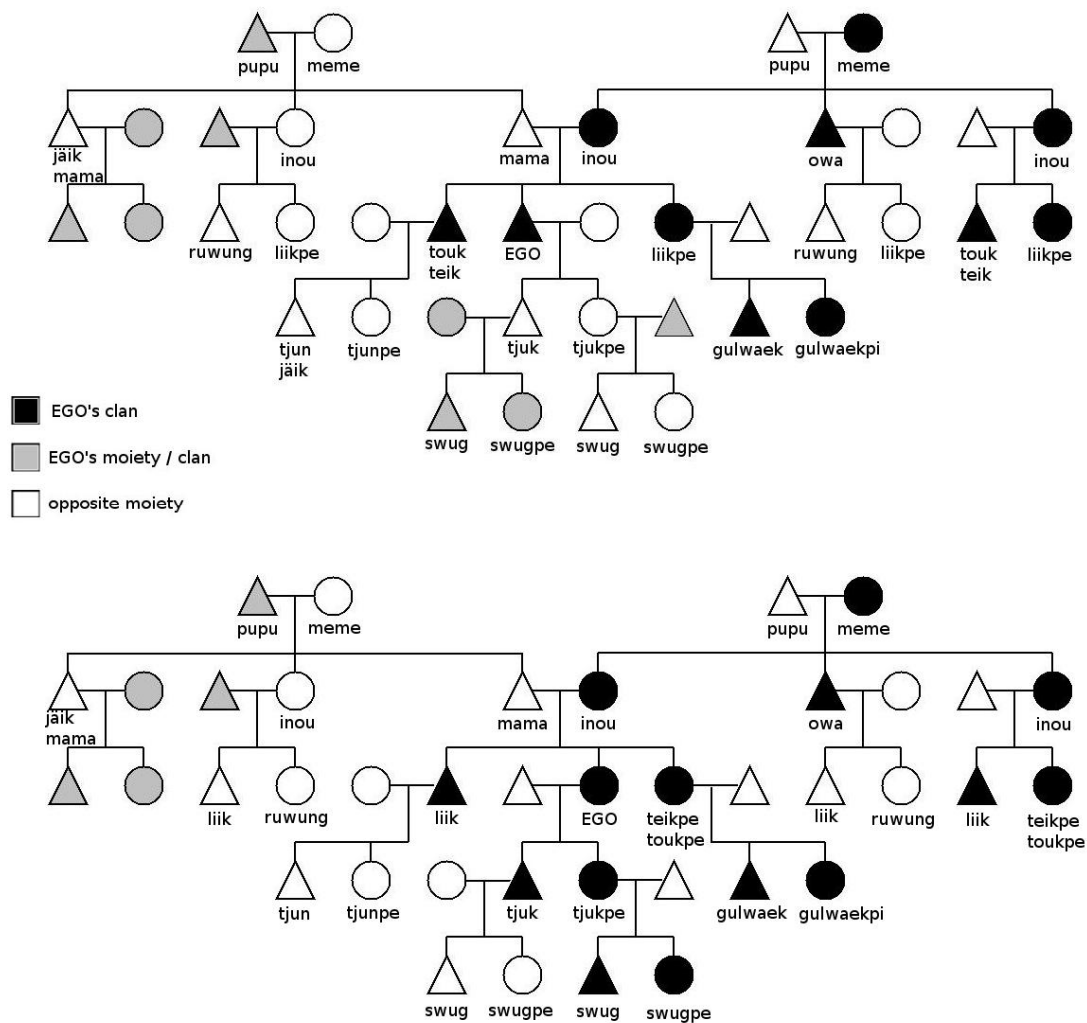


Diagram 2: Mengen kinship terminology for male and female Ego

The kinship terminology of the Mengen is quite complex, and according to one informant – an older man – many people do not know the precise meanings of all terms and thus confuse them in use. The terminology above is based on the account of two families, which whom I cross-checked the terminology and the definitions of individual terms. The Mengen kinship system is a version of the Iroquois kinship system (see Panoff 1976: 176). The system is partly classificatory in as much “mother” refers to all women regardless of their lineage that are one generation above the EGO. The terminology is also relational in reference to the gender and age of EGO, i.e. the term used for a particular kind of relative depends on in certain cases on whether the speaker is female or male and older or younger than the person referred to.

Mengen kinship terms:

pupu: a man two generations above EGO regardless of lineage; “grandfather”

meme: a woman two generations above EGO regardless of lineage; “grandmother”

mama: “father”, a man one generation above EGO from a different lineage; men other than the biological father can also be referred to with the term “jäik”

inou: “mother”, all women one generation above EGO regardless of lineage

owa: “mother's brother”, a man one generation above EGO from the same lineage

jäik: “father's brother”, a man one generation above EGO from a different lineage (from father's lineage?), see also “mama”. Note, that “jäik” is also the term for brother's son.

teik: “brother” or “younger brother”, a male EGO refers to a younger man from his lineage and generation

touk: “brother” or “older brother”, a male EGO refers to an older man from his lineage and generation

teikpe: “sister” or “younger sister”, a female EGO refers to a younger woman from her lineage and generation

toukpe: “sister” or “older sister”, a female EGO refers to an older woman from her lineage and generation

liik: “brother”, a female EGO refers to man from his lineage and generation, and to male cross-cousins

liikpe: “sister”, a male EGO refers to women from his lineage and generation, and to female cross-cousins

ruwung: “cross-cousin”, a person from the same generation and gender, but different lineage than the EGO

tjuk: “son” of EGO

tjukpe: “daughter” of EGO

tjun: a man from another lineage one generation below EGO

tjunpe: a woman from another lineage one generation below EGO

gulwaek: a man from the same lineage one generation below EGO

gulwaekpi: a woman from the same lineage one generation below EGO

swug: a man two generations below EGO regardless of lineage

swugpe: a woman two generations below EGO regardless of lineage

8.4 Mengen moieties and clans

The Mengen people (or tribe as they are often referred to, by themselves as well) is divided into two moieties and a number of corporate descent groups, i.e. clans and subclans. Also, the Sulka and Mengen share the same social structure, even though they are linguistically unrelated groups. As noted already, the two clan and moiety systems of the people are “compatible”, but they are not a single system. This means that even though Sulka and Mengen clans *correspond* to each other, for example the Sulka clan Sos is according to my informants “the same” as the Mengen clan Soe, but both groups have different leaders and territories. In intermarriages, which are frequent between the two peoples, marriage rules have to be obeyed.

During my stay I was able to gather 25 different named groups of which 14 were clans and 11 subclans. Table 1 shows the structure of clans and subclans accordingly. Two subclans were problematic, because one informant, an older man who knew well the stories and names, regarded them not as groups, but as names describing big men of the clans, whereas others noted that these names referred to certain subclans (marked with * in Table 1). This structure is based mainly on accounts by two families, but the information was checked also with other villagers. Different people had usually very different levels of knowledge about the clan structure. Named groups were always assigned to the right moiety, but not all people did know whether a named group was a

clan of its own or a subclan. Members of the respective groups had usually a rather clear picture of the construction their own clan. The same variation holds true for the names of the clans. Especially younger persons did not know the meaning of some names etc. Out of these clans and subclans 10 were represented in the village in which I stayed, the biggest groups being Wgar, which owned the land area of the village, Kaimun and its subclan Sole and Gup. Some clans had only a handful, or even only a single, member in the village. In addition to this, there were some Sulka and men from other provinces, such as Morobe and Bougainville, married to village members, but none was present at the time I stayed there. The list is most probably far from complete, especially regarding subclans. Other clans have probably their own subclans, but since many of the clans were not represented in Toimtop, people did not know about the possible subclans.

<i>Bik Pisin</i>	<i>Smol Pisin</i>
<u>Erier</u>	<u>Gup</u>
<u>Kaimun</u>	<u>Kamboing</u>
<u>Kaipure*</u>	<u>Lethun</u>
<u>Klan</u>	<u>Lungain</u>
<u>Mgulpun</u>	<u>Mamran</u>
<u>Sole</u>	<u>Matrau</u>
<u>Maksos</u>	<u>Tling</u>
<u>Seer</u>	<u>Wgar</u>
<u>Soe</u>	<u>Ligau</u>
<u>Walkoun</u>	<u>Ruglu</u>
<u>Glem</u>	<u>Rugwei</u>
<u>Kaisin</u>	<u>Rapupun*</u>
<u>Mgau</u>	
<u>Tgim</u>	

Table 1: Mengen clans and sub-clans

8.5 Illustrations



Illustration 1 - Human environments: an abundant subsistence garden



Illustration 2 - A young woman planting taro in a recently cleared garden



Illustration 3- A man working in his garden under a temporary shelter ("rabail" in Mengen)



Illustration 4 - Rot bilong mipela: a man walking on a track to his garden



Illustration 5 - Placed stories: Telpuputkeis or "the man trying to carve a possum out of a rock"



Illustration 6 - Legible environments: plantations and roads on the outskirts of Kokopo



Illustration 7 - A logging road cleared into primary forest



Illustration 8 - Members of the Toimtop Youth Group pose before the new Resource Center



Illustration 9 - Campaigning: supporters of Mr. Paul Tiensten hold electoral speeches in Toimtop village



Illustration 10 - Campaigning: Mr. Ereman Yareng holds an electoral speech in Sampun village

All illustrations are by the author.

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